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CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY IN OLD NORSE CULTURE

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DISCOVERING MEDIEVAL MASCULINITIES. A PERSONAL STORY

Some years ago, I saw one of the most beautiful films from the silent film era, "Tol'able David" by Henry King (1921). When young David is first introduced on the screen he is still a boy, as his clothes clearly indicate. He is wearing short trousers. David likes the girl next door and admires his strong, masculine older brother, who has a job of a great responsibility. He drives the mail-hack. When the brother's wife gives birth to their son, all the men present, the doctor, the brother and the father, gather to celebrate with drinks and cigars, the pleasures of the grown man's world. David wants to join them but they push him away. He is not yet a man. The family's peaceful world is disrupted when a criminal gang enters the scene. After an inevitable fight with them, the older brother becomes paralysed and crippled for life, deprived of his former status. David then wishes to replace him and drive the mail. He also tries to take revenge and in a moving scene his mother prevents him from going out with a gun. She clings to him and falls into the mud but doesn't let go of the boy. Instead of doing a man's job he must run errands for his mother. The family's troubles are not over. The father dies of a heart attack. Now, David is entrusted to drive the mail hack. He cannot escape the gangsters on his way and experiences a real David-Goliath fight with one of them, but he manages to escape and saves the mail, and thereby his honour. In the lovely scene that concludes the film, the battered and exhausted David humbly tells the girl next door, who obviously adores him, that he is "tol'able, just tol'able", but the proud mother cries out: "A man, my David".

For film enthusiasts, "Tol'able David" is a wonderful experience. For the medievalist, it is stunning to discover that constructing masculinity is the obvious theme of the film. It shows the transition from boyhood to manhood, as do many

medieval texts. He needs to separate himself from childhood play and the mother's world. The fight with the tall gangster and driving the mail is his initiation rite. Finally, he is accepted as a grown-up man. I saw this film in Nottingham while staying there as a visiting scholar in 2008. During a previous visit, back in 1995, I found a little book in the University Bookshop in Nottingham, *Medieval Masculinities*, edited by Claire A. Lees[1]. Inspired by this book, I decided to organize the first *Medieval Masculinities* course at my University. I did not know exactly what to expect, but it was considerably smaller than any class on women's or gender studies (which was more or less understood as women's studies). No enthusiastic young men were eagerly waiting in the class-room when I entered to give the first lesson. Only four female students sat there, but later one male student joined them and thereby saved the course, as we needed to have a minimum of five people to keep a class going. Feminist Studies, originating as Women's Studies, later becoming Gender Studies, paved the way for our present-day Masculinity Studies. It all began in the vibrant late sixties and seventies. In the enthusiastic, early stage of gender studies, the majority of scholars working on women's studies were women themselves. Academic studies became a part of feminism and were even seen as a means of the campaign for women's rights and recognition. Scholars took pleasure in discovering women, in texts and in history. The early works of the Icelandic feminist scholar Helga Kress are a good example, her later works became more dynamic and theoretical[2]. Women felt that they benefitted from academic women's studies, they were rediscovering and rewriting history and literary history, and this re-evaluation soon spread to other academic disciplines. Male students did not feel the same enthusiasm in the beginning, but I am glad to say that times have changed. I have offered masculinity courses several times by now, they have multiplied in number and more and more male students have enrolled. At first, male students were shy and not comfortable with males being read about and analysed as gender. Men had always been visible in texts, there seemed to be no need to search for them, contrary to the need to search for women in the early stages of women's studies. Women have had the tendency to see women's studies as a boost to their identity, but male students in a masculinity class felt insecure. Students had read male-dominated history as an equivalent of general history and were comfortable with that. It took some time to realize that although the subjects of study had been men, the discourse had not been about masculinity yet. Present-day masculinity studies have changed that.

The interest in aspects of masculinity is not entirely new. I want to mention here a few influential early works, from the Old Norse-Icelandic point of view. In 1980, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen published his *Norrønt nid. Forestillinger*

[1] *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Mediaeval Cultures), ed. by C.A. Lees, Minneapolis 1994.

[2] H. Kress, *Óþarfar unnustur og aðrar greinar um íslenskar bókmenntir*, Reykjavík 2009.

om den umandige mand i de islandske sagaer. An English translation appeared in 1983[3]. Modern studies see gender as relational and put emphasis on culturally constructed masculinity, difference and diversity. Feminist scholars have shown that gender roles put restrictions upon women, but scholars are now beginning to ask questions about how men reacted to the demands that were made on them. In 1993, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and Carol Clover published studies on the interaction between power and gender in the Icelandic sagas[4]. Sørensen pointed out that masculinity and femininity should not only be seen as opposites but also in relation to each other. A man's honour and prestige depended not only on himself but also on the appreciation of the women in his family. Men played an active part in society, but women watched over their honour and prestige, evaluated them and often encouraged them to take revenge and fight with their *frýjur*. Although there was a clear distinction between manliness and unmanliness in Old Icelandic society, both categories, male and female, were movable. A woman could be encouraged to adopt masculine behaviour, but a man would be degraded to the sphere of women if he showed any inclination towards femininity. But while Sørensen sees power as a metaphor for sex, Clover argues that sex can be a metaphor for power. The terms Clover suggests in her analysis to present the opposites are *hvatr* (vigorous) versus *blauðr* (soft, weak), instead of a man versus woman. Her analysis is influenced by Thomas Laqueur's book *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, where he presents the idea of the "one-sex model" in European history, which, according to Laqueur, prevailed in Western culture until the eighteenth century[5]. The one-sex model implied that femininity was simply a lack of masculinity and that women should therefore be understood as lesser man.

Theoretical approaches have changed and developed since the early days of gender studies. Influential studies have appeared, such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* presenting her ideas of gender identity and its signs as a performance[6]. Despite being influential, Butler has been criticised for her emphasis on discourse which according to her critics denies history any validity other than as text. What I have found most rewarding when teaching Medieval Masculinity is that no other courses have offered such completely new and unexpected readings of well-known and much read texts. Students have produced excellent papers and theses. Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir wrote a challenging paper called "Voru Æsirnir argir?"[7]

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[3] P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Norrønt nid. Forestillingen om den umandige mand i de islandske sagaer*, Odense1980; English translation: *The Unmanly Man. Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, Odense 1983.

[4] P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære. Studier i Islændingesagaerne*, Århus 1993; C. Clover, *Regardless of Sex. Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe*, "Speculum" 58 (1993), pp. 363–387.

[5] Th. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge MA 1990.

[6] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London and New York 1990.

[7] Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir, *Voru Æsirnir argir?*, "Mímir" 44(=50) (2005), pp. 100–107.

She wrote this paper while still being an MA student and it is published in a journal written and edited by students, but should not be overlooked.

In my own research, I have looked at several aspects of masculinity. Dragon-slaying and initiation rites are the topic of some of my articles[8]. The dragon-slaying motif links the narratives with the myth of the creation of the world, coming of age, and fertility. As previously mentioned, numerous saga texts tell us of the transition from boyhood to manhood, promising boys and un-promising boys, the *kolbítar*[9]. Stories telling of *kolbítar* indicate that meeting the demands of the society was not always easy for boys. In my articles, I have analyzed several *fornaldarsögur*, the Old Norse translation of *Parceval saga*, and *Kjalnesinga saga*. The two young protagonists of the *Kjalnesinga saga*, Búi and Kolfinnr, do not live up to the expectations of the society and its ideals. Kolfinnr is a typical *kolbítr*, but unlike the kolbítar in the *fornaldarsögur*, he does not grow up to perform heroic deeds. Búi's relationships with women show his insecurity and dependence. The issue of social demands is also the topic of my analysis of *Eyrbyggja saga*'s *Máhlíðingamál*[10]. In the beginning of the *Máhlíðingamál* narrative, the peaceful poet Þórarinn is accused of neglecting his duties as a man. It is implied that he doesn't provide enough for his family and he is said to have accidentally chopped off his wife's hand, therefore also seriously neglecting his duty to protect her. He was supposed to take care of the lives of his family members and uphold the family's honour. Their honour is in danger when he is accused of cowardice. In the stanzas attributed to him, he seeks balance in trying to be a man of peace and reconciliation and upholding his masculine honour. Paradoxically, he must prove himself by means of violence. Secular heroes have received more attention than saints and monks. They may not be the "typical males", but because of that they are intriguing and interesting. Bishops represent power and authority and it is emphasized that staying chaste requires masculine qualities, strength and stamina[11]. It has been rewarding to see how rapidly masculinity studies have grown during the last twenty years. Sessions on masculinity

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[8] Ásdís Egilsdóttir, *En verden skabes – en mand bliver til*, [in:] *Fornaldarsagaerne. Myter og virkelighed*, ed. by A. Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, A. Lassen, Copenhagen 2009, pp. 245–254. Eadem, *Serpents and dragons in two medieval narratives*, [in:] *Thinking Symbols – Interdisciplinary*, ed. by J. Popielska-Grzybowska, J. Iwaszczuk, Acta Archaeologica Pultuskiensia 6, Pułtusk 2017, pp. 69–74.

[9] Ásdís Egilsdóttir, *Kolbítur verður karlmaður*, [in:] *Miðaldabörn*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, T.H. Tulinius, Reykjavík 2015, pp. 87–100; Ibidem, *Esja´s Cave. Giantesses, Sons and Mothers in Kjalnesinga saga*, [in:] *Meetings at the borders. Studies dedicated to Professor Wladyslav Duczko*, ed. by J. Popelska-Grzybowska, J. Iwaszczuk in co-operation with Bozena Jozefow Czerwinska, Acta Archaeologica Pultuskiensia 5, Pultusk 2016, pp. 79–83.

[10] Ásdís Egilsdóttir, *Masculinity and/or Peace? On Eyrbyggja saga's Máhlíðingamál*, [in:] *Frederic Amory in Memoriam. Old Norse-Icelandic Studies*, ed. by J. Lindow, G. Clark, Berkeley, Los Angeles 2015, pp. 135–146.

[11] Ásdís Egilsdóttir, *Með karlmannlegri hughreysti og hreinni trú*, [in:] *Hugvísindaþing 2005: Erindi af ráðstefnu hugvísindadeildar og guðfræðideildar Háskóla Íslands, 18. nóvember 2005*, ed.

are presented at important conferences, such as *The International Congress of Medieval Studies*, Kalamazoo, and *International Medieval Congress*, Leeds. In 2008 and 2010, I organized an interdisciplinary Nordic workshop together with Henric Bagerius. In 2017, one year after my retirement, I gladly accepted to partake in sessions at Leeds, with promising young scholars including Yoav Tirosh, who has written his MA thesis on masculinity and male sexuality, and Gareth Evans who has published a book on masculinity and the Icelandic sagas[12]. In present-day theoretical studies, we find thought-provoking discussions on medieval sexuality and same-sex relationships.

In 2015, March 12–13, Remigiusz Gogosz organized an international conference at the University of Rzeszów: *Constructing Masculinity in Old Norse Society*. The following articles were presented as papers at this conference.Hegemonic masculinity is the topic of Csete Katona's article on masculinity and social status. The article demonstrates how two male characters in a saga can complement each other, with one representing valour and the other balance. Occasionally, one man can possess both types of qualities. Remigiusz Gogosz analyses the performance of *mannjafnaðr* in *Magnússona saga*. His analysis of the episode and several other saga passages shows how games and sports are important in defining masculinity. The interest in emotions in medieval literature has been growing since the appearance of Barbara Rosenwein's *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*[13]. Jakub Morawiec studies weeping and manly behaviour, with special emphasis on how emotional communities express mourning for the dead kings. One of the examples he uses is the episode where the poet Sigvatr Þórðarson compares the husband's grief to his own, and he boldly states that the king's men have suffered a greater loss than the man who has merely lost a woman's embrace. Sigvatr portrays the husband as a wailing effeminate in comparison with his own bloody tears and masculine poetry. Marion Poilvez discusses the contradictory physical strength of Grettir Ásmundarson and his weaknesses, such as fear of the dark, that he shares with another well-known saga-hero and outlaw: Gísli Súrsson. She explains how outlaw narratives can help our understanding of the concept of masculinity in the sagas. The article also analyses an anectote in the saga where a servant-woman sees Grettir naked and tells a farmer's daughter mockingly that she was suprised at the small size of his masculine attributes. However, it must not be overlooked that Grettir overheard the conversation, seized the serving woman reciting a poem, and seems to have proven his case since she *frýði eigi um Gretti*

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by Haraldur Bernharðsson, Margrét Guðmundsdóttir, Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir, Þórdís Gísladóttir, Reykjavík 2006, pp. 31–40.

[12] Y. Tirosh, *The fabulous saga of Guðmundr inn ríki: representation of sexuality in Ljósvetninga saga*, Reykjavík: Háskóli Íslands, 2014. Unpublished MA thesis, G.L. Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*, Oxford 2019.

[13] B. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, Ithaca N.Y., 2006.

um þat er yfir lauk[14]. Tommy Kuusela brings forward the hyper-masculinity of Þórr in his analysis of *Þrymskviða*. When insulted, Þórr threatens to use physical violence. Kuusela points out that Þórr's masculinity is never questioned, on the other hand he is endowed with hyper-masculinity. The article includes a useful discussion of terminology. "God cyning", a good king as a hegemonic male, is the topic of Łukasz Neubauer's article. He analyses "Hrothgar's sermon" in *Beowulf* and draws attention to echoes from Saint Augustine's *City of God*. Włodzimierz Gogłoza studies the social status of women in medieval Iceland, in the light of the medieval lawbook *Grágás*. The article shows clearly that men benefitted more from the legal system than women. However, Icelandic women had more rights than European women in the Middle Ages.

In addition, three more scholars have contributed to this volume, Ármann Jakobsson, Yoav Tirosh and Miriam Mayburd. The fascinating, ambiguous and flexible masculinity of Loki is the subject of Ármann Jakobsson's essay. He emphasizes that Óðinn and Loki are able to become theriomorphic. When Loki changes into an animal, he also becomes female. Copulating with an animal in female animal form makes him as transgressive as anything expected from a human male. Does Loki have a gender at all?

Applying Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, Yoav Tirosh analyses the complex meaning of milk and milk products in several saga texts. He points out that there is an equation between milk and femininity.

The *meykóngr* (maiden king) is an intriguing figure. To put it simply, a *meykóngr* reigns by the virtue of her claiming masculinity and refusing to submit to a man. Analysing the longer version of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, Miriam Mayburd draws attention to the complex, ambigious character of the *meykóngr* persona in this text, showing how this saga variant reflects nuanced conceptions of masculinity in a newly aristocratic society of late medieval Iceland.

Masculinity studies take a fresh look at the traditional male pursuits as well as focusing on less well-studied areas. The articles in this volume show considerable variety. Inevitably, some genres are missing, such as translated texts, entertaining literature and contemporary sagas. These texts add greatly to our knowledge and understanding of medieval masculinity. It is my sincere hope that this volume will inspire scholars to continue to work on this fascinating subject.

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ODKRYWAJĄC ŚREDNIOWIECZNĄ MĘSKOŚĆ. HISTORIA OSOBISTA

Streszczenie

We wstępie Ásdís Egilsdóttir opowiada, w jaki sposób jako pierwsza zapoznała się z naukami o „męskości" i o jej pionierskich latach nauczania na uniwersytecie o „męskości" w literaturze średniowiecznej. W przedstawianym tomie pisze krótkie słowa wprowadzające do każdego artykułu.

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THE FLEXIBLE MASCULINITY OF LOKI

Loki the Disparate

Loki is one of the gods and yet not really one of them. Loki is also one of the giants, but his giant persona is usually so firmly externalised that it is no longer seen as part of him. He is human and yet the genes he transmits are serviceable to construct huge serpents, eight-legged horses and gigantic wolves. Loki is also a male but sometimes he is not. Furthermore, this transmutable superhuman power does not make him a proper deity but perhaps he is more powerful than all the gods and in his destructive way also has a flexible or ambivalent gender role[1].

Loki has a second name, Loptr, rarely used and its connotations are unclear[2]. It could indicate a relationship with the air and the sky, as Old Norse *lopt* seems

[1] I will not attempt a review of the scholarly reception of Loki in this article but see e.g. J.C. Frakes, *Loki's Mythological Function in the Tripartite System*, "Journal of English and Germanic Philology" 86 (1987), pp. 473–486; Y.S. Bonnetain, *Der nordgermanische Gott Loki aus litteraturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive*, Göppingen 2006, esp. pp. 59–92.

[2] In the *Snorra-Edda*, Loki is only referred to as Loptr once, when he is first introduced (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen 1931, p. 34). This name is also used twice in the poem Lokasenna (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 27; *Norræn fornkvæði*, ed. by S. Bugge, Oslo 1867, p. 114 and 116), first where Loki uses it for himself and then Gefjun affectionally (or perhaps superciliously) calls him "Loptci" (Little Loptr). The name also appears in the *Hyndluljóð* (*Norræn fornkvæði*, p. 160). Skaldic poets seem to have used the name as a *heiti* in the 9th and 10th centuries. It appears in the poem *Haustlǫng* by Þjóðólfr of Hvinr (*Edda Snorra Stur-*

mainly to refer to altitude[3]. If such a relationship exists, Snorri Sturluson mentions the air on a couple of occasions[4], he introduces him without mentioning any supernatural or religious functions, nothing about it in his *Snorra-Edda*, even though he depicts Loki flying in and claims that he is renowned mostly for his slyness and machinations (*slægð ok vélar*)[5].

Even if Loki was to some, at some point in the history of paganism, a god of the sky, that would not seem to have much relevance to his narrative function in the extant Old Norse myths, mostly preserved in the *Snorra-Edda* more than two centuries after paganism had been discarded, at least officially. The only relevance to the question of his gender would then be that the ability to roam the sky is a popular and natural metaphor for freedom and Loki is indeed somewhat free from restrictions of species and gender.

According to scholars such as Ursula Dronke[6], Loki also possessed a third name and is the Lóðurr who makes a single appearance in *Vǫluspá*, as one of the three creators of mankind[7]. The main argument for this is that both L-gods appear on one occasion in the company of Óðinn and the nebulous god Hœnir[8]. Lóðurr is an enigmatic figure who does not make an appearance outside of *Vǫluspá*, unless he (or Loki, or both if they are the same) is the mysterious Logaþore who

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lusonar, p. 112) and in the *Þórsdrápa* of Eilífr Goðrúnarson (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 107), both of which are preserved in the *Edda* of Snorri. It also shows up in the Óðinn-kenning *Lopts vinr* in Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla* (*Heimskringla* I, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík 1941, p. 219).

[3] As in modern Icelandic, the mediaeval word *lopt* has two primary meanings, the air above the ground and an elevated floor in a building (Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog* II, Oslo 1891, pp. 559–592. Cf. Bonnetain, *Der nordgermanische Gott Loki*, pp. 63–65.

[4] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 80 and 105. I refer to the author of the 13th century text known as the *Prose Edda* as Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) since the text is attributed to him in early 14th century sources, for example on the first page of the Uppsala manuscript (DG 11 4to). That does not mean that Snorri was necessarily the only person involved in the composition of the *Edda* or that he is an original author; DG 11 in fact refers to him as a compiler rather than an author.

[5] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 34.

[6] *The Poetic Edda II: Mythological Poems*, ed. by U. Dronke, Oxford 1997, p. 125.

[7] *Norrœn fornkvæði*, p. 14 (R) and 21 (H). In Snorra-Edda, Lóðurr does not appear in this narrative (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 16) nor indeed anywhere else.

[8] The gods Óðinn, Hœnir and Loki occur as a trio in *Haustlǫng* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, pp. 111–13) and the prose prologue to *Reginsmál* in the Codex Regius (*Norrœn fornkvæði*, p. 212); see also *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, pp. 78 and 126–27). The Odin-kenning *Lóðurs vinr* in Eyvindr's Háleygjatal (*Fagrskinna*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson, Reykjavík 1985, p. 66; *Heimskringla* I, p. 108) and Haukr Valdísarson's Íslendingadrápa in the MS AM 748 (*Den Norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning* I, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen 1912, p. 556) furthermore appears to parallel the aforementioned kenning *Lopts vinr* in *Vellekla* (see no. 2), and Loki is similarly referred to as *Hœnis vinr* in *Haustlǫng* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, pp. 111–12).

is mentioned along with Óðinn (Wodan) and Þórr (Wigiþonar) on the Bavarian Nordendorf fibula from the mid-6th century[9].

If Loki is Lóðurr, it suggests his trickster role in legends from the 13th century and onwards might have been preceded by a much more dignified past, when Loki was possibly a part of a holy trinity along with Óðinn and Hœnir, whose roles as creators were later usurped by the sons of Borr (Óðinn, Vili and Vé), in the version handed down by Snorri in his Edda. In this interpretation, Loki is a disgraced god, a previously important deity who has been turned into an enemy of the gods, and a trickster[10].

If Loki is indeed a god of many names, including Loptr and Lóðurr, he resembles the high god Óðinn in this aspect, the latter's own multiplicity of names reflecting a diversity of identities and disguises[11]. Snorri seems to see this multiplicity of forms as an important attribute of Loki as well, and characterises him as *mioc fiolbreytíN at hattvm* (very disparate in his ways)[12]. This might be an indication of his wickedness, a standpoint that has a Neoplatonic trait: whilst everything good comes from one source, evil is disparate. However, Snorri's censure of disparity only applies to Loki; Óðinn is allowed to have many names and guises. Is there an echo here of the angel who wished in his pride to imitate the master? Scholars have noted more similarities between Loki and Lucifer than just their similar-sounding names, though that does not necessarily mean that Loki was nothing more than the pagan version of the fallen angel[13].

One might wish Snorri to have been clearer about whether Loki's disparity puts him on the same level as Óðinn with his many and varied identities. However, there is certainly no doubt that one of the features due to which Loki is said to resemble Óðinn is his ability to become theriomorphic. Both gods, the high one and the trickster, have a unique ability to become bestial at will. This also affects how scholars must think about his gender.

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[9] See *Runes, Magic and Religion: A Sourcebook*, Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia 10, ed. by J. McKinnell, Rudolf Simek and Klaus Düwel, Vienna 2004, pp. 48–49.

[10] The trickster designation has been one of the most popular ways to describe Loki in scholarly terms for most of the last century (see e.g. J. de Vries, *The Problem of Loki*, FF Communications No. 110, Helsinki 1933, p. 274, and John McKinnell, *Both One and Many: Essays in Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*, Rome 1994, pp. 30–38).

[11] Within *Snorra-Edda* itself, Óðinn frequently appears in disguise, most famously in the actual frame narrative (where he poses as the trinity Hárr, Jafnhárr and Þriði), and in the narrative of the theft of the mead of poetry, but also in the Eddic poems *Grímnismál*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Hárbarðsljóð* and in various legendary sagas, including the *Vǫlsunga saga* and *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*. He also has a variety of names, including Grímr, Gangleri, Gestumblindi, Hnikarr, Grímnir, Þundr, Herjan, Fjǫlnir, Biflindi, Bǫlverkr, Sviðrir, Viðrir, (see e.g. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, pp. 27–28). These also serve as *heiti* in skaldic poems (pp. 88–92).

[12] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 34.

[13] The relationship between Loki and Lucifer has recently been discussed by Bonnetain (*Der nordgermanische Gott Loki*, pp. 156–162).

Loki the Beast

Although theriomorphism is not limited to Óðinn and Loki, they are without question the most prolific shape-shifters among the gods, and the ability to change into animal form is an important connecting factor between the two[14].

The first example of such a metamorphosis of Loki in *Gylfaginning* is when the gods hire a masterbuilder, later revealed to be a giant, to build defensive walls around their city and promise to give him Freyja, the sun and the moon if he can finish this job at an appointed time with only his horse Svaðilfari to help him. Later they regret this bargain and decide that it must have been Loki who suggested it[15]. It must thus fall to him to solve the problem, which he does by transforming himself into a mare, using his feminine wiles to seduce Svaðilfari and eventually giving birth to Sleipnir[16].

Loki later changes into a salmon when trying to escape from the gods, albeit not successfully.[17] In *Skáldskaparmál*, as well as in *Þrymskviða*, he can use wings of Freyja or Frigg to take flight. In doing this, he is assuming bird-shape, cross-dressing if not actually changing species.[18] He changes into a seal in a little-known fight with his arch-enemy Heimdallr mentioned briefly in *Skáldskaparmál*[19], while in *Lokasenna*, Óðinn claims that Loki once transformed into a milking cow[20]. He is, morover, a flea and a fly in *Sörla þáttr* when he spies on Freyja and steals her Brísingamen[21], as well as in *Skáldskaparmál*, when he irritates one of the crafty dwarfs, Brokkr, by buzzing around as a fly[22].

If we take a closer look at these examples, what is most striking is a practical side to Loki's transgressions. He becomes an insect to spy, steal or irri-

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[14] P. Orton, *Theriomorphism: Jacob Grimm, Old Norse Mythology, German Fairy Tales, and English Folklore*, [in:] *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. by T. Shippey, Tempe, Arizona, 2005, pp. 299–334 (see in particular pp. 307–308).

[15] In the *Snorra-Edda* narrative, Loki is not seen suggesting this (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 46), so there is at least the possibility of regarding Loki as a scapegoat. There is a further link between Loki and the goat in the Skaði narrative of *Skáldskaparmál*, where he ties his genitals to the beard of a goat in order to amuse the wronged Skaði who is now being taken into the family of the gods (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 81). On Loki as a scapegoat, see e.g. Y. Bonnetain, *Potentialities of Loki*, [in:] *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives: Origins, changes, and interactions*, ed. by A. Andrén, K. Jennbert, C. Raudvere, Lund 2006, pp. 326–330 (p. 327).

[16] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, pp. 46–47.

[17] Ibidem, p. 69.

[18] Ibidem, p. 80 and 105; *Norræn fornkvæði*, pp. 124–125. The bird costumes that the two goddesses possess are referred to as *hamr* and thus when using them, Loki has, at least to a degree, undergone *hamskipti* (metamorphosis).

[19] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 99.

[20] *Norræn fornkvæði*, p. 117.

[21] *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* I, ed. C.C. Rafn, Copenhagen 1829, pp. 393–394.

[22] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, pp. 122–23.

tate. He takes salmon shape to hide and escape, becomes a bird to travel, and changes into a mare to accomplish a mission. We are not told the reasons behind his fight in seal shape or his outing as a milking cow but it might be inferred that there is also a practical reason for those. However, there is no clear pattern to the bestial shapes in his repertoire. Flies, fleas, birds, salmon, seals, mares and cows belong to various genera of the animal kingdom and there is no common characteristic that might be said to attract Loki to these particular animal forms.

While usually pragmatic[23], shape-shifting is never innocent. Loki's willingness to transgress the boundaries between a man and a beast is in itself irreverent and subversive. The transformation may also have a sexual aspect to it. As the encounter of Loki the mare with Svaðilfari demonstrates, changing into a beast will lead to bestiality, and this might apply to any such metamorphosis, even one that does not result in a child. Copulation with animals is as transgressive as anything a human can do, since it undermines the idea that humans are distinct from, and superior to, brutish beasts.

The clear link between shape-shifting and bestiality can thus also be discerned in the existence of Loki's transgressive apocalyptic children. As *Gylfaginning* has it, even Váli, one of his human children with Sigyn, can be turned into a wolf in order to commit fratricide.[24] His other children are Hel the goddess of death, the Midgard serpent, and Fenrir the wolf. How somebody who is usually in human form can father wolves and serpents by a giantess is never explained[25]. However, it is clearly a possibility, even though an unmentioned one, that Loki sired these children while in serpent or wolf shape, as indeed he was a horse when he gave birth to Sleipnir[26]. Loki is constantly on the boundaries between human and animal and perhaps it is this very bestiality which makes him a frightening adversary of the gods. Humans and animals need to be clearly separated, just as gods should be clearly discernible from giants, but all these demarcations become blurred in the figure of Loki.

It is remarkable how the other gods do not seem to be willing or able to turn into beasts, with the exception of Loki's blood brother Óðinn who also transforms on occasion into a snake and an eagle[27]. We might interpret that as another Lucifer-like aspect of Loki: again the high god has certain unique powers that Loki and his family also usurp for themselves. Or does the transgression say something

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[23] See e.g. P. Orton, *Theriomorphism*…, p. 308.

[24] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 69.

[25] Ibidem, p. 34.

[26] Ibidem, p. 46.

[27] Ibidem, pp. 84–85. See P. Orton, *Theriomorphism*…, p. 308. Óðinn also changes into a falcon (*í valslíki*) to escape from King Heiðrekr at the end of the riddle section of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (*The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, ed. by Ch. Tolkien, London 1960, p. 44.

about Óðinn? Is the high god really so different from the vile Loki? Is he not also a sorcerer and a giant[28]?

It is noteworthy that theriomorphism seems more common among the giants, with both Suttungr and Þjazi assuming the shape of an eagle for practical purposes[29]. There are also cases of Gefjun and her unnamed giant husband who have oxen offspring, and the Ironwood giantess who gives birth to wolves[30]. Loki's gigantic alter ego Útgarða-Loki is also skilled in sorcery, among whose accomplishments are transforming the Midgard serpent into a cat and adopting the guise of the giant Skrýmir[31].

While Snorri presents Útgarða-Loki and Loki as two separate persons, even including Loki in Þórr's retinue as they journey to Útgarðr[32], Saxo Grammaticus appears to suggest they are one and the same individual, depicting an "Ugarthilocus" tied in a cave and guarded by poisonous serpents[33]. There are further reasons for believing Loki and Útgarða-Loki are two representations of the same power. Firstly, the name is uncommon and only used for these two figures. Secondly, Loki is definitely one of the giants. His father is a giant, his mistress is a giant, he fights on the giant's side in the twilight of the gods, and he is even referred to as "jǫtunn" in st. 44 of *Vǫluspá*[34]. It seems somewhat overly convoluted to postulate that the giant who escapes in that stanza is a different creature than the gigantic captive portrayed in Book 8 (15,8) of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. Moreover, in *Lokasenna*, Loki gloats over Útgarða-Loki's tricks when insulting Þórr[35].

If Loki is Útgarða-Loki, this means that he is a giant. One can indeed see some of his giant characteristics in mythological narratives involving him: he is uncontrolled in various ways, he loses his temper several times, eats without tem-

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[28] As noted by Else Mundal (*Forholdet mellom gudar og jotnar i norrøn mytologi i lys av det mytologiske namnematerialet*, "Studia Anthroponymica Scandinavica" 8 (1990), pp. 5–18) and Marianne Ciklamini (Óðinn and the giants, "Neophilologus" 46 (1962), pp. 145–158), Óðinn's relationship with the giants is quite close, and his theoriomorphism and sorcery may be interpreted in that light.

[29] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, pp. 79–80 and 85. See also P. Orton, *Theriomorphism*…, pp. 308–309.

[30] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 8 and 18. P. Orton (*Theriomorphi*sm…, pp. 308–309) does not assume that actual mating with animals takes place every time a giant sires or gives birth to a beast. It must also be mentioned that the verb *fæðir* used in the depiction of the Ironwood giantess is ambiguous (can both mean "give birth to" and "nurture").

[31] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, pp. 50–60.

[32] See e.g. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 54. Snorri's reasons for keeping the two Lokis apart are hard to discern and it does not seem unlikely that he may be influenced by diverging traditions.

[33] Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* I, ed. by K. Friis-Jensen, P. Zeeberg, Copenhagen 2005, pp. 576–577.

[34] *Norræn fornkvæði*, pp. 17 and 23. Margaret Clunies Ross (*Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, Vol. 1: *The Myths*, Odense 1994, pp. 101 and 265) has argued that the inversion of the proper male-female relationship between the gods and the giants (the gods taking giant wives) makes Loki subversive.

[35] *Norræn fornkvæði*, p. 122.

perance (much and swiftly), and he seems to have an uncontrolled sexual appetite and thus ends up fathering monsters[36]. Even more significantly, Loki seems to be chaotic – male and female, man and beast, god and giant. Thus he represents that same wildness and that same chaos that the giants would seem to represent[37].

The fact that this agent of chaos is placed among the Æsir (although never really one of them) is an indication of the confusing relationship between good and evil in the mythology of *Snorra-Edda*[38]. The gods and giants are not clearly separate at all: the giants are the ancestors of the gods[39], the two tribes intermarry and make uneasy alliances, and Loki is at the centre of this confusion[40]. Furthermore, since Útgarða-Loki is a well-known illusionist and sorcerer, Loki, too, must be regarded as a great sorcerer. And both Loki's gigantism and his sorcery lead us toa different kind of transgression, present in the Sleipnir narrative. Not only is Loki theriomorphic but also an androgynous or gender-bending figure.

Loki the Lady

When Loki needs to seduce Svaðilfari, he has not only changed his species but also his physical sex. Both transgressions could be seen as abominable, but perhaps doubly so when put together. It may well be argued that not only the crossing of gender boundaries may be characterised as *ergi* in Old Norse legal vocabulary, but shape-shifting as well[41]. As noted above, shape-shifting may certainly lead to bestiality, which tends to be grouped with homosexuality in the law codes[42]. Thus the transgression of Loki in the masterbuilder narrative and

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[36] See Ármann Jakobsson, *Loki og jötnarnir,* [in:] *Greppaminni: Rit til heiðurs Vésteini Ólasyni sjötugum*, ed. by Margrét Eggertsdóttir et al., Reykjavík 2009, pp. 31–41. In that article, I discuss the arguments for Loki being regarded as a giant at more length. On monsters and genre, see e.g. B. Bandlien, *Man or Monster: Negotations of Masculinity in Old Norse Society,* Oslo 2005, pp. 43–44.

[37] See e.g M. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, pp. 144–186.

[38] Loki's androgynous state expresses the chaos of the giants, according to E. Mundal, *Androgyny as an image of chaos in Old Norse mythology*, "Maal og mine" 1 (1998), pp. 1–9.

[39] Óðinn indeed refers to his gigantic grandfather Bǫlþorn as one of his greatest rune teachers in Hávamál (*Norræn fornkvæði*, p. 61).

[40] On the complicated and ambivalent relationship between gods and giants, see e.g. Ármann Jakobsson, *A contest of cosmic fathers: God and giant in Vafþrúðnismál*, "Neophilologus" 92 (2008), pp. 263–277, and references there to the works of Ciklamini, Clunies Ross, Mundal and Steinsland.

[41] See Ármann Jakobsson, *The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch: The Meanings of Troll and Ergi in Medieval Iceland*, "Saga-Book" 32 (2008), pp. 55–63. There are unfortunately no clear instances where shape-shifting or bestiality is referred to as *ergi*, even though the word appears in a wide variety of meanings.

[42] See e.g. P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Norrønt nid: Forestillingen om den umandige mand ide islandske sagaer*, Odense 1980, K.E. Gade, *Homosexuality and the Rape of Males in Old Norse Law and Literature*, "Scandinavian Studies" 58 (1986), pp. 126–131.

presumably in the nebulous incident mentioned by Óðinn in *Lokasenna* is double: Loki not only changes species but also biological sex, becoming a cow and a mare rather than a bull and a stallion[43].

Sorcery may be regarded as feminine and abominable in itself, most famously expressed in *Ynglinga saga*'s comment about the sorcery of Óðinn's *seiðr* and the *ergi* it entails[44]. Clearly sorcery and *ergi* go hand in hand, and it is equally clear that a lack of masculinity constitutes the *ergi* of sorcery, which is also present in other depictions of it. It is hard to establish firmly the meaning of the words *argr* and *ergi*. One of the meanings of *argr* is "angry, enraged, trembling with rage" which may lead one to become "volatile". And its metathetical cousin *ragr* means "cowardly, trembling with fear", thus also "moveable". Both words are also used to talk about volatility of gender, and about sorcery[45].

Every definition of *argr* and *ragr* seems to fit Loki; he is volatile in every sense of the word, changing both species and genders, which leads him to become Sleipnir's mother. The seduction of Svaðilfari is not the only occasion which requires Loki to change his gender. He accompanies Þórr as a maidservant on their journey to Jötunheimr in the poem *Þrymskviða*, and unlike Þórr he does not protest against the female disguise. In fact, he eagerly volunteeres for the part, and seems to be quite in his element dressed up as a servant girl[46]. He also adopts the guise of a woman when he tricks Frigg into revealing Baldr's weakness[47], and he is again in female form, this time a giantess, when he is the only creature in the world who refuses to cry for Baldr and save him from Hel[48].

Words such as androgyny or bisexuality appear to be misplaced when speaking of Loki. It seems more helpful to describe him, as Bandlien does, as having a liminal gender identity[49]. Still, in each of those cases, deception is an important factor in his transformations. Every metamorphosis of Loki serves a practical purpose: If Þórr is to play Freyja, he has to have a maid. Svaðilfari presumably can only be seduced by a mare, and it also seems logical that Frigg should trust a strange woman rather than a man[50]. But why does it have to be a giantess rather

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[43] According to Hyndluljóð (*Flateyjarbok* I, ed. by C.R. Unger, Kristiania 1860, p. 15), perhaps Loki can also be a human mother (*vard Loptr kuidugr* / *af konu illri*), although the stanza is somewhat opaque.

[44] *Heimskringla* I, p. 19.

[45] This is discussed in more detail in Ármann Jakobsson, *The Trollish Acts*…

[46] *Norræn fornkvæði*, pp. 126–27.

[47] *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 64.

[48] Ibidem, pp. 67–68.

[49] See esp. B. Bandlien, *Man or Monster*…, pp. 69–72.

[50] Although Frigg's trust of the strange woman is in fact a curious flaw in the narrative, badly needing a "willing suspension of disbelief". Obviously the omission of the *mistilteinn* from the oath of immunity would have been a dangerous secret and far too important to be blurted out to a strange woman.

than a male giant who refuses to cry for Baldr? Are the gods more easily taken in by a female guise? Are they less likely to kill a giantess than a giant in a fit of rage[51]? Or does Loki enjoy crossing gender boundaries? Is it part of his subversive nature to switch genders?

When *ergi* begins to mean "cowardice", it is clearly not regarded as a strength, since a coward cannot be seen as strong. On the other hand, though Loki is volatile, he is not really cowardly. In fact, Loki's flexible gender identity has its advantages. He is indubitably the leading trouble-shooter of the gods and his volatility is an advantage in this role. It is precisely because Loki can be a flea, a fly, a mare or a bird that he is useful to the gods. In addition, his most successful acts of vandalism are performed in female guise.

Loki may be liminal, but this does not necessarily entail that he is weak, or, that he is less masculine than the other gods. *Lokasenna* reveals that he has had much heterosexual sex; in fact he claims to have cuckolded most of the other gods[52]. He certainly does not come across as weak in this poem; the other gods fear him and plead in vain for a cessation of hostilities. It is only Þórr who can tame this uncontrollable and wild force that Loki has become. But why should the gods fear Loki? What is the danger posed to them by his liminal status?

Transcendental Loki

When the gods have killed the giant Þjazi and made peace with his daughter Skaði, there is a small coda relating how Loki made the final peace offering by putting on an act for Skaði. His genitals are tied to those of a goat and when they are pulled in separate directions, each gives a great yelp which makes Skaði laugh[53]. Again Loki seems to be emasculated and humiliated in this anecdote, act-

[51] In the narrative of Baldr's funeral, the giantess Hyrrokin is asked to aid the gods to push the funeral ship afoot and whilst Þórr is visibly enraged at this, the gods plead with him not to kill the giantess (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, p. 65). This may not be due to her gender only as she has been invited to the funeral and thus presumably granted sanctuary. This mercy is not granted to everyone; in his anger Þórr instead kicks the dwarf Litr on to the funeral pyre (p. 66).

[52] Loki claims to have fathered a son by Týr's wife and not paid him any compensation for the slight. He also claims to have been invited to Skaði's bed and he claims to have cuckolded Þórr (*Norræn fornkvæði*, pp. 119 and 121). As seen in the prose epilogue to the poem in Codex Regius, these boastful claims have no effect on his own wife Sigyn's loyalty to him.

[53] Most scholars see this a symbolic or even an actual castration of Loki, perhaps even the cause of his ambiguous sexuality (R. North, *Loki's Gender: Or Why Skaði Laughed*, [in:] *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe*, ed. by K.E. Olsen, L.A.J.R. Houven, Leuven 2001, pp. 141–151). John Lindow ("Loki and Skaði", *Snorrastefna 25.–27. júlí 1990*, ed. by Úlfar Bragason, Reykjavík 1992, pp. 130–142) has pointed out that Loki's encounter with the god symbolises his sexual ambiguity since the she-goat (with its beard) is a creature of ambivalent sexuality and he furthermore explores the possibility that Loki enacts antoher mock-feminine ritual such as

ing as a clown to make a big joke out of a potentially explosive situation. But is he really just a harmless jester or the butt of the laughter of the other gods? Another possible interpretation is that he is yet again showing the power of a transgressive being, who is hampered neither by gender nor species. He is willing and able to submit himself to an ordeal that others would fear.

Loki seems unconstrained by all boundaries. This would seem to be a strength rather than a weakness and Loki is certainly able to exploit it. If he is an air god, he constitutes a metaphor for freedom from restrictions and boundaries. He also seems to be able to allow himself many guises and identities, much like the high god Óðinn himself. He imitates Óðinn in his ability to theriomorph, as well as in his sorcerous powers. And, finally, Loki alone is not afraid to be a woman when it suits him. In the relationship between gender and this particular subversive individual, he is certainly the master.

The power and attraction of all magic lies in the ability to transcend one's limitations, as Óðinn does in *Ynglinga saga* when he is able to be in two places at the same time through sorcery[54]. As a mythological figure, this might be what Loki is all about. There are no boundaries to his existence. He is a god of many species and genders. Thus one might discern in him a wish to transcend one's limitations, and his frequent gender mutations might indicate that gender is one of those categories that people secretly wish to transcend.

Loki the Evasive

Another and a more negative way to regard Loki is to see him as a cipher. As a figure of many guises, Loki is everything and nothing. When he is female, he is not really female. He can be a horse and yet not quite a horse. Loki that one might see swimming upstream in the river is not a salmon but a *faux* salmon. Just as Útgarða-Loki is primarily an illusionist who cannot create an incredible heavy cat, but only disguise Miðgarðsormr so that he resembles one, Loki may not really be able to transcend anything, may just act out various female and bestial parts. He begets only monsters. As a faker, Loki is not androgynous nor bisexual. He rather has no gender but can adopt any gender that he needs to. Thus Loki is not really tangible: in the end his meaning eludes us.

It could be argued that Snorri Sturluson leans towards the latter view of Loki. He may be fascinated by Loki but he certainly does not approve of him. Did

giving birth. Clunies Ross sees the sexual humiliation Loki acts out as a joke on Skaði who did not get the god she wanted but ends up getting won over by an androgynous/bisexual and marginal member of the god's household (M. Clunies Ross, *Why Skaði laughed: Comic Seriousness in an Old Norse Mythic Narrative*, "Maal og minne" (1989), pp. 1–14.

[54] *Heimskringla* I, p. 18.

he have to contend with an ancient cult of Loki which saw his transformational powers as something to aspire to? If so, its traces are few and unclear[55]. However, even if Loki was ever a deity, he may have been nothing like the Loki that Snorri commited to parchment in the 13th century. In the end, you may turn to face the faker but you never catch a glimpse.

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[55] Cf. e.g. U. Drobin, *Myth and Epical Motifs in the Loki-Research*, "Temenos" 3 (1968), p. 19–39.

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ZMIENNA MĘSKOŚĆ LOKIEGO

Streszczenie

Niniejsze studium dotyczy sposobu, w jaki płeć jest wyrażana i rozgraniczana w przedstawieniach Lokiego w głównych średniowiecznych źródłach, które określiły, jak późniejsze pokolenia postrzegają mitologię staronordycką, w szczególności *Eddę* Snorriego Sturlusona. Nacisk kładziony jest na mity prawdopodobnie obecne w całej Skandynawii w okresie średniowiecza, a nie na wcześniejsze pogańskie życie Lokiego jako kultowej postaci w całej germańskiej Europie. Analiza mitologicznych portretów zapewnia ważny wgląd w średniowieczny sposób myślenia, w tym przypadku – w jaki sposób zmienna płeć i gatunek Lokiego może uczynić go bardziej transcendentalnym, co przyczynia się do wyjaśnienia jego atrakcyjności jako kultowej postaci. Pamiętać należy jednocześnie, że Loki jest zbyt niematerialny, ponieważ jego przedstawienia dostarczają jedynie ulotnych wskazówek na temat jego średniowiecznego znaczenia.

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STUDIA I MATERIAŁY Z DZIEJÓW EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ

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VALOUR AND BALANCE: PREREQUISITES OF A HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN THE FAMILY SAGAS

The thesis that social positions in a community are dependent on gender, has recently been greatly influenced by the theory of "hegemonic masculinity" formulated by the Australian sociologist Reawyn Connel[1]. According to her, multiple types of masculinities co-exist in every society and each of them is associated with different positions of power. Her claim derives from the concept that gender is constructed in people's minds and thus is not immutable but constantly changing. It is therefore practised in order to maintain or alter social positions. As Connel argues, one of these practices is the notion of hegemony, used in societies to legitimize the dominant form of masculinity – to which few men are able or permitted to aspire – and which serves to marginalise or subordinate other masculinities as well as, of course, femininities[2].

The focus in this study will be on a more ancient past, namely on medieval Iceland. Even then hegemonic masculinity was discernible and, as it will be argued, the idea of a perfect and ruling man had to meet two requirements: valiant behaviour and well-balanced conduct in everyday conflicts. Neither of the aforementioned qualities were sufficient on their own to acquire the title of an "ideal man", since being merely strong and bold could easily result in too much aggressiveness condemned by the community. On the other hand, being cool-headed and unwilling to fight was often regarded as cowardice.

[1] *Masculinities*, II, ed. by R. Connel, Cambridge 2005.
[2] Ibidem.

A special way to achieve the ideal was the phenomenon which I labelled "fusion", where two persons, each of them owning only one of the attributes, unite to construct the hegemonic masculine ideal. This will be illustrated through two famous family sagas, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Brennu-Njáls saga*, where pairs like Snorri goði and Styrr as well as Njáll and Gunnarr cooperate to achieve social domination.

This paper aims to demonstrate the strong connection between masculinity and social status, and sheds light on how different layers of masculinity could be applied in thirteenth-century Iceland. The investigation is based on the Íslendingasögur, the sagas of Icelanders or family sagas, a literary corpus whose plot usually takes place in the ninth-eleventh centuries, but was written down at least two centuries later. Hence, it is likely that the sources mostly reflect contemporary rather than earlier beliefs concerning hegemony and masculinity.

Social domination and masculinity

Eigi eru þeir forystulausir, er ú ert fyrirmaðr, sakar árœðis ok karlmennsku ("With you at their head, no one will be without leadership, because of your daring and manliness")[3] – says Jökull to his brother Þorsteinn in *Vatnsdœla saga*, explicitly linking leadership with manliness. The correlation of masculinity and power is an old one in gender studies and is also discernible in the Old Norse corpus[4].

The strong link between masculinity and social rule is attested also in the beginning of *Vatnsdœla saga*, where the chieftain Ketill expounds to his son Þorsteinn on the ideal conduct of a young man. In his parables, the chieftain draws on precedents to Þorsteinn for the manly behaviour by referring to earls and kings as prominent examples to follow[5].

This close connection between manliness and social domination was well illustrated by Carol Clover, who showed that exceptional women could all reach a respected place in society (even leader roles) if they acquired manly features[6].

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[3] *Vatnsdœla saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit VIII, Reykjavík 1939, p. 11; *The Saga of the People of Vatnsdal,* [in:] *The Sagas of Icelanders. A Selection*, ed. by Örnólfur Thorsson, New York 2001, p. 193.

[4] B. Bandlien, *Man or Monster? Negotiations of Masculinity in Old Norse Society*, Oslo 2005, p. 2; Rulers were hailed as the best of warriors in skaldic poetry: R. Malmros, *Den hedenske fyrstedigtnings samfundssyn*, "Historisk Tidskrift" 99:2 (1999), pp. 353–355.

[5] *Vatnsdœla saga*, p. 5.

[6] C. Clover, *Maiden Warriors and Other Sons*, "The Journal of English and Germanic Philology" 85:1 (1986), pp. 35–49; Idem: *Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe*, "Speculum", 68:2 (1993), pp. 363–387. See also L. Normann, *Woman or Warrior? Construction of Gender in Old Norse Myth*, [in:] *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference*, ed. by M. Clunies Ross, G. Barnes, 2000, pp. 375–385.

Women challenged the masculinity of men when they intended to rebel against social oppression[7]. In *Laxdæla saga*, for instance, Guðrún's attempt to steal the sword of her former lover Kjartan and Auðr's attack on her husband's sword hand are considered to be symbolic castrations that caused serious wounds to the social status of the two men[8]. Clover's "one-gender model" argues that not only women could rise by being masculine, but men could also fall by being feminine; if someone was not manly enough, he could easily end up at the bottom of the social chain.

In the saga literature, the introduction of a character often helps us to determine the degree of his manliness[9]. The physical appearance and the internal attributes of a person have a significant impact on the reader's judgement on the character and often forebode his fate[10]. Thus, when we read about a person we already have some preconceptions of what kind of a person he is or how he is going to end up in the story. The typical hegemonic masculine character is introduced to us in the sagas by mentioning two essential qualities: valour and balance.

> *Hrútr var vænn maðr,* mikill *og* sterkr*,* vígr vel *ok* hógværr í skapi, manna vitrastr, harðráðr *við óvini sína, en* tillagagóðr *inna stœrri mála*[11]. [Emphasis mine]

> *"Hrut was a handsome man; he was* tall*,* strong*, and* skilled in arms, even-tempered *and very* shrewd*,* ruthless *with his enemies and always* reliable *in matters of importance"*[12]. [Emphasis mine]

The two requirements of an ideal man – valour and balance – are complex categories. The former one is quite obvious and expected in a Viking Age community and also in the later medieval period when the sagas were written, namely to be physically strong (in Hrútr's case: *mikill og sterkr*), courageous and unwilling to back up from a fight (*harðráðr við óvini sína*). The latter, however, is a more complicated category, comprised of a certain wisdom (*manna vitrastr*) and even-tempered conduct in everyday conflicts (*hógværr í skapi*). A valiant and a balanced person is usually typified by the following adjectives:

Valour: *mikill*, *sterkr*, *vígr vel*, *harðráðr*, áræði, *karlmennska*, *framgjarn*, *harðfengr*

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[7] A. Ney, *Drottningar och sköldmör: gränsöverskidande kvinnor i medeltida myt och verklighet ca. 400–1400*, Heidemora 2004, p. 9.

[8] N. Dolen, *Å fare som ein mann – om ære og kjønn i Laxdæla saga*, [in:] *Herzort Island: Aufsätze zur isländischen Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte: zum 65. Geburtstag von Gert Krauzer*, ed. by T. Seiler, Köln. 2005. pp. 27–41.

[9] L. Lönnroth, *Rhetorical Persuasion in the Sagas*, "Scandinavian Studies" 42:2 (1970), pp. 157–189.

[10] L. Lönnroth, *Kroppen som själens spegel – ett motiv i de isländska sagorna*, "Lychnos" (1963–1964), pp. 24–61.

[11] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XII, Reykjavík 1954, p. 5.

[12] *Njal's saga*, transl. by Magnus Magnusson, Hermann Pálsson, Penguin Books 1960, p. 39.

Balance: *hógværr*, *vitr*, *tillagagóðr*, *forspár*, *langrækr*, *heilráðr*[13].

Persons with both of these attributes usually turn out to be successful, well-respected and popular men, often occupying high social positions[14]. Other men, however, who lack one of these qualities, usually become troublemakers or are perceived as cowards. They are treated as unmanly and occupy socially inferior positions[15].

Two pioneering works have to be mentioned when concerning the ideals of medieval Icelandic literature: Theodore M. Andersson's article, the "Displacement of the Heroic Ideals in the Family Sagas" and Lars Lönnroth's theory of the "Noble Heathen". Both scholars argued that the Christian ethics at the time of saga writing influenced the morals, and that the social ideal in this literature was not heroic but peaceful[16]. Although this study does not intend to glorify heroism in the sagas, Andersson's and Lönnroth's views will be revisited. What is more, despite the fact that this will not challenge the viewpoint that someone can be a positive character without being valiant, the fact that it restrains the character's chances to become a hegemonic masculine person will be pointed out in selected episodes. Although this mindset might not dominate throughout the whole corpus of the *Íslendingasögur*, I believe the examples below demonstrate the importance of physical force in the saga world and its relation to manliness.

Valour but no Balance

One of the typical instances when a person has physical powers but lacks "balance" is the case of berserks – the ferocious, unbeatable warriors who, acting as unwelcome suitors, challenged peaceful farmers to duels for their property and women. These exceedingly aggressive, "over-masculine" figures were a social menace to ordinary men[17]. Despite their often hypermasculine physicality, their overbearing behaviour resulted in social contempt.

In *Eyrbyggja saga*, two berserks Halli and Leiknir are handed over almost like objects by earl Hákon to his respected retainer Vermundr. Halli and Leiknir are obviously very masculine figures: *Þeir váru menn miklu meiri ok sterkari en*

[13] For a broader term list see: Jón Vidar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, Odense 1999, p. 85.

[14] P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Individual and Social Values in Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu*, "Scandinavian Studies" 60:2 (1988), pp. 260–263.

[15] Individual traits of a character are thus never separated from the social context. Vilhjálmur Árnason, *An Ethos in Transformation: Conflicting Values in the Sagas*, "Gripla" 20 (2009), pp. 217–240.

[16] T.M. Andersson, *The Displacement of the Heroic Ideal in the Family Sagas*, "Speculum" 45:4 (1970), pp. 575–593; L. Lönnroth, *The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas*, "Scandinavian Studies" 41:1 (1969), pp. 1–29.

[17] B. Blaney, *Berserkr*, [in:] *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, ed by. P. Pulsiano, K. Wolf, New York–London 1993, pp. 37–38.

í þann tíma fengisk þeira jafningjar í Nóregi ("They were men of much greater size and strength than any other men in Norway")[18]. Still, they are treated like objects, changing masters twice throughout the course of the saga and it seems that they do not have much to say with regard to the choice of the owner they are given to. They address their harsh treatment later on, explicitly saying: *kalla Vermund eigi eiga at selja sik né gefa sem ánauðga menn*[19] ("that Vermund had no right to sell them or give them away like slaves"). This passage suggests that, despite their manly appearance and physical prowess, overbearing troublemakers, like the berserks, were socially inferior to other men. Too much "valour" was a disadvantage not only in the physical but also in the sexual sense. In a notable scene of *Njáls saga*, Hrútr cannot enjoy his wife Unnr as a result of the curse of his previous lover Queen Gunnhildr: his penis grows so large that he is not able to penetrate Unnr[20].

Later on, one of the berserk brothers Halli asks for the hand of Ásdís, the daughter of their current master Styrr[21]. In one of her articles, Judy Quinn asserts that Ásdís' description in her fascinating attire and her queen-like behaviour – she does not even answer to the brothers when they address her – makes it clear that this would not be a marriage between equals[22]. The marriage proposal, submitted by Halli, is thus rejected due to the discrepancy in social status between him and Ásdís, namely that a berserk will never be a match for a prosperous farmer's daughter. Although belonging to a different saga (sub-)genre, *Sörla saga sterka* reflects a similar notion when King Haraldr refuses to give his daughter in marriage to *svá leiðu trölli ok mögnuðum berserk* ("such a loathsome troll and bewitched berserk")[23]. Here the word *berserk* is synonymous with troll, linking it with bestiality, which was always socially condemned[24]. Berserks often do not even try to marry a woman, but to take her by force, and their attempts to rape farmers' daughters in general are challenges by the marginal against the settled[25]. That these monstrous troublemakers were handled as socially inferior could not be affirmed better than

[18] *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Matthías Þórðarson, Íslenzk fornrit IV, Reykjavík 1935, p. 61; *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, [in:] *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders. Including 49 Tales*, ed. by Viðar Hreinsson, Leifur Eiríksson Publishing 1997, p. 157.

[19] *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 64; *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, p. 159.

[20] U. Dronke, *The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls saga*, Viking Society for Northern Research, London 1981, pp. 1–31; C. Phelpstead, *Size Matters: Penile Problems in Sagas of Icelanders*, "Exemplaria" 19:3 (2007), pp. 420–437.

[21] *Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 70–75.

[22] J. Quinn, *Women in Old Norse Poetry and Sagas*, [in:] *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. ed. by R. McTurk., Oxford, 2005, pp. 518–535.

[23] Ármann Jakobsson, *The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch: The Meanings of Troll and Ergi in Medieval Iceland*, "Saga-Book" 32 (2008), p. 48.

[24] B. Bandlien, *Man or Monster*…, pp. 125–127.

[25] R.M. Karras, *Servitude and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland*, [in:] *From Sagas to Society. Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. by Gísli Pálsson, Wiltshire 1992, p. 299.

by the relevant sections of the medieval Icelandic law book the *Grágás* (1117–18), which punishes *berserkrgangr* ("berserk frenzy") with outlawry[26].

Not only berserks but other characters are also seen as socially inferior due to their hypertrophic masculinity; one good example is that of Grettir Ásmundarson the Strong. Grettir is said to have been the strongest man in Icelandic history and ends up as an outlaw due to his killings, thefts and other unsocial acts he has committed on the island[27]. The same is true for other socially overbearing men. After examining *Gunnlaugs saga*, Robert Cook observes that although Gunnlaugr is the protagonist of the saga and we are affected by his death, he is actually weak in character[28]. The same is claimed by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen saying "that Gunnlaugr lacks some of the qualities necessary for a chieftain, among them popularity"[29]. Although both Grettir and Gunnlaugr are examples of strong and courageous, if somewhat unbalanced, persons they are also positive characters in the eyes of the reader. Even an "over-masculine" man could therefore appear in a favourable light, although this could hardly be synonymous with being a hegemonic man. It is also true for the reverse: if someone is a peaceful and balanced person, it does not result in his being perceived as a social ideal.

Balance but no Valour

Berserks had "valour", in fact too much of it, which often resulted in their social condemnation. Too much aggressiveness was therefore a disadvantage for a man but the same could also be said for those who were not aggressive enough. Even Gunnarr, one of the main protagonists in *Njáls saga*, wonders whether his remorse – which he feels after a huge massacre he inflicted – is a sign of unmanliness:

> *Hvat ek veit, segir Gunnarr, hvárt ek mun því óvaskari maðr en aðrir menn sem mér þykkir meira fyrir en öðrum mönnum at vega menn*[30].
>
> "But I wish I knew, said Gunnar, whether I am any the less manly than other men, for being so much more reluctant to kill than other man are"[31].

The second type of people who were held on a liminal gender and social position, were those peacemakers, whom Andersson and Lönnroth regarded as the social ideals of the family sagas. Without being courageous and valiant, however,

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[26] V. Finsen, *Grágás I. Islændernes Lovbog i Fristatens Tid. Udgivet efter det kongelige Bibliotheks Haandskrift*, Copenhagen 1852, p. 23.

[27] See M. Poilvez in this volume.

[28] R. Cook, *Character of Gunnlaug-Serpent Tongue*, "Scandinavian Studies" 43:1 (1971), pp. 1–21.

[29] P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Individual and Social*…, p. 249.

[30] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 139.

[31] *Njal's saga*, p. 135.

it was hard to achieve a respected place in society[32]. Even the ideal peacemakers like Ingimundr, who is a typical "noble heathen" according to Lönnroth, are still up for fighting. The saga, moreover, speaks of him as a typical hegemonic masculine person:

> *Öllum þótti mikils um Ingimund vert, bæði um háttu hans ok yfirbragð; hann var kœnn við alla leika ok at allri atgørvi vel færr ok óágjarn við sér minni men, en* harðfengr *ok* framgjarn *við sína óvini*[33]. [Emphasis mine]

> *"Everyone thought a great deal of Ingimund, both his manner and appearance. He was talented in all games and very able in every accomplishment and not at all aggressive towards lesser men, but* tough *and* combatitive *with his enemies*"[34]. [Emphasis mine]

Valour was indeed an essential quality for a top-notch man and especially for a chieftain, who claimed to be a masculine ideal. It is quite frequent in the sagas that someone appears in a positive light as a peacemaker, nevertheless it does not necessarily mean that he is an ideal type of man, and especially not that he is fit for the leadership of a community.

One of these examples is Þórarinn from *Eyrbyggja saga*, a figure who has strength, though he does not make use of it. We read about him in the saga that he was *vel stilltr hversdagliga; hann var kallaðr mannasœttir* ("self-composed and he had a reputation as a peace-maker")[35]. This attitude, however, leads to our questioning of his manliness:

> *Svá var hann maðr óhlutdeilinn, at óvinir hans mæltu, at hann hefði eigi síðr kvenna skap en karla*[36].

> "He was so impartial that his enemies said that his disposition was as much like a woman's as a man's"[37].

Þórarinn is not just simply óhlutdeilinn but *svá óhlutdeilinn*, implying that his impartiality is exaggerated. As in the case of the "over-masculine" attitude of the berserks, the "overbalanced" conduct of Þórarinn is similarly intolerable in the eyes of men. However, he is perceived unmanly not only due to his excessiveness in virtues but also because of his lack of valour. This becomes apparent when he finally avenges an insult with physical force and when his kinsmen ask him whether the insulters *Hvárt vissu þeir nú, hvárt þú vart karlmaðr eða kona?*

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[32] See also: R. Cook, *Heroes and Heroism in Njáls saga*, [in:] *Greppaminni*, ed. by Margrét Eggertsdóttir et al., Reykjavik 2009, pp. 71–90.

[33] *Vatnsdœla saga*, p. 19.

[34] *The Saga of the People of Vatnsdal*, p. 199.

[35] *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 27; *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, p. 142.

[36] *Eyrbyggja saga*.

[37] *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, p. 142.

("have found out whether he is a men or a women")?[38] The nature of the question indicates that Þórarinn was once perceived on a liminal phase between men and women before the actions (a man with a behaviour of a woman) and only after overcoming his cowardice can he earn his respected place in society.

Backing up from a fight was often considered to be a social disgrace, particularly with regard to the leaders. Mörðr gígja in *Njáls saga* was *ríkr höfðingi* ("a powerful chieftain") and *Málafylgjumaðr mikill ok svá mikill lögmaðr, at engir þóttu lögligir dómar dœmðir, nema hann væri við* ("very experienced lawyer – so skilful, indeed, that no judgement was held to be valid unless he had taken part in it")[39]. Although he is a leader and appears to have a balanced type of character, his social status suffers a serious blow at the *Alþingi* after he refuses to fight in a duel which he is challenged to by another chieftain Hrútr.

> *Þá kvað Mörðr þat upp, at han mundi eigi berjask við Hrút; þá varð óp mikit at lögbergi ok óhljóð, ok hafði Mörðr af ina mestu svívirðing*[40].
>
> "So Mord announced that he would not fight with Hrut. There was a great shout of derision at the Law Rock, and Mord earned nothing but ignominy from this"[41].

The instances of Þórarinn and Mörðr show that to be socially dominant or respected, one's conduct had to be consistent with the expectations of "manly behaviour", which concerns both valour and balance. Excessive peacefulness or withdrawal from a violent situation could result in being dishonoured. The disdain of the community towards this unmanly conduct often manifested itself in personal insults (Þórarinn), or in public humiliation (Mörðr).

Not all of the family sagas of course share the completely same notion of manliness[42], and thus regarding these examples as the representative view of the society which produced it would be problematic. However, the other connected evidence might strengthen the point expounded above. Passivity in sexual life, for instance, was blameworthy too; in male same-sex intercourse, it was always the passive partner who suffered harsh condemnation, while being the penetrator was less of a dishonour[43]. Suffering from oppression either in sexual or social life was thus a form of effeminacy that a real man could not afford.

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[38] *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 43; *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, p. 149.

[39] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 5; *Njal's saga*, p. 39.

[40] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 28.

[41] *Njal's saga*, p. 55.

[42] See for instance: Ármann Jakobsson, *Masculinity and Politics in Njáls saga*, "Viator" 38 (2007), pp. 191–215.

[43] P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, transl. by J. Turville-Petre, Odense 1983; S. Fölke, *Níð, Ergi and Old Norse Moral Attitudes*, Viking Society for Northern Research, London 1974, pp. 1–20; K.E. Gade, *Homosexuality and Rape of Males in Old Norse Law and Literature*, "Scandinavian Studies" 58 (1986), pp. 124–141; J. Jochens, *Old Norse Sexuality: Men, Women, and Beasts*, [in:] *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. ed. by V.L. Bullough, J.A. Brundage, New York–London 1996, pp. 369–400.

Fusion

There were, naturally, people who were not suited for physical combat either due to their age, or to their body build. Their counterparts, that is the people who had less affinity for wisdom, were in the same boat. For both types, it was hard to reach the top layers of society with regard to their status. Nevertheless, as we will see in what follows, this did not mean that people possessing only one of the preferable attributes of a "real man" were completely excluded from leadership. If a person owned only one of the qualities, he could still turn to a phenomenon, which I refer to as "fusion"; meaning that in order to construct the hegemonic masculine ideal, he unites himself with a man who owns the opposite attribute. Two famous family sagas, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Brennu-Njáls saga*, are good examples here, where pairs like Snorri goði and Styrr, as well as Njáll and Gunnarr, cooperate to achieve social domination. Snorri the goði from *Eyrbyggja saga* lacks physical force while Gunnarr in *Njáls saga* ought to have more wisdom and self-control. Each of them is in need of the other component: Snorri needs valour, while Gunnarr lacks balance.

Snorri is the prominent character of *Eyrbyggja saga* who, thanks to his intellectual skills, slowly takes over the whole territory of Snæfellsnes and becomes the dominant figure in power. Acquiring leadership, however, is a slow process for him with many obstacles where he has to prove himself. This is sometimes quite hard as his original qualities are not sufficient to make him a chieftain and help him to maintain that position. When he is introduced in the saga, we are immediately informed about his problems:

> *Snorri var* meðalmaðr *á hæð ok heldr* grannligr*...hann var* hógværr *hversdagliga; fann lítt á honum, hvárt honum þótti vel eða illa; hann var* vitr *maðr ok* forspár *um marga hluti,* langrækr *ok heiptúðigr,* heilráðr *vinum sínum, en óvinir hans þóttusk heldr kulða af kenna ráðum hans…hann gerðisk þá höfðingi mikill, en ríki hans var mjök öfundsamt, því at þeir váru margir, er eigi þóttusk til minna um komnir fyrir ættar sakar, en áttu meira undir sér fyrir afls sakar ok prófaðrar harðfengi*[44]. [Emphasis mine]

> *"Snorri was a man of* medium height *but rather* thin*…He was usually an* even-tempered *man, and did not readily show his likes and dislikes. Snorri was a* wise man *and had* foresight *about many things, a* long memory *and a predisposition to vengeance. He gave his friends* good counsel*, but his enemies felt the chill of his strategies...He became a prominent chieftain but his power also occasioned envy since there were many who believed that their lineage gave them no lesser claim to leadership than his, and rather more in terms of strength of their following and their proven valour"*[45]. [Emphasis mine]

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[44] *Eyrbyggja saga*, pp. 26–27.

[45] *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, pp. 141–142.

As we read in the saga, Snorri is a very balanced person (*hógværr*, *vitr*, *forspár*, *langrækr*, *heilráðr*), but he has a shortage of valiant attributes; he is neither strong, nor brave, nor even a good fighter. He is only of medium height (*meðalmaðr*), slim (*grannligr*), and his enemies fear only his strategic skills (*kuldа af kenna ráðum hans*), not his physical strength. Snorri's position occasions envy since, due to their greater strength and proven valour, many men think of themselves as being more suitable for leadership than him.

Snorri, being a good strategist, recognizes his disadvantages and, to stabilize his power, allies himself with Styrr, a respected warrior of the district, through a marriage between the two families. According to the saga,

> *Var þat mál manna, at hvárrtveggja þótti vaxa af þessum tengðum; var Snorri goði ráðagörðarmaðr meiri ok vitrari, en Styrr atgöngumeiri*[46].
>
> "Everyone thought that both men's prestige was increased through this liaison. Snorri the godi was a better strategist and smarter, but Styr was more aggressive"[47].

In the power struggles of the district, their alliance works well and that this is not a simple alliance but something more becomes apparent at a later feast. Here was *Var þar talat um mannjöfnuð, hverr þar var væri göfgastr maðr í sveit eða mestr höfðingi* ("a lot of talk about who the most eminent man or the greatest chieftain in the district was")[48].

The fact that the text uses *göfgastr maðr* and *mestr höfðingi* as synonyms is in itself interesting and confirms a close connection between masculinity and social status. Different opinions of the feast participants, however, are even more notable.

> *Urðu menn þar eigi á eitt sáttir, sem optast er, ef um mannjöfnuð er talat; váru þeir flestir, at Snorri goði þótti göfgastr maðr, en sumir nefndu til Arnkel; þeir váru enn sumir, er nefndu til Styr*[49].
>
> "People were by no means on one opinion of this, as is often the way when there is a talk of comparing men. Most of them thought that Snorri the godi was the most eminent man, but some went for Arnkel. A few even named Styr"[50].

Snorri's personality and attributes have been already addressed and it is evident that he is one of the possible candidates for the recognition. That only a few people named Styrr as the most hegemonic of the men of the district is not surprising, as aggressiveness is less valued than mental qualities in the saga literature[51].

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[46] *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 75.

[47] *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, p. 165.

[48] *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 98; *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, p. 176.

[49] *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 98.

[50] *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, p. 176.

[51] Jón Vidar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*…, pp. 86–87; Since Icelandic society was more peaceful than contemporary Norway or the Orkney Islands and leaders rarely engaged in

However, it is not an underestimated attribute, as it at least qualifies Styrr for the "competition".

Arnkell, on the other hand, is a hegemonic masculine man with all the features that could be required, as we find out about him in one of the earlier passages:

> *Hann [Arnkell] var* mestr *ok* sterkastr*,* lagamaðr *mikill ok* forvitri*. Hann var* góðr drengr *ok* umfram alla menn *aðra þar í sveit at* vinsældum *ok* harðfengi[52]. [Emphasis mine]

> *"He [Arnkell] was the* biggest *and* strongest *of men, a* knowledgeable lawman *and very* clever*. He was a* man of sound character *and surpassed other men in that part of the country in both* popularity *and* valour"[53]. [Emphasis mine]

The situation is intriguing. We have two people (Snorri and Styrr), each of them excellent in his own respect, yet neither of them possesses both features: valour and balance. On the other hand, we have a chieftain (Arnkell) who is outstanding in both matters, surpassing any other man in the whole country. In spite of this, the result is by no means evident. One of the speakers at the feast, Þorleifr kimbi, says that the comparison should not be made between Snorri, Styrr and Arnkell, but only between Arnkell and the other two, since *Þar sé sem einn maðr, er þeir eru Snorri goði ok Styrr, fyrir tengða sakar* ("Snorri and Styr count as one man because of their kinship")[54]. The alliance of Snorri and Styrr is a particularly close one, perceived as a fusion of their personal qualities. This fusion was a special way to compete for hegemony, and the chieftains who were united in this way could be just as successful as the other, very masculine men. Andersson lists Snorri among the social ideals due to his diplomatic skills, but does not seem to acknowledge Styrr's role in Snorri's success[55].

The pattern is similar in *Njáls saga*, where Gunnarr, a fighter of legendary status, always has to rely on the support of Njáll, the wise and even-tempered lawyer. When they first appear, both Gunnarr and Njáll seem to be very trusted, skilled and popular people. However, their differences are very evidently stressed. This is what we read about Gunnarr:

> *Hann var mikill maðr vexti og sterkr, manna bezt vígr; hann hjó báðum höndum og skaut, ef hann vildi, ok hann vá svá skjótt með sverði, at þrjú þóttu á lopti at sjá. Hann*

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battle, chieftains' physical power was less important. Jón Vidar Sigurðsson, *Kings, Earls and Chieftains. Rulers in Norway, Orkney and Iceland c. 900–1300*, [in:] *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages. Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, ed. by G. Steinsland et al., Brill 2011, p. 79.

[52] *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 20.

[53] *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, p. 139.

[54] *Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 99. *The Saga of the People of Eyri*, p. 176.

[55] Andersson, *The Displacement*…, pp. 581–582; Jón Vidar Sigurðsson also states that "Snorri… used every possible means to achieve power domination, including killing chieftains". Jón Vidar Sigurðsson: *Chieftains and Power*…, p. 88.

skaut manna bezt af boga og hæfði allt þat, er hann skaut til; hann hljóp meir en hæð sína með öllum herklæðum, ok eigi skemmra aptr en fram fyrir sik; hann var syndur sem selr, ok eigi var sá leikr at nökkurr þyrfti við hann at keppa ok hefir svá verit sagt, at engi væri hans jafningi...Manna kurteisastr var hann, harðgörr í öllu, fémildr ok stilltr vel, vinfastr ok vinavandr[56].

"He was tall, a powerful man, outstandingly skilful with arms. He could strike or throw with either hand, and his sword-strokes were so fast that he seemed to be brandishing three swords at once. He was excellent at archery, and his arrows never missed their mark. He could jump more than his own height in full armour, and just as far backwards as forwards. He could swim like a seal. There was no sport at which anyone could even attempt to compete with him. It has been said that there has never been his equal...He was extremely well-bred, fearless, generous, and even-tempered, faithful to his friends but careful in his choice of them"[57].

In contrast, Njáll's description emphasizes other qualities:

Hann var vel auðigr at fé ok vænn at áliti, en sá hlutr var á ráði hans, at honum óx eigi skegg. Hann var lögmaðr svá mikill, at engi fannsk hans jafningi, vitr var hann ok forspár, heilráðr ok góðgjarn, ok varð all at ráði, þat er hann réð mönnum, hógværr ok drenglyndr, langsýnn ok langminnigr; hann leysti hvers manns vandræði, er á hans fund kom[58].

"Njal was wealthy and handsome, but he had one peculiarity: He could not grow a beard. He was so skilled in law that no one was considered his equal. He was a wise and prescient man. His advice was sound and benevolent, and always turned out well for those who followed it. He was a gentle man of great integrity; he remembered the past and discerned the future, and solved problems of any man who came to him for help".[59]

It is apparent from the comparison that Gunnarr has outstanding physical skills while Njáll excels in mental ones. Njáll is mocked several times throughout the course of the saga because of his unmanliness. His lack of eagerness to fight is apparent as we never see him with any weapons, with the sole exception of an axe, which he bears at an old age and which is, nonetheless, more likely to be used to chop wood than to harm people[60]. On the other hand, Gunnarr is a valiant man and a prominent leader. Still, being short of the necessary wisdom, he is not able to maintain his social position of a leader and gets into dangerous situations. In one such instance he intermeddles in a legal case that he has nothing to do with, and ignores Njáll's advice to get himself escorted everywhere by Njáll's

[56] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 53.
[57] *Njal's saga*, p. 73.
[58] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 57.
[59] *Njal's saga*, p. 74.
[60] Ármann Jakobsson, *Masculinity and Politics*…, p. 201.

sons for protection[61]. Gunnarr almost dies in an ambush as a consequence of his failures. The other instance for the socially unbalanced behaviour of Gunnarr is when he occupies a corn-field illegally, and thus becomes outlawed for his overbearing conduct[62].

However, when Gunnarr is allied with Njáll and follows his instructions, no one can stand against them. They cooperate in six different scenes and every time they overcome their opponents. In each case they combine their skills: Njáll excogitates a plan, in which Gunnarr's physical power plays a central role. This may be seen in the following passages.

1. *Recovering Unnr's dowry from Hrútr*
For the recovery of Unnr's dowry, Njáll's plan is to use Gunnarr's strength at the assembly to avoid physical confrontation with Hrútr and his company. Gunnarr's physical power serves as insurance to deter Hrútr and Höskuldr from the application of violence at the assembly: *þeir Hrútr ætlat at veita honum atgöngu, en treystusk eigi* ("Hrut and Hoskuld intended to use force against him, but they mistrusted their strength"[63]). Afterwards, Gunnarr challenges Hrútr to a duel, which the latter naturally rejects, letting Njáll and Gunnarr win the lawsuit.

2. *The lawsuit against Otkell*
Gunnarr asks for Njáll's help in a lawsuit against Otkell. Njáll gives a good counsel, suggesting that Gunnarr should see Hrútr (who is now their ally), and so the two build a strategy together. Hrútr's plan is based on Gunnarr's physical strength, namely he wants to challenge Otkell's patron, Gizurr hvíti Teitsson to a duel[64]. Hrútr says to Gunnarr that their *Höfum vér nú lið svá mikit allir saman, at þú mátt fram koma slíku sem þú vill* ("combined force is now so strong that we [viz. Hrútr and Gunnar] can accomplish whatever we want to do")[65]. Njáll's role in this episode is to point out that Hrútr will be of use to them. This time, the cleverness of Hrútr and the power of Gunnarr work as a fusion.

3. *The lawsuit against Gizurr hvíti and Geirr*
Njáll and Gunnarr team up together in a lawsuit against Gizurr hvíti and Geirr concerning the killing of Otkell. Njáll here restrains Gunnarr from making a harsh step – pronouncing outlawry against Geirr – saying that *Þetta mun nú verða mjök með kappi deilt* ("it would only exacerbate the dispute")[66]. Finally, people abide to

[61] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, pp. 152–153.
[62] Ibidem, pp. 166–181.
[63] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 66; *Njal's saga*, p. 81.
[64] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, pp. 128–130.
[65] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 131; *Njal's saga*, p. 129.
[66] *Njal's saga*, pp. 138–139; *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 144.

Njáll's advice and the suit ends with a reasonable arbitration. The emphasis here is on the cooperation: the valiant Gunnarr would fall into the over-aggressive, that is to say, "over-masculine" category without the assistance of his humble companion.

4. *The case following the horse fight*

After quarrels which arose during a horse fight and after which Gunnarr is attacked, Njáll helps his friend out and prepares the case with much care[67]. He plays all his tricks such as asking Gunnarr to dig up dead people's bodies and declare them outlaws. However, this in itself seems insufficient as Gunnarr makes sure to secure the place with enough forces:

> *Gunnarr hafði ok sendan mann mágum sínum at þeir skyldi ríða til þings ok fjölmenna mjök, kvað þeim þetta mjök kappdrægt mundu verða*[68].
>
> "Gunnar has also sent messengers to his brother-in-law, asking them to come to the Althing with as much support as possible, saying that it would be a hard-fought case"[69].

Gunnarr and his followers indeed behave violently at the assembly, as they *Gingu allir í einum flokki ok fóru svá snúðigt, at men urðu at gæta sín, ef fyrir váru, at eigi felli* ("all went about together in a close group, and walked so briskly that people in their path had to be careful not be knocked over")[70]. Thanks to the support of Njáll and some other chieftains, Gunnarr wins the case and *Urðu allir á þat sáttir, at engi væri hans jafnini í Sunnlendingafjórðungi* ("everyone agreed that he had no equal in the South Quarter")[71]. Thus, Gunnarr is a hegemonic masculine man but to achieve this social respect he has to take the advice of balanced persons.

5. *Thecombination against the Þorgeirrs*

The two Þorgeirrs (Otkelsson and Starkaðarson) plan to ambush the then lonely Gunnarr at Hlíðarendi. However, Njáll is reported about their intentions and sends Gunnar away from the forthcoming attack. Njáll himself rides out to deter the Þorgeirrs with words, saying that Gunnarr is recruiting men and is coming to attack them and their company. Therefore, the Þorgeirrs immediately turn back and abandon the quest[72]. In this scene, again, Njáll's wisdom and the threat of Gunnarr's strength are combined to overcome a fierce enemy.

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[67] Ibidem, pp. 160–166.
[68] Ibidem, pp. 163–164.
[69] *Njal's saga*, pp. 152–153.
[70] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 164; *Njal's saga*, p. 153.
[71] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 166; *Njal's saga*, p. 155.
[72] Ibidem, pp. 169–171.

6. *The lawsuit after the killing of Þorgeirr Otkelsson*

After Gunnarr kills a second person from the same family, Njáll's legal knowledge is required to pull him out from the mess in the following lawsuit[73]. With his cunning, Njáll achieves a decent settlement, and so Gunnarr only has to pay compensation instead of getting a harsher verdict. It is testified again that Gunnarr is involved in too much violence (perceived as too much "valour"), but to prevail socially he always needs reinforcement from wise, even-tempered people.

Gunnarr and Njáll rule if they cooperate[74]. They show up together at every assembly and even at a horse fight, practically at every social gathering where power relations should be exposed. That their relationship is an exceptional one and can be regarded as a fusion is not only demonstrated in the above-presented scenes, but also by an explicit expression coming from Óláfr pái, who says: *Mikils er vert, hversu fast Njáll stendr þér* [Gunnarr] *um alla ráðagerð* ("it's a great advantage to have Njáll supporting you [Gunnarr] so closely")[75]. Their relationship is probably the best-known friendship from the entire saga corpus, and the closeness of their bond even led some scholars to suspect these two men of a homoerotic attraction to one another[76].

It was argued that Gunnarr and Njáll together have all the manly attributes but it is not obvious enough to what degree the lack of wisdom (in one case) or battle skills (in the other) may really detract from their (hegemonic) masculinity. Both of them are mocked several times in the saga for their unmanliness, but *Njáls saga* is somewhat of an exception among the family sagas regarding gender roles. As Ármann Jakobsson put it: "it sides with the queers rather than those who brand others as unmasculine"[77] and thus the statements made by often unsympathetic characters in the saga concerning unmanliness need not be said to represent the authorial view. Albeit not explicitly expressed in words, the course of events testifies about this "detraction", as both men become socially unsuccessful without the other. This was discussed in relation to Gunnarr, who got outlawed for his overbearing conduct, showing that "balance" is required to be socially favoured. In the *Eyrbyggja saga*, Snorri also needed a powerful ally to ensure his rule, which testifies the need of "valour".

Njáll's case is similar. After the death of Gunnarr, Njáll uses his sons to fight for him and for the position of the family in the district, much in the same way as when he previously used and united himself with Gunnarr[78]. That their relationship is quite close is testified by the fact that despite being married, all of the Njállsons live

[73] Ibidem, pp. 180–181.

[74] For an exception: Cf. Cook, *Heroes and Heroism*…, p. 85.

[75] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 164; *Njal's saga*, p. 153.

[76] See discussion in: Ármann Jakobsson, *Masculinity and Politics*…, pp. 204–205.

[77] Ármann Jakobsson, *Masculinity and Politics*…, p. 215.

[78] I.W. Miller, *Justifying Skarpheðinn: Of Pretext and Politics in the Icelandic Bloodfeud*, "Scandinavian Studies" 55:4 (1983), p. 334.

together with their father in Bergþórshváll[79]. Skarpheðinn and Högni take a bloody revenge for Gunnarr's death after which Njáll defends them at the þing, with the effect that their opponent Mörðr has to pay compensation[80]. In another scene, the Njállsons are after Hrappr and Þráinn, as a result of the difficulties which they once caused them in Norway. Njáll suggests not to attack them first, but let Hrappr and Þráinn first insult their opponents with words which would justify the Njállsons later violent actions against them[81]. In the third cooperation episode, Skarpheðinn and the others kill the murderers of their half-brother Höskuldr but, as a result of Njáll's negotiations with Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði, everything works out well[82]. However, when later Skarpheðinn ignores Njáll's advice and kills his own foster brother Höskuldr, the social decline of the kin starts[83]. When his sons discuss the plan to kill Höskuldr, Njáll notes to his wife: *Sjaldan var ek þá frá kvaddr, er in góðu váru ráðin* ("I was seldom excluded when their plans were wholesome")[84]. This sentence refers to the success they enjoy for as long as their fusion works and both sides contribute to the alliance.

Njáll is also determined to die without any help from valiant people. He is unable to defend himself and would be unable to avenge the actions after Flosi and his company set fire to his farm: *Ek em maðr gamall ok lítt til búinn at hefna son minna* ("I am an old man now and ill-equipped to avenge my sons")[85]. Njáll's statement, again, emphasises the fact that "valour" and "balance" were both essential to ensure social domination, independent of the fact weather a character is being sympathetic or not.

Conclusion

This study meant to illustrate that in the *Íslendingasögur*, a hegemonic masculine ideal is indeed frequently discernible in close connection with social status. An ideal man, therefore, had to be: (1) courageous and physically strong, (2) even-tempered and wise, and (3) possibly a chieftain.

Other types of masculinity models, such as men with too much (the berserks Halli and Leiknir) or too less (Þórarinn, Mörðr) inclination for bloodshed were

[79] It is explicitly said in the saga that Skarpheðinn and Grímr stay at Njáll's farm after their marriage (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 71). The same can be assumed about Helgi as in a later chapter he and his wife are said to have returned home (to Bergþórshváll) to a feast before the guests arrived (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 91.)

[80] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 196.

[81] Ibidem, p. 226.

[82] Ibidem, pp. 253–254.

[83] Cf. Miller, *Justifying Skarpheðinn…*

[84] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 280; *Njal's saga*, p. 232.

[85] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 330; *Njal's saga*, p. 267.

treated as socially inferior. These categories are far from being static and the different layers of masculinity could be crossed[86]. The dynamics of these relations are attested in the fact that the positions could be challenged (Snorri is envied by those who are braver), and people could overcome their shortages (Þórarinn after the revenge) or fall back in hierarchy (Gunnarr being outlawed). Sometimes the same person flounders between the co-existing layers of masculinity, falling from one category to the other, much as Hrafnkell in his saga. Here we have a character who initially uses too much strength, becomes unpopular and is considered unfit to be a leader. He then avoids using force by not avenging his honour for a long time. When his enemies ride across his territory, Hrafnkell's masculinity is mocked by his house-woman, saying the famous sentence that a man becomes feebler when he grows older: *Satt er flest þat, er fornkveðit er, at svá ergisk hverr sem eldisk*[87]. The housewoman continues with an overview of Hrafnkell's masculinity and compares it with the manliness of Hrafnkell's new opponent Eyvindr Bjarnarson who has come to Iceland from abroad:

> *Verðr sú lítil virðing, sem snimma leggsk á, ef maðr lætr síðan sjálfr af með ósóma ok hefir eigi traust til at reka þess réttar nökkurt sinni, ok eru slík mikil undr um þann mann, sem hraustr hefir verit. Nú er annan veg þeira lífi, er upp vaxa með föður sínum, ok þykkja yðr einskis háttar hjá yðr, en þá er þeir eru frumvaxta, fara land af landi ok þykkja þar mestháttar, sem þá koma þeir, koma við þat út ok þykkjask þá höfðingjum meiri*[88].
>
> "The honour a man's given early in life isn't worth much, if he has to give it all up in disgrace, and hasn't the courage to fight for his rights ever again. It's a peculiar thing indeed to happen to those who were once thought brave. As for those who grew up with their father and who seemed to you utterly worthless compared to yourself, it's a different story, for as soon as they reached manhood they went abroad, travelling from country to country, and when they come back they're thought very highly of, even above chieftains"[89].

Associating powerlessness with old age is a commonplace, enough to mention the old Egill Skallagrímsson, who is pushed around by women near the end of his saga[90]. However, what has been said about *Njáls saga*, that is statements made by individual saga characters applies here as well. The words of the housewoman need not be taken at face value and might not represent a general view

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[86] See also in accordance with the changes of the body: C. Phelpstead, *Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow: Hair Loss, the Tonsure, and Masculinity in Medieval Iceland*, "Scandinavian Studies" 85:1 (2013), p. 8.

[87] *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, [in:] *Austfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Íslenzk Fornrit. XI, Reykjavík 1950. p. 126; See also: Bandlien, *Man or Monster?…*, p. 122.

[88] *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, pp. 63–64.

[89] *Hrafnkel's saga and other stories*, transl. by Hermann Pálsson, Penguin Books 1980, pp. 63–64.

[90] Clover, *Regardless of Sex…*, p. 382.

(especially since Hrafnkell is not particularly old at the time). Nevertheless, the events in the narrative prose all seem to confirm that a certain portion of violence or physical strength was indeed necessary for a man to rule socially. Namely, in the end, Hranfkell manages to achieve a balance between violence and composure, and finally regains the position of a chieftain. Throughout the course of the narrative, he flows between different social layers and his shifts are determined by his masculinity: first being "over-masculine", which makes him lose his chieftaincy; then being "under-masculine", which restrains him from becoming a leading chieftain again; and finally becoming "hegemonic masculine", through which he earns back the leadership of the district.

Another way of changing layers was to apply the strategy of fusion. Chieftains who did not own both valiant and balanced attributes by birth, or could not acquire them later, could turn to very close alliances with each other on the basis of kinship (Snorri and Styrr) or through exceptional amicable bonds (Gunnarr and Njáll). Apart from the two examples discussed here, others could also be mentioned, such as, for instance, the brothers from *Vatnsdæla saga*: the valiant Jǫkull and the wise and sober Þorsteinn[91]. Other occurrences do not always fit the pattern of uniting the two different qualities, as either both parties are hegemonic types, or the saga is simply taciturn about the characters. However, many pairs in the saga literature seem to work in close alliances on the basis of kin. The cooperation of Hrútr and Hǫskuldr[92] as well as Gizurr hvíti and Geirr from *Brennu-Njáls saga* who *fylgðusk at hverju máli* ("acted together in everything")[93] would also be possible examples of the phenomenon of fusion.[94].

These couples worked effectively in power struggles and it is not unlikely that the hegemonic masculine ideal, depicted in these selected family sagas served as a tool to legitimize the rule of the chieftain class in twelfth-thirteenth-century Iceland. The possibility of fusion perhaps worked as an ideology to justify political alliances of the era by stating that a particular community is going to be more successful with the combined forces of two chieftains, fit to be leaders by virtue of their inherent qualities: valour and balance.

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[91] See also: Lönnroth, *The Noble Heathen*…, p. 22.

[92] Cook, *Heroes and Heroism*…, pp. 79–80.

[93] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 119; *Njal's saga*, p. 119.

[94] They also owned together the *goðorð*.

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WALECZNOŚĆ I RÓWNOWAGA: WARUNKI HEGEMONICZNEJ MĘSKOŚCI W SAGACH RODZINNYCH

Streszczenie

Artykuł, poprzez zbadanie islandzkich sag rodzinnych w związku z pojęciem „męskości hegemonicznej", ma na celu wykazanie silnego związku między męskością a statusem społecznym w średniowiecznej Islandii. Pojęcie to odnosi się do dynamiki kulturowej, którą grupa mężczyzn utrzymuje w celu marginalizacji innych. W średniowiecznej Islandii idea idealnego i rządzącego mężczyzny polegała na dzielnym zachowaniu i równie ważnym zachowaniu równowagi w codziennych konfliktach. Jednakże, jak zostało to zilustrowane, żadna z wyżej wymienionych cech sama w sobie nie była wystarczająca, aby uzyskać tytuł „idealnego mężczyzny": osoby posiadające tylko jedną cechę pozostawały w liminalnej fazie nie tylko ze względu na płeć, ale także grupę społeczną. Różne ograniczenia indywidualnych męskości można jednak przekroczyć, stosując strategię polityczną, którą nazywam tutaj „fuzją", w której dwie osoby, każda z nich posiadająca jeden z atrybutów, jednoczą się, aby zbudować hegemoniczny męski ideał. Tak jest w przypadku dwóch słynnych sag rodzinnych: *Eyrbyggja saga* i *Njáls saga*, w których pary takie jak Snorri Goði i Styrr, a także Njáll i Gunnarr współpracują w celu osiągnięcia społecznej dominacji.

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STUDIA I MATERIAŁY Z DZIEJÓW EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ

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AGGRESSIVE MASCULINITY AND ENVIRONMENT IN THE ICELANDIC LANDNÁM

This article argues that the environmental conditions experienced by the early settlers in Iceland gave rise to a new form of aggressive masculinity. The tenets of this aggressive masculinity can be found in the foundation myth of the *landnám* in *Landnámabók*, where Ingólfr and Hjǫrleifr represent two cultural archetypes of males, who negotiate environment and social interaction successfully and unsuccessfully, respectively. The *landnám*-ritual, in which a man demonstrates dominance over his realm, represents the complete display of aggressive masculinity in this story, and it has implications for whether a *landnámsmaðr* is viewed as a legitimate ruler over his land. The underpinnings of the ritual are mythological. Earth is perceived as feminine and the instruments that aid the *landnámsmaðr* in his appropriation of the female ground, the *ǫndvegissúlur*, is a phallic representation of male gods, such as Þórr. In his appropriation of the land with this instrument, the male then demonstrates aggressive masculinity in a social setting with religious overtones, reflected in Old Norse mythology, claiming the support of the environmental wardens of Iceland, the *landvættir*. This act of domination of the land seems to be generated from early realizations by the settlers in Iceland that the environment was more difficult to navigate than that of their places of origins. The cold climate, volcanic eruptions, and other such environmental conditions offered resource scarcity and intensified group-competitiveness for the settlers. Their response was to bolster their social image of aggressive males with the ability to dominate the land and other social groups, in alignment with the male spiritual wardens of Iceland. This means that the image of the aggressive "Viking" male that appears in Old Norse literature, in *Landnámabók* and the *íslendingasögur*, not least Old Norse mythology, may be an inherently Icelandic phenomenon.

How the environment and Old Norse literature intersect

The question of how environment influences the evolution of culture has been addressed by several scholars of anthropology, ethnology, and religion[1]. However, in a context of Old Norse literature, such studies are limited[2]. If environment does influence cultural practices and the structures of social interaction, Old Norse literature produced in Iceland must represent a unique situation compared to continental Scandinavia. This means that one can expect to find alterations of culture and social interaction in Iceland, setting it apart from its antecedent cultures in Scandinavia, which have arisen in the experience of new environmental conditions during the *landnám* and ensuing centuries. These new environmental conditions may have redefined aspects of masculinity in Iceland. What this means for the study of Old Norse literature *vis á vis* its use as sources to augment our understanding of Viking Age life on the European continent, is that the locale of Iceland in the Viking world and early medieval times has produced a culture that stands separately from Scandinavia. In terms of understanding masculinity and gender dynamics in Viking Age Scandinavia, then, it is not simply a matter of Old Norse literature, such as the sagas, being removed from the Viking Age some 250 years in time, it is also possible that the environmental conditions of Iceland, experienced by Scandinavians migrating there, created new ideas and structures of social order. This indicates that any example of gendered behaviour that medieval Icelandic literature applies to individuals in narrating early Icelandic culture should be considered inherently Icelandic, not an expression of shared cultural

[1] J.H. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change. The methodology of multilinear evolution*, Urbana 1963; W.H. Sewall, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago 2005; R. Wagner, *Condensed Mapping. Myth and the Folding of Space/Space and the Folding of Myth*, [in:] *Emplaced myth:space, narrative, and knowledge in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea*, ed. by A. Rumsey, J. Weiner, Hawai'i 2001, pp. 71–78; R.A. Rappaport, *Pigs for the Ancestors*, New Haven 1968; R.A. Rappaport, *Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations among a New Guinea People*, [in:] *Ecology, Meaning & Religion*, ed. by R.A. Rappaport, Berkeley 1979, pp. 27–42; RA. Rappaport, *On Cognized Models*, [in:] *Ecology, Meaning & Religion*, ed. by R.A. Rappaport, Berkeley 1979: Å. Hultkrantz, *An Ecological Approach to Religion*, "Ethnos" 31 (1966), pp. 131–150; Å. Hultkrantz, *Ecology of Religion: Its Scope and Methodology*, [in:] *Science of Religion: Studies in Methodology*, ed. by L. Honko, Mouton 1979, pp. 221–36; *The Way the Wind Blows*, ed. by R.J. McIntosh, New York 2000.

[2] For such studies, see: M. Nordvig, *At fange havets ånd. Økoviden i den nordiske mythologi*, "Chaos. Skandinavisk tidsskrift for religionshistoriske studier" 64 (2016), pp. 77–98; M. Nordvig, *Nature and Mythology*, [in:] *Handbook of Old Norse Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. by P. Hermann, S.A. Mitchell, J. Glauser, Berlin 2018, pp. 539–548; M. Nordvig, *Katla the witch and a medieval Icelandic theory on volcanism*, [in:] *American/Medieval Goes North: Earth and Water in Transit*, ed. by G.R. Overing and Ulrike Weithaus, Göttingen 2019, pp. 67–86; M. Nordvig, F. Riede, *Are There Echoes of the AD 536 Event in the Viking Ragnarok Myth? A Critical Appraisa*l, "Environment and History" 24:3 (2018), pp. 303–24; N. Price, B. Gräslund, *Twilight of the Gods? The 'dust veil event' of AD 536 in critical perspective*, "Antiquity" 86 (2012), pp. 428–443.

and social structures across the Nordic realm. The discussion of how Old Norse literature represents expressions of an early culture or social life in the Nordic region has hitherto centered on the question of transmission. From mythology to sagas, scholarship debates the ability and propensity of medieval Icelandic literature to retain core truths about historical facts from earlier periods. The view applied in this article is one that agrees with Gísli Sigurðsson in *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition* (2004), where a reasonable case is made for an oral background to parts of the saga literature and Old Norse mythology. The level to which the subject of an oral background to Old Norse literature, even the quality of the transmission of this oral background[3], has been discussed suggests that regardless of where a scholar positions themselves on the subject of the idea of historical facts being present in Old Norse literature, the saga literature in particular, it cannot be denied that this body of diverse literature does represent a longer-standing cultural structure than one that was simply invented at the time of writing. The temporal scope, i.e. the distance in time between the events described in such sources as *Landnámabók* and the time of writing, is an obviously important topic. However, what has been largely ignored in scholarship is the question of what happens to social structures when a people migrates to a new place, a new en-

[3] See e.g. T. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origin*, Yale 1964; T. Andersson, *The textual Evidence for an Oral Family Saga*, "Arkiv för nordisk filologi" 81 (1966), pp. 1–23; J. Byock, *Saga form, Oral Prehistory, and the Icelandic Social Context*, "New Literary History" 16 (1984), pp. 153–173; Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition*, Cambridge 2004; Gísli Sigurðsson, *Orality and Literacy*, [in:] *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by R. McTurk, Oxford 2005, pp. 285–301; P. Hermann, *Íslendingabók and History*, [in:] *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, ed. by P. Hermann, J.P. Schjødt, R. Tranum Kristensen, Turnhout 2007, pp. 17–32; P. Hermann*, Concepts of Memory and Approaches to the Past in Medieval Icelandic Literature*, "Scandinavian Studies" 81:3 (2009), pp. 288–308; P. Hermann, *Methodological Challenges to the Study of Old Norse Myths: The Orality and Literacy Debate Reframe*d, [in:] *Old Norse Mythology – Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by P. Hermann et al., Cambridge 2017, pp. 29–52; J. Glauser, *The Speaking Bodies of Saga Texts*, [in:] *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World. Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. by J. Quinn, K. Heslop, Turnhout 2007, pp. 13–26. See e.g. T. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origin*, Yale 1964; T. Andersson, *The textual Evidence for an Oral Family Saga*, "Arkiv för nordisk filologi" 81 (1966), pp. 1–23; J. Byock, *Saga form, Oral Prehistory, and the Icelandic Social Context*, "New Literary History", 16 (1984), pp. 153–173; Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition*, Cambridge 2004; Gísli Sigurðsson, *Orality and Literacy*, [in:] *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by R. McTurk, Oxford 2005, pp. 285–301; P. Hermann, Íslendingabók and History, [in:] *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, ed. by P. Hermann, J.P. Schjødt, and Rasmus Tranum Kristensen, Turnhout 2007, pp. 17–32; P. Hermann, *Concepts of Memory and Approaches to the Past in Medieval Icelandic Literature*, "Scandinavian Studies" 81:3 (2009), pp. 288–308; P. Hermann*, Methodological Challenges to the Study of Old Norse Myths: The Orality and Literacy Debate Reframed*, [in:] *Old Norse Mythology – Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by P. Hermann, J.P. Schjødt, S.A. Mitchell, A. Rose, Cambridge 2017, pp. 29–52; J. Glauser, *The Speaking Bodies of Saga Texts*, [in:] *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World. Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. by J. Quinn, K. Heslop, T. Wills, Turnhout 2007, pp. 13–26.

vironment. Contemporary investigations of population migrations have revealed that considerable cultural changes in migrating populations do occur[4], for various reasons. Research on populations in pre-historic times, who have migrated due to environmental conditions, such as volcanic eruptions, has also demonstrated that experiences of environmental calamities of considerable magnitude influence social structures. Archaeologist James A. Zeidler has, for instance, suggested that the Muchique 2 culture that migrated back into the Jama-Coaque Valley in Ecuador around c. 400 AD had undergone immense social and cultural changes from its parent culture, the Muchique 1, which was destroyed by a volcanic eruption in ~90 AD[5]. Similarly, the anthology *The Way the Wind Blows*[6], which details cultural and religious response to environment in a variety of peoples, stands as a testament to the encompassing effect that environment can have on the social life of humans. In the context of Old Norse mythology, I have demonstrated that the experience of volcanic eruptions may have had considerable influence on how myths were restructured in early Icelandic society[7]. The impact of volcanism on early Icelandic culture has also been recognized by volcanologist Clive Oppenheimer and scholar of Old Norse mythology Andy Orchard, who have suggested that the cataclysmic Eldgjá eruption in 934–40 AD had direct impact on the Icelanders' decision to convert to Christianity[8]. Theoretically, then, it makes sense to assume that culture and social structures could have changed considerably as Scandinavian and Gaelic populations migrated across the North Atlantic to settle in Iceland. In this process of social change, one may assume, concepts of masculinity can have changed too. This means that it is a reasonable approach to the study of Old Norse literature to consider that the change in environmental arena had an impact on how the early Icelanders understood themselves in terms of their kinship and their individual place in the kinship structure, that is: as men and women. Multiple studies have already discussed kinship structures, gender,

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[4] M.E.W. Varnum, I. Grossmann, K. Shinobu,R.E. Nisbett, *The Origin of Cultural Differences in Cognition: The Social Orientation Hypothesis*, "Current Directions in Psychological Science" 19(1) (2010), pp. 9–13, p. 12; A.B. Cohen, M.E.W. Varnum, *Beyond East vs. West: Social Class, Region, and Religion as Forms of Culture*, "Current Opinion in Psychology" 8 (2016), pp. 5–9; J. Heinrich, S.J. Heine, A. Norenzayan, *The Weirdest People in the World?*, "Behavioral and Brain Sciences" 33 (2016), pp. 61–135.

[5] J.A. Zeidler, *Modeling Cultural Responses to Volcanic Disaster in the Ancient Jama-Coaque Tradition, Coastal Ecuador: A Case Study in Cultural Collapse and Resilience*, "Quaternary International" 394 (2016), pp. 79–97.

[6] *The Way the Wind Blows*, ed. by R.J. McIntosh, New York 2000.

[7] M. Nordvig, *At fange havets…*; M. Nordvig, *Nature and Mythology…*; M. Nordvig, *Creation from Fire in Snorri's Edda. The Tenets of a Vernacular Theory of Geothermal Activity in Old Norse Myth*, [in:] *Old Norse Mythology in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by P. Hermann, J. P. Schjødt, S.A. Mitchell, A. Rose, Cambridge 2017, pp. 269–289.

[8] C. Oppenheimer et al., *The Eldgjá eruption: timing, long-range impacts and influence on the Christianisation of Iceland* "Climate Change" 147:3–4 (2018), pp. 369–381.

and masculinity in Old Norse literature[9]. One notable feature of several of these studies is that they reflect a concept of masculinity that is incredibly aggressive. In the following, I will present an analysis of the aggressive male in the Icelandic foundation myth in *Landnámabók* as a concept of masculinity that has arisen from the experience of resource scarcity and environmentally charged social competition in early Icelandic history.

Experiencing the Icelandic environment as a *landnámsmaðr*

In *Landnámabók*, one of the earliest communicated messages about Iceland is that of its environmental conditions. Hrafna-Flóki reaches Iceland and creates a settlement, but as his story will have us know, he failed because of the cold climate. Being too preoccupied with fishing and game, the story relates that Flóki failed in collecting enough feed for his domesticated animals, and they therefore died during the winter. As he left the country in disappointment, he gave it the name "Iceland", when he saw the frozen bay:

> *Þá var fjǫrðrinn fullr af veiðiskap, ok gáðu þeir eigi fyrir veiðum at fá heyjanna, ok dó allt kvikfé þeira um vetrinn. Vár var heldr kalt. Þá gekk Flóki upp á fjall eitt hátt ok sá norðr yfir fjǫllin fjǫrð fullan af hafísum. Því kǫlluðu þeir landit Ísland, sem þat hefir síðan heitit*.
>
> [Back] then, the bay was full of fish and due to their fishing, they did not manage to collect hay, and all their cattle died during the winter. The spring was very cold [too]. Then Flóki went up on a tall mountain and looked northwards over the mountain [and saw] a bay full of sea ice. For that reason, they called the land Iceland, which it has been called since[10].

This suggests an environmental experience leading to certain realizations in the collective memory[11] of the early Icelandic population: conditions are different

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[9] M. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*. *Volume 1*, Odense 1994; M. Clunies Ross, Þórr's Honour, [in:] *Studien zum Altgermanischen. Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. by H. Uecker, Berlin 1994, pp. 48–76; M. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes. Volume 2*, Odense 1998; J. Jochens, *The Illicit Love Visit*, "Journal of History and Sexuality" 1 (1991), pp. 357–392; J. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, Ithaca, NY 1995. See also: Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property and Virginity: The Christianization of Marriage in Medieval Iceland 1200–1600*, Aarhus 2010; B. Bandlien, *Man Or Monster? Negotiations of Masculinity in Old Norse Society*, Oslo 2005; B. Bandlien, *Remembering Gendered Vengeance*, [in:] *Handbook of Old Norse Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. by P. Hermann, S.A. Mitchell, and J. Glauser, Berlin 2018, pp. 519–525; K. Hastrup, *Island of Anthropology*, Odense 1990; B. Solli, *Queering the Cosmology of the Vikings: A Queer Analysis of the Cult of Odin and 'Holy White Stones'*, "Journal of Homosexuality" 54:1–2 (2008), pp. 192–208.

[10] *Landnámabók*, [in:] *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk Fornrit I, Reykjavík 1968, p. 38.

[11] Concerning the term, see: J. Le Goff, *History and Memory*, New York 1992.

– colder – than those of their original lands. This understanding is accentuated in the very name given to the country: Iceland. Before Flóki named it Iceland, the explorer Naddoð called it *Snæland* (Snow-land) due to the heavy snowfall he experienced there[12]. Snjógrundr is another designation for the country, found in *Bergbúa Þáttr*. Iceland, as such, is consistently associated with cold, icy, and snowy environmental conditions. The fact that this is a consistent component in the narration of the early settlement of Iceland suggests that even for these peoples who were accustomed to Scandinavian winters, the environmental conditions of Iceland were notably different. The realization in Hrafna-Flóki's example is that the management of the Icelandic environment requires another kind of planning and preparedness than usual. This also seems to lead to a cultural response of ritual mitigation of the environmental forces among the male settlers who follow Hrafna-Flóki. The famous stipulation in the first law of Iceland, *Úlfljótslagr*, which prohibits sailors from advancing towards Iceland displaying the dragon-heads on their prow because it will scare the *landvættir*[13], is an indication of this. This stipulation suggests that an early conception of the Icelandic terrain includes the presence of beings who must be appeased in order to avoid conflict with the land, in other words: in order to avoid environmental conflict. That these beings, the *landvættir*, are environmental forces, is indicated by the associated traditions mentioned in *Kristni saga* and elsewhere. In the example from *Kristni saga*, a stone-dwelling being called an *ármann* (year-man or fertility-man), to whom a man named Kóðran gave offerings[14], seems to be such a warden of the land similar to the *landvættir*. The *landvættir* join other mythological beings, such as the Álfar as protective spirits in the Icelandic landscape, who were in charge of crop yield and the agricultural success of the early settlers[15]. Largely, the ritual methods for mitigating this complex of mythological wardens of the Icelandic environment fall along the lines of appeasement, such as the case of Kóðran in *Kristni saga*, but it is notable that the *landnám* ritual, associated with a land-taking patriarch's first appearance in Iceland, demonstrates aggressive male dominance. In the *landnám* ritual, the *landnámsmaðr* would throw his ǫndvegissúlur (high-seat pillars) overboard upon coming within sight of Iceland. Then he would take land wherever they would float ashore. In *Prolonged Echoes 2*, Margaret Clunies Ross has aptly analyzed the ritual act of *landnám*, which includes what she defines as an aggressive male domination act directed towards other males. She, however, suggests that the ritual itself is not directed at the *landvættir*[16]. In the *landnám*, the male

[12] *Landnámabók*, p. 34.

[13] *Landnámabók*, p. 313.

[14] *Kristni saga* 2, ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XV, Reykjavík 1959.

[15] R. Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, Cambridge 2007, p. 73 and 186; C. Raudvere, *Popular Religion in the Viking Age*, [in:] *The Viking World*, ed. by S. Brink in collaboration with N. Price, New York 2012, pp. 235–243, p. 237.

[16] M. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes Volume 2*, pp. 153–154.

landnámsmaðr will demonstrate his dominance outwards to other social groups by using phallic objects to appropriate the land in a symbolic penetrative act[17]. This is certainly a display directed towards other social groups, as Clunies Ross asserts, but it appears to be a display that has been generated from the conception of an Icelandic environment that is ruled by a class of spirits that recognizes male domination over land. It seems, then, that the ritual act is one that demonstrates to other social groups that the *landnámsmaðr* has the appropriate potency, supported by the powerful spirits of the land, to navigate a difficult environment and defend his claim to unification with the land. This is in that sense a unification of the human family with the spiritual family, through the patriarch, using a phallic ritual instrument that will function as a conduit for spiritual alignment with the wardens of the land. For this reason, the ǫndvegissúlur seem to represent the *axis mundi* in the architecture of pre-Christian Icelandic ritual spaces[18]. The significance of this ritualized mitigating of the environmental conditions is demonstrated in the settlement of Ingólfr Arnason, which will be addressed in the following.

Ingólfr and Hjǫrleifr – two examples of navigating the Icelandic environment

According to *Landnámabók*, Ingólfr succeeded Hrafna-Flóki and was the first settler who managed to create a viable settlement[19]. Ingólfr's settlement is inscribed in the typological literary structure that represents the foundation of Iceland in an ideological perspective in Old Norse literature[20], in particular in relation to *Íslendingabók*[21]. This means that Ingólfr's settlement is a form of ideological narrative, a foundation myth[22]. As a foundation myth, his settlement has implications for how the relationship between man and environment is perceived in early Icelandic culture. The story of how Ingólfr and his blood-brother Hjǫrleifr manage their settlement is consequential to how the relationship between humans and environment is conceptualized. Like the story about Hrafna-Flóki, the story

[17] Ibidem, pp. 156–157.

[18] T. Gunnell, *Hof, Halls, Goðar and Dwarves: An Examination of the Ritual Space in the Pagan Icelandic Hall*, "Cosmos" 17:1 (2001), pp. 3–36; K. Böldl, *Eigi einhamr*, [in:] *Beiträge zum Weltbild der Eyrbyggja und anderer Isländersagas. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, Vol. 48, Berlin 2005, p. 19; V. Höfig, *The Legendary Topography of the Viking Settlement of Iceland*, "Landscapes: the Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language" 8:1 (2018), pp. 1–19.

[19] *Landnámabók*, pp. 42–43.

[20] V. Höfig, *The Legendary Topography*…, pp. 6–7; V. Höfig, *Foundational Myth in Sturlubók*, [in:] *Sturla Þórðarson – Skald, Chieftain and Lawman*, ed. by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Sverrir Jakobsson, Boston 2017, pp. 70–82.

[21] P. Hermann, *Íslendingabók and History*…

[22] Ibidem; J. Lindow, *Íslendingabók and Myth*, "Scandinavian Studies" 69:4 (1997), pp. 455–464.

about Hjǫrleifr is one of failure due to the lack of planning and preparedness in a difficult environment. The first indication of Hjǫrleifr's lack of preparedness, and therefore his lack of understanding of the environment, is when his boat drifts and they run out of water. His slaves prepare a type of porridge called *minþak*, which was supposed to alleviate their thirst. However, when it began raining, they collected the rainwater instead, and so they threw the *minþak* overboard, letting it drift to an island that was then called Minþakseyrr. Ingólfr, on the other hand, immediately threw his *ǫndvegissúlur* overboard when he came within sight of Iceland, letting them drift ashore to where he would eventually settle. The *ǫndvegissúlur* function as the aforementioned phallic instruments with which male settlers in Iceland demonstrated their masculine domination over the land and other social groups. In comparison, the *minþak* that is the only instrument thrown overboard by Hjǫrleifr's team, and Ingólfr's *ǫndvegissúlur*, appear as opposites in the story. The *minþak* is an amorphous, soft substance, while the *ǫndvegissúlur* are hard, erect objects that represent phallic potency. Eventually, after this failed *landnám* ritual, Hjǫrleifr takes land at Hjǫrleifshöfði. Being unprepared, however, he has only brought one ox with him to Iceland, and he therefore makes his slaves drag the plow, sowing the seeds for rebellion. The slaves kill the ox and claim that it was killed by a bear. When they stage a search party for the bear, the slaves ambush and kill Hjǫrleifr and his men, taking their women and goods[23]. Ingólfr eventually avenges Hjǫrleifr, and presumably enrolls the women and goods into his own settlement. Ingólfr's commentary to Hjǫrleifr's death is, as Meulengracht Sørensen has pointed out, telling of the difference between the 'pious' Ingólfr and Hjǫrleifr who refuses to sacrifice to the gods[24]. However, the difference between the two rests not simply on reverence for deities, it also rests on the ability to mitigate and manage the environment. This is demonstrated in Hjǫrleifr's case, and it would seem that the ritual act in the *landnám* is part of this complex. The emphasis on ritual action in context of the settlement is explicitly stated by Ingólfr and given as reason for Hjǫrleifr's lack of success: *Lítit lagðist hér fyrir góðan dreng, er þrælar skyldu at bana verða, ok sé ek svá hverjum verða, ef eigi vill blóta* ("It is a poor fate for a good warrior that slaves became his murderers, and now I see

[23] *Landnámabók*, p. 43. The likelihood of finding a bear in southern Iceland must have been considerably low, unless it was a polar bear that had drifted from Greenland. This provides further evidence of Hjǫrleifr's lack of knowledge about the Icelandic environment. On the subject of polar bears in Iceland, see: A.E.J. Ogilvie, *Local knowledge and travellers' tales: a selection of climatic observations in Iceland*, [in:] ed. by C. Caseldine, A. Russell, J. Harðardóttir, O. Knudsen, *Iceland-Modern Processes and Past Environments, Developments in Quaternary Science 5*, London 2005, pp. 257–287; S. Hartman et al., *Medieval Iceland, Greenland, and the New Human Condition: A case study in integrated environmental humanities*, "Global Planetary Change" 156 (2017), pp. 123–139; p. 132.

[24] P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Social Institutions and Belief Systems of Medieval Iceland (ca. 870–1400) and Their Relation to Literary Production*, [in:] *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge 2000, pp. 8–28; V. Höfig, *The Legendary Topography*..., p. 6.

how it goes for anyone who will not [make] sacrifices")[25]. The implication is that the wardens of the land, the *landvættir*, were not with him because he did not treat them appropriately. The note in the *Sturlubók* version of *Landnámabók* that no one dared to settle at Hjǫrleifshöfði after he had been killed, because of fear of the *landvættir*[26], underscores the notion that environment is implicitly involved. Hjǫrleifr and his crew on the boat do not understand how to navigate the ocean, neither do they understand how to make the land suitable for living. Ultimately, his lack of understanding and providing proper guidance for life in Iceland results in a hostile appropriation of his resources by another competitive group, the Gaelic slaves. The lesson learned, then, is that the Icelandic environment offers complicated obstacles that require insight and tact to handle, otherwise one falls victim to resource scarcity and hostile outsiders. The first step in the process of adapting to the Icelandic environment is, to put it simply, "to man up".

Aggressive masculinity as a response to the Icelandic environment

Since it is realized that aggressive male domination acts are necessary in the *landnám* to survive in Iceland, it becomes important to examine why. Hjǫrleifr's example is instructive in that regard. Due to his failure to understand properly how to navigate the environment, he is killed by males from a hostile out-group, the slaves. Consequentially, it seems this is an encompassing risk in early Icelandic society: male aggression. The cultural pattern of males appropriating both property and women from other males in Iceland has deep roots[27]. It is explained in the case of Hrafna-Flóki that a failed settlement is caused by the lack of attention to the environment, and this is also the implication in the case of Hjǫrleifr. In the case of Ingólfr, it is realized that the correct ritual approach to the wardens of the environment, the *landvættir*, must be applied. In turn, Hjǫrleifr's failed settlement is tainted due to the mishandling of the wardens of the environment, and subsequently it is off bounds for future settlements. The method prescribed for handling the environment properly is an act of male aggression. This suggests that the phallic, penetrative object that is used to appropriate the land, the feminized Earth (Jǫrð), is an extension of the aggressive male's body. The hostile feminizing of an opponent is a consistent theme in Old Norse literature, and may find its ideological examples in Þórr's battles with the Jǫtnar[28]. In the mythol-

[25] *Landnámabók*, p. 44.

[26] V. Höfig, *The Legendary Topography*..., p. 6; *Landnámabók*, p. 334.

[27] J. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, p. 18.

[28] M. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes volume 1*; M. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes volume 2*; M. Clunies Ross, Þórr's Honour...; J. Lindow, *Bloodfeud and Scandinavian Mythology*, "Alvíssmál" 4 (1994 [1995]), pp. 51–68.

ogy, Þórr acts as the protector of the Æsir and in particular the Ásynjur[29]. The Jǫtnar's attempts at appropriating the Æsir's women are acts of male aggression that would, if successful, feminize the Æsir as they fall to subjugation from an out-group[30]. As the Æsir succeed in fending off male aggression from the Jǫtnar, they demonstrate themselves to be the most masculine part in this pattern of group-competitiveness. Since they are wardens of culture[31], the spiritual antecedents of the pre-Christian settlers, they function as protagonists in a system of male aggression against environment and out-groups. Their involvement in the *landnám* as protagonists siding with the settlers is demonstrated in Þórólfr Mostraskegg's settlement in *Eyrbyggja saga*, where he takes land with *ǫndvegissúlur* that have Þórr's face carved in them[32]. It is no surprise that Þórr is featured in this narration of the *landnám*, considering that he represents aggressive masculinity in the Norse pantheon, and is found battling Jǫtnar in various myths with environmental undertones, such as those that relate volcanism[33]. Beyond the cold climate, the Icelandic environment offers multiple other dangers that the first settlers had to learn to manage through experience. Natural features, coastal currents, storms and fog, would be part of this, offering different challenges, but the period of the *landnám* also saw the incredible force of two of the largest volcanic eruptions in the history of human habitation in Iceland. The fissure Eldgjá opened in 934–940 AD and caused an eruption of a magnitude larger than the Lakagígar/Skaftáreldar eruption of 1783–1784[34]. The magnitude of this eruption

[29] M. Clunies Ross, Þórr's Honour…

[30] Ibidem; J. Lindow, *Bloodfeud and Scandinavian Mythology*…

[31] See *Völuspá*, [in:] G. Neckel, H. Kuhn, *Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denmälern*, Heidelberg 1962, pp. 1–17. The gods build civilization in an environment that they successfully manage.

[32] *Eyrbyggja saga*, [in:], ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit IV, Reykjavík 1957.

[33] B. Phillpotts, *Surt*, "Arkiv för nordisk filologi" 21 (1905), pp. 14–30; Sigurður Nordal, *Völuspá*, Copenhagen 1927; M. Nordvig, *Of Fire and Water. The Old Norse Mythical Worldview in an Eco-Mythological Perspective*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, Aarhus 2014; M. Nordvig, *What happens when 'Hider' and 'Screamer' go sailing with 'Noisy'? Geomythological traces in old Icelandic mythology*, [in:] *Past Vulnerability. Volcanic Eruptions and Human Vulnerability in Traditional Societies Past and Present*, ed. by F. Riede. Aarhus 2015, pp. 75–88; M. Nordvig, *At fange havets ånd...*; M. Nordvig, *Creation from Fire...*; Nordvig, *Nature and Mythology*; M. Nordvig, *Katla the Witch*; M. Nordvig, F. Riede, Felix. *Are There Echoes of the AD 536 Event in the Viking Ragnarok Myth? A Critical Appraisal*; D. Taggart, *All the Mountains Shake: Seismic and Volcanic Imagery in the Old Norse Literature of Þórr*, "Scripta Islandica" 68 (2017), pp. 99–122.

[34] G.A. Zielinski, *Evidence of the Eldgjá (Iceland) eruption in the GISP2 Greenland ice core: Relationship to eruption processes and climatic conditions in the tenth Century*, "The Holocene" 5:2 (1995), pp. 129–140; A. Witze, J. Kanipe, *Island on Fire*, London 2014; Th. Thordarson and Á. Höskuldsson, *Postglacial volcanism in Iceland*, "Jökull" 58 (2008), pp. 197–228; Th. Thordarson, G. Larsen, *Volcanism in Iceland in historical time: Volcano types, eruption styles and eruptive history*, "Journal of Geodynamics" 43 (2007), pp. 118–152.

impacted areas as far away from Iceland as China and the Middle East[35], and it is possible that this eruption had influence on the interest of new settlers coming to Iceland in the 930s, where it is reported by Ari Þorgilsson that the settlement period ended[36]. As mentioned earlier, the Eldgjá eruption may also have had impact on Iceland's decision to convert to Christianity, thereby having the potential to considerably alter the social landscape of the country[37]. Soon after, probably in the 950s, Langjǫkull also erupted, causing the lava-flow now called Hallmundarhraun, north-east of Borgarfjǫrður. This eruption produced approximately 70% of magma output in the Reykjanes and Western Volcanic Zones in Iceland in the last 1130 years[38]. This is where Surtshellir is located, the cave dedicated to the fire-Jötunn Surtr, and it seems that local, pre-Christian Icelanders responded with ritual acts to appease the volcanic phenomenon[39]. These volcanic eruptions, compounding with the climatic conditions of Iceland, would have offered considerably harsh times, resource scarcity, and other immediate hazards for a large portion of the Icelandic population[40]. In the case of the aforementioned Muchique 2 culture, Zeidler has suggested that the volcanic eruption in the Jama-Coaque Valley around ~90 AD produced a descendent culture from Muchique 1, which retained the memory of the calamity and restructured their society into a warrior aristocracy that was prone to diversification in resource collection, including aggressive means such as raiding and warfare[41]. This does not seem to have been part of the social patterns in the Muchique 1 culture. In Papua New Guinea, another culture seems to have displayed similar patterns of male aggression based on volcanic experiences. The Maring in the Simbai valley have a cultural system that fuses myth, cosmology, warfare, and environmental observations, most like-

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[35] J. Fei and J. Zhou, *The possible climatic impact on China of Iceland's Eldgja eruption inferred from historical sources*, "Climate Change" 76 (2006), pp. 443–457; R. Stothers, *Far reach of the tenth century Eldgjá eruption, Iceland*, "Climate Change" 39 (1998), pp. 715–726.

[36] Nordvig, *Nature and Mythology*…, p. 540.

[37] Oppenheimer et al, "The Eldgjá eruption: timing, long-range impacts and influence on the Christianisation of Iceland".

[38] Th. Thordarson, G. Larsen, *Volcanism in Iceland* …, p. 140.

[39] K.P. Smith, Guðmundur Ólafsson, C. Wolf, "Surtshellir Archaeological Project: Investigating the End of Time at the Start of Settlement". Project blog, ed. by K.P. Smith, 2018.

[40] J. Grattan and B.F. Pyatt, *Acid damage to vegetation following the Laki fissure eruption in 1783. An historical review*, "The Science of the Total Environment" 151 (1993), pp. 241–247; J. Grattan, *An amazing and portentous summer: Environmental and social responses in Britain to the 1783 eruption of an Icelandic volcano*, "The Geographical Journal" 161 (1995), pp. 125–136; J. Grattan et al, *Illness and elevated human mortality in Europe coincident with the Laki fissure eruption*, [in:] *Volcanic Degassing*, ed. by C. Oppenheimer, D.M. Pyle,Jenni Barclay. London 2003, pp. 401–414; J. Grattan et al, *Volcanic air pollution and mortality in France 1783–1784*, "C.R. Geoscience" 337 (2005), pp. 641–651.

[41] Zeidler, "Modeling Cultural Responses to Volcanic Disaster in the Ancient Jama-Coaque Tradition, Coastal Ecuador: A Case Study in Cultural Collapse and Resilience", p. 91.

ly as a response to volcanism[42]. If such cultural developments in other parts of the world can be taken to be a natural reactive response to environmental calamities, they are instructive cases to reflect on in relation to the Icelandic example. In the period of the *landnám*, Iceland was a descendent culture of Scandinavia and the British Isles. The social structures in Scandinavia certainly seem to have been based on a warrior aristocracy, possibly with a strong memory of another environmental catastrophe, the 536 AD 'dust veil' event, which had considerable impact on life in Scandinavia, resulting in famine and depopulation. In the ensuing decades, it seems, Scandinavia underwent considerable social and societal restructuring, possibly with an emerging warrior aristocracy as the result[43]. The experience of the British Isles, for Scandinavians and Gaelic peoples alike, also offered considerable levels of hostility, warfare, and group-competition[44]. It is likely that such social structures were intensified in Iceland, leading to an even more aggressive male culture when faced with a difficult environment. The foundation myth in *Landnámabók* seems to suggest this, as it details the difference between failure and success in the two characters Hjǫrleifr and Ingólfr in context of environmental conditions and group-competition.

Conclusion

In this article, it has been argued that concepts of aggressive masculinity in the early history of Iceland are influenced by environmental experiences. A harsher climate resulted in intensified group-competition among the early settlers, and this social pattern became even stronger as the settlers were faced with volcanic activity. With comparable examples from other cultures, it can be argued that some human responses to environmental catastrophe-induced resource scarcity generate social structures based on ideals of aggressive masculinity. A function that ensures the survival of the in-group by, among other, appropriating resources from various out-groups. In Old Norse literature, the cultural pattern of resource competition and hostile in-group-out-group relations, based on male aggression, is strong. This is a central theme in the *íslendingasögur*, encased in a cultural system of honor codes[45]. This social pattern is also consistent in the medieval

[42] Rappaport, *Pigs for the Ancestors*; Rappaport, "Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations among a New Guinea People"; Nordvig, *Of Fire and Water*, pp. 27–28.

[43] Price and Gräslund, *Twilight of the Gods?...*; See also: T. Gunnell. *From One High One to Another: The Acceptance of Óðinn as Preparation for the Acceptance of God*, [in:] *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by L.P. Słupecki, R. Simek, Vienna 2013, pp. 153–178.

[44] C. Downham, *Vikings in England*, [in:] *The Viking World*, ed. by S. Brink in collaboration with N. Price, New York 2012, pp. 341–349.

[45] P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære*, Aarhus 1993.

Icelandic sources to Norse mythology. The portrayal of Viking Age males in Old Norse literature, then, displays a particularly aggressive male culture, which may be unique to Iceland and its environment. This means that the Viking male figure in Old Norse literature and the figures representing ancient Nordic gods in Norse mythology are designed from a cultural pattern that may be considerably different from the antecedent cultures in continental Europe. It may simply mean that the aggressive masculinity culture attached to "the Viking" as a literary figure in Old Norse literature does not represent male behavior in the Scandinavian realm in the same way. What this means, is that the standard image of a Viking, gendered portrayals in particular, may not be viable in terms of reflecting masculine cultures in Viking Age Scandinavia, for more reasons than simply transmission issues. It is possible that the Icelandic environment played a central role in creating a highly aggressive masculinity culture that intensified group-competition over the centuries, and ultimately led to the disintegration of society in the Age of the Sturlungs, where the competition for resources culminated in the concentration of land on the hands of only a few families, and left Icelandic society vulnerable to a hostile Norwegian take-over in 1262[46]. As such, the historical processes in early Iceland, including the portrayal of Viking culture in Old Norse literature, should be considered in context of environmental change and human response.

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Clunies Ross, M., *Prolonged Echoes*, Vol. 2, Odense 1998.

[46] Jón Viðarr Sigurðsson, *Iceland*, [in:] *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink in collaboration with Neil Price, New York 2012, pp. 571–578: p. 573.

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AGRESYWNA MĘSKOŚĆ I ŚRODOWISKO W ISLANDZKIM LANDNÁM

Streszczenie

Artykuł ten dowodzi, że warunki środowiskowe, jakich doświadczali pierwsi osadnicy na Islandii, doprowadziły do powstania nowej formy tzw. agresywnej męskości. Założenia tej agresywnej męskości można znaleźć w micie założycielskim *landnám* w *Landnámabók*, gdzie Ingólfr i Hjǫrleifr reprezentują dwa kulturowe archetypy mężczyzn, którzy bez powodzenia próbują zdominować środowisko i interakcje społeczne. Rytuał *landnám*, w którym mężczyzna demonstruje dominację nad swoim królestwem, przedstawia w tej opowieści pełny przejaw agresywnej męskości i ma wpływ na to, czy *landnámsmaðr* jest postrzegany jako prawowity władca swojej ziemi. Podstawy rytuału są mitologiczne. Ziemia jest postrzegana jako odpowiednik kobiety, a instrumenty, które pomagają *landnámsmaðr* w przywłaszczeniu sobie kobiecej ziemi, *ǫndvegissúlur*, to falliczne przedstawienie męskich bogów, takich jak Þórr. Aktem przywłaszczenia ziemi przy pomocy tego instrumentu mężczyzna demonstruje agresywną męskość w otoczeniu społecznym z podtekstem religijnym, odzwierciedlonym w mitologii nordyckiej, domagając się wsparcia opiekunów Islandii, *landvættir*.

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STUDIA I MATERIAŁY Z DZIEJÓW EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ

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MANNFRŒÐI AND *MANNJAFNAÐR* AND THEIR RELATION TO GAMES

Introduction

One of the many aspects of playing games and their descriptions in Icelandic Sagas is the view of masculinity that they reveal. Saga authors often introduce an upcoming protagonist in a certain, very original way. Those *mannfrœði* which deal with sporting skills of a man can be found in almost every literary Old Norse source in Iceland. Characters and personages in the sagas are described as skilled, handsome, and with many attributes. But not all character descriptions contain information about their strength or skills in sports. These character descriptions and *mannjanfðr* ("comparisons of men") are often related to sporting activities, as the saga authors use the episodes of sporting events for character presentations and comparisons. This essay will examine how the sports and game-playing skills mentioned in the sagas are narratively integrated with individual character descriptions, pointing out that the sagas' depictions of masculinity are specific to the cultural paradigm in question. The first part will examine introductions of new characters in their respective sagas, the characters' sporting skills forming an important formulaic component in such introductions. I will then move on to consider comparisons between male protagonists in relation to their skills, which are integral parts of the contest. I interpret *mannjanfðr* as a game in itself, and there are insights to be gained from thus regarding it. Each of these phenomena reveals particular ramifications for how masculinity was culturally constructed and understood.

Hermann Pálsson refers to this practice using the term *mannfræði.* He understands this term in a twofold way:

> …it denoted the discipline of knowing and understanding important people of the past; it has been tentatively translated as 'personality lore'. Whereas *ættfræði* or *áttvísi* "genealogy" dealt with kinship… *mannfræði* was concerned with individuals, their personal qualities and achievements, what made each man stand out from the rest. Secondly, *mannfræði* had a much wider application, referring to the study of human nature in general… *Mannfræði* seems to have been an important aspect of traditional lore before saga writing began…"[1].

Hermann Pálsson states that those descriptions were "tradition bearers" and used consequently by the saga writers. As one of the outstanding examples he sees Ári Þorgilsson's *Ævi Snorra goða*[2]. The text is an account of the life of Snorri góði, who lived between 963 and 1031. At the beginning Ári wrote the list of Snorri's children with short descriptions of them. One may agree with Pálsson that "character delineation was an important feature of the sagas and must derive from traditional *mannfræð,* as it was practiced in the pre-literary period"[3].

The longest saga and the apex of saga writing, *Brennu-Njáls saga* includes twenty-six skillfully made character sketches. It is worth to consider them as examples of character descriptions. These portraits and their quality have been examined by many scholars[4]. It became a narrative pattern used by saga writers, not only for main protagonists but also for marginal characters who appear just once or twice and receive little attention in the plot otherwise. It would not be incorrect to adapt Einar Ól. Sveinson's words about the character sketches from *Njáls saga* to other sagas, as we know the accounts and the presentation of characters are similar in every saga. In his work about *Njáls saga* he states that:

> "In some cases the author shows us a picture of the external appearance of his characters. In all cases he affords us a description of their internal nature, of their mental disposition and temperament. To be sure, we may sometimes have questions regarding the true motives of the characters when under strong emotional stress… But in all these cases we will arrive at a satisfactory understanding if we read the saga thoughtfully and with an open mind. In so doing we must be careful not to jump to conclusions regarding any of the

[1] H. Pálsson, *Oral Tradition and Saga Writing*, Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia 3, Vien 1999, p. 59.

[2] *Ævi Snorra goða*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Matthías Þórðarson, Íslenzk Fornrit IV, Reykjavík 1935, pp. 185–186.

[3] Ibidem, p. .

[4] P.V. Rubow, *Smaa kritiske Breve*, Copenhagen, 1936, p. 30; H. Pálsson, *Oral Tradition…*, pp. 63–64; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Njáls saga: A literary Masterpiece*, Lincoln 1971, pp. 85–116.

characters on the basis of the first impression or of a single episode. It is necessary to keep in mind everything a character says and does, without subtracting anything from or adding anything to the author's account. And it goes without saying that we must not indulge in speculation regarding the historical reliability of this or that scene or character"[5].

There is nothing to argue against this passage. The saga authors show exactly what they wanted to show to the reader. These character portrayals in the sagas need not always be untrue. As it was mentioned earlier, the descriptions of Snorri góði and his children do not have to be an imagination of Ari fróði. The same could probably be said about other famous characters from sagas who are known to have existed in early medieval Iceland. Einar Ól. Sveinsson draws attention to the fact that the authors intentionally embellished (overrun) descriptions of the characters and that we should "make an honest effort to see and understand the author's characters as he portrayed them"[6]. Later he posited a question whether those portrayals are good or faulty, stating that we must accept them as they are presented to the reader.

It may be argued that saga authors, in their capacity as individuals, may unavoidably have held certain biases towards the characters they presented, and we cannot know which of these narrative descriptions bear any semblance to real-life qualities of the people they described. The question which always comes to the scholar's mind is who exactly the saga writer is describing and in which level this description works with a true personage. The descriptions that concern this essay are rather simple, and there is no need to examine them in the entire spectrum of character portrayal concerning his actions and deeds outside the immediate context of the games.

In the Icelandic family sagas, one may distinguish some groups of characters described by using a reference to some skills in sports. One may begin by looking at the ways of describing men according to their social status (specifically men, as there are no descriptions of women which could be linked to sports, even though they did play board games), if he is a king, a chieftain, a hero or a simple farmer.

In all, there are almost 200 character descriptions which include sporting activities or skills in sports[7]. Looking at them, one may clearly see a pattern for *mannfræði*, which is almost always presented in one specific order: name, physical skills (accomplishments), appearance, character traits. Sometimes if a saga author wanted to point out great skills of a character he added one of the following terms: "one of the best", (*mest*, "the greatest," "overbearing", *ok allra mana bestvígr*

[5] Ibidem, pp. 85–86.

[6] Ibidem, p. 86.

[7] According to unpublished Sæmundur Guðmundssons from Háskóli Íslands, huge database of all sporting activities in Old Icelandic literary corpus which was kindly given to me by him.

("better than anyone else")[8], *at eigi váu hans jafningjar* ("no one could compare with him")[9], *at ekki helzt við þeim* ("no one could be a match with them"), *sterkastur jafn gamall*, ("the strongest of his contemporaries")[10], *allra manna vænstur* ("superior to other men in all skills")[11].

As mentioned above, *Njáls saga* has numerous character descriptions, but in only few cases is there mention of sports. One of the personages described in the saga is Gunnarr from Hilðarendi. Einar Ól. Sveinsson wrote that "his portrait and personality bear the stamp of a later age"[12]. With suggestion that "historical inaccuracies are of importance only if they are detrimental to the verisimilitude of the literary work" and they have nothing to do with aesthetic enjoyment of the saga[13]. This "artistic" presentation undoubtedly is a matter of examination by a literature scholar, but the interdisciplinary point of view concentrated on games which I am representing does not allow me to go into this important issue. Moreover, sagas which were alive in the Middle Ages (oral or written) had a great influence on the contemporaries and future generations.

A closer look at the sources shows how important *mannfræði* was and the prominent degree to which games figured in character introductions in the Icelandic Sagas.

Droplaugarsona saga, (chapter 2)

Helgi var mikill maðr vexti ok vænn ok sterkr, gleðimaðr ok hávaðasamr. Hann vildi ekki um búnað hugsa. Vígr var hann manna bezt. Grímr var mikill maðr vexti ok afrendr at afli, hljóðlátr ok stilltr vel. Hann var búmaðr mikill. Þeir bræðr vǫndu sik alls kyns íþróttum, ok þóttu þeir þar fyrir ǫllum ungum mǫnnum í allri atferð sinni, svá at þeira jafningjar fengusk eigi.

"Helgi was a big man in stature, and handsome and strong, a cheery man and assertive. He had no interest at all in farming. He was as skilled in arms as any man. Grim was a big man in stature and very strong, as well as taciturn and calm tempered. He was a great farmer. Those brothers trained themselves in skills of every kind, and they were regarded as foremost among all young men in everything they did, so that their equals were nowhere to be found"[14].

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[8] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XII, Reykjavík 1954, p. 19.

[9] *Egils saga*, ed. by Sigurðr Nordal, Íslenzk Fornrit XII, Reykjavík 1933, p. 1.

[10] *Gull-Þóris saga Þorskfirðinga saga*, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XIII, Reykjavík, 2009, p. 2.

[11] *Laxdœla saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Matthías Þórðarson, Íslenzk Fornrit V, Reykjavík 1934, p. 28.

[12] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 86.

[13] Ibidem, pp. 88–89.

[14] *Droplaugssona saga*, Íslenzk Fornrit XI, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Reykjavík 1950, pp. 141–142*; The Saga of Droplaug's Sons*, [in:] *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol. II, Reykjavík 1997, Vol. IV, p. 357 (Later as "CSI").

Fljótsdæla saga (chapter 9)

Nûú fara þeir upp með Bersa, ok er hann ástsamligr til þeirra bræðra, en lagði þó meira stund á at kenna (...) Helgi var mikill maðr vexti, ljósjarpr á hár ok rauðli-taðr, breiðleitr ok hinn kurteisasti, en þat þótti helzt at yfirlitum Helga, at hann var munnljótr.

"Then they went up with Bersi, and he was affectionate to the brothers, though he spent more time teaching Helgi physical feats (…) Helgi was a man of large sta-ture, with light chestnut-coloured hair and a ruddy complexion and a broad face; he was a very courteous man, and the most noted thing about his appearance was that he had an ugly mouth"[15].

Ólafs saga ins helga (chapter 21)

Einarr hafi verit allra manna sterkastr ok beztr bogmaðr, er verit hafi í Nóreg, ok var harðskeyti hans um fram alla menn aðra. Hann skaut með bakkakólfi í gǫgnum uxahúð hráblauta, er hekk á ási einum. Skíðfœrr var hann allra manna bezt. In mesti var hann íþróttamaðr ok hreystimaðr. Hann var œttstór ok auðigr.

"Einar was a man of enormous strength and the best archer that ever lived in Norway; and his hard shooting excelled that of all other men. With a blunt-headed arrow he could shoot through a raw oxhide suspended from a beam. He was a most skilled runner on skis, a great athlete, and most courageous. He was of noble kin and wealthy"[16].

Hálfdánar saga Eysteinssonar (chapter 7)

Grímr inn ellri var svá stórr vexti, at fáir váru hans líkar. Hann var sterkr ok fimr við alla leika ok var opt at leikum með konungsmönnum á skotbakka ok at knat-tleikum.

"The younger Grim had a great talent for games, particularly archery, but never took part in trials of strength. He was a first-rate shot with handbow and crossbow"[17].

Brennu-Njáls saga (chapter 25)

Skarpheðinn hét inn ellsti; hann var mikill maðr vexti ok styrkr, vígr vel, syndr sem selr, manna fóthvatastr, skjótráðar og øruggr, gagnorðr ok skjótorðr, en þó lǫngum vel stilltr.

"Skarpheðin was the eldest, a big and strong man and a good fighter. He swam like a seal and was swift of foot, quick to make up his mind and sure of himself"[18].

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[15] *Fljótsdœla saga*, Íslenzk Fornrit XI, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Reykjavík 1950, p. 236; *The Saga of the People of Fljotsdal*, [w:] *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol. IV, p. 393.

[16] Ólafs saga Helga, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit XXVII, Reykjavík 1945, p. 27; Snorri Sturluson, Óláfr Haraldsson (The Saint), [in:] *Heimskringla*, Vol. II, transl. by Alison Finlay, Anthony Faulkes, London 2014, p. 16.

[17] *Hálfdánar saga Eysteinssonar*, *Fornaldarsögur Nordrlanda*, Vol. IV, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík 1944, p. 256; *Hálfdánar saga Eysteinssonar*, [in:] *Seven Viking Romances*, ed. by Herman Pálsson, Paul Edwards, London 1986, p. 178.

[18] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 70; *Njal's saga*, CSI, Vol. III, 30.

Orms þáttur Stórólfssonar

hann var snemmendis bæði mikill ok sterkr ok vel at íþróttum búinn, því at þá er hann var sjau vetra, samvægði hann inn? sterkustum mönnum um afl ok allar íþróttir.

"[Orm] was big and strong from an early age and highly accomplished in skills, because by the time he was seven years old he was the equal of the mightiest men in strength and all skills/sports"[19].

Name	Saga	Look	Character	Skills	Profession
Ospak	Bandamanna s.		overbearing and very assertive	big and strong, immensely strong	cargo business
Gunnar	Brennu-Njáls s.	handsome and fair of skin and hair straight		big, strong, excellent fighter, swift in sword	
Sigmund	Brennu-Njáls s.	handsome, bisterous, sarcastic and overbearing	courteous	full of ambition and good poet and skilled in most sports	sea-faring merchant
Helgi	Droplaugssona s.	big man in stature, handsome	a cheery man and assertive	Skilled in arms, foremost among all young men	no interest at all in farming
Grim	Droplaugssona s.	big man in stature	taciturn and calm tempered	very strong	strong
Helgi	Fljótsdæla s.	large stature, with light chestnut-coloured hair, ruddy complexion, broad face, an ugly mouth	very courteous man	physical feats	
Þórðr	Þórðar saga hreðu	well built, strong, handsome imposing	generous, affable and a oyal friend, good company, generally popular	exelent all-round sportsman, a better swimmer than everyone else	talented poet

The examples here show the way of presenting new characters in the saga narratives. In the first example from *Droplaugssona saga* we see two brothers who are almost the same in physical strength but they differ in an attitude to farming. We can see in this *mannfræði* also an element of comparison between brothers. In the second example again we see brothers who are above average in comparison to others but elder Bersi is teaching Helgi in skills. Next examples present a motif used in sagas where people were considered by authors as the strongest in Iceland or Norway. Even though they were living at the same times. That brings the question of regional identity and creation of regional heroes (unfortunately there is no space

[19] *Orms þáttur Stórólfssonar*, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XIII, Reykjavík 2009, p. 70; *Orm Storolfsson's tale*, CSI, Vol. III, 455.

here to go further on this subject). Sometimes good character goes together with skills and handsome appearance, but it is not the general rule. Many times we encounter characters being introduced as skilled in sports, yet they differ in character and in physical looks. The only consistency is that they are good in *íþróttir*.

The table above shows just some of these descriptions in a schematic way. The examples in the table have been chosen because not many of the descriptions are fitting into all categories I have made. As the table shows, in the narration introducing a character we can clearly see the importance of games and skills. This idea comes from the broader interests of the Norse people in physical skills. These skills were considered among pre-requisites for an ideal man, perfect warrior, and important personage. Men were expected to be good at sports to present themselves as leaders, chieftains or even kings.

Mannjafnaðr – comparison of men as a game

The classic example of *mannjafnaðr* can be seen in *Magnússona saga*[20]. There, the two kings Sigurðr and Eysteinn, who are brothers, exchange insults with each other and claim that one is better than the other at sporting activities. In this fragment we can see another aspect of mentioning games which are used rather as a literary motif than an attempt to show what the actual Old Norse games were. It is said here that it was customary for men to compare themselves while drinking. We can see it also in the make-believe games (e.g. *Ynglinga saga* – chapter 34) where children try to be better than others[21]. But focusing on Sigurðr and Eysteinn, it is worth emphasizing that they start quarrelling as a result of games and then they move on to more important matters such as their reigns and their expeditions. The games were the easiest, simplest and quickest forms of proving the strength of a man. And as it was written in this saga, the games and sports which require agility belong to the leading group. What is interesting is that they start comparing themselves by saying that they have equal status and position.

[20] *Orkneyinga saga* in chapter 61 expresses the idea that the comparison of men took place while they were drinking: *þar var margt talat er menn vóru drukknir mjök, ok kom þar at rætt var um mannjöfnuð*, *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XXXIV, Reykjavík 1965, p. 134. We see it also in *Flóamanna saga*, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson, Bjarni Vilhálmsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XIII, Reykjavík 1991, p. 304: þeir fóru í mannjöfnuð ok töluðu um Þorgils ok Eirek; *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Matthías Þórðarson, *Íslenzk Fornrit* IV, Reykjavík 1935, p. 98: þar var ölteiti mörg, þar var talat um *mannjöfnuð, ok hverr þar væri göfgastr maðr í sveit eðr mestr höfðingi ok urðu menn þar eigi á eitt sáttir, sem optast verðr ef um mannjöfnuð er talað*, and *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk Fornrit III, Reykjavík 1938, p. 66: Þorsteinn svarar, ekki ferr ek í mannjöfnuð, segir hann.

[21] *Ynglinga saga*, [in:] *Heimskringla* I, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit XXVI, Reykjavík 1941, pp. 63–64.

Karen Swenson notes that the entire saga is a prelude to the flyting of the kings, and it is worthwhile now to describe the characters as well as their actions and the events in which they were involved[22]. The first chapter tells about King Eysteinn's and Sigurðr's division of duties. One is going to govern at home while the other will lead expeditions abroad. The following chapters up to 16 deal with the brothers' deeds (especially those of Sigurðr). In chapter 16 there is a description of King Eysteinn: he is handsome, wise-minded in all knowledge, laws, judgements and histories, sagacious and wise-spoken; eloquent, cheerful, amiable, beloved by all people[23]. The following chapter describes Sigurðr as imposing but not handsome, not amiable, of few words, a good and staunch friend, not very talkative, well-mannered and stately, a good ruler and stern punisher who keeps the law well, generous with wealth, powerful and famous[24]. One may see that they both are presented in a positive way, with some differences. In chapter 18 the reader knows that their brother, Óláfr, died and left them the kingdom. The following chapter "presents, first, Eysteinn's dalliance – innocent, if we believe the evidence of the ordeal of carrying hot iron – with the woman Borghil-dr, and, second, Sigurðr's active acquisition of her as his concubine and mother of his son"[25]. In the next chapter we see the naming of Sigurðr's wife and her relatives. Those two chapters reveal to the reader the differences between these brothers and prepare for the verbal conflict which is going to happen. Finally in chapter 21 we see the brothers, sitting at the table and drinking. It is worth quoting the whole *mannjafnaðr* here:

> *Þá mælti Eysteinn konungur: "Sá ölsiður hefir oft verið að menn taka sér jafnaðarmenn. Vil eg hér svo vera láta". Þá þagði Sigurður konungur. "Sé eg", segir Eysteinn konungur, "að eg verð hefja þessa teiti. Mun eg taka þig bróðir til jafnaðarmanns mér. Færi eg það til að jafnt nafn höfum við báðir og jafna eign. Geri eg engi mun ættar okkarrar eða uppfæðslu". Þá svarar Sigurður konungur: "Manstu eigi það er eg braut þig á bak ef eg vildi og varstu vetri eldri?" Þá segir Eysteinn konungur: "Eigi man eg hitt síður er þú fékkst eigi leikið það er mjúkleikur var í". Þá mælti Sigurður konungur: "Manstu hversu fór um sundið með okkur? Eg mátti kefja þig ef eg vildi". Eysteinn konungur segir: "Ekki svam eg skemmra en þú og eigi var eg verr*

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[22] K. Swenson, *Performing Definitions: Two Genres of Insult in Old Norse Literature*, Columbia, SC 1991, p. 48.

[23] *Eysteinn konungr var maðr inn fríðasti sýnum, bláeygrr, ok nǫkkut opineygr, bleikhárr ok hrokkinhárr, ekki hár meðalmaðr, speklingr at viti, at ǫllu fróðr, lǫgum ok dœmum ok mannfrœði, ráðsnjallr ok orðspakr ok inn snjallasti, manna glaðastr ok lítillátastr, hugþekkr ok ástsœll allri alþýðu*, *Magnússona saga*, [in:] *Heimskringla* I, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit XXVIII, Reykjavík 1951, p. 256.

[24] *Sigurðr konungr var maðr mikill vexti ok jarpr á hár, skǫrligr, ekki fagr, vel vaxinn, snœfurl-igr, fámœltr ok optast ekki þýðr, vingóðr ok fastúðigr, ekki talaðr mjǫk, siðlátr ok veglátr. Sigurðr konungr var stjórnsamr ok refsingasamr, helt vel login, mildr af fé, ríkr ok ágætr*, *Magnússona saga*, p. 256.

[25] Ibidem, p. 49.

kafsyndur. Eg kunni og á ísleggjum svo að engan vissi eg þann er það keppti við mig en þú kunnir það eigi heldur en naut". Sigurður konungur segir: "Höfðinglegri íþrótt og nytsamlegri þykir mér sú að kunna vel á boga. Ætla eg að þú nýtir eigi boga minn þótt þú spyrnir fótum í". Eysteinn svarar: "Ekki em eg bogsterkur sem þú en minna mun skilja beinskeyti okkra og miklu kann eg betur á skíðum en þú og hafði það verið enn fyrr kölluð góð íþrótt". Sigurður konungur segir: "Þess þykir mikill munur að það er höfðinglegra að sá er yfirmaður skal vera annarra manna sé mikill í flokki, sterkur og vopnfær betur en aðrir menn og auðsær og auðkenndur þá er flestir eru saman". Eysteinn konungur segir: "Eigi er það síður einkanna hlutur að maður sé fríður og er sá og auðkenndur í mannfjölda. Þykir mér það og höfðinglegt því að fríðleikinum sómir hinn besti búnaður. Kann eg og miklu betur til laga en þú og svo, hvað sem við skulum tala, em eg miklu sléttorðari". Sig-urður konungur svarar: "Vera kann að þú hafir numið fleiri lögprettu því að eg átti þá annað að starfa. En engi frýr þér sléttmælis en hitt mæla margir að þú sért eigi allfastorður og lítið mark sé hverju þú heitir, mælir eftir þeim er þá eru hjá og er það ekki konunglegt". Eysteinn konungur svarar: "Það ber til þess, er menn bera mál sín fyrir mig, þá hygg eg að því fyrst að lúka svo hvers manns máli að þeim mætti best þykja. Þá kemur oft annar sá er mál á við hann og verður þá oft dregið til að miðla svo að báðum skuli líka. Hitt er og oft að eg heiti því sem eg em beðinn því að eg vildi að allir færu fegnir frá mínum fundi. Sé eg hinn kost ef eg vil hafa, sem þú gerir, að heita öllum illu en engi heyri eg efndanna frýja". Sigurður konungur segir: "Það hefir verið mál manna að ferð sú er eg fór úr landi væri heldur höfðingleg en þú sast heima meðan sem dóttir föður þíns". Eysteinn konungur svarar: "Nú greipstu á ký-linu. Eigi mundi eg þessa ræðu vekja ef eg kynni hér engu svara. Nær þótti mér hinu að eg gerði þig heiman sem systur mína áður þú yrðir búinn til ferðar". Sigurður konungur segir: "Heyrt muntu hafa það að eg átti orustur mjög margar í Serklandi er þú munt heyrt hafa getið og fékk eg í öllum sigur og margs konar gersemar, þær er eigi hafa slíkar komið hingað til lands. Þótti eg þar mest verður er eg fann göfgasta menn en eg hygg að eigi hafir þú enn hleypt heimdraganum". Eysteinn konungur svarar: "Spurt hefi eg það að þú áttir orustur nokkurar utanlands en nytsamlegra var hitt landi voru er eg gerði meðan. Eg reisti fimm kirkjur af grundvelli og gerði eg höfn við Agðanes er áður var öræfi og hvers manns för, þá er fer norður eða suður með landi. Eg gerði og stöpulinn í Sinhólmssundi og höllina í Björgyn meðan þú brytjaðir blámenn fyrir fjandann á Serklandi. Ætla eg það lítið gagn ríki voru". Sigurður konungur segir: "Fór eg í ferð þeirri lengst út til Jórdanar og lagðist eg yfir ána. En út á bakkanum er kjarr nokkuð en þar á barrinu reið eg knút og mælti eg svo fyrir að þú skyldir leysa bróðir eða hafa ellegar þvílíkan formála sem þar var á lagður". Eysteinn konungur segir: "Eigi mun eg leysa þann knút er þú reiðst mér en ríða mátti eg þér þann knút er miklu síður fengir þú leyst, þá er þú sigldir einskipa í her minn, þá er þú komst í land". Eftir það þögnuðu þeir báðir og var hvortveggi reiður. Fleiri hlutir urðu þeir í skiptum þeirra bræðra er það fannst á að hvor dró sig fram og sitt mál og vildi hvor vera öðrum meiri. En hélst þó friður milli þeirra meðan þeir lifðu[26]

King Eysteinn said, "It has been the custom for men when drinking to choose someone to compare themselves with. Let us do so now". To that, King Sigurth said noth-

[26] Ibidem, pp. 259–260; Translated as *Saga of the Sons of Magnús*, [in:] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla. History of the Kings of Norway*, transl. by Lee M. Hollander, Austin 1964, p. 703.

ing. “I see”, said king Eysteinn, “that it behooves me to start this entertainment. I shall choose you, brother, for my match. And I shall start by saying that we two have the same title and equal possessions. There is no difference between our birth and upbringing. Then king Sigurth replied, “Do you remember that I had the better of you in wrestling whenever I wanted to, though you were a year older?” Then king Eystein answered, “I recall as well that you were no match for me in agility. King Sigurth replied, “Do you remember how it was with our swimming, and that I could duck you whenever I wanted to?” King Eysten said, “I could swim as far as you could, nor was I worse at diving. Also, I was so good at skating that I did not know anyone who could vie with me; but you were not better at that than a cow”. King Sigurth said, “A more chieftainly sport, and a more useful one, it seems to me, is to shoot well with bow and arrow. And I believe you would not be able to stretch my bow even though you used both feet [to stretch it]”. King Eystein answered, “I am not as strong at the bow as you are; but there is less difference between our marksmanship. And I am better at the use of skins than you, and that has also been considered a worthwhile accomplishment”. King Sigurth said: “It is considered more chieftainly that he who is to command other should standt tall in a group and be stronger and more practiced in arms than others and be easily seen and recognized when men are gathered”. King Eystein said, “It is no less distinctive that a man be handsome. And then he is no less easily recognized in a multitude. That too seems to me chieftainly, because fine clothes go best with a handsome exterior. Also, I have better knowledge of the laws than you; and whatever the subject, I am by far the better speaker”.

The word which describes the situation used by Snorri is a “flyting”. Karen Swenson lists it with other words as terms denoting segments of the text. She put together *hvǫt*, *níð*, *spá*, *mannjafnaðr* and *senna* and explains that “these terms, used to define texts or segments of texts by naming them, indicate a poetic self-consciousness, a cultural awareness of literary form and content that often goes unnoticed or eludes definition by an uninitiated modern audience”[27]. Those terms are seen now in a different context and it is hard to match them to the modern definitions because we live in a different society now.

The Cleasby and Vigfusson Dictionary provides a translation of these words as follows: *mannjafnaðr* (“a comparison of men”); *níð* (“contumely”) or insulting

[27] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen denife níð runes: “Níð signifies gross insults of a symbolic kind. Usually the allegation is to the effect that the person who is the object of níð is a passive homo-sezual or has been used in this way, thus that he is *ragr*. The purpose of níð is to terminate a period of peace or accentuate a breach of the peace and isolate an opponent form society by declaring that he is unworthy to be a member. The man attacked must show that he is fit to remain in the com-munity, by behaving as a man in the system of Norse ethics; that is to say, he must challenge his adversary to battle, or avenge himself by blood-revenge. The typical form of níð, or at any rate the most effective, was in verse; but judging by the laws and literary instances, prose of similar content had more or less the same effect”. P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: concepts of sexual defamation in early Northern society*, The Viking Collection Studies in Northern Civilization 1, Odensee 1983; Swenson, *Performing Definition…*, p. 28.

display; *senna* ("high words, gibing)"[28], also "a dispute in which each contends that his hero is the greatest". From those three, *níð*, which is an insult, is not related to any gaming activity that occurs in the sources examined by me for this purpose. Insulting is a very common type of action shown in Old Norse liter-ature and it was a part of tradition[29]. People who used Old Icelandic distinguished *mannjafnaðr* from other genres of insult and it seems to be a representation of a native category which resembles competition and games[30]. The difference between *senna* and *mannjafnaðr* seems to be in the actions which are taken on by an opponent. The first one is an attack on the opponent and the degradation of his personage, while the second is based on speaking favourably of himself.

The episode from *Magnússona saga* is performed for the sake of diversion. Marcel Bax and Tineke Padmos see evidence for this in Eysteinn's proposal with the words *fám oss ölteiti nökkur*. They write that the contest between the kings, "is occasioned by complaints about Sigurðr's arrogance since his trav-els abroad. It seems that Eysteinn intends to injure Sigurðr's pride"[31].

Eysteinn challenges Sigurðr by explicitly stating that one precondition is fulfilled. Sigurðr accepts the challenge by further developing this topic although arguing against their supposed equality in other respects....the contender that is challenged accepts the challenge by performing the first move in the game. This supposition is supported by formal qualities of the interaction, that is, the pattern of subsequent moves…[32].

The same event is described also by the author of *Morkinskinna*. But here the action, as Marianne Kalinke writes, "is presented less as an accepted sport than as the result of Eysteinn's efforts to determinate the cause of Sigurðr's moroseness, and as expression of a previously unspoken displeasure at the haughty demeanor of the former Crusades"[33]. The starting point for the case is the disparity between the two brothers, one is a warrior and adventurer and the other stays at home as an administrator. This is the magisterial flyting of the saga[34].

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[28] *An Icelandic-English dictionary, based on the ms. collections of the late Richard Cleasby. Enl. and completed by Gudbrand Vigfússon*, Oxford: MA 1874, p. 1121

[29] The best example can be seen in mythology. The whole poem of *Lokasenna* is nothing else but an insulting of Loki. See, U. Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, Vol I, Oxford 1969, pp. 332–348.

[30] M. Bax, T. Padmos, *Two types of verbal dueling in Old Icelandic: the interactional structure of the senna and mannjafnaðr in Hárbarðsljóð*, "Scandinavian Studies" 55:2 (1983), p. 158; Cf. J. Harris, *The senna: from description to literary theory*, "Michigan Germanic Studies" 5 (1979), p. 67; C.J. Clo-ver, *Hárbarðsljóð as Generic Farce*, "Scandinavian Studies" 51 (1979), pp. 139–140; and *The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode*, "Speculum" 55 (1980), p. 455; A. Heusler, *Die altgermanische Dichtung*, Postdam 1941, p. 105–108; J. de Vries, *Altnordishe Literaturgeschichte*, Berlin 1964, p. 56–58.

[31] M. Bax, T. Padmos, *Two types of verbal dueling*…, p. 153, ref.18.

[32] Ibidem, 159.

[33] M.E. Kalinke, *Sigurðar saga Jórsalafara: the fictionalization of fact in Morkinskinna*, "Scandinavian Studies" 56:2 (1984), p. 162.

[34] C. Clover, *Unferþ Episode*…, p. 455.

The structure of *mannjafnaðr* in *Heimskringla* depends on verbal duelling in which two kings say that the other is better. This claim is rejected by a denial of the propositional content. "Rejection of a claim is also realized by declaring the fact which was boasted about irrelevant. This strategy of putting off (that does not affect the content of the foregoing claim as such) is, for example, used by Sigurdr who says, after Eysteinn has claimed to be the better skater of two. […] *Magnússona saga* exposes another option: a simple rejection of the foregoing claim … rejection not followed by a counterclaim is an appropriate move in the game"[35]. Bax and Padmos in their conclusion try to generalize what *mannjafnaðr* is. They explain what the rules of this event and these actions are. They write that:

> "(A) claim in this type of verbal duel is made by reference to a special event in the personal history of the speaker; as regards the nature of these mentionable events, we saw that warlike spirit, virility, physical abilities, verbal abilities, and magic cunning are relevant issues in the course of Halfs saga. *mannjafnðar*. In the context of this verbal duel, such a claim by the speaker is heard as an abuse, an attempt to reduce the prestige of the hearer. This pragmatical meaning is either covert or overt. The obligatory response following this dominance proclaiming action is either a rejection or a rejection delivered together with a counter-claim. The act of rejecting is realized by a denial, a reproach, a questioning, by putting off or, implicitly, by mirroring or exceeding[36].

The situation and its rules can be shown in a table which describes certain moves[37]"

Turn:	1	2	3	4
Move:	claim	counter-claim# or rejection ---------- or rejection + counter-claim	rejection + counter-claim# ---------- rejection or rejection + counter-claim	---------- rejection + counter-claim#

The simpler way is shown by Karen Swenson:

Speaker A: "I did X better than you did".

Speaker B: "Well, that may be true, but X is not important. I did Y better than you did"[38].

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[35] Ibidem, pp. 168–169.

[36] Ibidem, p. 169.

[37] Ibidem, p. 170.

[38] Swenson, *Performing Definitions…*, p. 116.

The case of *mannjafnaðr* in *Heimskringla* shows its regular structures. In other examples the regularity is not so obvious and differs a little bit. Karen Swenson interprets the episode in *Morkinskinna* as very exciting because of the fact that opponents are "at least superficially equal"[39]. She notices in regard to the end of a story that "After this comparison, we are told that the brothers are very angry with each other. Because the audience must expect that this *mannjafnaðr* will end in the customary way, we are told that, in fact, it does not"[40]. Lars Lönnroth noticed that the way of doing a *mannjafnaðr* presentation is char-acterized by how it allows the audience to witness the alternation between par-ties. And the switching between the present tense and the past tense is a sty-listic feature which "serves to obliterate boundary between the audience and the story"[41].

> "The form, rhetoric, and opposition of the Magnússona saga flyting is strictly conventional (particularly in its pre-Snorri form). Only the bias is uncharacteristic, but this is of course a deliberate reversal: Eysteinn's particular success lies in having upended the traditional terms. Travel and adventure are otherwise unanimously favo-red over domestic pastimes"[42].

King Eysteinn, already in *Heimskringla* characterized as "very clever" and "the happiest and most humble among men" (it is worth to note, that describing him as "humble", *litillar*, the author of a saga was aware that this word is not a part of the normal saga code, but is a part of the Christian and courtly litera-ture!), while drinking at some point states that he and Sigurðr shall set off any ölskämt (beer joke/beer entertainment). King Sigurðr, who earlier in the saga was described as "usually not very amiable", now turns out to live up to this characteristic by the brusque tone with which he declines. This legitimizes young Eysteinn's next move, which is to suggest making a comparison of them two. King Sigurðr continues to remain silent, which is the signal to King Eysteinn to open the game. Preludes are thereby quickly passed over and the game can begin. King Eysteinn's first gambit in the *mannjafnaðr* is still completely free from aggression or self-assertion. He claims only that the story itself has already provided evidence that the two kings have equal rank and dignity. But thus he provokes Sigurðr to the first "real" *manjafnaðr* reply, to the effect that he has held the title in wrestling. From here the game gradually moves on its own, and it is Sigurðr who leads the attacks in comparison. Consistently in all rounds, Sig-urðr claims to possess the superior virtue of greater boldness, physical strength and aggression – i.e. the traditional virtues which comparison of men is focused on. On the other hand Eysteinn bases his claim on peaceful and courtly virtues based on courtesy.

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[39] Ibidem.

[40] Ibidem.

[41] Lönnroth, *En kunglig kontrovers*..., p. 71.

[42] Clover, *Unferþ Episode*…, p. 456.

There are thus two different manly ideals confronted, and the narrator presents them as two alternatives. Nonetheless, Eysteinn stands as the superior, because he manages to parry each of Sigurðr's attacks which has the effect of turning his ag-gressiveness to their advantage. The last round will be the crucial. Since Eysteinn also has the last word, he wins the competition, even if it is not explicitly stated. The Eystein parry is effective because it emphasizes his superiority in swimming and skating – two branches that are more skillful and together outweigh Sigurðr's previously mentioned skill in wrestling. Swimming was a brutal sport that was highly popular among the Scandinavians.

In the 3rd round Sigurðr makes claim to be skilled in archery and accuses Eystein of not even being able to tighten his bow, again an implicit accusation of being unmanly (cf. Odysseus and the suitors). To fully understand Eysteinn's reply it should be made clear that archery, especially at this time, was practiced in combination with skiing, and connected with winter hunting. Eystein's reply, that he aims as good as Sigurðr and he skis better, means that Sigurðr's claim to superiority in this branch has been reduced to superiority in an insignificant detail, drawing his bowstring, where he again is able to use his brute strength. Eysteinn stands out, however, in being the general "supreme" winter hunter. The last three rounds treat the theme of journey abroad versus staying at home, a traditional *manjamningar* theme that is here, however, varied in a new way. This final part of the strife of words concentrate first on Sigurd's departure from Norway, then at his performances abroad, finally at his homecoming – thus a strictly symmetrical progression. Eysteinn stayed at home and took care of and developed the country which in his mind is better than leaving the country for the sake of fighting for Christendom far away from homelands. But in the eyes of Marianne Kalinke travels of king Sigurð are not all negative. She interprets his behaviour as "pan-European" struggle of all Christianity in the times of Crusades[43].

Scholars have argued over the relative merits of the *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla* versions of the verbal duel. *Heimskringla* exhibits a strict paral-lelism and progression. The characters answer each other in an exaggerated way and Snorri has them abide by the rules of the game. In *Morkinskinna* the game is constructed on the principle of contrast, however, and, as Kválen has rightly observed, the *mannjafnaðr* is a literary characterization and criticism constructed on everything that has preceded[44]. The antithetical and dissimilar character of the repartees reflects the antithetical and dissimilar personalities of the speak-ers. In this one dramatic incident the anonymous author of the *mannjafnadr* in *Morkinskinna* has enunciated what he perceived to be the brothers' disparate but complementary personalities and accomplishments[45].

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[43] Kalinke, *Sigurdar*…, p. 165.

[44] Eivind Kválen, *Tillhøvet millom Morkinskinna, Fagrskinna, Ágrip og Orkneyinga saga*, "Edda" 24 (1926), p. 311.

[45] Kalinke, *Sigurdar*…, p. 165.

After all one may observe three stages of *mannjafnaðr*:

1. Words;
2. Two people in the game/sport competition;
3. Battle.

Firstly, the words are seen in the fragment we used in the analysis. There, the comparison of men has no physical impact but in a way it is more accurate. The words pretend a real fight and when somebody is using words in front of the audience people believe in them and in a way make them stronger, because words are travelling fast and news could spread among many persons. On this level of competition there was a matter of previous deeds of men who were compared with themselves and spreading of it throughout audience and further.

The second stage of *mannjafnaðr* appears in the games. Two men compete with each other to decide who is stronger and who is better in skills (games). Here we see the physical aspect of comparison of men but, again, it is a way to prevent violence and the actions only pretend to be war-like. Here the competition was based on actual events and there was no connection with earlier actions of protagonists.

The last stage is the time of no return. It is a battle game which is taken seriously. The battle had also different meanings than previous stages. It was not the matter of being better in front of the people who watched it. Here no one watched the battle for pleasure, unless it was the duel where two men stayed in the *hólmganguhring*[46]. The goal of *mannjafnaðr* was to compare two men with each other but at all cost do not allow them to reach the third stage where blood comes out.

Conclusion

Why are the examples of *mannfræði* and *mannjafnaðr* discussed above only about men? At the end of this essay we have to consider the role of women in games. As far as I am aware, after examining all the instances concerning games in saga literature, women are not playing (probably were not allowed) any "masculine" games like *glíma* (wrestling), *knattleikr* (ball game) and many other games which required strength.

One may assume it was due to the violence inherent in such events. Female saga protagonists were aware of such dangers, as *Njáls saga* makes clear when Hildigunnr is talking to her brothers about horse-fights[47]. On the other hand, in *Vatnsdæla* saga we read that women were looking at the *knattleikr*[48] and in *Sturlu saga* there is evidence that women attended rather than participated in the

[46] See, Bø, *Hólmganga* and *Einvigi*…, pp. 132–114.

[47] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 148.

[48] *Vatnasdæla saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinnson, Íslenzk Fornrit VIII, Reykjavík 1939, p. 98.

horse-fights[49]. The argument of fearing violence, in my opinion, is doubtful. But one may see many examples when women are playing board games. Also here a problem arises because almost every such occasion involves one woman playing with one man. Jenny Jochens notes that only supernatural women played together in groups, not ordinary women[50]. The explanation for that is unclear and we do not know if it was a custom. More likely, women played against each other without any reasons. The same was with drinking, women drank together with men but did not join drinking games because it insulted them. The example is seen in *Vǫðu-brands þáttr*, where one may read about inventing of *Syrpuþing*[51]. This kind of a game (law from Syrpa's thing) with a word *syrpa* (dirty woman) is suggested by Jochens to be a game of insulting women (in a sexual matter)[52]. On the other hand, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriskdóttir shows the example of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* in which she tries to see womanly *íþróttir*. She writes that "embroidery cannot be seen as the female equivalent of male *íþróttir*, but some women in the *fornaldar-* and *riddarasögur* arguably possess skills that could be regarded as *íþróttir* in the specific denotation…These include higher learning, playing chess, oratory, knowledge of runes, and medical skills"[53]. Those skills have not much to do with jarl Rǫgnvald's list of skills, which he listed in his poem in *Orkneyinga saga* and are considered as an example of the meaning of the word *íþróttir*[54].

The idea of another character or the hero being presented by himself as a great man skilled in physical feats is all the time presented in the sources. This goes with the claims of society of having heroes and being heroes during the lifetime. As it was shown in the examples, this is done by showing superiority of a man among others. Not without significance is a question always repeated in the narration while coming to games: *hver er sterkastr*? Who is the strongest?

Both *mannfræði* and *mannjafnaðr* shows to what great degree games and sports were important for Icelandic saga authors and their audiences. Society needed strong characters skilled in many *íþróttir*, not only to identify with them but also to regard them as heroes. The masculinity of physical strength was also

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[49] *Sturlu saga*, [in:] *Sturlunga saga*, Vol. 1, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, Kristján Eldjárn, Reykjavík 1946, p. 101.

[50] J. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Soc*iety, Cornell 1995, p. 104.

[51] *Vǫðu-brands þáttr*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, *Íslenzk Fornrit* X, Reykjavík 1956, p. 129.

[52] J. Jochens, *Women*…, p. 111.

[53] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature. Bodies, Words, and Power*, Palgrave 2013, pp. 30–31.

[54] *Orkneyinga saga* metiones his poem: *Tafl emk ǫrr at efla; íþróttir kannk níu; týnik trauðla rúnum; tíðs mér bók ok smíðir. Skríða kannk á skíðum; skýtk ok roek, svát nýtir; hvártveggja kannk hyggja: harpslôtt ok bragþôttu*, [in:] *Lausavísur*, ed. by J. Jesch, [in:] *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, Vol. II, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2: from c. 1035 to c. 1300*, ed. by K.E. Gade, Turnhout 2009, pp. 297–578.

used by saga authors not only in describing characters as sportsmen but also in the motif of character comparisons. As the above discussion shows, games and sports played significant role in medieval Iceland.

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MANNFROEÐI I *MANNJAFNAÐR* I ICH ZWIĄZEK Z GRAMI

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia wpływ gier i aktywności fizycznej na sposób przedstawienia postaci w sagach islandzkich, który określa się mianem *mannfræði*. W sagach idealnego człowieka prawie zawsze przedstawiało się jako mistrza w różnego rodzaju grach i próbach sił. Jest to wyraz maskulinizacji kultury islandzkiej, która weszła również w sferę sag. Podobnie rzecz się ma z kolejnym zjawiskiem opisanym w artykule – *mannjafnaðr*. To z kolei jest niemal rytualnym porównywaniem się dwóch równych sobie osób, mającym na celu zdyskredytowanie przeciwnika. W słynnym *mannjafnaðr* dwóch królów, braci, główną płaszczyznę porównania stanowią właśnie sporty.

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STUDIA I MATERIAŁY Z DZIEJÓW EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ

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A FEW THOUGHTS ON WEEPING AND MANLY BEHAVIOUR IN OLD NORSE LITERATURE

At first sight, the two elements highlighted in the title, weeping and manly behaviour, seem to be absolutely separate. Crying lies completely outside the world of male virtues and is not part of a typical picture of a masculine hero. Medieval Scandinavian literature, first of all sagas and myths, provides us with approximately the same pattern. Weeping belongs to the world of women, whereas men were generally supposed to "behave like men". Any sign of a "female factor" in a male profile would have been condemned, as any instance of this kind would have questioned and challenged another important social factor – honour. In other words, male weeping could not agree with male honour, so men were supposed to do their best to avoid reactions that would call their social status into question.

Still, Old Norse accounts provide us with occasional instances of male weeping that have recently attracted the attention of scholars. The aim of this paper is first to recapitulate these recent views and then to supplement them with my own thoughts on the subject. These recent contributions I intend to refer to are in two articles: the first by Erin Goeres[1], and the second by Kristen Mills[2].

The circumstances surrounding the funeral of the Norwegian king Magnús the Good, son of St. Óláfr, constitute the basis of Goeres' analysis. The memorable event is described in several kings' sagas most notably in the Flayetjarbók ver-

[1] E.M. Goeres, *How to do with tears. The Funeral of Magnús inn góði*, "Saga-Book" 37 (2013), pp. 5–26.

[2] K. Mills, *Grief, Gender, and Genre. Male Weeping in Snorri's Account of Baldr's Death, Kings' Sagas, andGesta Danorum*, "The Journal of English and German Philology" 113:4 (2014), pp. 472–496.

sion of Magnúss saga góða ok Haralds harðráða[3]. According to the latter account, some members of King Magnús' retinue, his foster father Einarr Þambaskelfir and Þórirr, started to grieve once they learnt about his illness[4]. When the king finally died, *nu er þar enn til ath taka ath j frafalle Magnus konungs uar mikid nidrfall huorutueggia rikinu Danmork og Noregi og uar hann miog harmdaudi flestum monnum*[5]. Sadness and grief connected people during Magnús's funeral, which took place in Niðaross. All lamented over the dead monarch, both his retainers and ordinary people. As the author of the saga concludes: these events provoked the grief of many a man in all of Norway[6].

The story of death and funeral of Baldr, son of Óðinn, as known from the mythological accounts in the Elder Edda and Gylfaginning, is another starting point of Goeres' analysis[7]. Both accounts recall the general grief of all beings who wished that the young god, killed accidently, could live once again. For this reason, nobody hesitates to fulfil the wish of the goddess Hel, who agrees to release Baldr on the condition that the whole world weeps for him. This is disturbed by treacherous Loki, who, disguised as a giantess, refuses to join the rest of the world in weeping; the reaction that decides Baldr's fate[8].

According to Goeres, both cases are good examples of collective mourning, the phenomenon that also allowed men to share their emotions and openly display their ultimate sadness by weeping. As Goeres states, in these specific cases, male weeping should not be considered as a sign of weakness. Rather, it should be seen as the somatic manifestation of a complex psychosocial process. It provides the means through which the bereaved communicate their emotional experience to the wider community and differentiate themselves from those unaffected by the death of the person mourned. It especially refers to Magnús' hirðmenn, who, by public weeping, express their unity as king's retainers and show the exclusive character of their group[9].

This state of emotions seems to be confirmed by skaldic stanzas analysed by Goeres that refer to the day of Magnús' funeral. Both Oddr kíkinaskáld and Þjóðólfr Arnórsson voice the whole set of emotions, shared by all king's followers who constitute, as Goeres puts it[10], the emotional community. In other words, the funeral of the deceased king is another, quite specific, occasion on which to

[3] *Flateyjarbók. En samling af norske konge-sagær*, Vol. III, Christania 1868, pp. 328–334.

[4] Ibidem, pp. 328–329.

[5] Ibidem, p. 332.

[6] *Flateyjarbók*, p. 334.

[7] E.M. Goeres, *How to do with tears…*, pp. 5–6.

[8] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by A. Faulkes, London 2005, pp. 45–46.

[9] E.M. Goeres, *How to do with tears…*, pp. 6–8.

[10] Following Barbara Rosenwein's theory (*Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, Ithaca 2006).

display the exclusivity and unity of the hirð that shares the sadness, and also the tears, in the same way as it shared the king's favour, access to riches and political splendour.

According to Goeres, Magnús' funeral seems to have gained a reputation as an unusual event precisely because of the extent to which emotion was publicly displayed. It is important to note, following Goeres, the political context of the event. The tears of Magnús' *hirðmenn* seem to express not only the loss of the favoured king; they also seem to symbolize some kind of resistance to his successor, Haraldr harðráði[11].

In this context, both of the stories of the death of Magnús and Baldr share the same perspective of a claim to general grief that marginalizes gender conventions and is dictated by extraordinary conditions: the succession to the Norwegian throne by Haraldr and the approaching end of the mythical world respectively.

An almost identical approach defines Kristen Mills' analysis. She embraces many more instances of male weeping in her article that appear in various Icelandic sagas and other sources (like Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*) of the medieval North[12]. At first, she considers them from the perspective of gender requirements. Weeping remains the domain of women, thus male weeping is a sign of weakness and as such questions social order. Mills points out that within the saga realm the accusation of crying (with respect to men) was considered a tremendous insult to masculine identity. Crying for reasons other than sadness or grief was considered unmanly[13]. However, the cases of royals, like Magnús, Amleth and Valdemar, and divine beings, like Baldr, gave room for an exceptional approach to male weeping. Grief and sadness over the death of a high-status individual could include male tears, employed to demonstrate the exceptional esteem in which the deceased was held[14].

Both Goeres and Mills emphasize a perspective, that in my opinion, remains crucial to understand the conditional acceptance of male weeping as attached to grief for a deceased person. This is, apart from sadness and despair, the lack of stability and safety, accompanied by the fear of an uncertain future. It is somehow visible in the story of Baldr. Both gods and other beings seem to know that Baldr's death is the first sign of the end of the world. Thus, their tears may also reflect a fear of the new world order that remains uncertain and hardly positive in the light of a potential victory for the enemies of Asgard[15].

This tendency seems to be even more visible in the story of death of Magnús the Good. All kings' sagas underline the barely hidden tension between Magnús and his uncle Harald. It was not easy for them to settle terms and share power in

[11] E.M. Goeres, *How to do with tears*…, p. 19.
[12] K. Mills, *Grief, Gender, and Genre*…, pp. 478–490.
[13] Ibidem, p. 479.
[14] Ibidem, pp. 484–485.
[15] See L.P. Słupecki, *Mitologia skandynawska w epoce wikingów*, Kraków 2013, pp. 202–203.

the country[16]. The co-regency of Norway did not satisfy either of them. Moreover, saga authors portray the former as the rex iustus, and the latter is the hard-ruler. As was noted above, the first news of the king's illness alarms his followers, and they are constantly afraid of the prospect of Haraldr ruling the country alone. Haraldr, on the other hand, seems to confirm these fears. He is not eager to favour Magnús' followers, does not trust them, and treats them like potential traitors.

Leaving aside, at least for a while, the historical veracity of the story, I can only agree with Goeres that the use of Oddr's stanzas in the account of Magnús' funeral results in the strengthening of the impression of the emotions that the king's retainers shared at that very moment. In order to supplement the arguments of both authors, Old Norse literature had no better way to express any feelings and emotions than skaldic poetry[17].

Obviously, we are dealing with a special case here. Usually, skalds focused on various aspects of masculine prowess. If they dealt with the opposite, it was only to insult somebody with their *niðvísur*[18]. In this context, poetry that praises male grief and tears could be found as cheap provocation. Both authors, however, rightly indicate that a death of this very leader, a respected and popular ruler, created circumstances that fully justified such an attitude. On a symbolic level, their loss was very similar to the loss of Baldr for the mythological world. The death of a monarch and a patron also meant a lack of certainty about the future, political and material status. These men were ready to weep not only to manifest their sorrow but also ongoing unity – the only reasonable way to face a shaky future.

For this reason, it seems reasonable to treat male weeping over a deceased ruler as a physical supplement to the mourning poetry, *erfikvæði*, that Oddr's and Þjóðólfr's stanzas represent. In this context, the arguments of both articles may be further developed and strengthened by examples only briefly treated by both Goeres and Mills.

Hallfreðr Óttarsson is one of the most renowned skalds, known mainly for his service and poetry for the Norwegian king Óláfr Tryggvason. He is also the protagonist of *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, a supposed story of his life. Hallfreðr, similarly to other young Icelandic poets, finds it hard to accept the norms of the local community, gets into conflicts with other prominent chieftains and tries to win his case through his poetry. This quite uniform profile features, among others, an unfortunate love-affair, that leads to tragic consequences. In the case of Hallfreðr, it is a duel with Gríss, the husband of his beloved Kolfinna. Both men hope that a victory over their opponent will eventually allow them to attain their

[16] J. Morawiec, *Między poezją a polityką. Rozgrywki polityczne w Skandynawii XI wieku w świetle poezji ówczesnych skaldów*, Katowice 2016, pp. 527–532.

[17] E.M. Goeres, *How to do with tears*…, pp. 16–17.

[18] F. Ström, *Nid, ergi and Old Norse moral attitudes*, London 1973; A. Finlay, *Monstrous Allegations. An Exchange of ýki in Bjarnar saga hítdœlakapp*a, "Alvíssmál" 10 (2001), pp. 21–44.

goals[19]. This is the reason, according to the saga, why all involved in the conflict are very surprised when Hallfreðr does not turn up for the fight. It turns out that on that very same morning, he had gone out to a hillock, and had seen some men riding towards him in coloured clothing. He asked them for news, and they told of the fall of King Óláfr. Hallfreðr, staredas though he had been hit by a stone, and at once walked back to his booth in great sorrow, and lay straight down on his bed[20].

Seeing this, Grís's men said that his behaviour was unmanly. It was only Gríss who understood the poet's behaviour: "It is not that way at all. I had less honour forthe emperor of Byzantium, yet it struck me as the greatest news when I lost my sovereign. Love for a liege lord burns hot"[21].

Both men were reconciled and Hallfreðr left Iceland and sailed to Norway. There he managed to findretainers of King Óláfr who witnessed his death. Their accounts let the skald compose the *erfidrápa* about the king. Still, according to the saga, he was unhappy and could not find pleasure in anything. His despair moved him to formulate the idea of killing jarl Eirikr of Hlaðir, but a miraculous intervention by King Olaf made him change his plans[22].

Although it is not explicitly stated, one can assume that Hallfreðr and those of king Óláf's retainers who survived the battle of Svoldr, constituted another emotional community. Similarly to Magnús' hirðmenn, they could grieve and fear the future, defined by the reign of jarl Eirikr. The skald's *erfidrápa*, in the same way as the stanzas of Oddr and Þjóðólfr, was supposed to express these feelings in the best and most proper way possible. Interestingly enough, on the level of the Hallfreðar saga narrative, one can add Gríss to this community. He alone, the retainer of the emperor, could understand skald's feelings. His words point at some kind of mutual understanding that both shared. Once again, the bonds between the lord and his hirð were defined by an exclusiveness that distinguished those who not only were good enough to deserve royal favour but also could afford to express their loyalty in this specific way, otherwise found as unmanly.

Another example also refers to the renowned and distinguished skald Sigvatr Þórðarson, famous for his service to King Óláfr Haraldsson. Their relations were complex. Sigvatr, being a very active poet, had to face accusations of treachery against the king. Nevertheless, Óláfr managed to keep his favour towards Sigvatr[23]. The skald was not present at the king's side during the battle of Stiklastaðir, a fact that also resulted in questions concerning Sigvat's loyalty. According to the

[19] J. Morawiec, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Saga o Hallfredzie skaldzie kłopotliwym*, ed. by J. Morawiec, Wrocław 2011, pp. 47–52.

[20] *Hallfreðar saga*, ed. by. Einarr Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit VIII, Reykjavík 1939, p. 192.

[21] Ibidem, p. 192.

[22] Ibidem, pp. 194–195.

[23] J. Morawiec, *Sigvatr Þórðarson's Vestrfararvísur and Cnut the Great's conquest of Norway in 1028*, "RMN Newsletter" 6 (2013), p. 37; Idem, *Między poezją a polityką*, pp. 222, 381–392.

skald himself and later king's sagas, he was in Rome at that very time and that was where he learnt about Óláfr's death. According to *Heimskringla*: Sigvatr the skald made pilgrimage to Rome the time the battle of Stiklastaðir took place. But on his journey north he learned of the fall of King Óláfr, and that was a great sorrow for him. The news made him compose the following stanza:

Stóðk á Mont ok mintumk
mǫrg hvar sundr fló targa
breið ok brynjur síðar,
borgum nær of morgin;
munða ek þanns unði
(ǫndverðan brum) lǫndum
(faðir minn vas þar þenna
Þorrøðr) konung forðum.

where many a broad shield,and long mail-shirts, flew asunder near towns, one morning; I recalled, who once enjoyed,in that period, his lands, Þórðr, my father was there early, the king[24].

The story continues with an incident that happened shortly afterwards. One day, Sigvatr came through a hamlet and heard a certain farmer wailing loudly because of the death of his wife. He beat his breast and rent his clothes, weeping greatly and saying that he would gladly die. Sigvatr spoke this stanza:

Fúss læzk maðr, ef missir
meyjar faðms, at deyja;
keypt es ǫst, ef eptir,
of, látinn skal gráta;
en fullhugi fellir
flóttstyggr, sás varð dróttin,
várt torrek lízk verra,
vígtár, konungs ǫrum[25].

It is quite easy to distinguish already well known elements in the story of Sigvatr. The skald suffers as he lost his lord. The intriguing comparison with a husband losing his beloved wife let Snorri underline the level of emotions Sigvatr was supposed to express at this very moment. Once again, one can talk about the emotional community, constituted by those two, even if Sigvatr claims his loss is bigger. The context of the story allows us to attach another feeling to the situation, namely a fear of the future and lack of stability. In the case of the skald it is the result of a new political reality in Norway. Sigvatr's situation is even worse. The new

[24] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* III, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit XXVIII, Reykjavík 2002, p. 14.

[25] Ibidem, p. 15.

Danish regime in the country would not welcome him warmly. Moreover, Óláfr's companions who survived the Stiklastaðir catastrophe see him as a coward and traitor. Sigvatr's career at Magnús the Good's court started with self-defence and the declaration of loyalty. In this context it is easier to understand the skald's grief, once again understood only by those who experienced an equally ultimate loss.

The articles of both Goeres and Mills show that despite strictly defined gender roles, the society described in Icelandic sagas could accept, under extraordinary circumstances, examples of behaviour that questioned the social norm. The weeping of men, or, strictly speaking, retainers, on the occasion of the death of a sovereign, is a good example of this. The hirðmenn of a deceased ruler were allowed to express their obedience, loyalty, sorrow and grief by a public display of tears that could accompany funerary celebrations.

It is no accident that such displays supplemented the composition of *erfikvæði*, the kind of poetry dedicated to a deceased patron and which highlightedthe exclusive link between him and a skald and rest of the retinue. The poetry itself and episodes listed above point towards a feeling of ultimate loss that could be compared, although not fully, with the loss of a family member. In both cases, a need to underline the special bonds between the deceased and those still living, the view that such a loss cannot be counterbalanced, the lack of safety and the prospect of an uncertain future, form the core of the whole concept[26].

In the context of political turbulence resulting from the death of a ruler, grief, lamentation and weeping were not only signs of the high esteem that the deceased had been held in, but also expressed the fears and bewilderment of those who were left alive and had to find their place in the new reality.

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KILKA PRZEMYŚLEŃ NA TEMAT PŁACZU I MĘSKIEGO ZACHOWANIA W LITERATURZE STARONORDYCKIEJ

Streszczenie

Świat sag wygląda jak festiwal męskości, w którym oczekuje się właściwego męskiego zachowania i za jego spektakularne przejawy darzy się szacunkiem. To także świat ostrych i dyskryminujących społecznym podziałów między rolami mężczyzn i kobiet w codziennym życiu. Owa reglamentacja obejmuje między innymi także emocje i sposób ich wyrażania. Tak więc dwa przypadki męskiego płaczu, odnotowane w staronordyckich relacjach, spowodowane śmiercią boga Baldr i Magnusa Dobrego, króla Norwegii i Danii, do dziś intrygują uczonych. Celem artykułu jest zarówno wypowiedź na temat bardzo niedawnego wkładu analizy tego wątku w literaturę tematu, jak i refleksja nad możliwymi rozszerzeniami jego interpretacji w ramach sagi.

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STUDIA I MATERIAŁY Z DZIEJÓW EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ

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GRETTIR'S LITTLE SWORD: OUTLAWRY, CHILDHOOD AND MASCULINITY IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND[1]

Satt er þat, sem mælt er, at engi maðr skapar sik sjálfr[2]
Grettir *sterki* Ásmundarson

Introduction

Grettir *sterki,* the most famous outlaw from the saga-corpus, was considered the strongest man of the Icelandic Commonwealth. At the end of his biography, he is said to have been the *sterkastr á landinu sinna jafnaldra* ("strongest in the land for his age")[3]. He is renowned for his overbearing force and extraordinary deeds of strength against creatures from the Nordic supernatural world (trolls, *draugar* or *berserkir*) and landmarked actions such as the carrying of a huge stone at a young age (*Grettishaf*). Still nowadays, a festival (*Grettistak*) is held to honour him at *Grettisból* in Iceland where men can come and test their strength in Grettir-like fashion.

Yet, if we pay attention to some less heroic scenes from his saga, his masculinity may be challenged. For instance, after his vigorous swim between Drangey and Reykjanes, a female-servant discovers him asleep in the hall at Reykir. His clothes

[1] This article is the result of a presentation for the "Constructing Masculinity in Old Norse Society" International Old Norse Conference at the University of Rzeszów in March 2015 and thus reflects the state of scholarship at that time.

[2] References to the sagas are all from the Íslenzk Fornrit editions, except if mentioned otherwise. *Grettis saga* ed. by G. Jónsson, B. Vilhjálmsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XIII, Reykjavik 1964, p. 137. "It is true what they say, that no one shapes himself", *The Saga of Grettir*, [in:] *Three Icelandic Outlaw Sagas: The Saga of Gisli, The Saga of Grettir, The Saga of Hord*, ed. by A. Faulkes, G. Johnston, London 2004, p. 160.

[3] *Grettis saga*, p. 289; A. Faulkes, *Three Icelandic Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 263.

had fallen to the floor. Recognizing the famous outcast, the servant-woman tells the farmer's daughter: *Svá vil ek heil, systir, hér er kominn Grettir Ásmundarson, ok þykki mér raunar skammrifjamikill vera, ok liggr berr. En þat þykki mér fádoemi, hversu lítt hann er vaxinn niðri, ok ferr þetta eigi eptir gildleika hans* ǫðrum ("My goodness, sister, this is Grettir Ásmundarson here, and he looks really big about the ribs, lying there with nothing on. But it seems to me very strange how little he has developed between the legs, and it is not in keeping with his size elsewhere")[4].

She laughed and taunted Grettir until he decides to attack her, uttering a verse in defence of what he calls (in a poetic way) his "little sword" (*Sverðlítinn*):

> *Sverðlítinn kvað sæti,*
> *saumskorða, mik orðinn;*
> *Hrist hefir hreðja kvista*
> *hoelin satt at mæla;*
> *alllengi má ungum,*
> *Eyleggjar bíð Freyja,*
> *lágr í læra skógi,*
> *lotu, faxi mér vaxa*[5].
>
> "The woman says I am short-sworded, that seam-prop [= woman]; the boasting Hrist of the twigs of the testicles [= goddess of penises = woman] speaks the truth; but for a long time a small horse [literally "mane"] can grow in the forest of my young thighs: prepare for trouble, Freyja of the leg of the island [= goddess of the stone = woman]!"[6].

Grettir's masculine attribute is diminished and mocked, and this attack contrasts with the picture of the violent warrior, the larger-than-life outcast hero ready to cleanse the land from all kinds of creatures. The servant-woman, after being asked to shut up, confirms how unexpected this discovery is: *"Eigi má ek hljóð vera um þetta, sæl systirin", segir griðkona, "því at þessu hefða ek eigi trúat, þó at nǫkkurr hefði sagt mér"* ("I cannot be quiet about this, dear sister", says the serving-girl, "because I wouldn't have believed if anyone had told me")[7].

Grettir's "little sword" has not triggered much scholarly attention so far, perhaps because of the striking assault following the servant-woman's statement[8]. Also, sources do not agree on this particular aspect, as in *Grettisfærsla*, Grettir seems to be

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[4] *Grettis saga*, p. 240; A. Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 228.

[5] This vísa and the previous one are missing in AM 556 A, 4to., which is the manuscript containing Grettisfærsla. Discussed below.

[6] C. Phelpstead, *Size Matters: Penile Problems in Sagas of Icelanders*, "Exemplaria" 19:3 (Fall 2007), p. 429.

[7] *Grettis saga*, pp. 240–241; Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 228.

[8] On another occasion, Grettir protects women from being raped by a group of berserkir (*Grettis saga*, chapter 19), which adds to the ambivalence of Grettir's character, being at the same time protective and abusive towards women.

rather well off in all aspects, stating for example that "stórt er hans reður"[9]. Moreover, the scene is episodic and does not have any consequences for the main plot. Nevertheless, after such an insult – which Grettir does not deny – we may begin to question Grettir's masculinity: was Grettir *sterki* considered manly after all? What kind of masculinity was he associated with? Was, in fact, what we read nowadays as an extreme display of masculinity – sometimes called hypermasculinity[10] – considered as such by the saga-authors and/or by their contemporary audience?

Through a description of his childhood, and its consequences in his adult years, we will argue that Grettir the outlaw is not only associated with wild or monstrous creatures, as is often mentioned by scholars[11], but also with childish traits. Adding some parallels with other outlaw figures, such as Gísli Súrsson (*Gísla saga*) and Hǫrðr Grimkelsson (*Harðar saga)*, we will define a type of incomplete adulthood that some outlaws may have been associated with. This will help to characterise the lesser outlawry penalty – a three-year exile abroad – as a social structure generated by a stateless society to give a last chance of integration to these childish men.

Failing childhood

Childhood, and more specifically teenagehood, is a key feature in the shaping of gender identities[12]. *Grettis saga* shows a great deal of interest into Grettir's childhood and teenagehood. In general, interest in children is rare in medieval lit-

[9] *Grettisfærsla* "The Handing of Grettir", a poem of sexual jokes inserted at the end of the "outlaw manuscript" AM556 4to, gives a different characterization of Grettir's skills. Unlike the saga, the poem states that *Margt kann Grettir vel at vinna* ("Grettir can work many things well") which include indiscriminately farm work, women, bishops, old ladies or popes. Among other excessive deeds and attributes, *stórt er hans reður* (v. 85) – "His dick is big". See K. Heslop, *Grettisfærsla: The Handing of Grettir*, "Saga-book" 30 (2006), pp. 80–83. Even though there might be an identity mistake between this Grettir and Grettir sterki as pointed out by Ólafur Halldórsson (Ólafur Halldórsson, *Grettisfærsla*, "Opuscula" 1(BA 20) (1960), pp. 49–77), the association of this hypersexual Grettir and the saga-age namesake displays a different discourse on the outlaw's masculine attributes in popular culture, linking his physical strengh and violence to sexual demeasure and deeds.

[10] The concept of "hypermasculinity" is first mentioned by D. Mosher for men having harsh behaviour toward women, believing that violence is manly and those who experience danger as exciting. See D. Mosher, M. Sirkin, *Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation*, "Journal of Research in Personality" 18 (1984), pp. 150–163.

[11] Ármann Jakobsson, *The Fearless Vampire Killers: A Note about the Icelandic Draugr and Demonic Contamination in Grettis saga*, "Folklore" 120 (2009), pp. 307–316. J. Hawes, *The Monstruosity of Heroism: Grettir Ásmundarson as an Outsider*, "Scandinavian Studies" 80 (2008), pp. 19–50; R. Merkelbach, *The Monster in Me: Social Corruption and the Perception of Monstrosity in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, "Quaestio Insularis" 15 (2014), pp. 22–37. *Monstruous Families, Familiar Monsters: On the Use of Stories about Outlaw Heroes in the Íslendingasögur*. Paper presented at Miðaldastofa Háskóla Íslands, Reykjavík, Iceland, March 26, 2015.

[12] C. Callow, *Transitions to Adulthood in Early Icelandic Society*, [in:] *Children, Childhood and Society*, ed. by S. Crawford, G. Shepherd, Birmingham 2007, pp. 45–55.

erature, which led scholars to question the issue in the past century with regard to general medieval history, or, more specifically, medieval Scandinavia. This lack of descriptions could be summarized in a stricking rhetorical question: "Did medieval children exist?"

In the sagas, the most significant descriptions of children belong to extremes, andare often used to explainspecific traits in adulthood, as in the prefiguration process that defined the genre of the *Íslendingasögur*. These children are either extremely precocious or extremely slow for their age (or both), but never truly normal. The most discussed example is probably that of Egill Skalla-Grímssonwho is described as a precocious child able to compose poetry and kill at a very youngage, a kind of "hero in the making". Another type of characters described as children in a positive though unrealistic way are some Icelandic saints and bishops.

Much as the famous Egill, Grettir seems to be a difficult child, though not as prolific. He was "*mjǫk ódæll í uppvexti sínum, fátalaðr ok óþýðr, bellinn bæði í orðum ok tiltekðum*" but "*ekki bráðgǫr, meðan hann var á barnsaldri*"[13]. In the same chapter, at the age of ten, he refuses to complete tasks ordered by his father. He does not only stay passive by refusing to work, but he is described as mutilating and killing the animals he was in charge of, out of rage, in a description uncannily similar to psychological research explaining some children's cruelty towards animals. Like in Egill's case, his short temper will be the cause of several troubles to come.

These scenes were interpreted as signs of a cruel, unloving father, who is in part responsible for Grettir's behaviour, while Robert Cook stressed that a reader could be confused about who is to be blamed between the father and the son. However, the tasks assigned by the father were probably natural to ask from a boy his age (around 10 years old) in the medieval Icelandic context, and they appear as a logical way to integrate a growing boy into the farm life. Moreover, we could argue that the last task – taking care of the mare Kengala – has nothing cruel nor shaming, as it is labelled kalt *verk ok karlmannligt* ("...cold and manly work")[14], which indicates that it was suitable for a man, while the previous work seemed too low for his status[15]. Therefore, Grettir displays not only an unnecessary cruelty, but also a bad will on something that was expected from him as a growing man. The episode ends on a comment stating that he kept on doing *bernskubrǫgð* – usually translated as "childish pranks"[16] or "boyish tricks"[17] – and that he was

[13] *Grettis saga*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk Fornrit VII, Reykjavík 1936, p. 36.

[14] *Grettis saga*, p. 40; Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas...*, p. 93.

[15] Both Egill and Grettir seem to consider some type of work too low for their social status and are longing for higher rank activites. See C. Larrington, *Awkward adolescents. Male Maturation in Norse Literature*, [in:] *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. by S. Lewis-Simpson, Leiden Boston 2008, pp. 151–166.

[16] Ármann Jakobsson, *Troublesome children in the Sagas of Icelanders*..., p. 17.

[17] Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 94.

extraordinary tall, though nobody knew exactly the extent of his force, which fits the idea of a "dangerous precocity"[18].

During his teenagehood, Grettir is again described as immature and short-tempered, this time going out of his household and dealing with an extended social group at a ball-game (*knattleikr*), animportant event which could be regarded as a public display of masculinity[19]. During the event (much as in the case of Egill), Grettir thinks that another teenager, Auðunn, is making fun of him and a fight breaks out, resulting in Grettir losing face[20]. This "childish feud"[21] leads to Grettir's killing Skeggi, and thus his first outlawry abroad. Moreover, it could be argued that his father even tries to give him a chance by sending him as his representative to the general assembly, because he finds Grettir intelligent enough to do that[22]. But Grettir fails again, and he is then described as a disproportioned child and teenager, both physically and mentally.

Even though Grettir and Egill have similar childhood experiences marked by a paternal conflict, Grettir is described as a slow child, in a way as a "failure in the making". Another outlaw and "failure in the making" in that aspectis Hǫrðr Grímkelsson. He is also said to be precocious, with an incredible strength, though he is unable to walk: *Hann var snemma mikill vexti ok vænn at áliti, en ekki dáliga bræðgerr fyrst í því, at hann gekk eigi einn saman, þá er hann var þrévetr at aldri* ("He was at an early age of great size and handsome in appearance, but not all precocious in this respect, that he could not walk on his own when he was three years old")[23], which makes him another unbalanced type of child, with manly traits and an uncommon weakness[24]. Precocious in some matters but slow in others, they are everything but normal children with a normal childhood.

Haunting childhood

Egill and Grettir also share the fact that they are both mocked and attacked on account of their lack of potency by women. Like Grettir, Egill reacts in skaldic verses:

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[18] A. Hansen, *The Precocious Child: A Difficult Thirteeth-Century Icelandic Saga Ideal*, [in:] *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages: Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference, Bonn/Germany, 28th July – 2nd August 2003*, ed. by R. Simek, J. Meurer, Bonn, 2005, pp. 220–228.

[19] On games and comparison between men, see R. Gogosz in this collection (pp. 64–81).

[20] *Grettis saga*, pp. 43–44.

[21] C. Larrington, *Awkward adolescents*..., p. 163.

[22] *Grettis saga*, p. 45.

[23] *Harðar saga*, ed. by Þórhallur Vilmundarson, Bjarni Vilhálmsson, Íslenzk Fornrit XIII, Reykjavík 1991, pp. 15–16; A. Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., pp. 272–273.

[24] This association contributes to the creation of a tragic type of heroes. See A. Hansen, *The Precocious Child*..., p. 228.

Vals hefk vǫfur helsis;
váfallr em ek skalla;
blautr erum bergis fótar
borr, en hlust es þorrin.

"I have a shaking horse of the collar [=neck]; I am inclined to fall onto my bald head; my borer of the hill of the leg is soft, and my hearing has diminished"[25].

Yet, Egill is mocked in his old age[26], when such physical decline is to be expected. Grettir, on the other hand, is insulted with regard to his manhood at the height of his strength, after a vigorous swim. Ármann Jakobsson adds another difference between Egill and Grettir, saying that Egill remains the same childish egoistic character he was during his childhood, whereas Grettir, even though more cruel at first, evolves into a more mature version of himself, at least able to protect people from monsters[27]. I would rather nuance this point and argue that, on the contrary, Egill grows into a more normal adult, while Grettir does not[28]. Fears such as fear of the dark – rarely appear in the corpus. To the best of my knowledge, we can only once witness a contemporary distinction about fear in both Grettis saga and *Fóstbræðra saga*[29]. Only one instance, present in both, shows a classification of fear by saga-writers, where Þorgils compares three men and their fears:

Þorgils segir: *"Alla ætla ek þá fullrǫskva til hugar en þeir eru tveir at ek ætla hræðast kunna. Er þat þó ólíkt því at Þormóðr er maðr* ***guðhræddr*** *ok trúmaðr mikill en Grettir er svo* ***myrkfælinn*** *at hann þorir hvergi at fara þegar at myrkva tekr ef hann gerði eftir skapi sínu. En Þorgeir frænda minn hygg ek* ***ekki hræðast kunna****"* (emphasis mine).

Thorgils said, "I think they are all very valiant in heart, but there are two of them that I think do know what fear is. But there is a difference, for Thormod is a man with the fear of God and is a very religious person, but Grettir is so afraid of the dark that he dares go nowhere when it begins to get dark if he is left to himself. But my kinsman Thorgeir I think does not know what fear is[30].

The fear of God can be expected from Christian medieval men and in fact the word *guðhræddr* appears frequently in the religious textual corpus[31]. However,

[25] The interpretation is still debated on whether Egill refers to his poetic skills through his tongue, or to his potency as a man, though considering the poetic nature of the quote, it may be both at the same time. See C. Phelpstead, *Size Matters*..., p. 425.

[26] *Egils saga*, pp. 178–179.

[27] Ármann Jakobsson, *Troublesome children*..., p. 19.

[28] More recently, Egill's main problem has been interpreted as being mostly greed and not immaturity. See S. Barreiro, *Genealogy, Labour and Land: The Settlement of the Mýramenn in Egils saga*, "Network and Neighbours" 3:1 (2015), pp. 33–34

[29] *Fóstbræðra saga*, p. 191. *From the Flateyjarbók redaction in Vestfirðingasǫgur*, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson, Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk Fornrit VI, Reykjavík 1943.

[30] *Grettis saga*, p. 163; A. Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 178.

[31] According to the Old Norse prose dictionary: http://onp.ku.dk/english/

the Old Norse adjective *myrkfælinn* or substantive *myrkfælni*, which seem to be rather unusual constructions, also appear seven times in *Grettis saga.* Because of this irrational fear, Grettir leaves the perfect hideout in Þórisdalr where he had had shelter, food, and half-giant women to spend time with[32]. All the needs of an outlaw have been fulfilled (food, shelter, personal safety and company)[33], yet Grettir becomes afraid of an angry sheep harassing him at night, and prefers to leave the place, which ultimately leads to his death on the island of Drangey.

Interestingly enough, fear of the dark reappears only one more time in the *Íslendingasögur* corpus[34]. The only other character from the family sagas who is said to be afraid of the dark is another outlaw, Gísli Súrsson. Both descriptions are fairly similar: Gísli, like Grettir, grew *svá myrkfælinn* "so afraid of the dark", that he could not stand to be alone anymore: Á því fann hann mikla muni, at hann var orðinn maðr svá myrkfælinn, at hann þorði hvergi at fara einn saman, þegar myrkva tók ("He noticed this great difference in himself, that he had become a person so afraid of the dark that he dared go nowhere on his own after it got dark")[35], compared to: *Nú gerðisk sva mikit um drauma Gísla at hann gerir svá myrkhræddan, at hann þorir hvergi einn saman at vera...* ("Now the dreams become so much for Gísli and he becomes so frightened of the dark, that he is afraid to be alone")[36].

We can interpret this similarity in two ways. On the one hand, the author of *Grettis saga* might have borrowed the motif from *Gísla saga* (supposedly an earlier redaction, even if Gísli is compared to Grettir in the preserved version[37]), which would support the idea of a continuity and influence between the two sagas, as it repeats motifs from the "outlaw saga" sub-genre. On the other hand, it might also show a glimpse of the Icelandic medieval understanding of irrational fears in extreme situations, namely outlawry. In both cases, it is impressive to see its accuracy with the modern description of the separation anxiety disorder experienced by young children. As Freud noticed, it is not the dark itself that children fear, but the anxiety of separation from the care-giver: "The first situation phobias of children are darkness and solitude; the former often persists throughout life; common to both is the absence of the dear nurse, the mother"[38]. In fact, Gret-

[32] *Grettis saga*, pp. 199–200.

[33] M. Poilvez, *Access to the Margins: Outlawry and Narrative spaces in medieval Icelandic outlaw sagas*, "Brathair" 12:1 (2012), p. 121.

[34] According to the Old Norse prose dictionary, it appears as a substantive in *Stjórn*, and as an adjective in *Sturlunga saga*. Although, the Cleasby dictionary only mentions *Grettis saga* and *Gísla saga* for instance.

[35] *Grettis saga*, pp. 122–123; A. Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 150.

[36] *Gísla saga*, [in:] *Vestfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson, Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk Fornrit VI, Reykjavík 1943, p. 104; A. Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 60.

[37] *Gísla saga*, p. 70.

[38] S. Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, p. 352

tir's reaction in front of Glámr is reminiscent of the phobias and dreams where the subject feels petrified or immobilized in the face of some threat[39]. Similarly, this interpretation would fit the idea of Glámr being a haunting reminiscence of Grettir's conflictive father[40].

Without forcing a too modern psychological approach on medieval texts[41], we can underline the fact that there might be some universality in children's and/or childish behaviours. For instance,once Gísli's parents are dead, he surrounds himself with female figures, such as Auðr and Guðrún and hides next to them, putting his life at risk on several occasions. Similarly, Grettir helps women throughout the saga[42] and cannot help seeing his loving mother one more time at Bjarg before heading to his final stay on Drangey[43]. Hǫrðr, though not afraid of the dark, is nonetheless rejected at a young age by his mother when he breaks her necklace in an attempt to walk[44], and brings with him in his outlawry his own wife Helga and young children (the only woman with children mentioned to live with the outlaw community on Geirshólmr). The connection between outlaws and women has already been stressed to some extent[45], thoughI would add that this very connection increases the childish aspects of the men who are supposed to be wild and fearless survivors, but in the end find themselves unable to part from the female care-taker figure. As an illustration, Grettir's expression of love for his mother in skaldic verse is striking: *at bezt es barni, benskóðs fyr gjǫf, móðir* ("a boy's best friend is his mother")[46].

Other childish aspects from *Gísla saga* could be his recurrent dreams. Dreams are not rare in saga-literature, though repeated and contradictory dreams such as those are quite exceptional for a saga of Icelanders. Dreams in general reveal an important event to come, a prophecy, but in Gísli's case, two women tell him different stories in them, denoting more of a torment, nightmares or night terrors in the modern sense. Though nightmares are not the children's prerogative – and in this particular case could belong to the wider literary visionary tradition[47] – their overwhelming occurrences could be associated with other uncommon motifs from

[39] R. Poole, *Myth, Psychology, and Society in Grettis saga*, "Alvíssmál" 11 (2004), p. 4

[40] T.H. Tulinius, *Framliðnir feður: um forneskju og frásagnarlist í Eyrbyggju, Eglu og Grettlu*, [in:] *Heiðin minni. Greinar um fornar bókmenntir*, ed. by Haraldur Bessason, Baldur Hafstað, Reykjavík 1999, pp. 283–315.

[41] The validity of a psychological approach to the father-son relationship in the sagas has already been assessed by Tulinius, *Framliðnir feður*..., p. 293, and Ármann Jakobsson, *Troublesome children*..., p. 13.

[42] *Grettis saga*, pp. 61–73 and 210–211.

[43] Ibidem, pp. 222–223.

[44] *Harðar saga*, 7, p. 16.

[45] J. Ahola, *Outlaws, women and violence. In the social margins of saga literature*, [in:] *Á Austrvega. Saga and East Scandinavia*, ed. by A. Ney, H. Williams, F. Ljungqvist, Gävle 2009.

[46] *Grettis saga*, p. 50; Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 99

[47] P. Langeslag, *The Dream Women in Gísla saga*, "Scandinavian Studies" 81:1 (2009), pp. 47–72.

Gísla saga. For instance, the fact that Gísli hides in beds[48] as a kind of re-enactment of his hidden crime in his sister's marital bed[49], or the fact that he seems to have high mimetic skills (*hermikráka*)[50] and imitates an idiot (*fífl*)[51] in Hergilsey in order to escape his enemies. This might be related to a childish characterization of Gísli, since the imitation or hiding in beds appear to be childish playful activities rather than adult ones.

Finally, almost as a mockery or comic reminder of his tragic condition, Grettir meets in Norway an unclean spirit (*óhreinn*) in the shape of a boy (*piltr*) who insults him and prevents him from passing an ordeal with King Óláfr[52], which could otherwise help him prove his innocence. Later on, this incident seals his fate as a full outlaw, as he cannot prove the accidental nature of his crime. The fact that a devilish child prevents Grettir from getting his status back into societyis not too obscure as a metaphor to interpret.

As a result of his murderous cruelty and physical strength in childhood, Grettir is then described as a man with serious mental issues as an adult, as if haunted by what modern readers could identify with childish aspects. We can only speculate whether a medieval audience would have also interpreted these aspects as childish.

Fixing childhood

Though it seems that Grettir fails at becoming a man, or, in other words, fails at getting rid of his childish traits, I believe that his saga reveals that he was given a chance to solve his problem. I would like to argue that medieval Icelandic society seems to have had a social structure for that type of profile, troublesome childish men[53], and would have given them a last chance before having to get rid of them through more extreme measures such as full outlawry.

In the first days of adult life, young men had to show their potential. In many sagas, youngsters appear eager to go abroad to prove themselves. In some cases,

[48] *Gísla saga*, 27, pp. 85–88. Bed-scenes regularly occur in the saga. First as a marital scenes in chapter 9, where the couple Ásgerðr-Þorkell argues and then reconciles in bed, and in contrast the couple Auðr-Gísli, resolving a conflict without fighting this time. In chapters 13 and 16, the intimate bed turns into a crime-scene twice. Thereafter, Gísli hides in Refr's bed, and most of his haunting dreams come to him when in bed with his wife Auðr.

[49] *Gísla saga*, 6, pp. 53–54.

[50] Apparently a hapax. *Gísla saga*, p. 85.

[51] *Gísla saga*, p. 82.

[52] *Grettis saga*, p. 133.

[53] I consider here outlawry during the saga-age as a man's business. To my knowledge, we do not have any examples of women outlawed in the sagas of Icelanders. For good or bad, they are often in the margins of public legal dealings.

it is to escape a bad situation at home, or a low position in society. One such case is the young Kjartan in *Laxdæla saga* who says *er mér á því hugr, at fara útan* ("I have set my mind on going abroad")[54] and, for this purpose, delays his marriage with Guðrún, the most promising woman of the district, all despite her opinion on the matter. Another young character, Glúmr from *Víga-Glúms saga,* states very clearly to his mother the reason behind his wish to travel:*Glúmr segir móðr sinni að hann vill utan ráðast:* "*Sé ek at þroski minn vill engi verða en þat má vera at ek hljóti gæfu af gǫfgum frændum mínum* […]*" Þá var Glúmr fimmtán vetra er hann fýstist útan* ("Glúmr told his mother that he wanted to go abroad: "I can see that I'm not going to get anywhere here, but perhaps I may get some good luck from my noble relatives […] Glúmr was fifteen years old when he decided to go abroad")[55]. Many young men, including Grettir, develop similar desires: *Við þetta urðu glaðir margir ungir menn ok fýstusk til útanferðar. Ok svá sem Grettir spurði þessi tíðendi, gerðisk honum hugr á at sigla; vænti hann sér soemðar sem aðrir af konunginum* ("Many young men were very attracted by this and were keen to go abroad. And when Grettir heard all this, he developed a mind to sail. He was hoping for some advancement for himself from the king like other people")[56]. They seem to be bound to accomplish what we may identify as a "rite of passage" in the sense given by the anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner[57]. This voluntary and positive departure was initiatic, a symbolic transition from youth to adulthood. This move seems to have been almost mandatory and, by contrast, a man who stayed at home was *heimskr*, as angrily confirmed by Earl Hákon. *Þessir menn munu vera snápar ok hafa ekki komit fyrr í ǫnnur lǫnd* ("These men must be idiots who've never been to a foreign country before")[58]. They leave their home, accomplish some warrior deeds, commercial activities, integrate the court or *hirð* of the Norwegian king, and come back with more wealth or gifts (especially from the king). But more than just wealth or heroic fame, this rite of passage was supposed to give them a new status, as confirmed by the aging Glumr saying to his freed-slave: *Margir fara þeir útan, er ekki eru mannvænligri en þú ert at sjá; nú þoetti mér miklu skipta, at þú fengir heldr af fǫrinni sæmð ok mannvirðing en mikit fé, ef eigi er hvárstveggja kostr* ("Lots of people go abroad who are no more promising than you. Now it seems important to me that you should get

[54] *Laxdæla saga*, ed. by E. Ó. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit V, Reykjavík 1934, pp. 114–115.

[55] *Viga-Glúms saga*, p. 16, [in:] *Eyfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by J. Kristjánsson, Íslenzk Fornrit IX, Reykjavík 1956; *Killer-Glum's Saga*, transl. by J. McKinnell, [in:] *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol. II, ed. by V. Hreisson, Reykjavík 1997, p. 274,

[56] *Grettis saga*, p. 125; Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 151.

[57] A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of passage*, London 1960, p. 11. See also V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Ithaca 1969.

[58] Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts, [in:] *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslenzk Fornrit IX, Reykjavík 1956, p. 103; *The Tale of Ogmund Bash*, [in:] *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol. II. p. 315.

honour and reputation from the journey rather than a lot of money, if you can't get both")[59]. The voyage was supposed to turn them into better adults, as confirmed by the return of Eyvindr Bjarnarson in *Hrafnkels saga freysgoða*: *Þess er getit, at skip kom af hafi í Reyðarfjǫrð, ok var stýrimaðr Eyvindr Bjarnason. Hann hafði útan verit sjau vetr. Eyvindr hafði mikit við gengizk um menntir ok var orðinn inn vaskasti maðr* ("One summer a ship put in at Reydarfjord; its captain was Eyvind Bjarnason. He had been abroad for seven years and had greatly improved himself and now he was a highly successful man")[60]. These new men became ready to start a more adult life in Iceland, getting married and managing their (often) inherited property.

At a young age, Grettir loses his temper again in Iceland and kills a slave, Skeggi. As a result, he is sentenced to the *fjörbaugsgarðr*[61], often called "lesser outlawry", a three-year exile abroad. Although not clearly stated, Grettir is still probably a teenager at the time, the story happening after an episode where he is fourteen years old. Moreover, his reaction to his sentence at the *Alþing* is to lift a huge stone, which amazed the witnesses for he is *svá ungr maðr* ("such a young man")[62].

In theory, exile as a rite of passage and lesser outlawry are two different structures, one legal, and one social. In practice, however, there is not such a large difference. In both cases, the manleaves Iceland for Norway where he is free in his actions. He often makes some commercial expeditions or joins the court of the Norwegian king and accomplishes some deeds, waiting to be reintegrated and given back his status. The lesser outlawry penalty follows the same pattern of the rite of passage: separation-liminality-reintegration. The main difference lies in the sphere they belong to. One is forced by law, the other promoted by social norms. We should not forget that Greenland owes its discovery to a case of lesser outlawry: Eírikr the Red starts to look for a place to settle because he has been temporarily expelled from Iceland[63].

Therefore, it could be said that this legal penalty is an educational measure in disguise, a way to re-educate childish men, pushing them away for a time, and giving them an opportunity to make some accomplishments that will transform them

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[59] *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, p. 102; *The Tale of Ogmund Bash*, [in:] *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* Vol. II, p. 314,

[60] *Hrafnkels saga freysgoða*, [in:] *Austfirðinga sǫgur*, ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Íslenzk Fornrit XI, Reykjavík 1950, p. 125; *Hrafnkel's Saga and other Icelandic stories*, ed. by Hermann Pálsson, London 1971, p. 62.

[61] *Grettis saga*, p. 48. *Fjörbaugr* is a fee paid in compensation, and *garðr* a fence: "within a fixed space), the convict was safe, having paid the life-money". See G. Turville-Petre, *Outlawry*, [in:] *Sjötíu Ritgerðir*, Reykjavík1977.

[62] *Grettis saga*, p. 48; Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 98

[63] *Eiríks saga rauða*, [in:] *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Matthías Þórðarson, Íslenzk Fornrit IV, Reykjavík 1935, pp. 198–202.

into better members of society, into complete men. In this aspect, it represents a difference of nature with the *skóggangr*, full outlawry, which was "virtually a death penalty"[64]. But is it an efficient measure? It seems that Grettir, during and after his lesser outlawry, in some way discovers his function in society. Being first unbearable on the boat shipping him to Norway, he then reveals himself very useful for the first time, or "responds positively" to the challenge given there by Hafliði[65]. Thereafter, he starts to become a monster-slayer during this lesser outlawry penalty, protecting farms and women from outsiders (as *berserkir*). On his coming back to Iceland, after 3 years of exile, it seems that the penalty has good effects. As soon as he returns, it is said that *fell vel á með þeim brœðrum* [*Grettir and Atli*] ("The brothers [Atli and Grettir] got on well together")[66]. Even if he remains an extremist of sorts, Grettir feels bumped up by possibilities: *Þá gerðisk ofsi Grettis svá mikill, at honum þótti sér ekki ófært* ("Grettir's self-conceit now grew so great that he thought nothing was beyond him")[67]. All his former teenage fellows are now grown up (*fullhraustir menn*), yet Grettir gets into another conflict with Auðunn, the same boy as during the games in his childhood[68]. However, this time, the fight is solved in a much more adult fashion, with a settlement. Similarly, Grettir is now said to treat a horse *af Kengálu kyni* ("from the same strain as Kengala")[69] in a more humane way, much unlikethe mare he previously tortured and mutilated[70]. Therefore, after his return from his lesser outlawry abroad, he faces similar situations, though this time they are solved with less violence. His temper may seem slightly improved, which is the key to what a rite of passage should bring: a place in society, even if it is a marginal one. In a similar way, Egill becomes a better member of society after his rite of passage abroad, when he establishes himself a chieftain, even though his temper remains rather difficult.

Nonetheless, it has to be stressed that this educational measure, be it legal or social, has its limits. First of all, much as in extreme cases such as that of Grettir, the outcome of the measure was expected to be some improvements in characters, though it was not automatic, and the social structure could fail, as in the case of Glúmr: *Ok litlu síðar sumars kom Glúmr út ok er litla hríð við skip, ferr til bús síns með auð fjár. En it sama skaplyndi hafði hann sem fyrr […] Hvern morgin svaf hann til dagmála ok annaðisk ekki um bú* ("A little later in the summer, Glum came out to Iceland, and after staying briefly with his ship, went to his farm with a lot of wealth. But he had the same nature as before […] Every morning he

[64] *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás I*, ed. by A. Dennis, P. Foote, R. Perkins, Winnipeg 2006, p. 8.
[65] R. Cook, *The reader in Grettis saga*, "Saga-Book" 21 (1984–1985), p. 14.
[66] *Grettis saga*, p. 95; Faulkes, *Three outlaw sagas*..., p. 131.
[67] *Grettis saga*, p. 95
[68] Ibidem, pp. 42–44.
[69] Ibidem, p. 99; Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 134.
[70] *Grettis saga*, pp. 40–41.

slept until breakfast time, and he did not bother about the farm")[71]. Secondly, the possibility to go abroad as a rite of passage was probably the prerogative of privileged men, like the luxury to refuse work or to act childishly. Historically, the violent behaviour of upper-class youth is a common source of concern and was often institutionalized or channelled through elite activities such as hunting, the defence of family honour, high-rank military service (it has been noted that musketeers were nothing more than "bullies with pedigree") or colonial adventures (such as the *conquistadores*)[72]. Not all Icelanders, nor the outlaws, had the means to set up an expedition abroad and meet with the Norwegian king, as Egill or Grettir did. Therefore, even though this may require more investigation, this may be showing that legal measures with pedagogical agendas, such as lesser outlawry, were mostly applied to a defined social group.

Conclusions: uninteresting child, *sǫguligr* outlaw?

In conclusion, we may say that the masculinity of the outlaws is one of unbalanced adult men. The outlaw is not only the *vargr* (a word that meant at the same time criminal and wolf[73]), associated with the wilderness and/or the monstrosity. He has indeed a larger-than-life strength or endurance, yet the sagas seem to associate him with childish weaknesses too, which prevent him for reaching complete manhood, and may be the reason for his outlawry. Moreover, this incomplete masculinity might be connected to the fact that Grettir and Gísli are unable to have children themselves[74], while, for instance, having children was a mark that confirmed the masculinity of Njáll[75].

Therefore, what does the example of the outlaw show us about the perception of masculinity in Old Norse society? Firstly, that one can fail to become a man. Grettir fails in a certain way. He was given a chance during his first outlawry abroad. The sagas seem to mirror the fact that medieval Icelandic society was very

[71] *Víga-glúms saga*, pp. 23–24; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol 2, p. 278.

[72] E. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, London 1969, p. 30.

[73] For a recent analysis of the vocabulary of outlawry and outlaws, see A.I. Riisøy, *Outlawry: From western Norway to England*, [in:] *New Approaches to Early Law in Scandinavia*, ed. by S. Brink, L. Collison, Turnhout 2014, pp. 101–129.

[74] Gísli only has a foster-child, Guðrún. Rumours said that Grettir seems to have had a son named Skeggi (the same name as the first man he killed), who died young (*Grettis saga*, p. 219).

[75] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, [in:] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by Einar Ó. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit 12, Reykjavík 1954, pp. 311–315. Njáll, being attacked again on account of his masculinity, his son Skarphéðinn answers that he is a man because he had sons with his wife. I thank here my colleague Yoav Tirosh to have drawn my attention to that fact. On Njáll's masculinity and relationship to his children, see Ármann Jakobsson, *Masculinity and Politics in Njáls saga*, "Viator" 38:1 (2007), pp. 191–215 and Y. Tirosh, *Víga-Njáll: A New Approach Toward Njáls saga*, "Scandinavian Studies" 86:2 (2004), pp. 208–226.

aware of that type of men, and tried to force them into sociability and manhood through travels, either socially promoted as a rite of passage at a young age, or as a legal obligation for the most reluctant ones, which was a last chance for them to "grow up".

Secondly, the outlaw, the stereotypical anti-social figure, shows by contrast the norms of masculinity in the saga-world and confirms Ármann Jakobsson's argument that "The lack of self-control is childish, while maturity should bring moderation"[76]. Extreme strength meant nothing if managed by a child's mind, and Grettir's disproportioned body and spirit is summed up in yet another scene from *Grettis saga*, where Grettir and Þorsteinn, his brother, compare the size of their arms. Grettir is again described in a disproportioned way, and he mocks his brother's skinny arms saying *ok varla ætla ek þik kvenstyrkvan* ("and I think that you can scarcely have the strength of a woman")[77]. His brother answers: "but you can be sure of this, that these slender arms of mine will avenge you" which will turn out true in the end of the saga when Þorsteinn becomes the actual role-model ending Grettir's story.

Nevertheless, how can we know that these weaknesses were perceived by Icelanders as childish traits, since we indeed lack descriptions of normal children in the corpus? Unfortunately, we can never know that. The sagas tell us about the exceptional, the *sǫguligr*, the worth-telling. Children with child-like traits were perhaps too normal to be told about, but grown-up men with childish traits on the other hand are out-of-the-norm, thus worth-mentionning because they are uncommon. Realistic descriptions of actual children may be lacking in the saga-corpus, yet we may say that through the tragic outlaws' characterization, we might have a glimpse of medieval Icelanders' perceptions of children and childhood.

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[76] Ármann Jakobsson, *Troublesome children*..., p. 12.

[77] *Grettis saga*, p. 138; Faulkes, *Three Outlaw Sagas*..., p. 160.

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MAŁY MIECZ GRETTIRA: BANICJA, DZIECIŃSTWO I MĘSKOŚĆ W ŚREDNIOWIECZNEJ ISLANDII

Streszczenie

Grettir „silny" Ásmundarson był prawdopodobnie najsilniejszym człowiekiem wymienionym w całym korpusie islandzkich sag. Jest znany ze swojej apodyktycznej siły i niezwykłych czynów przeciwko nadprzyrodzonym stworzeniom (trolle, draugar, berserkir). Jednak jego męskość jest kwestionowana przez niewolnicę w niezwykłej – i często pomijanej – scenie (*Saga o Grettirze*, rozdział 75), w której omawia wielkość jego atrybutów. Wcześniej w tej sadze jego odwaga poddana jest również próbie, kiedy opuszcza idealną kryjówkę w Þórisdalr z powodu gniewnych zjaw dręczących go w nocy. Dlatego możemy zapytać: czy Grettir był w końcu uważany za spełniającego męski ideał? Poprzez opis młodzieńczej banicji (*fjörbaugsgarðr*) jako rytuału przejścia i skupieniu się na dzieciństwie banitów ten artykuł ma na celu zbadanie cech męskości związanej z banitami. Tylko mężczyźni są wymieniani w sagach jako wyjęci spod prawa: czy to ma coś wspólnego z ich męskością? W szerszej perspektywie, ten artykuł ma na celu zbadanie islandzkiego wyjęcia spod prawa, mężczyzn, którzy nie spełnili kryteriów rytuału przejścia w dorosłość, gdyż dwóch z nich (Grettir i Gísli Súrsson) ma dziecinną słabość: strach przed ciemnością. Wreszcie, jeśli wyjęci spod prawa są postaciami, którym nie udaje się stać się ludźmi w sensie społecznym, narracje o wyjętych spod prawa mogą dać nam wskazówki, poprzez przeciwstawienie, co pojęcie męskości oznaczało w świecie sagi.

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"THE ÆSIR WILL CALL ME PERVERSE!" ÞÓRR AND HYPER-MASCULINITY IN ÞRYMSKVIÐA

Introduction

The humorous framework of the Eddic poem *Þrymskviða* has led many scholars to believe that it is a young and satirical poem because it ridicules the god. I do not agree; in my opinion, the poem is made up of several layers of text and that older contents can be found if we scratch the surface and consider the epic material of the poem carefully. I would argue that the older contents and epic material includes a sacred ritual related to Þórr's hammer and Þórr as a god of rain and protector of cosmos. The later can be seen as the famous motif, the "Theft of the Thunder Instrument", identified as tale-type Aarne-Thompson-Uther 1148B.[1] The narrative of the poem spread in different forms – most likely orally – in the Nordic countries and its colonies, up until the twentieth century[2]. The form and elements changed over time in the process of transition from orality to literacy.

[1] See Frog, *Germanic Traditions of the Theft of the Thunder-Instrument (ATU 1148b): An Approach to Þrymskviða and Þórr's Adventure with Geirrøðr in Circum-Baltic Perspective*, [in:] *New Focus on Retrospective Methods – Resuming Methodological Discussions: Case Studies from Northern Europe*, ed. by. E. Heide, K. Bek-Pedersen, FF Communications, 307, Helsinki 2014, pp. 120–162, and works cited there.

[2] For example, it was translated into an Icelandic rímur known as *Þrymlur*, probably composed around c. 1400. For more details, see S. Bugge, M. Moe, *Torsvisen i sin norske form. Udg. med en afhandling om dens oprindelse og forhold til de andre nordiske former, Festskrift til H. Maj. Kong Oscar II ved Regjerings-Jubilæet den 18de September 1897 fra Det kongelige Frederiks Universitet*, B. 2:5, 1897 or Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafn*, Samf. til udgivelse af gl. nordisk litteratur, 35, København 1905–12, pp. 278–289.

The poem as we know it in writing is one version of the narrative that is related to a much larger body of myths and sacred narratives that once were primarily performed orally[3]. As an historian of religion, my perspective is not to consider the god Þórr as a literary character, but to view him as a deity. Even if the poem is regarded as late, e.g. composed in the thirteenth century, it is clear that it contains old epic motifs and mythological conceptions that had been passed on by word of mouth, before a narrative in the form we know of today took shape[4].

In the following article, I would like to, contrary to many previous interpretations of the poem, demonstrate that Þórr's role as "hyper-masculine" is never questioned, he is never considered to be effeminate and behaves in ways that actually fortify his manly character traits. The emotional elements in the conception of the god can be seen as a trait of anthropomorphism, which is a personal side of the god that makes him act as far as possible in the same way as a human. When the god's honour is injured, he makes sure to inflict punishment and consequently regains his status. An injury to someone's reputation and honour works in the same way for a man as for a god; it entails a loss that must be compensated for, if he is to recover his full honour. The divine wrath of Þórr mirrors retribution and bloodshed, caused by accusations and loss of honour, amongst men. My hypothesis is that Þórr's actions, his honour and bravery, including notions of his manliness, echo many of the traits cherished by warriors and rulers, groups that can be said to support and embrace these virtues[5].

The narrative

Þórr wakes up in anger when he finds out that his hammer is missing. He asks Loki to find out where it is. Loki borrows Freyja's feather-shirt and travels to the giant Þrymr. The giant says that he has hidden the hammer deep underneath the earth, and that he is only willing to give it up if he gets Freyja as a bride[6]. When Freyja heatedly refuses, the gods must find another solution. Heimdallr comes up with the idea that Þórr should disguise himself as Freyja, so that he can get close to his hammer. At first Þórr refuses, he is afraid that he will be called unmanly, but Loki reminds him of the consequences of not having his hammer and eventually

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[3] See W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, London 1982; J. Goody, *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, Cambridge 2010.

[4] See M. Bertell, *Tor och den nordiska åskan. Föreställningar kring världsaxeln*, Stockholm 2003; H. Ljungberg, *Tor. Undersökningar i indoeuropeisk och nordisk religionshistoria*, Uppsala universitets årsskrift 9, Uppsala 1947.

[5] This topic is explored in more detail in my doctoral dissertation that will be published in 2017.

[6] Giants usually desire and try to abduct goddesses, see further M. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse Myths in Medieval Society*, The Viking Collection 7, Odense 1994, pp. 111–115.

he agrees. Loki follows as his handmaiden. When they come to the giant's hall, Þórr's actions make the giant suspicious, but Loki finds quick answers for his odd behaviour. Eventually, the hammer is brought forward and when Þórr gets it in his hands, he massacres all of the giants in Þrymr's hall.

Earlier interpretations of *Þrymskviða*

The oldest known version of a myth in which Þórr is missing his hammer and has to retrieve it from a giant can be found in *Þrymskviða*, a poem composed in the *fornyrðislag* meter, framed by humour and usually dated to the mid-13th century. It only exists in one surviving manuscript, Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to, ca. 1270), and the poem is not cited by Snorri, nor are its contents referred to in skaldic poetry. Its origin has been considered variously to be Swedish (Henrik Schück), Norwegian (Jan de Vries), Northern English (McKinnell), and most commonly, Icelandic[7]. Some have argued that the poem, with its burlesque character, cannot represent a myth, or that it is distorted, a view that very much depends on what someone means when they use the term "myth"[8]. Jan de Vries went as far as to consider the whole poem as a joke: "Jede Szene, fast jedes Wort ist als ein Spaß gemeint"[9]. Åke Ohlmarks went even further when he called it: "Worthless as a source, a late imitative pastiche of Snorri"[10]. Peter Hallberg also thought of *Þrymskviða* as amusing, and comments that in it "the poet's poetic vein lay bare and open for all to see"[11]. For Hallberg, the poem was a lampoon of Norse myths, written by a Christian author who he identified as Snorri Sturluson[12]. Others were of a diametrically different opinion. Finnur Jónsson, for example, considered the poem to be a masterpiece, composed in Norway in the 9th century, and pointed to the fact that its contents also could be found in Nordic medieval ballads[13].

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[7] For a survey of scholarship on the poem, see *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda 2: Götterlieder (Skírnismál, Hárbarðslióð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða)*, ed. by von See et al., Heidelberg 1997, pp. 509–26.

[8] See the contributions in G. Schrempp, W. Hansen, *Myth. A New Symposium*, Bloomington 2002, cf. L. Honko, *The Problem of Defining Myth*, [in:] *The Myth of the State*, ed. by H. Biezais, Stockholm 1972.

[9] J. de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, Grundriss der germanischen Philologie 16, Berlin 1942, p. 133.

[10] Å. Ohlmarks, *Asar, vaner och vidunder. Den fornnordiska gudavärlden: saga, tro och myt*, Stockholm, 1963, p. 11.

[11] P. Hallberg, *Den fornisländska poesin*, "Verdandis skriftserie" 20, Stockholm 2003, p. 50.

[12] This idea was briefly mentioned, six years earlier, by Åke Ohlmarks, *Eddans gudasånger*, Stockholm 1948, p. 285), but he never elaborated on it further.

[13] Finnur Jónsson*, Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie* 1, København 1920, pp. 164–166. Cf. Bugge, Moe, *Torsvisen i sin norske form*…

Many dating principles are roughly based on aesthetic evaluations of contents, something that can partly explain the diverging opinions. The narrative in the poem is not known from any other source, but it does show phraseological parallels with other Eddic and Skaldic poems. This indicates a possible borrowing *from* the poem, an opinion that was popular earlier, when Þrymskviða was considered one of the oldest poems in *The Poetic Edda*. It can also indicate a loan *to* the poem, an opinion that is predominant today when the poem is considered one of the younger Eddic poems[14]. Certainly, it can also point to a borrowing from oral tradition known by the poets, both in style and wording.It is easy to think that the poet knew of a set of phrasings and formulas in advance, taken from a pool of verbal and semantic formulas, which were improvised and combined during the recitation. One example that supports this is the existence of the almost identical stanzas in *Þrymskviða* 13 and *Baldrs draumar* 1. Another example is the use of the wide-spread formula *iǫrð* "earth" and *upphiminn* "heaven above" in stanza 2. The formula is well-known in Germanic poetry, for instance it can be found in the Old High German poem *Wessobrunner gebet* from the 9th century, and on the Skarpåker rune stone in Sweden from the 11th century[15].

Masculinity and hyper-masculinity

To define masculinity and manhood is not an easy task, and there is not a single monolithic conception that covers all possible aspects. If we consult *The Oxford English Dictionary* it is not very helpful, it gives the following explanation for manliness: "The state or quality of being manly; the possession of manly vigour, or of those virtues characteristic of a man". We have to turn to the definition for masculine before we learn what these virtues are (besides pertaining to the male sex): "Having the appropriate excellences of the male sex; manly, virile, vigorous, powerful. Rarely of persons; usually of attributes, actions and productions"[16].

There are many ways to construct and understand masculinity. In brief, there are different constructions of gender to consider. What it means to be a man or perform masculinity can also vary in different contexts. One of the most well-known theories of masculinity is by R.W. Connell and is aimed at contemporary

[14] Theories of borrowing between known sources are problematic. See the discussion in B.Ø. Thorvaldsen, *Om Þrymskviða, tekstlån og tradisjon*, "Maal og Minne" 2 (2008), pp. 142–166.

[15] See J. de Vries, *Over de dateering der Þrymskviða*, "Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taalen Letterkunde" 47 (1928), pp. 251–322; L. Lönnroth, *Iǫrð fannz æva né upphiminn: A formula analysis*, [in:] *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by U. Dronke et al., Odense 1981, pp. 310–327.

[16] *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by J.A. Murray, Vol. 6, 1933, pp. 127 and 198.

Western society. Connell's theories are usually used in the field of sociology; the most famous aspect is something referred to as "hegemonic masculinity"; a culturally idealized and dominant form of masculinity, and a form of a pattern of practice that allows men's social dominance over women to continue[17]. When I speak of masculinity below, it is the main form of being a man in Old Norse society as drawn out of the texts I have been studying (laws, sagas, and poetry). These can be seen as examples of hegemonic masculinity[18].

Another study that I have found helpful is an article by Scott Rubarth, who discusses three different competing concepts of masculinities in Ancient Greece: masculinity and courage, masculinity and patriarchy, and masculinity and political participation[19]. The first category proposed by Rubarth, who mainly discusses differences between Athenian and Spartan men, can be useful in analysing Þórr's masculinity in *Þrymskviða*. Even though the Greek and Old Norse societies are separated by time and place, they place similar values on masculine courage, in particular how Spartans praise bravery on the battlefield may be compared here.

Donald L. Mosher and Mark Sirkin established something they referred to as a hyper-masculinity inventory to measure a macho personality. Essentially, it consists of three main components: (a) calloused sex attitudes toward women, (b) violence as manly, and (c) danger as exciting.

These components reflect the macho man's desire to appear powerful and to be dominant in interactions with other men, women, and the environment. Mosher and Sirkin describe them accordingly:

> "Violence as Manly refers to the attitude among some men that violent aggression, either verbal or physical, is an acceptable, even preferable, masculine expression of power and dominance toward other men […] Danger as Exciting reflects the attitude that survival in dangerous situations, including "tempting fate", is a manly display of masculine power over the dangerous environment"[20].

In the following, I will use a simplified version of their concept of hyper-masculinity. Hyper-masculinity will be used as an intensified form of masculinity in Old Norse society, where Þórr, as one of the most popular gods, mirrors notions of manhood and serves as an ideal amongst men.

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[17] See R.W. Connell, J.W. Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity. Rethinking the Concept*, "Gender & Society" 19:6 (2005), pp. 829–859 for a discussion of the term and its history.

[18] As I mentioned earlier, I am aware that it is problematic to speak of one form of masculinity as hegemonic. It is a complex concept; therefore, I consider it better to focus on the aspects of violence against other men (not women), stoicism, and courage for this study.

[19] S. Rubarth, *Competing Constructions of Masculinity in Ancient Greece*, "Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts" 1 (2014), pp. 21–32.

[20] D.L. Mosher, M. Sirkin, *Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation*, "Journal of Research in Personality" 18:2 (1984), pp. 151–152.

The concept of unmanliness in Old Norse society

Masculine virtues in the Old Norse society, as described in the Icelandic sagas, Eddic and Skaldic poetry, Snorri Sturluson, and other sources, are closely integrated with notions of honour and social status. Prominent scholars such as Preben Meulengracht-Sørensen, Erik Noreen, Folke Ström, Bo Almqvist, and others, have, from different perspectives, explored and elucidated how sexual defamation worked in early Northern society[21]. Fundamental studies on how *níð* operates in verse, and to a lesser degree in prose, already exists, but no one has seriously analysed *Þrymskviða* and Þórr's role in the whole poem beside the idea that it is late and burlesque in style.

One of the worst insults for a man was to be accused of being effeminate, and therefore unmanly. The crucial word in *Þrymskviða* occurs in the scene in which Þórr is afraid that if he puts on the bridal garb, the other gods will consider him *ragr*. What does this expression actually mean, and why does this defamation distress Þórr? The adjective *ragr*, with its metathesized form *argr*, and the nouns *ergi* and *regi*, are invectives that mean 'sexually perverse, unmanly, effeminate, and cowardly'. The implication and undertone of sexually perverse is that a man has been sexually used by another man, that is, he is accused of being willing or inclined to play the female part[22]. For a female, the counterpart would be a nymphomaniac, and this is a notion that Freyja intensely opposes earlier in the same Þrymskviða (stanza 13). Notions of *ergi* are also connected with the practice of *seiðr* (but this will not be considered here, as it is not relevant for Þórr)[23]. As Meulengracht Sørensen, speaking of the Valkyrie-figure as emphasising the masculine and military ideal, says

> "the dominating masculine ethic which made the presentation of women in a male role into a favourite literary motive, at the same time rendered impossible the converse breach of sexual roles. The mere suggestion of a man in a female role was enough to symbolize unmanliness"[24].

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[21] E. Noreen, *Om niddiktning*, [in:] *Studier i fornvästnordisk diktning II, Filologi, språkvetenskap och historiska vetenskaper*, 4, Uppsala 1922; F. Ström, *Nid, Ergi and Old Norse Moral Attitudes*, London 1974; Bo Almqvist, *Norrön niddikting: traditionshistoriska studier i versmagi, 1. Nid mot furstar. Dissertation*, Nordiska texter och undersökningar 21, Stockholm 1965; *Norrön niddikting: traditionshistoriska studier i versmagi, II. Nid mot präster*, Nordiska texter och undersökningar 23, Stockholm 1974; P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, transl. by J. Turville-Petre, The Viking Collection 1, Odense 1983.

[22] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man…*, p. 18. Modern terms with similar connotations would be to call someone a "fairy", "bender", "fudge", "homo", or "poof, poofter".

[23] See for example D. Strömbäck, *Sejd: Textstudier i nordisk religionshistoria*, (Nordiska texter och undersökningar 5), Stockholm 1935; N. Price, *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*, Uppsala 2002; C. Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic, I-II*, FF Communications 296, Copenhagen 2009.

[24] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man…*, p. 23.

When Þórr actually puts on female clothes and acts in a female role, it is more than enough to make him vulnerable to accusations of unmanliness. The poem is not the only source that explores the borders of manliness. Accusations of unmanliness or cowardice directed against Þórr also come up in other sources, for instance in *Lokasenna* and *Hárbarðsljóð*. In the former, Þórr is mocked by Loki, in the latter by Óðinn. The form is expressed in the following formula: You have done *x* (with the insinuation that it is unfitting and therefore unmanly behaviour), while I have done *y* (with the implication that it is proper and hence manly behaviour). The sources, both sagas and the mythological texts, usually mention this form of verbal duelling during drinking sessions in which, if the worst came to the worst, it could result in blood being spilt[25]. In *Lokasenna* and *Hárbarðsljóð*, Þórr, finally, when the insults have gone too far, threatens his opponent with physical violence. This kind of behaviour is representative for what Mosh and Sirkin labels hyper-masculinity.

Negative attitudes for cross-dressing

Þrymskviða is not the only Old Norse source that mentions cross-dressing. Below, I will give some further samples from other sources where this occurs and where a negative judgement is recognisable.

The collection of laws known as Grágás (*Konungsbók*) condemns cross-dressing and specifies outlawry as punishment:

> *Ef kona klæðist karlklæðom eða sker sér skör eða fer með vopn fyrir breytni sakir, þat varðar fjörbaugsgarð. Það er stefnusök, ok skal kveðja til búa fimm á þingi. Sá á sök er vill. Slíkt er mælt um karla af þeir klæðast kvenna klæðnaði*[26].
>
> "If in order to be different a woman dresses in men's clothes or cuts her hair short… or carries weapons, the penalty for that is lesser outlawry… The same is prescribed for men if they dress in woman's clothing"[27].

The sentence seems harsh and indicates that cross-dressing was something that was regarded as a crime. It was considered appalling by society, at least at the time when the laws were written down. It seems that the same negative connotations for cross-dressing can be found in other sources, in both prose and poetry. The texts usually mention that a man has to escape his enemies and as a last resort he puts on a woman's clothing as a disguise.

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[25] C. Clover, *The Germanic Context of the Unferð Episode*, "Speculum" 55 (1980), pp. 447–448.

[26] *Grágás. Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, ed. by Gunnar Karlsson et al., Reykjavík 2001, p. 125, §27.

[27] *Laws of Early Iceland: The Codex Regius of Grágás*, Vol. II, transl. by A. Dennis, P. Foote, R. Perkins, Winnipeg 2000, p. 219.

In the second heroic lay *Helgakviða Hundingsbana*, the hero Helgi has to put on a serving-woman's clothes when he spies on his enemy, King Hunding, but his piercing eyes almost give him away. In stanza 2, the poet says: *Hvǫss ero augo í Hagals þýio* ("Piercing are the eyes of Hagal's maidservant")[28].

Cross-dressing is also something that is considered unmanly in some of the Icelandic sagas[29]. In the most famous of the sagas, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Helgi Njálsson, puts on a woman's clothing to escape his enemies and the flames around their household. At first he refuses, but is persuaded to do so. *Gakk þú út með mér og mun eg kasta yfir þig kvenskikkju og falda þig með höfuðdúki* ("Come out with me – I'll put a woman's cloak on you and wrap a scarf around your head")[30]. His enemies notice that one of the women leaving the house is too big and discover that it is Helgi who reveals himself and slays one of his enemies with a sword, before his adversaries decapitate him.

The head-dress, something that usually designated a married woman, is used in a disguise by Brandr in *Hallfreðar saga* to avoid capture by his enemy Þorkell[31].

In *Laxdœla saga*, a woman is advised by her lover to make a shirt for her husband that is so low cut that it reveals his nipples, which is considered grounds for divorce: *Gerðu honum skyrtu ok brautgangs hǫfuðsmátt ok seg skilit við hann fyrir þessar sakar*[32].

The Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus, in *Gesta Danorum*, written in the early 13th century, tells us of another instance when a manly man dresses like a woman. Hagbarth puts on women's clothing to get close to his beloved, Signe[33]. In book three, Saxo says that Othinus (Óðinn) puts on women's clothes and disguises himself as a woman under the name Vecha to get close to the princess Rinda[34].

Above, I mentioned some examples of cross-dressing in the Icelandic sagas, and it is clear from these examples that this was considered unmanly by society. In many cases, the man who dons woman's clothing usually has to escape enemies and is frequently referred to as a manly and a heroic character that has no other choice. This is an old motif found elsewhere, for example in the Bible or in the Greco-Roman world.

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[28] *Edda: die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. by H. Kuhn, G. Neckel, 3rd edition, Heidelberg 1962, p. 151; *The Poetic Edda*, transl. by C. Larrington, revised edition, Oxford 2014, p. 128.

[29] See K. Wolf, *Klæðskiptingar í Íslendingasögunum*, "Skírnir" 171 (1997), pp. 381–400.

[30] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Forrit XII, Reykjavík 1954, pp. 329–330.

[31] *Hallfreðar saga*, ed. by. Einarr Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Fornrit VIII, Reykjavík 1939, p. 190.

[32] *Laxdœla saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk Forrit VIII, Reykjavík 1934, p. 94.

[33] Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes Books I-IX*, ed. by H.R. Davidson, translated by P. Fisher, Woodbridge 1996, p. 214.

[34] Saxo Grammaticus, Book 3, pp. 77–78.

In *Deuteronomy* 22:5 (NIV) it is explicitly said that: "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this"[35].

If we turn to Ancient Greece, or more precisely, to the poem the *Illiad*, Achilles is said to have been concealed by his mother Thetis amongst the daughters of King Lycomedes to prevent him from taking part in the Trojan wars. As we all know, he still enters the war together with the Myrmidons and is filled with godlike wrath (similar to the berserker's rage) when his beloved companion, Patroclus, is killed by Hector. In *the Bacchae* by Euripides, King Pentheus dresses up like a woman in order to spy on the boisterous Maenads who worship the Greek god Dionysus, but he is eventually discovered and ripped to pieces[36].

Is mockery of Þórr evidence of a poem being young?

In a recent and admirable study, Frog argues that "the lack of early evidence suggests that the Þórr bride narrative was either not in circulation or not interesting in Iceland in the first half of the thirteenth century"[37]. His opinion might be correct, at least for Iceland, but a lack of earlier evidence is not enough to rule out the possibility that this motif was indeed in circulation. As shown above, cross-dressing of a masculine character is not isolated to *Þrymskviða* as it can be found in other sources, as well as from comparable mythological narratives from other cultures. Frog goes on to say that:

> "*Þrymskviða* was composed as a mythological burlesque centrally developed from an ATU 1148B tradition with an orientation away from vernacular mythology and belief traditions, most probably in poetic form in thirteenth century Iceland, very likely near the time of its earliest documentation, and most probably intended for 'Christian' audiences in the context of discourses surrounding tensions and conflicts between Christian and vernacular beliefs"[38].

Is this poem composed to be a deliberate mockery of Þórr?[39] Is Þórr being ridiculed, and if so, does this mean that the poem cannot be considered old? Many have these arguments as a criterion for asserting the young age of the poem, since they believe that absurdity and comedy has no place in a genuine belief system. In

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[35] *New International Version Bible*, https://www.biblica.com/bible/ (accessed 2015-10-10).

[36] Compare with Tale Type 1545A* "It's a Man", in A. Antti, *The Types of the Folktale. A Classification and Bibliography*, transl. and enl. by S. Thompson, Second Revision, FF Communications 184, Helsinki 1987, p. 447.

[37] Frog, *Germanic Traditions*…, p. 152.

[38] Ibidem, p. 153. He points out, in a footnote, that the "gods must not necessarily be treated seriously and with reverence where mythology is vital" (Ibidem, footnote 51).

[39] Ibidem, p. 145.

fact, this is a very strange way of looking at religious narratives and traditions, and is based on an understanding of Christianity as a case in point. It can be argued that the seriousness that often characterizes Christianity is not a good comparison when it comes to other religious traditions; it is actually an awkward criterion, as comedy, even mockery of the holy, also exists in Christian traditions[40]. Narratives of comical and disrespectful behaviour among the gods are found in several Eddic poems that are generally considered to be old.

Theodore Andersson has pointed out, mainly with examples from *Egil's saga*, that caricature and exaggerations are undeniably distinctive features of the Icelandic sagas[41]. Egill is considered a very masculine character, and some of his actions and words are sometimes exaggerated to the point that the audience listening to the saga certainly laughed out loudly. Ironic humour and parodic episodes can be seen as key elements and a distinctive trait of the Icelandic sagas. "Comic sagas" is even a recent term for some of the sagas (even though most of them are considered to be late)[42]. Is comedy a young innovation, characteristic for some of the sagas? No, I do not believe so, as it can be found in abundance in earlier sources from other cultures, most notably in ancient Greek Comedy where mythological burlesque is common, as well as in other sources of *The Poetic Edda*[43].

Gurevich has stated that the amusing and satirical qualities of the Eddic poems should not be interpreted as constituting a critique of heathenism. His main focus is *Lokasenna*, but he also comments on burlesque episodes in all the poems of *The Poetic Edda*. Gurevich believes that comedy is an integral part of the sacral, and proposes that a freedom from taboos and other restrictions on men reaffirms the sanctity of the gods[44].

Þórr as hyper-masculine in *Þrymskviða*

One way of portraying Þórr would be to refer to his aspects of violence, strength, short temper, and sexual aggression, as well as his lust for adventure. He

[40] See O. Ferm, *Abboten, bonden och hölasset. Skratt och humor under medeltiden*, Runica et mediævalia, Scripta minora 7, Stockholm 2002, and references cited there. Scatological humour is also something that can be considered old, see V. Allen, *On Farting. Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages*, The New Middle Ages, New York 2007.

[41] Th.M., Andersson *Character and Caricature in the Family Sagas*, [in:] *Studien zur Isländersaga. Festschrift für Rolf Heller*, ed. by H. Beck, E. Ebel, Berlin 2000, 1ff.

[42] Many "comic sagas" have been gathered and edited in a recent collection, *Comic Sagas and Tales from Iceland*, ed. by Robert Kellogg, with an introduction on the subject by Viðar Hreinsson, Penguin Books 2012.

[43] See the articles in *Broken Laughter: Select Fragments of Greek Comedy*, ed. by D. Olsson, Oxford 2007.

[44] See A. Ya, Gurevich, *On the Nature of the Comic in the Elder Edda: A Comment on an Article by Professor Höfler*, "Mediaeval Scandinavia" 9 (1976), pp. 127–137.

was expected to be the ultimate fighter and was a renowned slayer of giants and giantesses. The sources tell us that Þórr has fiery eyes and a great red beard. His realm is Þrúðheimr ("The mighty abode") or Þrúðvangr ("The mighty fields"), and his hall is called Bilskírnir ("Flashing of Light"). He is armed with Mjǫllnir, a hammer that he wields whilst wearing iron gloves, and a belt that enhances his strength. He travels the skies in a chariot drawn by two billy-goats, Tanngrísnir ("teeth-barer") and Tanngnjóstr ("teeth-grinder"). He has two sons, Magni ("The angry one") and Móði ("Strong one"), and a daughter, Þrúðr ("Mighty woman"). These mythological features are intimately associated with power and strength, as are most myths about the god. These attributes are well known, and there is no reason to elaborate on them any further.

My arguments for proposing that Þórr is described as hyper-masculine in the poem follow below. In my opinion, the conception of the god Þórr in the poem, is serious and serves as a model for humankind. Depictions of the god function – like most myths about Þórr – as a reminder of the gods' superiority and divine power. Þórr, like a heroic warrior, is greater than other men. Even when he is faced with a degrading act, such as cross-dressing, he displays a model of the masculine ideals of courage and stoicism, and he quickly recovers his honour by slaying all of his offenders. Interesting also are the epic motifs that can be found in the poem that fit the other accounts of a Pre-Christian mythological system.

Not much attention has been given to descriptions of the god's emotive characteristics, besides his short temper. The poem clearly states that he is anxious that the gods will call him *ragr* if he puts on female clothes. Obviously, he is afraid of being considered unmanly, a degradation of his masculinity. Eventually, he agrees because he needs to retrieve his hammer which is a crucial tool for keeping the gods as supreme rulers of the cosmos. In other words – the end justifies the means. The description of how Þórr dresses like Freyja is comical and might be a late theme, added to an older mythical narrativ2ear a bridal gown. He is expected to lash out violently and brutally. The giants are killed without hesitation and the cosmic balance is back to normal, with the gods in command as guarantors of order.

Conclusion

In the Eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, the poet describes Þórr's forceful reaction to the suggestion of letting him dress up in a bridal gown and act Freyja's part in a marriage ceremony with a giant. He declares that the gods will call him *argr* if he dresses like a woman; a breach of sexual roles that was shameful and more than enough to symbolize unmanliness. Eventually, Þórr agrees and puts on the bridal outfit and travels to Þrymr's hall together with Loki, a mythological personage who can easily transgress gender boundaries. While impersonating Freyja, Þórr shows considerate emotional self-control, but is on the verge of exploding with

rage as his identity as a man is severely tested. Only Loki's witty responses to the giant save Þórr from revealing himself. In the end, Þórr wins back his weapon and regains his manly status, slaying everyone in his path, including male and female, old and young.

If we go back to the inventory defining hyper-masculinity by Mosher & Sirkin, their first category is an unsympathetic attitude towards women. The sexual part is seldom a topic in myths about Þórr, but he has fathered children with giantesses while he lives in a marital relationship with the goddess Sif[45]. In *Þrymskviða* there is one example of this violent attitude towards women when Þórr gets his hammer back and goes to massacre every giant in the hall. In the last stanza (32), the poet clearly reflects on this as a crude joke: *Drap hann ina ǫldno iǫtna systor, / hin er brúðfiár of beðit hafði; / hon scell um hlaut fyr scillinga, enn hǫgg hamars fyr hringa fiǫlð* ("He killed the old sister of the giants, she who'd asked for the gift from the bride; striking she got instead of shillings, and hammer-blows instead of heaps of rings")[46].

The next category of Mosher & Sirkin is violence as hyper-masculine, a masculine expression of power and dominance toward other men, an aspect that Þórr can be said to embody. Every myth about the god includes a reference to his skills as a slayer of giants or to his great strength. He is the protector of cosmos and mankind; therefore, it is natural to associate him with great battle prowess. In this, he is indeed hyper-masculine.

The last category in their inventory is "danger as exciting", reflecting an attitude that survival in dangerous situations, including "tempting fate", is a manly display of power over the dangerous environment; for example, by crossdressing and visiting a hostile giant without a weapon. In *Þrymskviða*, the poet describes how cross-dressing makes Þórr worried about defamation, an action that symbolically might reduce him to an unmanly man. The poet goes on to describe Þórr's emotional self-control as a sign of toughness and how he, in the end, wins back his honour by acting in a violent manner. His manly traits cannot be hidden under a bridal gown and his behaviour is indeed very masculine, even though he has to resist and control his violent temper.

One motif, found in several poems, is to slander Þórr by accusing him of being unmanly[47]. The poem includes many traditional stock motifs, well-known

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[45] It can, however, be used to explain Óðinn's masculinity that is often centred on his treacherous methods and conquest of women. Cf. T. Kuusela, *»Med trehövdad turs skall du leva«: sexuellt betvingande trolldom i nordisk mytologi och religion*, "Chaos. Skandinavisk tidsskrift for religionshistoriske studier" 62 (2015), pp. 41–74. Þórr is the eldest son of Óðinn and their rivalry is obvious in mythological narratives and might have been evident in their cults as well.

[46] *Edda. Die Lieder*…, p. 115; *The Poetic Edda*, p. 97.

[47] See above. *Lokasenna* and *Hárbarðsljóð* give good examples of this. Another example is when the giant Hrungnir says that it would be without honour if Þórr attacks him when he is not carrying his weapon. See T.T. Kuusela, *Tors strid mot Hrungner. Tvekamp, brynstenssymbolik och*

from other sources, and I would like to add Þorr's hyper-masculinity to this list; he is never considered unmanly and the section in which he dresses in a bridal gown might be considered amusing just because he is too masculine to be considered effeminate. It is precisely Þórr's hyper-masculinity that makes the poem work as comedy.

The narrative described in *Þrymskviða* is not an isolated case where cross-dressing occurs; rather it expresses a traditional motif that works well – even in a hilarious manner – when applied to somebody that embodies masculine attributes. The poem considers the same topics as many other sources – the complexity of masculinity and the thin line between fame and defamation.

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„AS BĘDZIE NAZYWAŁ MNIE PRZEWROTNYM!" ÞÓRR I HIPERMĘSKOŚĆ WÞRYMSKVIÐA

Streszczenie

W *Þrymskviða*, wierszu *Eddy Poetyckiej*, bóg Þórr przebiera się w suknię ślubną i bierze udział jako Freyja w ceremonii zaślubin z gigantem. Zanim się godzi, obawia się, że bogowie będą go nazywać *argr*, jeśli ubierze się jak kobieta – naruszenie ról seksualnych było haniebne i więcej niż wystarczające, by symbolizować niemęskość. Używając teorii hipermęskości płci, Kuusela twierdzi, w przeciwieństwie do wielu wcześniejszych interpretacji wiersza, że męski charakter Þórra nigdy nie jest kwestionowany; przeciwnie – bóg zachowuje się w sposób, który faktycznie wzmacnia jego cechy charakteru macho.

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STUDIA I MATERIAŁY Z DZIEJÓW EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ

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ÞÆT WÆS GOD CYNING: READING 'HROTHGAR'S SERMON' AS AN AUGUSTINE-INSPIRED SPECULUM PRINCIPUM

The very concept of monarchy as a political institution whose principal foundations are righteousness, law and order is in its conceptual as well as practical sense a thoroughly male-dominated construction. Notwithstanding some clearly discernible differences with regard to the continuously evolving roles and responsibilities of kings – ancient, medieval or modern – it has, as a matter of fact, provided scholars with some of the most absorbing and multifaceted models of masculinity since the dawn of mankind. Over the centuries, royal sovereigns have performed the multiple functions of father-like figures, moral mentors, spiritual anchors, artistic patrons and, last but not least, military leaders who in times of both war and peace dutifully served their subjects, using their prerogatives for the realisation of the common good[1]. Needless to say, even today, when the natural male-female dichotomy is being more and more often challenged, most of the aforesaid roles remain almost exclusively within the realm of traditional male responsibilities determined by a variety of biological, psychological and cultural factors.

In northern Europe[2], where the numerous communal habits and practices of late-tribal societies seem to have lingered longer than in the south, the notion of

[1] There are obviously many, often truly horrendous, exceptions to this model of masculine leadership. However, since the present paper focuses primarily upon the *gode*, not *yfele cyningas*, it seems fitting to lay more emphasis – even at this early stage of writing – to those features that are generally regarded as laudable.

[2] Here, the term is used merely to distinguish the realms of predominantly Germanic customs and clan ethics from the far more Latinate culture of Europe's south-western territories.

kingship (or some other form of paternal overlordship) was relatively egalitarian, based on the mutual, though at that time still obviously unwritten, contract between the lord and his people. This may already be seen in the works of ancient historians. According to Tacitus, for the inhabitants of north-central Europe in the first century AD, *nec regibus infinita ac libera potestas* (*Germania* VII) "the power of kings is neither unlimited nor arbitrary" and might therefore be subject to some sort of judicial review of those who appoint them or legitimise their authority. The mutual dependence that must have naturally evolved between the lord and his men would gradually become a kind of emotional bond (in certain cases perhaps also a calculated and profit-orientated union) in which the generous sovereign would regularly provide his faithful followers with the gifts of rings, horses, swords and other items of personal war-gear.[3] It should be noted, however, that, regardless of the evident temporal remoteness between the writing of Tacitus' *Germania* (around 98 AD) and the composition of *Beowulf* (see below), the concept(s) of loyalty inevitably affected both sides with more or less equal proportions. Near suicidal obedience may have been tacitly expected in some particular cases, but in the long run it would be acutely counterproductive to assume that entire legions of free men would willingly sacrifice their lives solely for the sake of their lord's military reputation[4]. On the other side of the coin, the kings would also be expected to know their own, especially physical limitations as well as the numerous responsibilities they owed to the people they ruled. What was needed, then, was a certain roughly definable degree of moderation which was all too often lacking in most Germanic heroes, legendary as well as historical, from fame-thirsty ealdorman Byrhtnoth of *The Battle of Maldon* (late tenth c.) to gold-loving Sigurd in *The Saga of the Volsungs* (late thirteenth c.). It also appears to be fatally insufficient in the character of Beowulf, the renowned Geatish warrior who came to be immortalised by the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet[5].

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[3] Numerous references – sometimes very detailed – to the custom of gift-giving in the early medieval world are to be found in many a text of Germanic provenance or association, perhaps most notably in Tacitus' *Germania* (chapter XIV), *Beowulf* (e.g. 1019–61, 2144–2196) and *The Battle of Maldon* (188). For more information on the munificence of the lords in Old English literature, see, for instance, D.H. Green, *Language and History in the Early Germanic World*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 67–8 and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Heroic Values and Christian Ethics*, [in:] *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. By M. Godden, M. Lapidge, Cambridge 1998, pp. 107–125.

[4] Some interesting remarks concerning the unwavering commitment of the *comitatus* in various literary works of particularly – though not exclusively – early medieval provenance may be found in Roberta Frank's excellent chapter on the heroic dimensions of *The Battle of Maldon and Heroic Literature*, [in:] *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. by D. Scragg, Oxford 1991, pp. 196–207.

[5] Here and elsewhere, the expressions such as "the anonymous poet" or "the *Beowulf* poet" are used to denote the assumed author(s) of the poem, particularly with regard to the later (post-oral) stages of its composition.

Originally compiled probably in the eighth or early ninth century[6], the epic poem which came to be known as *Beowulf* offers a fascinating, though at the time of its ultimate composition noticeably antiquarian, insight into the complex world of political and personal ambitions in early medieval Scandinavia, the ancestral homeland of the Angles as well as the Jutes. Regardless of the three monster-slaying episodes that constitute its narrative backbone and, unsurprisingly, attract much of the attention of modern readers, the gripping tale of *Higelaces mæg* (*Beowulf* 407-8) "Hygelac's kinsman" who ultimately becomes the king of Geatland is filled with various references and allusions to the idea and practical realisation of the concept of kingship. The Beowulfian kings may be praised for their wisdom and foresight, munificence and hospitality[7]. They are extolled for their great deeds of valour and prowess[8], thanks to which they can continuously revive their reputation[9] and provide gifts for their faithful subjects[10]. Finally, characters like Hrothgar and Hygelac, the semi-historical kings of, respectively, the Danes and the Geats[11], are also celebrated for their non-military exploits such as erecting a large and splendid hall (Hrothgar's Heorot)[12] or marrying a wise and beautiful woman (Hrothgar's wife Wealhtheow)[13].

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[6] The poem's dating has been a matter of much academic dispute ever since it was originally published in 1815 by the Icelandic-Danish scholar Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin. Cf., for instance, Colin Chase's examination in *Opinions on the Date of Beowulf, 1815–1980*, [in:] *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. by C. Chase, Toronto 1986, pp. 3–8 and, especially the recently published book *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*, ed. by L. Neidorf, Cambridge 2014.

[7] Many a kind word of Hrothgar's thoughtfulness and generosity may be heard from Beowulf's own lips when the Geatish warrior recounts the events of his heroic exploits at Hygelac's court (1999–2151).

[8] *Hwæt we Gar-Dena in gear-dagum þeod-cyninga þrym gefrunon, hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon* (1–3) "Lo, we have heard tell of the glory of the kings of the people of the Spear-Danes, how those princes accomplished deeds of valour".

[9] *Him þæs Lif-frea, wuldres Wealend, worold-are forgeaf* (16–17) "To him the Lord of Life, the Heavenly Ruler granted honour in this world".

[10] *Swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean, fromum feoh-giftum on fæder bearme, þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen wil-gesiþas, þonne wig cume, leode gelæsten* (20–24) "In this way a young man shall, through good deeds and splendid gifts – while still in the house of his father – make sure that afterwards, when he grows old, his dear companions will stand by him and serve him in time of war".

[11] The Geats were a North Germanic tribe or federation of tribes, first referred to in Ptolemy's *Geography*, whose memory survived in several works of especially early medieval literature including, amongst others, the Old English poems *Beowulf* and *Widsith*. For more information on the Geats see, the somewhat dated but still relevant book by J.A. Leake, *The Geats of Beowulf. A Study in the Geographical Mythology of the Middle Ages. Madison*, Milwaukee and London, 1967.

[12] *Him on mod bearnþæt healreced hatan wolde, medoærn micel, men gewyrceanþonne yldo bearn æfre gefrunon* (67–70) "It came into his [i.e. Hrothgar's] mind that he should construct a building, a mightier mead-hall than the children of men had ever known".

[13] Most importantly, perhaps, Hrothgar's wife also plays the role of a *friðusibb folca* (2017) "peace-pledge between the nations".

It appears, however, that as far as kingship is concerned, by far the most important passage in the poem is Hrothgar's *gid* (1723) "tale" (1700–1887), the moralising, homiletic-like (and so usually referred to as "sermon"[14]) speech where the suddenly reflective monarch warns his young benefactor of the many pitfalls of pride and fame, perhaps best understood as the unrestrained drive for earthly reputation which, as was the case with the Danish king Heremod[15], might often lead to one's exile and ultimate downfall. Despite its 'here-and-now' allusion to Beowulf's military exploits, Hrothgar's speech is in point of fact a Christian-coloured and highly universal, all-enveloping call to ponder on the sense of ethical commitment in every human being, heroes and kings included. Most importantly, however, it deals with the unrelenting transience of our earthly existence and the futility of the accomplishments that may have once seemed to be of prime importance in the world of early Germanic values (wealth, earthly power, prestige), but in the light of particularly Christian concept of afterlife they are indeed less than marginal and of practically no eternal consequence.

Hrothgar begins his speech with some words of lavish praise for the young Geatish warrior, a genuine *captatio benevolentiae* through which he attempts to bring his guest and benefactor to a more reflective mood. First he acknowledges Beowulf's widespread and, obviously, hard-earned reputation[16], then he enumerates some of the most distinctive and commendable attributes of his people's benefactor[17]. Having said that, Hrothgar turns to the aforementioned account of Heremod's wickedness and downfall (1709–1722), the moral foil to his emotional discourse. Perhaps to intensify the strength of his argument, this brief but captivating piece of ancient Germanic lore is instantly followed by a truly Christian oration in which the Danish king expresses his endless admiration for the righteous and just ways of the Almighty, how He *on lufan læteð hworfan monnes mod-geþonc mæran cynnes, seleð him on eþle eorþan wynne to healdanne, hleo-burh wera* (1728–1732) "allows the thoughts of the heart of the man of distinguished birth to follow its bent, grants him joys on this earth and a protective stronghold". Hrothgar then warns his valiant guest against the numerous downsides of worldly prosperity[18]

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[14] Cf., especially, E.T. Hansen, *Hrothgar's 'Sermon' in Beowulf as Parental Wisdom*, "Anglo-Saxon England" 10 (1981), pp. 53–67. The term "Hrothgar's sermon" is now widely used in *Beowulf* scholarship.

[15] Heremod was a legendary king of the Danes who, according to the *Beowulf* poet, was banished for the *wælfealle ond* [...] *deaðcwalum* (1711–2) "death and destruction" he brought to his own people.

[16] *Blæd is aræred geond wid-wegas, wine min Beowulf, ðin ofer þeoda gehwylce* (1703–5) "Your glory is extolled far and wide, my friend Beowulf, over each nation".

[17] *Eal þu hit geþyldum healdest, mægen mid modes snyttrum* (1705–6) "You hold it all with patience and prudence of mind".

[18] *Bebeorh þe ðone bealo-nið, Beowulf leofa, secg betsta, ond þe þæt selre geceos, ece rædas* (1758–60) "Beware of this grievous affliction, dear Beowulf, the best of warriors, and choose the better reward, the eternal gains".

and arrogance[19], the menacing curse of many an earthly ruler. Finally, he caps his speech with a relation of his own long reign[20], concluding with an invitation to the feast and a promise of royal munificence.

It would be incorrect, of course, to interpret the words of Hrothgar as a confirmation of the vices and weaknesses in his own or his guest's character. What appears to cut through his emotional but sombre rhetoric is an authentic concern for the Geatish hero, the wish to somehow avert the hubristic tendencies in Beowulf, which, in some measure, evince themselves in the young man's longing for recognition and excessive concern for praise, as was evidently the case with his swimming match with Breca (506–606), and the preventable, though in the long run unintentionally advantageous, magnanimity that made him face the man-eating ogre Grendel unprotected and with bare hands (677–687). As may be expected, Beowulf listens patiently, knowing well that for a strong-minded and ambitious man like him there is no better guidance than the wisdom of an aging king. It appears, though, that despite Hrothgar's explicit warning that arrogance often *weaxeð ond wridað* (1741) "grows and flourishes" utterly unnoticed, the future ruler of the Geats ultimately fails to remember one of his principal duties as a king when, several years later, he refuses to be aided in his duel with the fire-breathing dragon (2510–2537) and in this way needlessly exposes his people to a serious risk of being deprived of a strong and, above all, experienced leader[21].

All this leads to unavoidable speculation on whether the said passage or, perhaps, its later revision, was thought of as some sort of an instruction – perhaps in the mould of Carolingian *specula principum*[22] – for the prospective rulers who, by identifying themselves with the legendary kings of the past, could more or less consciously profit from the few but unfortunately consequence-laden errors of

[19] *Ofer-hyda ne gym* (1760) "Pay no attention to pride".

[20] Although Hrothgar assures Beowulf that he has ruled his kingdom justly for fifty years, he does not hide the fact that, being at the peak of his earthly power, he, erroneously, *ænigne under swegles begong gesacan ne tealde* (1772–3) "came to believe he had no longer any foes under the sky".

[21] Before he faces the *lig-draca* (2333) "fire-dragon" in what turns out to be his ultimate battle, Beowulf boldly declares that it is solely his responsibility *þæt he wið aglæcean eofoðo dæle* (2534) "that he should match his strength with the terrible fiend".

[22] The *speculum principum*, or 'mirror for princes' is a literary genre, popular especially in the Middle Ages, whose aim was to provide sons of kings or some lesser rulers with more or less direct instructions on how to rule the country. Despite the fact that they sometimes differed considerably with regard to their compositional and stylistic qualities, the *specula* usually featured the characters of two monarchs, the successful one and the indolent one, to serve as images for, respectively, imitation and avoidance. For more information on the origins and development of the genre, see, for instance, J.P. Genet, *L'évolution du genre des miroirs des princes en Occident au Moyen Âge, Religion et mentalités au Moyen Âge. Mélanges en l'honeur d'Hervé Martin*, ed. by S. Cassagnes-Brouquet et al., Rennes 2003, pp. 531–541 and W. Fałkowski., *Karolińskie zwierciadło władcy – powstanie gatunku*, [in:] *Europa barbarica, Europa christiana. Studia mediaevalia Carolo Modzelewski dedicata*, ed. by R. Michałowski et al., Warszawa 2008, pp. 59–74.

Beowulf. The poem's distinct lack of generic integrity, with its shifts in emphasis and not infrequent inclusion of various illustrative digressions, suggests a longer course of composition – almost certainly involving a number of successive *scopas*, some of them probably adding, deleting and reimagining individual episodes and asides – prior to its being ultimately recorded in what came to be known as the Nowell Codex (late tenth or early eleventh c.), the only manuscript that contains the epic tale of the Geatish hero. One of the last, if not the last, links in the chain of *Beowulf*'s compositional history may have been some antiquarian-minded scribe who not only deemed *Hinieldus* (or, rather, his Geatish counterpart) a legitimate literary hero that, at least potentially, had something to do *cum Christo*[23], but also, decided to use (part of) the narrative to promote his own didactic message. Of course the odds that the above hypothesis could ever be verified as accurate (or even partially accurate) are very slim, yet there seems to be no reason why it should be excluded from the poem's hermeneutical scope, especially since its plausibility is believed to rest upon relatively good cultural-historical foundations.

The idea that in its post-oral stage the epic poem of *Beowulf* may have been once intended – in part rather than as a whole – as a quasi-didactic textbook to be read in some royal or princely milieu has over the years been explored by a number of scholars. Of particular interest here are the notes of John Earle in *The Deeds of Beowulf*[24] and the article by Levin L. Schücking "Das Königsideal im *Beowulf*" which first appeared in 1929 in the annual *Bulletin of the Modern Humanities Research Association*[25]. Both texts point especially to the idealistic and somewhat unfeasible components of the heathen warrior ethos, which may have been a result of the poet's wish to illustrate and perhaps even accentuate the most significant principles of leadership in pre- or early Christian societies. Not surprisingly, some of these views were further elaborated on in the works of later scholars including J.M. Wallace-Hadrill[26] and, especially, Scott Gwara[27], the latter of whom differs from Schücking in that he, for instance, reads Hrothgar's "sermon" as an exploration – rather than a wide-ranging affirmation – of the ideal Christian kingship (34ff.).

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[23] The above-quoted words obviously come from the famous remonstrance of Alcuin, *quid Hinieldus cum Christo* "What has Ingeld to do with Christ" (itself probably an imitation of 2 Corinthians 6:15), by means of which the Anglo-Saxon scholar evidently tried to express his reservation about the widespread interest of his contemporaries in heroic poetry, often at the expense of the Word of God.

[24] J. Earle, *The Deeds of Beowulf: An English Epic of the Eight Century Done into Modern Prose*, Oxford 1892.

[25] L.L. Schücking, *'Das Königsideal im Beowulf'*, "Bulletin of the Modern Humanities Research Assocition" (1929), pp. 143–154.

[26] J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent*, *The Ford Lectures delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1970*, Oxford 1971.

[27] S. Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, Leiden, Boston 2008.

In addition to that, there has also been much scholarly interest in the general patristic as well as homiletic influence on the poem, some of which is succinctly summarised in Andy Orchard's *A Critical Companion toBeowulf*[28]. Amongst these are, for instance, the works of Thomas D. Hill, who has frequently argued in favour of the wide-ranging impact of the writings of the Early Church Fathers on Old English poetry[29]. Several valuable arguments and observations could also be found in the works of Margaret E. Goldsmith, particularly in her book *The Mode and Meaning ofBeowulf*[30], where she tries to attribute some of the Christian-related themes in the earliest English verse to the influence – both direct and indirect – of Latin patristic and homiletic texts.

Yet, regardless of the actual sources for Hrothgar's words and the place where the poem was given its final shape, it is, I believe, possible to look at the crux of the said 'sermon' through the prism of the works which are said to have inspired the composition of some of the earliest known *specula*, such as the indubitable cornerstone of all Christian philosophy, Saint Augustine's *De civitate Dei* "The City of God" (early fifth c.). It may or may not have been known to the *Beowulf* poet, but, given the fact that the teachings of the bishop of Hippo Regius (354–430) were exceptionally popular and, in one way or another, continued to live (with some minor alterations and additions) in the works of Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), Hincmar of Rheims (806-82) and other leading theologians of the early Middle Ages, there is much possibility that at least some of the essence of Augustinian rhetoric could somehow find its way into the Anglo-Saxon poem[31]. We shall therefore consider some of the most significant ideas contained in *The City of God* which directly pertain to the subject of kingship and weigh them against the pertinent words of Hrothgar.

In book V of his work, Saint Augustine argues that genuine happiness could only be attained by those who *iuste imperant* (chapter 24) "rule justly" and *inter linguas sublimiter honorantium et obsequia nimis humiliter salutantium non extolluntur* (chapter 24) "are not inspired by the praises of those who pay them sublime honours and the obsequiousness of those who salute them with excessive

[28] A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 151–162.

[29] Th.D. Hill, *Two Notes on Patristic Allusion in Andreas*, "Anglia" 84 (1966), pp. 156–162; Idem., *The Christian Language and Theme of Beowulf*, [in:] *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. by H. Aertsen and R. Hendrik Bremmer, Amsterdam 1994, pp. 63–77.

[30] M.E. Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*, London 2014 (originally published in 1970).

[31] Saint Augustine's works (including, of course, *De civitate Dei*) are known to have been widely read in the scholarly milieu of early medieval England. See, for instance, the attempts to reconstruct – through various inventories and references in the existing manuscripts – the catalogues of pre-Norman book collections in Michael Lapidge's book *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, Oxford 2008. Besides, as is observed by Marie Padgett Hamilton, Augustine's book was often quoted or referred to by a number of "Anglo-Latin writers from Aldhelm to Alcuin" (1946, p. 312).

humility". In other words, they are morally obliged *se homines esse meminerunt* (chapter 24) "to remember that they are human", not divine or in any way better than other mortals. This, of course, in large measure, runs counter to the final words of the *Beowulf* poet who maintains that in spite of Hrothgar's moral guidance, the much-lamented leader of the Geats continued to be *lofgeornost* (*Beowulf* 3182) "most eager for fame". Indeed, as observed by Roberta Frank, despite the fact that the expression was probably meant to be semantically harmonised with the other three Christian-flavoured superlatives that appear in the poem's last two lines (*mildust* "mildest", *mon-ðwærust* "kindest", *liðost* "gentlest"), it is otherwise found in Old English poetry "only in a bad sense meaning 'ostentatious, boastful'"[32].

It is doubtlessly for this reason, Beowulf's inner drive to confirm his enduring valour, that in the second part of the poem the then elderly[33] king decides to send away the eleven hearth-companions that have followed him on the way to the dragon's den prior to his ultimate combat with the untimely awakened dragon. He explicitly informs them that he *wylle* [...] *fæhðe secan* (*Beowulf* 2512–3) "wishes to seek the feud" with the fiery beast, so that he could in this way *mærðu fremman* (2514) "achieve renown". Hence, despite the fact that, at the same time, he rather pompously calls himself *frod folces weard* (2513) "old guardian of the people", Beowulf appears to be much more interested in solidifying his own reputation as a monster-slayer than in the long-term security and wellbeing of his own people, thus rather manifestly confirming that the erstwhile concerns of Hrothgar were regrettably not groundless. In other words, the aging king of the Geats fails to remember the fundamental principles of vertical loyalty (in this case his responsibility downwards), namely that the king should first and foremost protect his subjects.

The words of the aged Danish ruler thus seem to mirror those of Saint Augustine, who in *The City of God* maintains that what is first and foremost expected from the king is not his love of himself, but the love of his realm and the folk who inhabit it (chapter 24). The protagonist might, of course, be emphatically described as being *leodum liðost* (*Beowulf* 3182) "gentlest to [his] people", but it barely obscures the fact that his evident recklessness prior to the combat with the dragon[34] in effect deprives the Geats of their experienced, if obviously aging, leader with the effect that they end up living in relentless fear of what the future

[32] R. Frank, *Skaldic Verse and the Date of Beowulf*, [in:] *The Beowulf Reader*, ed. by P.S. Baker, New York and London 2000, p. 166. Likewise, its Old Norse equivalent *lofgjarn* may also be translated as "eager for praise or renown" (G.T. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, Toronto 2004, p. 277).

[33] According to the majority of scholars, at the time of his death, after *fiftig wintra* (2733) "fifty winters" on the throne, the Geatish hero must have been at least seventy, seventy-five years old.

[34] Cf., for instance, some of Beowulf's final words before he goes on to face the dragon: *Nis þæt eower sið, ne gemet mannes, nefne min anes þæt he wið aglæcean eofoðo dæle, eorlscype*

might hold. Here the anxieties of the lamenting Geatish woman are perfectly clear – they *heregeongas hearde ondrede*[*n*] *wælfylla worn, werudes egesan, hynðo ond hæftnyd* (3153-5) "greatly feared the coming of foreign armies, masses of slaughter, terror of their foes, humiliation and captivity"[35]. The enormous significance of these words may be somewhat obscured by the obvious grandeur of Beowulf's funeral. Nonetheless, they are indisputably a deeply concerned voice of the suddenly leaderless people and, perhaps, the poet's skilfully disguised critique of the hero's excessive haughtiness, a renewed warning against the pitfalls of what Hrothgar refers to as *ofer-hygd* (1740) "pride, arrogance", perhaps best understood in terms of the Geat's unrestrained wish to excel.

The pursuit of earthly glory, against which Saint Augustine warns particularly in chapters 18–20[36], is of course a major flow of character in many a hero – Greek, Roman, Germanic, or other. Ostensibly irremediable (or so it often seems) elements of selfishness, egoism and vanity may be easily detected in numerous works that deal with the early medieval ideals of war, from Tacitus' *Germania*, where it appears to be camouflaged behind the warriors' wish *fortia facta gloriae* [*eum*, i.e. *principem*] *assignare* (XIV) "to attribute their glorious deeds to their lord's reputation", to *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Song of Roland* (late eleventh c.), where the poems' central characters, respectively, Æthelred's ealdorman and Charlemagne's paladin (after whom the latter poem is titled), choose to place their men at unnecessary risk in order not to stain their hitherto irreproachable military reputation with any suspicion of cowardice. With his decision to send the companions away, so that he could *mærðu fremman* (*Beowulf* 2514) "achieve renown", Beowulf demonstrates that his affiliation with the most famous heroes of early medieval lore is regrettably not limited to the poem's temporal dimensions, but, most importantly, evinces itself in the protagonist's nearly archetypal self-centredness and limited consideration for others. In other words, the Geatish king is more inclined to take delight in what Saint Augustine calls *gloria humanae* (*De civitate Dei*, book V, chapter 19) "human glory", which Beowulf – a "good heathen" though he may be – every now and then chooses to place above the only profound exaltation that, according to the bishop of Hippo Regius (and Hroth-

efne (2532–5) "Neither is it your undertaking, nor is it expected of any man but me to measure his strength against the monster, perform the warrior's deed".

[35] Her fears are not groundless, as the leaderless Geats are now bound to be drawn again into their long-standing conflict with the Swedes. Cf. the words of the unnamed messenger: *Þæt ys sio fæhðo ond se feondscipe, wæl-nið wera, ðæs ðe ic wen hafo, þe us seceað to Sweona leoda* (2999–3001) "That is the feud and the enmity, the mortal hatred between men, which I expect shall come to us from the Swedish people".

[36] Cf., for instance, *Et ideo virtutes habenti magna virtus est contemnere gloriam, quia contemptus eius in conspectu Dei est, iudicio autem non aperitur humano* (XIX) "And to him who possesses virtues, a great virtue it is to scorn glory, for the contempt of it is seen by God, though it may not be manifest to human judgement".

gar[37]), ought to be realised through one's pious deeds *propter vitam aeternam* (chapter 25) "for the sake of eternal life".

All this inevitably leads to the confrontation of two apparently irreconcilable conceptual models: the old pagan principles of "heroic ideal" and the far more restrained doctrines of Christianity (even if only implied rather than genuine in the character of Hrothgar). Being an exemplary warrior in the pre-Christian milieu of early medieval Scandinavia, Beowulf does not necessarily meet all the criteria commonly required from the somewhat later *reges iusti et probi* of Anglo-Saxon England. Despite the fact that the lacking qualities are dexterously supplied (often in abundance) by the anonymous poet, the Geatish hero is still, at best, only a wishful compromise between what the ninth- or tenth-century Anglo-Saxon audiences probably imagined as an archetypal warrior of the past and the ideal Christian ruler of the subsequent centuries[38]. Accordingly, the character of Beowulf turns out to be full of cultural peculiarities and paradoxes, as is evidently the case when, ironic as it may seem, the aging *folces weard* (*Beowulf* 2513) "guardian of the people" chooses to face the dragon solely on his own, and in this way exposes his people to the danger of being faced with what seems to be a looming breach of continuity in the royal line[39].

Yet another markedly homiletic feature, one which is particularly detectable in the words of Hrothgar and would have probably been lacking in the earlier, perhaps even pre-scriptural phases of the poem's existence, is the explicit and recurrent references to the Almighty God along with His purpose and intent for the worldly rulers. It cannot obviously be argued that the general character of the old king's rhetoric is by and large Christian. However, this evidently anachronistic aspect of the Anglo-Saxon epic is in all likelihood a result of its later colouring or even complete reworking which could only have been possible in the theologically-informed circles of early English kingdoms[40]. If such had really been the case, it seems quite improbable that the anonymous poet (or at least his presumably monastic brethren with whom he would doubtlessly sometimes converse on

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[37] Cf. the words of Hrothgar who advises Beowulf that, instead of being satisfied with the mundane pleasures and concerns, he *selre geceos*[*e*], *ece rædas* (1759–1760) "should choose the better reward, the eternal gains".

[38] L.L. Schücking, *Das Königsideal im Beowulf*…, pp. 143–154; Th.D. Hill, *Scyld Scefing and the 'Stirps Regia': Pagan Myth and Christian Kingship in Beowulf*, [in:] *Magister Regis: Studies in Honor of Robert Earl Kaske*, ed. by A. Groos, New York 1986, pp. 37–47; Hill J.M., *The Cultural World of Beowulf*, Toronto 1995, pp. 85–107.

[39] One could also add, following Tolkien's line of reasoning, that of the two men, Hrothgar, in his visible monotheism, appears to be far more "Christian", whereas his Geatish benefactor is still submerged in the pagan way of thinking (2006:40).

[40] F.C. Robinson, *Beowulf*, [in:] *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by M. Godden, M. Lapidge. Cambridge 1998, pp. 150–152; Th.D. Hill, *The Christian Language*…, pp. 63–77; A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion*…, pp. 130–168

the matters of religion) would have been entirely ignorant of the essence of Saint Augustine's teachings, whether it be *The City of God* itself or its not-so-distant reverberations in the works of later theologians of the early Middle Ages[41].

In his efforts to instruct Beowulf on the principles of *gumcyste* (*Beowulf* 1723) 'manly virtues' Hrothgar reveals to his young friend and benefactor the real nature of all victory and success in this fleeting life. It is of course the spirit and practice of Christian piety, for it is no other than the *mihtig God* (1716, 1725) "mighty God" Himself who *manna cynne þurh sidne sefan syttru bryttað, eard ond eorlscipe* (1725-7) "in His magnanimous spirit apportions unto mankind wisdom, land and lordship". Hrothgar does not obviously provide the young Geatish hero with ready answers and solutions. Nor does he specify any follow-up steps of Christian-like initiation and growth. His spiritual guidance is far more implicit, deeply embedded in the logic of his argument, as he spells out the innumerable dangers that may befall a reckless king ere his *lichoma læne gedreoseð* (1754) "transitory bodily-home [i.e. the body] in age declines". In doing this, he seems to put the bulk of his faith in Beowulf's intellectual and moral faculties, leaving him with free rein *selre geceos*[*an*]*, ece rædas* (1759–60) "to choose [for himself] the better option, the eternal gain" in the Kingdom of Heaven.

All this naturally bears a strong, if not immediately perceptible, resemblance to the words of Saint Augustine, who maintains that true contentment in the Lord could only be found by those who *suam potestatem ad Dei cultum maxime dilatandum maiestati eius famulam faciunt* (*De civitate Dei*, book V, chapter 24) "put their power at the service of His majesty by using it for the greatest possible extension of His veneration". Perhaps the most lucid rhetorical association, however, between the words of Hrothgar and those of the bishop of Hippo Regius is to be seen in the latter's remark that eternal felicity could never come through *inanis gloriae* (chapter 24) "empty glory" or what William Shakespeare would later call "bubble reputation [...] in the cannon's mouth" (*As You Like It* II.7.155-6). The vivid illustration of man's moral depravity which the Danish king provides in his dramatic account of Heremod's decline and eventual downfall (*Beowulf* 1713–17)[42] is therefore a perfect illustration of Saint Augustine's argument, whether directly inspired by the anonymous poet's acquaintance with *The City of God*, its resonance in the works of later theologians or simply stemming from his common sense and independent examination of the fallible nature of man is a matter of separate discussion.

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[41] M.P. Hamilton, *The Religious Principle in Beowulf*, [in:] *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* LXI, 1946, p. 312; M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 125ff.

[42] *Breat bolgen-mod beod-geneatas, eaxl-gesteallan, oþþæt he ana hwearf, mære þeoden, mon-dreamum from, ðeah þe hine mihtig God mægenes wynnum, eafeþum stepte, ofer ealle men forð gefremede* (1713-8) "Swollen with rage, he slew his table-companions, the comrades at his side, until, in his loneliness, he turned away from the human joys, the famous lord, although the Mighty God had set him up over all men, raised him in the joys of strength".

The ultimate question which remains unanswered is whether 'Hrothgar's sermon' (or, at least, its existing version) was originally intended as a piece of didactic literature, the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the *speculum principum* genre. And if so, could it be that the words that were once put in the mouth of the Danish king were inspired, directly or not, by the Augustinian concepts of a moral and just ruler? There is, of course, not much chance that our curiosity with regard to this particular matter could ever be fully (or even partly) satisfied. Nevertheless, the poem's numerous references to both the ideals and the flaws of kingship, often in line with the concepts of royal authority and its practical realisation that were put forth by Saint Augustine in his *De civitate Dei* – and/or the works that were more or less directly inspired by it – point to a strong possibility that in some cases the intentions may have been predominantly or at least largely didactic, especially since the passages in which the issue is brought to the surface are regularly embedded with clearly discernible Christian colourings, and so may be assumed to be later, post-oral interpolations[43].

This way or the other, *Beowulf* exposes two extremes of the same spectrum – the (unfortunately) real and the expected models of royal (and, by extension, masculine) conduct. As for its protagonist, the disparities are not as wide as they may initially seem. After all, the Geatish hero is neither a faultless sovereign of purely selfless dedication, nor a brainless swashbuckler interested only in the augmentation and prolongation of his earthly glory. Under the later layers of Christian meanings and associations there may have once been a portrait of a strong but noble heathen ruler whose numerous exploits were once praised, perhaps even far and wide, in the pre-Christian realms of Anglo-Saxon England. It may therefore be that by beginning and ending the poem with vivid accounts of the funerary rites performed in honour of, first, the legendary Danish king Scyld Scefing (*Beowulf* 26–52) and then the dragon-slaying ruler of Geatland the poet might have wished to accentuate the continuity of certain ideals and values that were once of foremost significance in the often harsh world of pre-Christian Europe. In this way, the rather universal approval of Scyld's long and glorious reign (despite his being no more than a "good heathen") – perfectly recapitulated in the short but highly expressive phrase *þæt wæs god cyning* (11) "that was a good king" – could have been in some way meant to be extrapolated onto the character of Beowulf.

If such indeed had been the case, the only vital ingredient that would later turn out to be lacking in this rich mosaic of cultural patterns and values was a discernibly Christian dimension of kingship and rule. Whether it was directly inspired by the works of Saint Augustine or not is, as has been observed, no longer pos-

[43] Over the past few decades much has been written about the origins of *Beowulf*'s Christian implications and undertones. A useful summary, including footnoted lists of books and articles that touch upon the subject, might be found, for instance, in the fifth chapter ("Religion and Learning") of A. Orchard's *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (130–168).

sible (or, it is at least very difficult) to determine. However, given the intriguing parallels and similarities that, as we have seen, certainly do exist – at the general semantic, rather than lexical level – between the aforementioned passages in *The City of God* and the words of advice that the "Christian" Hrothgar gives to the "pagan" Beowulf after the latter has returned to Heorot (1700–1887), there is a not-too-implausible likelihood that the form that the poem ultimately assumed in the Nowell Codex (or earlier) had indeed something to do with the poet's acquaintance with *De civitate Dei* and/or its more or less direct reverberations in the writings of some later Christian scholars, continental as well as insular.

This, of course, does not automatically rule out the possibility that the said passages of didactic reflection had not been there before some scribe finally decided to provide them with a more explicit Christian face. After all various instructional elements and attitudes might be found in a number of earlier texts, sometimes dating back to as early as the first and second millennia BC[44]. In a less distant past, some clearly discernible didactic (or gnomic) features would also find their way into the earliest works of Germanic literature, some of which are thought to be of partly or even predominantly pre-Christian origin[45]. It appears, however, that attributing the instructional nature of Hrothgar's speech, particularly in the light of the numerous Christian allusions that seem to have provided a theoretical underpinning for the old king's words of advice, to some of the earlier, "unhallowed" (though not necessarily meaning pre-596[46]), stages of *Beowulf*'s development (or, as for that matter, any tale of Beowulf that predated the poem whose only surviving version came to be recorded in the Nowell Codex) would not only be incorrect, but also, in the first place, flawed in its conceptual foundations.

Of course in its entirety, the poem may have never been intended to serve predominantly didactic purposes. Given its indisputable entertaining quality as well as the recurrent references to storytelling and the art of poetic performance (much as in, for instance, Homer's *Odyssey*)[47], one can conclude that *Beowulf* was, first

[44] R.J. Clifford, *Introduction*, [in:] *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. by Richard J. Clifford, Atlanta 2007, pp. XI–XIII.

[45] Perhaps the most illustrative example of a didactic work in Old Germanic literature (or, at least, one interwoven with gnomic reflections) is the eddic poem *Hávamál* "Sayings of the High One" which, in its evidently composite form, contains various instructions and pieces of advice that appear to have once been useful in the north of Europe. Despite some plausible Christian (and other) reverberations (Larrington C., *Hávamál and Sources outside Scandinavia*, "Saga Book of the Viking Society" 23 (1992), pp. 141–157), it appears that the poem's didactic framework is of predominantly heathen nature.

[46] The earliest mission to convert the Anglo-Saxons was initiated by Pope Gregory the Great in 596. Within less than a century practically all of England was, at least nominally Christianised.

[47] There are numerous references to the art of poetic performance in *Beowulf*, perhaps the best known one being the passage in which we are told of the *hearpan sweg* (89) "sound of the harp" and *swutol sang scopes* (90) "clear song of the poet" that would often be heard in Hrothgar's hall prior to the coming of Grendel.

and foremost, meant to be performed to delight the audience with a gripping tale of heroism and fate. However, if one should approach the poem with a greater interpretative flexibility, it might turn out that, it is just as much concerned with the more serious themes of mortality, corruption and monarchic decay. Being in all likelihood one of the most notable literary achievements of the period, the tale of Beowulf's heroic exploits would almost certainly have been known in the royal and princely milieux of Anglo-Saxon England where, sitting at the feet of their fathers, with bated breath and flushed cheeks, highborn lads listened attentively to the spellbinding accounts of legendary heroes and exemplary kings, the heroes and kings that, one day, they doubtlessly wished to be themselves. Whether they ultimately did become *gode cyningas* or *yfelan* would obviously largely depend upon their self-critical faculties, the shaping of which must have been a complex and often life-long process. It was, however, a process in which the didactic endeavours of Anglo-Saxon poets, with recurrent digressions and extra-narrative episodes concerning good and bad kings of the early medieval world (pagan and Christian alike), may have played no small part.

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ÞÆT WÆS GOD CYNING: PRÓBA ODCZYTANIA TZW. MOWY HROTHGARA JAKO SWOISTEGO ZWIERCIADŁA WŁADCY W ŚWIETLE FILOZOFII ŚWIĘTEGO AUGUSTYNA

Streszczenie

Adresowane do głównego bohatera poematu moralizatorskie słowa legendarnego króla Hrothgara z pewnością stanowią jeden z najbardziej intrygujących (nie tylko pod względem kulturowo-historycznym) passusów staroangielskiego *Beowulfa*. Zarówno sam charakter wypowiedzi starego monarchy, jak też okoliczności, jakie towarzyszą jego mowie, zdają się sugerować, iż źródłem inspiracji – niekoniecznie bezpośrednim – anonimowego poety mogły być tzw. zwierciadła władcy, średniowieczne traktaty o charakterze parenetycznym, kreślące idealne wzorce osobowe dla przyszłych władców. Jednym z takich tekstów (naturalnie nie w sensie wyłącznym) jest historiozoficzne dzieło świętego Augustyna *Państwo Boże*, którego echa wydają się pobrzmiewać właśnie w słowach Hrothgara. Opublikowany w niniejszym tomie tekst ma na celu identyfikację pewnych cech wspólnych dla obu tekstów w kreśleniu obrazu powinności przykładnego monarchy.

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STUDIA I MATERIAŁY Z DZIEJÓW EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ

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MILK, MASCULINITY, AND HUMOR-LESS VIKINGS – GENDER IN THE OLD NORSE POLYSYSTEM

A concrete perception of masculinity in the sagas is hard to trace. Jóhanna Katrín Friðríksdóttir has recently pointed at the multiplicity of gender systems present in saga literature, either within or across generic boundaries[1]. One reason for this, as Ármann Jakobsson shows, is a multiplicity of voices: the represented time's perceptions, those of the author's time, and those of the saga itself[2]; to this one can add also the perceptions of the post-medieval period when the saga was copied down into paper manuscripts, as well as variations within the medieval period itself. As Jóhanna Katrín Friðríksdóttir points out, different genres also offer different voices and perceptions. Most recently, Gareth Evans has suggested to approach the research into Old Norse masculinity through the concept of hegemonic masculinity; this acknowledges a multiplicity of gender perceptions operating within a society, while work is done to define the most prominent ones[3].

One way to work with and even reconcile opposing gender perceptions could be found in what has been dubbed 'polysystem theory', developed by Itamar Even-Zohar. Polysystem theory suggests that within each literary system more than one set of repertoires operate, each representing different forces in society, and each with its own inner logic and intratextual connections, in addition to ex-

[1] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Gender*, [in:] *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Sverrir Jakobsson, New York 2017, p. 227.

[2] Ármann Jakobsson, *Masculinity and Politics in Njáls Saga*, "Viator" 38:1 (2007), p. 195.

[3] G.L. Evans. *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*, First ed. Oxford English Monographs, Oxford 2019, pp. 15–26.

isting intertextual connections[4]. This theory is based on the often misrepresented diachronic approach to genre suggested by Russian Formalism[5]. Scholars such as Massimiliano Bampi, Torfi Tulinius and Stefka Georgieva Eriksen have noted the benefits of applying polysystem theory to the Old Norse corpus, especially (but not exclusively) in the context of the influence that translations and Latin had on the local Icelandic literary products[6]. Looking at the issue of genre through polysystem theory allows for a synchronic and diachronic understanding of their hierarchy, struggles and development. Like with genres, different gender perceptions also represent different forces within society. Polysystem theory can thus be used both to trace these individual forces, and also to understand how and when these forces intersect. In the following pages, three – intersecting and yet separate – attitudes towards gender and sex differences will be traced: The saga mind, which represents an elusive congregate of local traditions that may or may not be influenced by other perceptions; the Christian mind, which represents Christian notions of gender; and the scientific mind, which represents influences from continental medical writing that made their way into the Icelandic sagas. This separation is, of course, in many ways unnatural. For example, as will become apparent in the discussion below, most of the examples that exhibit a Christian mind-frame could also be seen as representing older gender concerns in a new suit. Yet, the benefit of this method is in the fact that it sheds a light on perceptions that can only be discussed if they are first examined in their own right before we see how they are incorporated into the larger gender framework.

The case studies in this article will center around milk and milk products, since the attitude towards them reveals much of the variance in approaches that this article argues for. After coming back to Iceland from an outlawry sentence in Norway, Grettir Ásmundarson returns with significantly more status and riches. One day he sets off towards his kinsman Auðunn, who had insulted him years before during a ball game. When Grettir arrives at Auðunn's farm, he finds his kinsman carrying a milk curd pouch. After Grettir makes Auðunn trip on the curd pouch, his kinsman returns the favor; "Audun bent down to pick up the curd pouch, slung it into Grettir's arms and told him to take what he was given. Grettir was covered with curds, which he considered a greater insult than if Audun had

[4] I. Even-Zohar, *Polysystem Theory*, "Poetics Today" 11:1 (1990), pp. 9–26.

[5] See e.g. Y. Tynyanov, *The Literary Fact*, translated by Ann Shukman, [in:] *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by D. Duff, Harlow 2000, pp. 29–49.

[6] M. Bampi, *Literary Activity and Power Struggle*, [in:] *Textual Production and Status Contests in Rising and Unstable Societies*, ed. by M. Bampi, M. Buzzoni, Filologie medievali e moderne 59, Venezia 2013, pp. 59–70, T.H. Tulinius, *Writing Strategies: Romance and the Creation of a New Genre in Medieval Iceland*, [in:] *Textual Production*…, ed. by M. Bampi, M. Buzzoni, Venezia 2013, pp. 33–42, S.G. Eriksen, *The Change in Position of Translated Riddarasögur within Old Norse Literary Polysystems: A Case Study of Elíss saga ok Rósamundar*, [in:] *Textual Production*…, ed. by M. Bampi, M. Buzzoni, pp. 43–58.

given him a bloody wound"[7]. Grettir's new clothes are now covered with filth, and he has once again been defeated by a man who had humiliated him in the past. But what is it about being covered in curds that Grettir sees as more humiliating than a bloody wound? When one pays attention to milk and its by-products throughout the Icelandic saga corpus, a certain intolerance towards lactose can be detected. It will be argued that this stems from an equation between milk and femininity; and even more significantly, towards a certain awareness and assimilation of some of the Icelanders penning these texts towards contemporary continental European understandings of sexual difference.

The Saga Mind

Since the time of Ancient Mesopotamia and Gilgamesh, to the days of the Greeks and Romans, and the saga authors' contemporary European visitors to the court of the Mongols, consumption of milk was considered an action done by people who they considered untamed, who led a nomadic life[8]. If beer meant civilization, milk meant being wild, beastly. Milk was therefore also closely associated with being monstrous. While monstrosity and femininity did not always go hand in hand, this was often the case, as studies into concepts such as *ýki* and *ergi* have shown[9]. What seems to be even more humiliating is when this perceived feminine fluid is emitted, and in some cases even consumed, by men.

Milk was considered an undignified food to serve one's guests. In *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* Þorsteinn Kuggason is forced to take refuge from a storm at the house of his rival, the saga's eponymous hero. Þorsteinn's men are received quite literally coldly, as the fires are not lit up and they are not offered a change of clothes. To add insult to injury, the guests are offered "cheese and curds" to eat. The host makes sure the insult was clear to the guest: "Bjorn asked Thorstein, "What do people call this food in your district?" He answered that they called it cheese and curds. Bjorn said, "We call this food 'enemies' cheer"[10]. The serving

[7] *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, transl. by B. Scudder, New York 2005, p. 67; *Auðunn laut þá niðr ok þreif upp skyrkyllinn ok sletti framan í fang Gretti ok bað hann fyrst taka við því, er honum var sent. Grettir varð allr skyrugr; þótti honum þat meiri smán en þó Auðunn hefði veitt honum mikinn áverka.Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, [in:] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar. Bandamanna saga. Odds þáttr Ófeigssonar*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit VII, Reykjavík 1936, p. 96.

[8] D. Valenze, *Milk: A Local and Global History*, New Haven 2011, pp. 23–30.

[9] A. Finlay, *Monstrous Allegations. An Exchange of ýki in Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, "Alvíssmál" 10 (2001), pp. 124–141, Ármann Jakobsson, *The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch: The Meanings of Troll and Ergi in Medieval Iceland*, [in:] *Nine Saga Studies: The Critical Interpretation of the Icelandic Sagas*, Reykjavík 2013, pp. 93–123, Ármann Jakobsson, *The Troll Inside You: Paranormal Activity in the Medieval North*, Earth, Milky Way [sic], 2017.

[10] *The Saga of Bjorn: Champion of the men of Hitardale*, transl. by A. Finlay, Enfield Lock Middlesex 2000, pp. 64–65. *Bjǫrn spurði Þorstein: "Hvern veg kalla menn slíka vist í yðvarri*

of these milk products as food is meant to make Bjǫrn's rival feel unwelcome. In *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*, the wayward skáld answers King Haraldr harðráði's implied lack of hospitality by running off from his retinue and eating buttered porridge[11]; this play on convention means that the connotation between bad hospitality and serving of milk products was prevalent.

A more extreme case where milk products serve as a sign of bad hospitality can be found in *Egils saga*. There, Ármóðr skegg serves the violent protagonist and his companions skyr without informing them that better food will come afterwards.

The drunk Egill sees this as a severe breach in rules of hospitality. As a response,

> "He stood up and walked across the floor to where Armod was sitting, seized him by the shoulders and thrust him up against a wall-post. Then Egil spewed a torrent of vomit that gushed all over Armod's face, filling his eyes and nostrils and mouth and pouring down his beard and chest. Armod was close to choking, and when he managed to let out his breath, a jet of vomit gushed out of it. All Armod's men who were there said that Egil had done a base and despicable deed by not going outside when he needed to vomit, but had made a spectacle of himself in the drinking-room instead. Egil said 'Don't blame me for following the master of the house's example. He's spewing his guts out just as much as I am"[12].

Egill had just before eagerly eaten a large amount of skyr, which implies that the vomit would contain the white material. When he spews, Egill transfers the shame onto the host himself. But there is also something shameful about this behavior, and Egill himself acknowledges this; after all, the host Ármóðr him-

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sveit?" Hann svarar ok kvað menn kalla ost og skyr. Bjǫrn mælti: "En vér kǫllum slíka vist óvinafagnað, *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, [in:] *Borgfirðinga sögur, Hœnsna-Þóris saga, Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu, Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa, Heiðarvíga saga, Gísls þáttr Illugasonar*, ed. by S. Nordal,G. Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit III, Reykjavík 1938, p. 185. I wish to thank Joanne Shortt Butler for pointing out this scene to me.

[11] *Morkinskinna* I, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, Íslenzk fornit XXIII, Reykjavík 2011, pp. 274–275. See Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging, Morkinskinna and Icelandic Identity, C. 1220*, Viking Collection 22, Odense 2014, p. 178, and Y. Tirosh, *Scolding the Skald: The Construction of Cultural Memory in Morkinskinna's Sneglu-Halla* þáttr, "European Journal of Scandinavian Studies" 47 (2017), p. 7 ft. 11, as well as the *þáttr*'s Flateyjarbók version where the connection between Halli's actions and the king's lack of hospitality are made clearer.

[12] *Egil's saga*, transl. by B. Scudder, [in:] *The Sagas of Icelanders: A Selection*, ed. by Ö. Thorsson, London 2001, p. 139. *stóð hann þá upp ok gekk um golf þvert, þangat er Ármóðr sat; hann tók hǫndum í axlir honum ok kneikði hann upp at stǫfum. Síðan þeysti Egill upp ór sér spýju mikla, ok gaus í andlit Ármóði, í augun ok nasarnar ok í munninn; rann svá ofan um bringuna, en Ármóði varð við andhlaup, ok er hann fekk ǫndinni frá sér hrundit, þá gaus upp spýja. En allir mæltu þat, þeir er hjá váru, húskarlar Ármóðs, at Egill skyldi fara allra manna armastr ok hann væri inn versti maðr af þessu verk, er hann skyldi eigi ganga út, er hann vildi spýja, en verða eigi at undrum inni í drykkjustofunni. Egill segir: 'Ekki er at hallmæla mér um þetta, þótt ek gera sem bóndi gerir, spýr hann af ǫllu afli, eigi síðr en ek.'* (*Egils saga*, ed. by Sigurðr Nordal, Íslenzk fornit II, Reykjavík 1933, p. 226).

self vomits in response to Egill spewing on him, which in a way equates the two actions, though Egill's defecation is intentional and forceful. It is possible that the force by which Egill pins Ármóðr to the wall, the slowed down pacing of the scene, the untypically (and unpleasantly) descriptive focus on the vomit, and Egill's need to justify himself, all point to there being another layer to this liquid emission. A hint for this can be found in *Ljósvetninga saga*, where it is described how Guðmundr inn ríki's henchman Rindill is speared and spews skyr at his assailant, Ísleifr/Eilífr[13]. Rindill's spewing skyr parallels Egill's vomiting on his host. As Gísli Sigurðsson has suggested, given the rumors concerning Rindill's patron's sexuality, this spewing of skyr could be meant to indicate another white liquid; semen[14]. The fact that Rindill was left alone with a single companion to look for his horse supports this. In his study of phallic symbolism, Thorkil Vanggaard introduced the concepts of phallic aggression and the aggressive erection, that assert that beyond an erotic element, sexual acts of penetration could also be a means for men to establish their dominance over other men[15]. The forcefulness of Egill's spewing suggests a reading wherein by vomiting on Ármóðr skegg, Egill asserts his dominance, and shows phallic aggression; the white skyr that accompanies the vomit would then symbolize semen. But since Ármóðr skegg spews back at Egill, the need arises to further assert his male dominance by emasculating Ármóðr; removing an eye and cutting off a beard can both be read as emasculating actions[16]. In addition, Egill removed from Ármóðr the very thing that had given him his nickname skegg; his beard.

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[13] "Rindil had curds and ate quicly because it was thin; then they rode away into the woods where men jumped out at them. It was Eilif and another man with him. Not much time was taken to exchange greetings. He plunged a halberd into Rindil, and the curs spurted out of him and all over Eilif",*The Saga of the People off Ljosavatn*, transl. Th.M. Anderson and W.I. Miller, [in:] *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol. IV, p. 228. *Rindill hafði skyr ok mataðisk skjótt, því at skyrit var þunnt; ok riðu síðan út frá garði ok svá í skoginn. Þá hleypðu menn í móti þeim. Ok var þar kominn Eilífr ok maðr með honum, – þar varð fátt af kveðjum –, ok setti þegar kesjuna á Rindil miðjan, en skyrit sprændi ór honum ok upp á Eilíf.Ljósvetninga saga*, [in:] *Ljósvetninga saga með þáttum, Reykdœla saga ok Víga-Skútu. Hreiðars þáttr*, ed. by Björn Sigfússon, Íslenzk fornrit X, Reykjavík 1940, pp. 1–106, p. 55.

[14] G. Sigurðsson, *The Immanent Saga of Guðmundr ríki*, transl. by N. Jones, [in:] *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse world. Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. by J. Quinn et al., (Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 18), Turnhout 2007, pp. 201–218.

[15] T. Vanggaard, *Phallós*, Copenhagen 1969, pp. 93–103, see also P. Meulengracht Sørensen *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, The Viking collection: studies in Northern civilization 1, transl. by J. Turville-Petre, Odense 1983, p. 27 as well as pp. 51–61, and G.L. Evans, *Men and Masculinities...*, pp. 25–26.

[16] Cf. C. Phelpstead, *Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow: Hair Loss, the Tonsure, and Masculinity in Medieval Iceland*, "Scandinavian Studies" 85:1 (2013), pp. 1–19, esp. 9–10, and S. Lawing. *Perspectives on Disfigurement in Medieval Iceland: Cultural Study Based on Old Norse Laws and Icelandic Sagas*, Doctoral thesis, Reykjavík 2016, pp. 94–5.

Immersion in milk products could be seen as humiliating: in *Íslendingasaga*'s account of the *Flugumýrarbrenna*, or burning of Flugumýri, when Gizurr Þorvaldsson's farmstead is almost completely overrun by his enemies, the head of the household hides in a barrel of whey to avoid the battle and fire. When the burners search the room in which he hides, they thrust their spears into the whey barrel. It is then related that "Gizurr moved his hands before his stomach very gently, so that they would barely feel that something was there"[17]. Gizurr is here described as caressing these long shafted objects, which cause him to emit a liquid; blood. This immersion of whey alongside the gentle handling of phallic objects puts Gizurr in a passive role. The impression that this action is seen as a breach in masculinity norms that needs to be remedied is strengthened when after the fire the freezing Gizurr is warmed between the thighs of a woman, which helps to reassert his masculinity. However, not every dip into whey is seen as a humiliation; in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* immersion into sour whey is seen as a practical solution to avoid a fire rather than a source of humiliation[18], Gísli's father's nickname 'súrr' notwithstanding[19].

The Christian Mind

Another kind of approach towards milk products can be detected when we are presented with a Christian hero. The version of *Morkinskinna* preserved in the Hulda-Hrokkinskinna manuscripts contains the story *Þorgríms þáttur Hallasonar*, a tale about an Icelandic follower of King Óláfr helgi. The narrative relates that during Ember Week a snowstorm hits Þorgrímr and his family as they are travelling. Þorgrímr displays his valiance by helping others, while risking himself, but eventually succumbs and falls unconscious. Þorgrímr is brought into a farm and is given warm milk to resuscitate him, and is thus saved. Later on, when he arrives in Norway, he is met by the retinue of Kálfr Árnason, who battled against King Óláfr helgi in the battle of Stiklastaðir. Kálfr offers Þorgrímr and several other Icelanders winter lodgings, and Þorgrímr shows himself to be uncomfortable in

[17] My translation: *Gizurr hafði lófana fyrir kviði sér sem hógligast, at þeir skyldi sem sízt kenna at fyrir yrði*. *Sturlunga saga* I, ed. by J. Jóhannesson et al., Reykjavík 1946, p. 493.

[18] *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, [in:] *Vestfirðinga sögur: Gísla saga Súrssonar, Fóstbræðra saga, Þáttr Þormóðar, Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings, Auðunar þáttr Vestfirzka, Þorvarðar þáttr krákunefs*, ed. by Björn K. Þórólfsson, Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit VI, Reykjavík 1943, pp. 12–13 chapter 3 and pp. 30–31 chapter 9 of the longer version, extant in NKS 1181 fol. and AM 149 fol., marked as Y in the Íslenzk fornrit edition. For a discussion of the variance between different Gísla saga redactions, see E. Lethbridge, *Gísla saga Súrssonar: Textual Variation, Editorial Constructions and Critical Interpretations*, [in:] *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse saga literature*, ed. by J. Quinn, E. Lethbridge, Odense 2010, pp. 123–152.

[19] *Gísla saga Súrssonar*…, p. 15 and p. 15 ft. 1.

the presence of the man who was involved in his sovereign's death. Things are exacerbated when two Icelandic brothers point out Þorgrímr's cold attitude. One of these brothers, Bjarni, recites a poem composed in Kálfr's honor; a poem full of praise for the magnate's part in the battle of Stiklastaðir. This becomes too much for Þorgrímr to handle, and he calls out Kálfr for his pride in killing the saintly king. To this Bjarni replies: "Be quiet, villain. Out in Iceland you pretended to be ill so that you could be fed milk during the fast"[20]. Þorgrímr's consumption of milk, then, is used as a source of shame; but this time from a Christian perspective; the follower of King Óláfr helgi is mocked for consumption of milk that is against Christian law; but it is hard to avoid the suspicion that the material itself nevertheless makes the shaming even worse.

Flóamanna saga has its protagonist Þorgils recreate scenes from the lives of saints and Christ in various ways[21]. In one such scene, the Christian Þorgils irresponsibly leaves his wife alone with a group of disgruntled enslaved men, after they are all shipwrecked. As is the wont of shipwrecked enslaved men, these men kill Þorgils's wife. The Christian man must now deal with the issue of feeding his newborn son, lest it starve and perish. He solves the issue by cutting his nipple. Initially blood drips out, but then, slowly, milk starts to come out, and the child is breastfed by the father. Þorgils's story is not told to shame the main character by having him emit the female liquid; *au contraire*, Þorgils's actions are meant to retrace those of male and female saints whose wounds drew milk rather than blood and the Holy Virgin and Christ Himself emitting milk from their nipples[22].

But as Siân Grønlie points out, the *Flóamanna saga* narrative does not feel entirely comfortable with its lactating protagonist. In one redaction of the text, we are told that before cutting his nipple Þorgils "bravely called to mind his manhood"[23]. Later on a dispute starts between a follower of Þorgils and one of Eiríkr inn rauði's followers in – tellingly – the queue for the toilet, because the latter

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[20] *Thorgrim Hallason's Tale*, transl. by S. Brumfit, [in:] *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol. 3, ed. by Viðar Hreinsson, Reykjavík 1997, p. 486. *Þegiðu, skemmdarmaðrinn; þú slótt á þik skrópasótt, til þess at hellt var í þik mjólk á imbrudǫgum út á Íslandi*. *Þorgríms þáttur Hallasonar*, [in:] *Eyfirðinga sögur: Víga-Glúms saga, Ögmundar þáttur dytts, Þorvalds þáttur tasalda, Svarfdæla saga, Þorleifs þáttur jarlsskáld, Valla-Ljóts saga, Þorgríms þáttur Hallasonar*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, Íslenzk fornrit IX, Reykjavík 1956, p. 301.

[21] H. Antonsson, *Damnation and Salvation in Old Norse Literature,* Woodbridge, Suffolk 2018, pp. 171–177.

[22] C.W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley, CA 1984, pp. 122–123, 132–133, S. Grønlie, *Saint's Life and the Saga Hero: Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature*, Cambridge 2017, p. 21, H. Antonsson, *Damnation and Salvation...*, p. 175.

[23] S. Grønlie, *Saint's Life...*, p. 175. *minntist þá drengilega á karlmennsku*, *Flóamanna saga*, [in:] *Harðar Saga. Bárðar Saga. Þorskfirðinga Saga. Flóamannasaga...*, ed. by Þ Þórhallur Vilmundarson, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Íslensk Fornrit XIII, Reykjavík 1991, p. 288.

states about Þorgils that "it's not clear to me whether he is a man or a woman"[24], due to his misfortunes. Likewise, when Þorgils's son first drinks breastmilk from a woman, the surprisingly talkative newborn responds that it is of a different color or appearance than his father's breastmilk[25]. With this statement, the son implies that his father is nothing like a woman, even though he has breastfed him. The narrative reveals that while Þorgils is certainly respected in the narrative for his Christian action, the association with the female action of emitting milk nevertheless causes unease.

The Scientific Mind

In her often – quoted 1993 article "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe", Carol Clover pointed out the *blauðr/blautr* weak, soft, and wet semantic field in Old Norse literature[26]. She also noted that "I also presume that in the same way that the thirteenth-century authors were cognizant of other medical learning (the theory of humors, for example), they were cognizant of the learned hot/cool model of sexual difference-but they did not insinuate that model into the "historical" texts"[27]. It is indeed hard to dismiss an awareness of contemporary scientific thought in Old Norse learned society. In the second half of the thirteenth century we find AM 655 XXX 4to that cites Pedanius Dioscorides and Galen, both of whom applied humor theory in their treatments. The late fourteenth century manuscript AM 194 8vo features an extensive medical treatise based on the work of Hippocrates[28]. Hippocrates (or the Hippocratic

[24] *óvíst er mér, hvárt hann er heldr karlmaðr en kona*, *Flóamanna saga…*, p. 305. This echoes a similar accusation made by Flosi in *Brennu-Njáls saga* (*Flóamanna saga*…, p. 305 ft. 1.).

[25] *sagði hann mjólk föður síns ekki svá lita*, *Flóamanna saga…*, p. 299. On this see also G. Evans, *Men and Masculinities*, pp. 101–102.

[26] C.J. Clover, *Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe*, "Representations"44 1993, pp. 1–28. Clover's understanding of Old Norse sexual difference was influenced by the much problematized one-sex model offered by Thomas Laqueur, and she therefore did not distinguish between the male and female sex in her writing on the topic. See T.W. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge 1990. For criticisms of his model, see K. Park and R. Nye, *'Destiny Is Anatomy'. Essay review of Thomas Laqueur: Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, *The New Republic* (February 18, 1991), pp. 53–57, J. Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*, Cambridge 1993, Park 1995. See also B. Bandlien, *Man or Monster? Negotiations of Masculinity in Old Norse Society*, "Acta Humaniora" 236, Oslo 2005, pp. 10–11, and G. Evans. *Men and Masculinities* pp. 12–15, as well as M. Mayburd, *'Helzt þóttumk nú heima í millim…*': *A reassessment of Hervör in light of seiðr's supernatural gender dynamics*, "Arkiv för nordisk filologi" 129 (2014), p. 123 ft. 3 for criticism of Clover's one-sex model.

[27] C.J. Clover, *Regardless of Sex*…, p. 12.

[28] *Samfundet til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 37, Cod. Mbr. AM 194 8vo*, [in:] *Alfræði Íslenzk,* Vol. 1, *Islandsk encyklopædisk Litteratur*, ed. by K. Kålund,Copenhagen 1908, pp. 61–77.

corpus) is the one that introduced the hot/cold, dry/moist polarities in antiquity[29]. Most interesting of all is the *Heimspeki ok helgifræði* segment in the early-fourteenth-century *Hauksbók* that features an extensive description of the different humors and their effect. According to this study, depending on the balance of temperature and moist in the body, a person could take on different ailments and characteristics. This shows an elaborate understanding of the humor system and its influences.

But was the hot/cool and by implication dry/wet, as well as the humor theory, truly not integrated into saga literature, what Clover refers to as "historical" texts"? Medical learning was certainly integrated into some of these texts, the most memorable examples can be found in *Flateyjarbók*'s redaction of *Fóstbræðra saga*. We are told there about a certain Loðinn who is stricken with jealousy in regards to his lover: "He felt that she did not twine her fingers around his neck as she used to and that made him angry. A man's anger resides in his gall, his life-blood in his heart, his memory in his brains, his ambition in his lungs, his laughter in his spleen and his desire in his liver"[30]. Later, when a certain Egill is mistakenly identified as a killer, the reaction of this less than valiant man is related: "Every bone in his body shook, all two hundred and fourteen of them. All his teeth chattered, and there were thirty of them. And all the veins in his skin trembled with fear, and there were four hundred and fifteen of them"[31]. Yet another informative scene can be found in *Fóstbræðra saga*, after Þorgeirr receives news of his father's death: "His face did not redden because no anger ran through his skin. Nor did he grow pale because his breast stored no rage. Nor did he become blue because no anger flowed through his bones. In fact, he showed no response whatsoever to the news – for his heart was not like the crop of a bird, nor was it so full of blood that it shook with fear. It had been hardened in the Almighty Maker's forge to dare anything"[32]. Lars Lönnroth examines this example and others to suggest that we can find evidence for knowledge and application of physiognomy and humor theory in

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[29] J. Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference…*, p. 17.

[30] *The Saga of the Sworn Brothers*, transl. by M.S. Regal, [in:] *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol. 2, ed. by Viðar Hreinsson, Reykjavík 1997, p. 374, ch. 21. *Þykkir honum hon leggja sjaldnar tíu* [*fingr*] *upp sér um háls en verit hafði. Lyptisk þá lítt þat reiði í sínu rúmi, en reiði hvers manns er í galli, en líf í hjarta, minni í heilam metnaðr í lungum, hlátr í milti, lystisemi í lifr*, *Fóstbræðra saga*, [in:] *Vestfirðinga sögur…*, p. 226 ft. 1.

[31] *The Saga of the Sworn Brothers*, p. 378. *Qll bein hans skulfu, þau sem í váru hans líkama, en þat váru tvau hundruð beina ok fjórtán bein; tennr hans nǫtruðu, þær váru þrír tigir; allar æðar í hans hǫrundi pipruðu fyrir hrœzlu sakar, þær váru fjǫgur hunðruð ok fimmtán*, *Fóstbræðra saga…*, p. 233 ft. 3.

[32] *Eigi roðnaði hann, því at eigi rann honum reiði í hǫrund; eigi bliknaði hann, því at honum lagði eigi heipt í brjóst; eigi blánaði hann, því at honum rann eigi í bein reiði, heldr brá hann sér engan veg við tíðenda sǫgnina, því at eigi var hjarta hans sem fóarn í fugli; eigi var þat blóðfullt, svá at þat skylfi af hrœzlu, heldr var þat hert af inum hæsta hǫfuðsmið í ǫllum hvatleik*. *Fóstbræðra saga*..., pp. 127–128.

the sagas[33]. These examples show that at least some Icelandic saga authors/scribes incorporated their scientific learning into their 'historical' writing.

Treatment of milk could be argued to be another manifestation of this learned perception of the body. In a climactic moment of *Ljósvetninga saga*, the chieftain Guðmundr inn ríki confronts his nemesis Þorkell hákr by attacking him at his home. At the moment of confrontation, Þorkell mocks Guðmundr for his sweaty buttocks, and then, when Þorkell is almost vanquished, Guðmundr tumbles into a conveniently placed milk-vat. To this the dying Þorkell reacts by saying: "I imagine your ass has slaked itself at many streams, but I doubt it has drunk milk before"[34]. As Andersson and Miller point out, there are several layers of insult here. After Guðmundr's buttocks were established as sweaty, they now drink from the milk vat. Andersson and Miller also point out that Guðmundr's body is established here as inverted, somewhat bizarre and monstrous, since he drinks from his behind rather than from his mouth[35]. But the fact that Guðmundr's body is described as emitting and taking in liquid also gives the sense of a porous body, borderless, and wet. Another occurrence of this kind is in Guðmundr's final scene in the saga. After a farmer tells him what seems to be a cursed dream, Guðmundr proceeds to drink warm milk. Each time his wife presents him with the milk, he complains that it is not hot. After the third time this occurs, he sits back and dies. After his brother Einarr is called from his farm to come and handle the body, he says that "He must have been cold inside already since he felt nothing"[36]. To our modern ears this sounds like an emotional statement, especially considering the cold relations between the two brothers Einarr and Guðmundr as described in Ljósvetninga saga and elsewhere. But here, again, it should be considered that the

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[33] L. Lönnroth, *Kroppen som själens spegel: ett motiv i de isländska sagorna*, „Lychnos" 4 (1963), pp. 24–61. See also B. Þorgeirsdóttir, *Humoral Theory in the Medieval North: An Old Norse Translation of Epistula Vindiciani in Hauksbók*. "Gripla" 29 (2018), pp. 35–66 and C. Crocker, *Emotions*, [in:] *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson. New York and London, p. 243.

[34] *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland: Ljósvetninga saga and Valla-Ljóts saga*, ed. by T.M. Andersson and W.I. Miller, Stanford, CA 1989, p. 193. *nú kveð ek, at rassinn þinn hafi áðr leitat flestra lækjanna annarra, en mjólkina hygg ek hann ekki fyrr hafa drukkit*), *Ljósvetníngа saga: Eptir*, ed. by Þorgeir Guðmundsson, Þorsteinn Helgason, Sérprent úr Íslendinga sögum, 2 bindi. Kaupmannahöfn 1830, pp. 61–62. Note that I am using this edition rather than Íslenzk Fornrit due to my preference for its base manuscript AM 485 4to, over Björn Sigfússon's JS 624 4to for the saga's C-redaction. The following scene appears almost verbatim in the earlier extant AM 561 4to, also known as the A-redaction manuscript.

[35] T.M. Andersson, W.I. Miller, *Law and Literature...*, p. 193, ft. 125. See also *Ǫlkofra þáttr*, p. 94, Meulengracht Sørensen, *Unmanly Man...*, p. 37. and L. Keens, *Scenes of a Sexual Nature: Theorising Representations of Sex and the Sexual Body in theSagas of the Icelanders*, Doctoral thesis, London 2016, pp. 194–199.

[36] T.M. Andersson, W.I. Miller, *Law and Literature...*, p. 204. *kaldr hefir hann nú verit innan, er hann kendi sín eigi*, *Ljósvetníngа saga...,* p. 70.

coldness Einarr and the narrator refer to could be also a bodily condition: Guðmundr is described as cold, and before as wet. In the medieval manuscript Hauksbók, we learn how different humors in a person influence their characteristics; when blood phlegm is the most prominent, the man is "of cold nature and wet. Unsteady, alert and a coward"[37]. Guðmundr described as cold and wet at the end of his narrative, therefore, fits with his general portrayal in the saga as a cowardly and unpredictable individual. Elsewhere I have argued that Guðmundr inn ríki's portrayal is the embodiment of the Icelandic concept of *argr*[38], an unmanly man. The present analysis suggests that Guðmundr could also be seen as a phlegmatic man. This, in turn, points to the high similarities between the *argr* and phlegmatic man; both were unmanly men, in the eyes of medieval Icelanders.

Gender and the Old Norse Polysystem

The saga, Christian and scientific minds are by no means isolated. Lars Lönnroth has suggested, for example, that concepts such as *feigr* and *gæfa*, which we perceive as native to the Icelandic sources, could actually show Christian influence as well[39]. And, indeed, as he also pointed out, "even a layman in thirteenth-century Iceland may have had a "clerical mind" ... a mind formed by the Christian culture of medieval Europe"[40]. Clover too argued that "Christian resonances" could at times be detected in saga literature[41]. It is hard at times to tell apart what is Christian and what is 'scientific', since the same basic belief system leads both approaches in medieval times. Even the examples have, at times, a multiplicity of voices. In Bjarnar saga, for example, when Þorsteinn Kuggason's men are served cheese and curds, we are told that this is done "for fasts were not yet established by law"[42]. The narrative finds it necessary to clarify this, either because it wants to absolve Björn and Þorsteinn from breaking of Christian decree, or because it wants to qualify the insult of serving the cheese and curds as pertaining to the saga mind rather than the Christian mind. Be it as it may, the mere mention of the fast brings Christianity into the narrative and makes it clear that the audience (the ideal one, at least) would be people who cared about whether or not their saga character offended Christian law or not.

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[37] My translation: *af kalldri natturu. ok vátri. vstǫðugr. vakr ok udiarfr*. *Hauksbók*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, København 1892–1896, p. 181.

[38] Y. Tirosh, *Argr Management: Vilifying Guðmundr inn ríki in Ljósvetninga saga*, [in:] *Bad Boys and Wicked Women. Antagonists and Troublemakers in Old Norse Literature*, ed. by D. Hahn, A. Schmidt, Münchner Nordistische Studien 27, Munich 2016, pp. 240–72.

[39] L. Lönnroth, *Kroppen som själens spegel*…

[40] L. Lönnroth, *Njáls Saga: A Critical Introduction*, Berkeley, CA 1976, p. 105.

[41] C. Clover, *Regardless of sex*…, p. 2.

[42] *því at eigi var þá enn lǫgtekin fasta, Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*..., p. 185.

Despite the many intersections, however, by taking saga authors' treatment of milk and showing how different texts express different perceptions of gender and sex difference, we are able to better understand the different forces operating within medieval Icelandic society. These forces were not only separated by genre; all of these can also be apparent in the same text, and it is possible to identify them and where they operate. A polysystemic approach allows to find moments of intersection, but also moments when an individual perception is fore fronted.

Medieval Icelandic society showed a clear apprehension when it came to milk products. There seemed to be specific situations in which these could be served, but people had to be careful how they consumed it, used it, and interacted with it, since the wrong usage could be a source of shame. Christian decrees regarding milk products were in many times excuses for perpetuating pre-existing notions; this is most apparent in the case of Þorgrímr, who is shamed for consuming warm milk during a fast, but the implication is on his manhood, and being put in this helpless position. What came to them from learned treatises echoed what they already knew from local tradition; that there was something problematic about certain aspects of milk products, and that one must be wary when handling this material.

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MLEKO, MĘSKOŚĆ I POZBAWIENI HUMORU WIKINGOWIE – GENDER W STARONORDYCKIM POLISYSTEMIE

Streszczenie

Po niedawnej dyskusji na temat różnorodnych poglądów na płeć w literaturze staronordyckiej artykuł ten promuje wielosystemowe podejście do tematu. Teoria wielosystemowa sugeruje, że w każdym społeczeństwie działa wiele systemów narracji literackiej, które reprezentują różne siły społeczne. Teorię tę stosowano głównie w dyskusji na temat gatunku, ale tutaj sugeruje się, że można ją zastosować w odniesieniu do innych dziedzin nauki, takich jak płeć. Artykuł koncentruje się na podejściu do mleka i przetworów mlecznych w odniesieniu do męskości w korpusie *Sag o Islandczy-*

kach jako studium przypadku, oddzielając trzy systemy: umysł sagi, umysł chrześcijański i umysł naukowy. W dyskusji o umyśle sagi w artykule przeanalizowano przykłady upokorzenia związanego z mlekiem w *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*, *Sadze o Egilu* i *Ljósvetninga saga*, a także współczesnych *Islendinga sogur*. W dyskusji o chrześcijańskim umyśle *Þorgríms þáttur Hallasonar* i *Flóamanna saga* rzucają światło na ambiwalentne podejście do mleka w chrześcijańskich ramach myślowych. Dyskusja naukowego umysłu stwierdza najpierw, że autorzy *Sag o Islandczykach* rzeczywiście włączyli naukową wiedzę do swoich tekstów, a następnie pokazują wykorzystanie mleka w *Ljósvetninga saga* do przedstawienia jej głównego bohatera, Guðmunda inn ríkiego, jako człowieka flegmatycznego. Po ustaleniu tych różnych sposobów postrzegania uznawane są momenty skrzyżowania w ramach różnych systemów płci. Ten artykuł stanowi wkład zarówno w badania nad płcią i męskością staronordycką, jak i obrazuje podejście do produktów mlecznych w średniowiecznej Skandynawii.

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STUDIA I MATERIAŁY Z DZIEJÓW EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ

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"MAN IS MAN'S DELIGHT": THE MAIDEN KING IN THE LONGER VERSION OF *HRÓLFS SAGA GAUTREKSSONAR*[1]

Introduction

In a classic monograph study published in 1938, Eric Wahlgren coined the term "maiden king" for a character trope frequently encountered in medieval Icelandic romance literature: a female protagonist who assumes rulership under a male royal title and not infrequently becomes the target of a male protagonist's bridal quest[2]. Reading this figure as a distinct literary motif, Wahlgren postulates

[1] I extend my thanks to the organizers and audience of the conference on "Gendering Viking-Age Rulership in Medieval Scandinavia", which took place at University of Silesia in Katowice in February 2019 and where an earlier version of this article was presented. Lead quotation in the title taken from the Eddic poem *Hávamál*: "maðr er manns gaman" (*Sæmundar-Edda. Eddukvæði,* ed. by Finnur Jónnsson, Reykjavík 1905, p. 30). All translations in the present study are mine unless otherwise noted.

[2] For more on maiden kings as a distinct literary motif, see M.E. Kalinke, *The Misogamous Maiden Kings of Icelandic Romances*, "Scripta Islandica" 37 (1986), pp. 47–71; M.E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland.* Ithaca, NY 1990 (esp. pp. 66–108); Henric Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom. Sexualitet, homosocialitet och aristokratisk identitet på det senmedeltida Island*, Göteborg 2009 (esp. pp. 127–130 and 155–186); Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *From Heroic Legend to 'Medieval Screwball Comedy'? The Origins, Development and Interpretation of the Maiden-King Narrative*, [in:] *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, A. Lassen, A. Ney, Reykjavík 2012, pp. 229–249; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power,* New York 2013 (esp. pp. 107–133). Marianne Kalinke further elaborates on distinguishing characteristics of the maiden king formula as it has largely been accepted in scholarship: "1. the desired bride is the sole ruler, *meykóngr*... of

that "the notion of a Maiden King took hold of the saga writers' imagination to the extent that it became a convention"[3] – popular in medieval Iceland to the point that imported queen characters became re-stamped as "maiden kings" (*meykóngar*) in many translated romances[4].

Following in Wahlgren's footsteps, saga scholarship on maiden kings has overwhelmingly focused on classification, origins, and formulaic elements of this literary motif – approaching *meykóngar* collectively as a category group, or even as a sub-genre. References to "the maiden-king sagas" abound in literary studies, and while this makeshift label serves only as a focusing prism and not a claim of generic demarcation, it does however contribute to reading maiden king characters as belonging to a collective stock group or distinct category. Their forceful independence and challenge of gender norms have been linked to fabled martial females of Old Norse legendary matter such as valkyries and shieldmaidens[5]; their misogamous" latter's sometimes violent conquest of their persons were linked to

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a country [...]; 2. she disdains and mistreats all suitors; 3. like other suitors, the hero is humiliated and rejected...; 4. the hero returns to engage in a battle of wits and wiles with the misogamous ruler; 5. only after the hero has discerned the woman's major flaw is he able to outwit and then marry her" (*Bridal-Quest Romance*…, p. 36). Conflation of the maiden-king motif with the bridal-quest motif has recently been questioned, however: see Védis Ragnheiðardóttir, *Kynjuð yfirnáttúra. Samband kyngervis og galdurs í meykóngasögum*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Iceland, Reykjavík 2014, pp. 144–145. Available at: https://skemman.is/handle/1946/18194 (accessed: 8.18.2020).

[3] E. Wahlgren, *The Maiden King in Iceland*, The University of Chicago Libraries, Chicago 1938, p. 20.

[4] For the sake of disambiguation, it bears clarifying that medieval Icelandic literary corpus contains romances, or *riddarasögur*, of two kinds: Old Norse translations/adaptations of continental European romances as commissioned by Norwegian court in the thirteenth century (and thus imported to Iceland, as attested by their preservation in Icelandic manuscripts), and indigenous Icelandic romances that were written in Iceland as original compositions loosely inspired by continental courtly matter but not directly sourcing it. For an overview of *riddarasögur* and state of their scholarship, see Stefka Eriksen, *Courtly Literature*, [in:] *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Saga*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Sverrir Jakobsson, London and New York 2017, pp. 59–73; for a survey of translated *riddarasögur,* see J. Glauser, *Romance (Translated Riddarasögur)*, [in:] *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture,* ed. by R. McTurk, Oxford 2005, pp. 372–386. For more on development of romance literature in medieval Iceland, see M.E. Kalinke, *Scribe, Redactor, Author: The Emergence and Evolution of Icelandic Romance,* "Viking and Medieval Scandinavia" 8 (2012), pp. 171–198.

[5] C.J. Clover, *Maiden Warriors and Other Sons*, "Journal of English and Germanic Philology" 85 (1986), pp. 35–49; M.E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*…; L. Norrman, *Woman or Warrior? The Construction of Gender in Old Norse Myth*, [in:] *Old Norse Myths, Literature, and Society. Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference*, ed. by G. Barnes and M. Clunies Ross, Sydney 2000, pp. 375–85; W. Layher, *Caught Between Worlds: Gendering the Maiden Warrior in Old Norse*, [in:] *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the limits of Epic Masculinity*, ed. by S.S. Poor, J.K. Schulman, New York 2007, pp. 183–208; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdótir, *From Heroic Legend to 'Medieval Screwball Comedy'*…

"taming of the shrew" motif[6], while their endurance of these hardships drew comparisons with the Griselda trope made famous by Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales*[7]. Some connections with Byzantine and Arabic material have even been suggested, illustrating geographic and temporal breadth of this character type which appears not to have been unique to the North but present across many cultures[8]. Medieval Icelandic maiden king literary figure thus emerges as hybrid conglomeration of multiple literary layers, origins, and generic cross-pollinations. However, looking closer at specific textual sources for some of these comparisons, it becomes clear that they do not always add up, and do not always reflect the whole upon the part. Not all maiden kings are cut from the same cloth: there are variable degrees of severity or laity in their interaction with male protagonists, and variable degrees of gender dynamics and narrative tensions such differences afford[9]. While categorizing literary motifs sheds light on sagas' transmission history and is valuabe for source criticism, the maiden-king category demarcation somewhat occludes these characters' individual nuances and unique narrative details from receiving due scrutiny in closer readings on their own merits. An overzealous emphasis on formulaic motifs may inadvertently lead to missing the trees for the forest, losing sight of textual variation and projecting upon it expectations of conformity to a pre-assumed generic standard.

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[6] *Clári Saga*, ed. by G. Cederschiöld, Halle 1907, p. xvi. For an exploration of medieval Icelandic romances' occasional depictions of sexual violence in strictly historical context, see H. Bagerius, *Romance and Violence: Aristocratic Sexuality in Late Medieval Iceland*, "Mirator" 14:2 (2013), pp. 79–96. These violent undercurrents may be seen as literary reactions to the overt idealizations of the feminine ideal that many medieval romances engage in. For more on these literary engantlements, see R.H. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, Chicago 1991.

[7] Shaun F.D. Hughes, *Klári saga as Indigenous Romance*, [in:] *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland. Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. by K. Wolf, J. Denzin, Islandica 54, Ithaca, NY 2008, pp. 135–163, p. 152.

[8] M. Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, London 1934, pp. 92–93, 62–63; F. Amory, *Things Greek and the Riddarasögur*, "Speculum" 59 (1984), pp. 509–523, p. 517; M.E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*…, pp. 106–108. There are also some intriguing and heretofore unexplored parallels with Slavic folklore, namely in the figure of Царь-Девица (*Tsar-devitsa*, translated from Russian as literally "Tsar-maiden") whose royal title is likewise gendered as male. For a detailed elucidation of extant scholarship on origins and development of maiden kings as a literary motif in medieval Iceland, see Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *From Heroic Legend to 'Medieval Screwball Comedy'*…

[9] As noted by Daniel Sävborg, many *riddarasögur* do not indulge in sexual violence towards women (*Sagan om kärleken. Erotik, känslor och berättarkonst i norrön litteratur*, Uppsala 2007, p. 578), which makes positing said violence as part of the maiden-king categorical formula not unproblematic. Ármann Jakobsson likewise draws attenion to variance and complexity of these characters' functionalities within their own respective narratives (*Queens of Terror. Perilous Women in Hálfs saga and Hrólfs saga kráka*, [in:] *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi. Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9.2001*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, A. Lassen, A. Ney, Uppsala 2003, p. 174).

Previous studies on *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* have not been immune to such tendencies. This saga is notable for containing both the earliest extant appearance of a maiden king figure in indigenous Icelandic literature, and perhaps the most memorable[10]. Two extant redactions of this saga differ significantly (more on which below). In the longer version, the maiden king Þornbjörg takes on a whole male persona in addition to the kingly title, essentially becoming male: from that point onward the saga begins to reference this character by masculine name Þórbergr and using male pronouns. The shorter version contains no gender transformation and consistently calls this character Þórbjörg (in feminine form), whose only masculine feature is the kingly title she assumes. Saga variants differ in their portrayal of her suitor Hrólfr as well: in the shorter he is forward and brusque; in the longer he is articulate and courteous[11]. Literary interpretations of this saga have largely sought to reconcile the two versions and read one through lens of the other, tendentious of traditional philological pursuit of a "lost original" text.

Past assessments of Þornbjörg/Þórbergr/Þórbjörg have in no small part been shaped by genre expectations of the critics, not infrequently resulting in reading this character into the generic androcentric bridal quest formula, conflating her with a no less formulaic and generic maiden-king category group, and attempting to reconcile maiden kings with their pre-discursively assumed femininity[12]. This has resulted in some rather bizarrely overwrought interpretations of the maiden kings' behavior, such as claiming them to be "in a pre-pubertal state" until "the hero comes along and captures their hearts"[13], which neatly explains away their presumed submission to feminine gender norms. In similar vein, maiden kings' rulership has been discursively reduced to mere adolescent phase, resulting

[10] M.E. Kalinke singles out *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*'s female protagonist as "the most masculine of the maiden kings" because she alone is depicted as actually "engaging in activities, notably warfare, ordinarily reserved for the male" (*Bridal-Quest Romance*…, p. 72).

[11] A detailed comparison between the two versions of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* as far as they relate to characterizaion of its protagonists may be found in M.E. Kalinke, *Textual Instability, Generic Hybridity, and the Development of Some Fornaldarsögur*, [in:] *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development,* ed. by A. Lassen, A. Ney, Ármann Jakobsson. Reykjavík 2012, pp. 201–227 (see esp. pp. 204–209). It is worth noting that Hermann Pálsson and Peter Edwards follow the longer version in their English translation of the saga (*Hrolf Gautreksson: A Viking Romance*, Edinburgh 1974), yet their pronounced reluctance to present Þornbjörg's gender-bending at face value to English-speaking readers results in such editorial intrusions as inserting quotation marks in narrative references to "King Thorberg" (ibidem, p. 36) and persisting in occasional female pronoun usage after the original Old Icelandic text decisively switches to male pronouns in references to this character (ibidem, pp. 53, 66).

[12] E. Wahlgren, *The Maiden King in Iceland*; C.J. Clover, *Maiden Warriors and Other Sons*; Helga Kress, *Máttugar Meyjar: Íslensk fornbókmenntasag,* Reykjavík 1993; J. Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women*, Philadelphia 1996; L. Normann, *Woman or Warrior?...*; W. Layher, *Caught Between Worlds*…

[13] L. Norrman, *Woman or Warrior?...*, p. 381.

from these saga heroines "not having found their 'gender-identity' yet"[14] and terminating in "becoming aware of their female sexuality"[15]. The critics, however, do not elaborate any further on how this presumed "female sexuality" is to be understood in this context, or whether the term as it is used today is applicable here at all. In strained efforts to fit Þornbjörg into conventional maiden-king formula, the details setting her story apart have not been duly emphasized – such as the fact that she quite willingly takes up feminine activities, and that Hrólfr does not seem to capture Þornbjörg's heart as much as her army and her physical person in an open battle. Short of having actual intimate encounter on the battlefield that would make her, to quote Aretha Franklin, "feel like a natural woman", Þornbjörg does not easily fit the mold of such arguments[16]. It is not difficult to observe some preconceptions and category assumptions leaking into these interpretations: gender is interpreted as if intrinsically linked to sex as a point of departure, pitting this presumed femininity in opposition to these characters' masculine identities and taking for granted that they cannot coexist.

It is only fairly recently that different manuscript variants in saga literary corpus started attracting scholarly attention on their own textual merits, indicative of the paradigm shift in Old Norse philology "to an interest in the individual manuscript as a communicative act performed by the scribes"[17]. Instead of downplaying textual divergence as inferior or defective, it has become widely accepted that medieval textual variation attests to vibrancy and liveliness of a non-linear, rhizomatic literary growth[18]. As literary criticism increasingly started

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[14] Ibidem.

[15] J. Jochens, *Old Norse Images*…, p. 111. For a historical perspective and a departure from tendency to shoehorn *meykóngar* into narratives of female subordination, see H. Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom...,* which locates the source of the maiden kings' power precisely in their status as outsiders to social order. It must be emphasized, however, that Bagerius is discussing strictly the maiden kings in *riddarasögur*, without applying his conclusions to the unique situation of Þornbjörg. The maiden king may be seen as standing outside the social hierarchy, with no ties or obligations to a higher authority. Upon entering marital and/or sexual union with a male champion (which, in *riddarasögur*, does herald an end to the maiden king's sovereignty), a gendered social contract is established between the two (*Mandom och mödom...*, p. 197). Despite its usage of the gender binary, this reading is more convincing than Norrman's and Jochens' as it does not fixate on some unclarified and mysterious "discovery of sexual identity", and bases itself rather on contextualized historical social contract that a marital union brings within the gendered structure of medieval social order.

[16] A. Franklin, *(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman*, from the album *Lady Soul*, Atlantic Records, 1968.

[17] K.G. Johansson, *The Hauksbók: An Example of Medieval Modes of Collecting and Compilation*, [in:] *The Dynamics of the Medieval Manuscript. Text Collecting from a European Perspective*, ed. by K. Pratt, B. Besamusca, M. Meyer, A. Putter, Göttingen 2017, p. 131.

[18] See the classic manifesto by Bernard Cerquiglini for an eloquent elucidation of medieval scribal practices and manuscript transmissions (*In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, Baltimore 1999). For applications and ramifications of these new philological approaches to Old Norse manuscripts, see J. Quinn and E. Lethbridge ed. *Versions, Variability and*

favoring the particular over the general, critical theory in gender studies underwent the same phenomenological shift "in praise of the variant", turning to vantage points of individual narratives long dismissed as incompatible with hegemonic stemmatic hierarchies[19]. Revaluation of the maiden king episode in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is therefore very opportune.

The present article offers a close reading of the Þornbjörg/Þórbergr episode in the longer version of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, focusing on its creative repurposing of the maiden-king motif and engaging it on its own narrative merit as a singular text. Its unique narrative features are presently embraced as original and integral to the story it unfolds, without invalidating or downplaying them by generic or formulaic comparisons. While past scholarship on maiden kings has nearly universally focused on them from a post-feminist perspective of women studies[20], the present article departs from this trend and contends that critically engaging these figures through their masculinity offers a nuanced vantage point to examining gender dynamics in Old Norse imagination. Distancing from past attempts to relegate Þornbjörg/Þórbergr's masculinity to mere imitation, I posit this maiden king figure as inherently provocative, throwing into question discursive boundaries of gender demarcations and exposing their contingency.

By exaimining a narrative clearly intended as fictitious entertainment, I make no claim of mining it for grand historical truths. However, the very existence of such a narrative suggests that saga compilers and their audiences did not entirely take standard social norms at face value, but in circulating such stories participated in creative reinterrogation and reimagining of possibilities and affordances such fictional gender fusions and infusions could yield. Instead of seeking to generalize how literary portrayal of gender dynamics in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is supposedly reflective of pan-Nordic gender paradigms, the present inquiry aims rather to undo the strands of such generalizations by demonstrating how this longer saga variant's portrayal of gender dynamics is reflective of multimodal complexities inherent in culturally dynamic constructions of gender in medieval Icelandic milieu.

Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature, Odense 2010. See especially Matthew James Driscoll's chapter in the afore-cited volume (*The words on the page: Thoughts on philology, old and new*, [in:] *Versions, Veriability and Editorial Interpretations…*, pp. 87–104). For case studies on how these critical approaches bear upon a single saga's manuscript transmission, see E.Lethbridge, Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir ed. *New Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njáls saga:The historia mutila of Njála*, Kalamazoo, Michigan 2018.

[19] B. Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant*…, title.

[20] C.J. Clover, *Maiden Warriors...*; M.E. Kalinke, *The Misogamous Maiden Kings*…; M. McLaughlin, *The Woman Warrior: Gender, Warfare, Society in Medieval Europe*, "Womens Studies" 17 (1990), pp. 193–209; H. Kress, *Máttugar Meyjar*; J. Jochens, *Old Norse Images*…; L. Norrman, *Woman or Warrior?...*; W. Layher, *Caught Between Worlds*…; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *From Heroic Legend...*; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*…

Setting the scene

The oldest extant redaction of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is the so-called shorter version, whose composition has been dated to the late thirteenth century, while the saga's longer version has been dated to the late fourteenth[21]. As noted earlier, the most striking differences between the short and long versions are the longer version's narrative details concerning its female protagonist Þornbjörg after she becomes king: the change to a male name and the saga's inclusion of male pronouns in references to this character. This gender transformation has been interpreted by earlier critics as a stylistic influence or borrowing from the legendary *Hervarar saga* (whose titular protagonist receives the same gender-bending narrative treatment), a reading which inadvertently diminishes these features' own contextual originality and narrative impact[22]. If this interpretation of source derivation is correct, then the very fact these stylistic elements are present in the later, rather than earlier, extant version of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* points to non-linearity of its development, as well as to persistent interest in older indigenous legendary matter that appears not to have waned in late fourteenth-century Iceland amid preponderance of newer *riddarasögur* with their courtly aeshetics. These newer literary tastes do nevertheless bear upon *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar's* narrative tone, causing some consternation among saga critics due to its genre hybridity: while based upon indigenous legendary matter, and thus a *fornaldarsaga*[23], its obvious continental chivalric coloring distances it

[21] This manuscript dating follows L.M. Hollander, *The Relative Age of the Gautrekssaga and the Hrólfssaga Gautrekssonar*, "Arkiv för nordisk filologi" 29 (1912), pp. 120–134. The shorter version of the saga may be found in Ferdinand Detter's edition of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (in *Zwei Fornaldarsögur. Hrólfssaga Gautrekssonar und Ásmundarsaga Kappabana. Nach Cod. Holm. 7, 4to.*, Halle 1891), based on the manuscript Stockholm. Perg. 7 4to which Detter dates to the early fourteenth century. The longer version of the saga may be found in C.C. Rafn's edition (*Saga af Hrólfi konúngi Gautrekssýni*, [in:] *Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda eptir Gömlum Handritum*, Vol. 3, Kaupmannahöfn 1830) from which all subsequent citations in the present study will be drawn. Rafn's edition is based on the early sixteenth-century manuscript AM 152 fol. and its paper copy from the seventeenth century, AM 590 b-c 4to.

[22] F. Detter ed. *Zwei Fornaldarsögur...*, p. xii; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *From Heroic Legend*…, p. 244. Detter considered the longer saga version to be of little literary merit, remarking it was begging for editorial intervention ("sie eine erweiterte Redaction bietet", *Zwei Fornaldarsögur...*, p. v.) and all but worthless ("ebenfalls werthlos", ibidem, p. vii). The gender-shift from Þornbjörg to Þórbergr is interpreted by Detter as a later splitting of the "original" Þórbjörg into two names, male and female. Yet this onomastic permutation may just as well have occurred in reverse: it is not altogether unlikely that the gender-shifting Þornbjörg/Þórbergr character was conflated into the single name Þórbjörg in the saga's shorter redaction. For a detailed study on the dynamics of gender transformations in *Hervarar saga*, see M. Mayburd, *'Helzt þóttumk nú heima í millim...' A reassessment of Hervör in light of seiðr's supernatural gender dynamics*, "Arkiv för nordisk filologi" 129 (2014), pp. 121–164.

[23] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* owes its status as a *fornaldarsaga* thanks to C. C. Rafn, who included it in his 1829–1830 printed edition of *fornaldarsögur* and who indeed coined the term *for-*

from heroic tone of other *fornaldarsögur,* and its playful repurposing of some medieval romance formulae have led it to be featured alongside other indigenous *riddarasögur* in many studies, hence leading to the afore-referenced lumping of this saga's female protagonist into generic category formula of maiden kings at large. But what nuances does the saga's longer version hold if we approach its narrative on its own terms? Due to frequent conflation of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*'s two redactions in past literary studies, it becomes worthwhile at this point to offer a brief overview of the longer version's portrayal of Þornbjörg.

Þornbjörg enters the saga[24] as the only child of the Swedish king Eirekr, raised at home by her parents. The saga narrator distinctly comments on her femininity, noting that *hún var hvörri konu kænni... um allt þat er til kvennmanns handa kom* ("she was keenest among women... in all that concerns feminine pursuits")[25]. Þornbjörg, then, is quite aware of her own femininity – excelling at it, in fact – and her subsequent decisions, interests, and choices thus cannot be attribued to some deficiency or inadequate self-awarenes. Her proficiency in feminine matters notwithstanding, she occupies herself just as much in masculine activities, mastering jousting, sword-fighting and other warlike feats to the point of being equal to any capable knight. Her preference for those activities causes her father to voice displeasure and request her return to female chambers. Þornbjörg's reaction is to demand a part of his kingdom, stating her intent to use her masculine skills for military defense of the realm against the inevitable swarm of unworthy invading suitors. Eirekr sees the prudence in his daughter' 's request for sovereign autonomy and is willing to grant it, perhaps glad to be rid of responsibility for any consequences caused by her belligerence. There is a hint of intimidation and dismay in his deliberation, which further illustrates this request was no mere plea for self-defense but a product of a willful personality: *þótti honum eigi ólíkligt, at hann ok ríki hans fengi ónáðir af hennar ofsa ok kappgirnd; tekr þat ráðs, at hann fær henni til forráða þriðjúng af ríki sínu...* ("it seemed to him not unlikely that he and his realm would fall to unrest through her pride and ambition; he resolves to give her governance of a third of his kingdom")[26]. But Þornbjörg does not stop there. Once she assumes rulership over the third of Sweden from her autonomous personal estate at Ullarakr, she transforms herself into a full-fledged king in the masculine sense, publicly taking the male royal

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naldarsögur ("sagas of ancient times") in reference to this compilation's contents. For critical evaluations and reassessments of generic demarcations in referece to *fornaldarsögur*, see studies collected in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, A. Lassen, A. Ney Reykjavík 2012; see especially M.E. Kalinke, *Textual Instability, Generic Hybridity*…, pp. 201–227.

[24] Here and henceforth, references to "saga" and "saga nararter" denote strictly the longer version of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* on which this study focuses specifically. All citations are from C.C. Rafn's edition, which utilizes this longer version.

[25] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, p. 68.

[26] Ibidem, p. 69.

title and changing her name to the male form Þórbergr. Right in mid-sentence and without breaking pace, the saga switches to male pronouns and begins referring to this character as male: *skyldi ok engi maðr svá djarfr, at hana kallaði mey eða konu, en hvörr, et þat gjörði, skyldi þola harða refsíng* ("and no one should be so daring as to call him a maiden or a woman, and any who does so shall pay hard")[27], perhaps with a pinch of playful obeisance in timing this pronoun shift with reportage of the king's first public decree.

Several things are interesting here. Eirekr's initial reprimand aiming to lead Þornbjörg back towards the feminine only results in her more extreme entrenchment in the masculine. As in Newtonian laws of motion, any action prompts equal and opposite reaction. But instead of explaining away this behavior in light of presumed inability of the masculine to coexist with the feminine, as earlier critics of the saga have done, it is perhaps more fruitful to observe in this dynamic a reaction against the very "either-or" notion of gender. I choose not to read this as some teenage protest against authority, nor a rebellion against some oppressive patriarchy[28]. In her behavior pattern, Þornbjörg demonstrates her unwillingness to retract her steps and "go back" to an earlier status quo. She is, essentially, refusing to buy into the "either-or" construct of gender and cancel masculinity in favor of femininity, revealing the inadequacy of applying this model in her context. As further discussion below will show, Þornbjörg in her decisions and choices positions herself in such a way as to remain fully in control of her gender dynamics, mediating her public person in relation to others and actively renegotiating her enacted self-construct.

The man in drag

Returning to Þornbjörg's kingship in the saga, she clarifies, in her own words, that motivation to seek autonomous rule and develop military strength is to ward off invasions and unwanted suitors, knowing that marriage is inevitable in the long run and not wanting to take anyone against her will. These reasons are understandable in their logic and prudent foresight. Which invites the question: why assume the title of a male king and a male name – and presumably male clothing as well, as would befit a warlike monarch this character becomes?[29] She is already strong-willed and assertive even without any male titles or names. She is, furthermore, already versed in warcraft, and thus quite capable of defending her realm without resorting to any public acts. As practical as the reasoning behind her actions is,

[27] Ibidem.

[28] As, for instance, is done in H. Kress, *Máttugar Meyjar...*

[29] The saga does not explicitly mention it, but it is implied: in the chapters following, this king is portrayed in full armor and battle gear, obviously masculine attire.

assumption of an entire male identity on top of the royal title appears extraneous to her goal[30]. Does she, in fact, need it? Is this an attempt at self-assertion to ensure her masculinity (and, paradoxically, her femininity) will not be threatened? Is it indeed masculine, or is her masculinity itself only a put-on mask?

She may pass for a man in her kingly raiments, but she is not fooling anyone by her new name, attire, and behavior: Þornbjörg's assumption of the male Þórbergr persona is, emphatically and by her own design, very public. Her no less public prohibition against being called by any feminine term contains implicit and ironic reminder that she could still be perceived as such even after becoming *Svíakonungr* (Swedish king), as the saga narrator starts referring to this character from that point onward. What is more, it is her public display of assuming the masculine kingly identity that leads her renown to spread all the way for Hrólfr to hear about her and become interested[31]. Indeed, Þórbergr's masculinity is a large part of Hrólfr's attraction: it is hearing enumeration of her martial talents that draws his attention and causes him to regard her so highly as to initially count himself out of her league[32]. Is it all a sort of baiting, a provocation? With the tongue-in-cheek tone of the narrative, Þórbergr's act is hard to be taken entirely seriously. Yet at the same time, Þórbergr does not take this "gender game" lightly and amasses more sinister overtones: the saga alludes to many suitors whom this king had maimed and castrated[33].

Rather than making a switch from one gender to another, Þórbergr's behavior is destabilizing the very notion of gender binary. This character becomes a blur of ambiguity, neither entirely a man nor a woman. The very same seemingly-unquestionable masculine pursuits of building fortifications, sitting in a hall with weapons hanging on the walls in the company of armed retainers, and meting out cruel punishments to lesser underlings could at the same time be interpreted as startlingly effeminate in these desperate, hysterical efforts to put on a bold front, stemming from insecurity and a sense of personal weakness. If a male character was

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[30] Irina Matyushina points out that the female royal title *dróttning* – which can be applied as much to an unmarried ruler as to a king's wife – implies a somewhat limited power as compared to the sovereign male title *kongr* (Поэтика Рыцарской Саги [*Poetics of Riddarasaga*]), Moscow 2002, p. 88). Thus, even without assuming a male personal name, the adoption of the *kongr* title already makes a powerful statement on its own.

[31] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, chapter 6.

[32] Hrólfr's brother offers the following praise in describing her: *þat hef ek frétt, at Eirekr konungr í Svíþjóð á sér dóttur væna ok vitra, þá er Þornbjörg heitir ...en hún hefir suma hluti til jafns við hrausta riddara; þat er burtreið ok at skilmast við skildi ok sverði, þat hefir hún umfram allar konur, þær ek hefi spurn af* ("I have news that Eirekr king of Sweden has a daughter named Þornbjörg, fair and wise ... yet in some ways she is equal to valiant knights, namely jousting and fighting with shield and sword; in that she is foremost to all women that I know of"). This causes Hrólfr to ponder: *ekki berum vér áræði til slíkra hluta ...* ("we are not daring enough for such undertaking..."). *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, p. 73.

[33] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, p. 85.

doing all this, a modern reader might have called it "overcompensating". Þórbergr emerges thus as a somewhat effeminate king, prone to temper flares when his masculinity is being challenged[34]; – and yet, simultaneously and contrastingly, Þórbergr is a calculating, prudent monarch whose primary agenda is a muscular defense of the realm and who does not hesitate to draw sword and be foremost in battle. This character never ceases to be a woman – after all, she is still attracting bride-seekers – though she actively destabilizes the female identity category by assumption of this new name and public persona. Yet due to retaining a degree of female identity in the public eye (insofar as attracting bridal seekers), she succeeds in destabilizing her masculine identity at the same time, ending up as neither of the two – an "other" within an "other".

Þórbergr's hypermasculine identity may tickle the male saga characters the wrong way. There is something more unsettling about a woman in drag than in the open, no matter how jocular or tongue-in-cheek portrayal; especially a vicious woman in drag capable of castrating the suitors she does not fancy. Could her being in male guise deliver a harder blow on their own masculinity, suggesting that theirs too is a parody that can be stripped away? Does it induce the creepiness of dealing with this queer? The tension created by this destabilization of identity categories inevitably plays on the desire of this character's suitors, as they are greeted not with a courtly lady but with a figure potentially more masculine than even they are. The masculine and feminine cease to be discrete identities, becoming blended and inseparable. In the words of Judith Butler, as "both terms lose their internal stability and distinctness from each other […] the very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question"[35]. In the figure of Þórbergr, a new identity is being presented: a remix, a fusion and reconfiguration of gender norms into a nuanced pattern of behavior that avoids being easily gendered – simultaneously unsettling and yet (or perhaps all the more), to the suitors, irresistible. In approaching this figure with their courtship requests, they are of course casting themselves in light of transgressive behavior, inherently compromising and weakening their own gendered identities.[36]

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[34] Reacting to Hrólfr's reminder that the king is a woman, *konungr Þórbergr ... var svá óðr ok æfr, at hann vissi trautt, hvat hann skyldi at hafast*. (*Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, p. 88. "King Þórbergr ... was so wroth and furious, that he hardly knew what he should do"). Compare this momentary lapse of self-mastery with Skarphéðinn Njálsson's reaction to hearing a malicious insult in *Njáls saga*: *Ekki höfu vér kvenna skap ... at vér reiðimsk við öllu* (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit XII, Reykjavík 1944, p. 114. "We are not fashioned like a woman ... that we get enraged at everything"). For a discussion of this latter quote in broader context of medieval Icelandic constructions and conceptions of masculinity, see Ármann Jakobsson, *Masculinity and Politics in Njáls Saga*, "Viator" 31:1 (2007), pp. 191–215.

[35] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York 1990, p. 123.

[36] In this context, it is interesting to consider Judith Butler's description of the anatomy of male transgender attraction in this regard, arguing against interpreting it as yet another solidified entity

Hrólfr consciously demonstrates this transgressive aspect on his first audience with the king: *Hrólfr konungr tók hjálminn af hofði sér, ok hneigði konunginum, en stakk blóðreflinum í borðit, ok mælti: "Sitið heilir, herra, ok i náðum allt yðvart ríki"* ("King Hrólfr took off the helmet from his head, and bowed to the king, then struck the blade tip into the table and spoke: 'hail, my lord, and peace to all your realm'"). Having made this courteous entrance, he reveals the purpose of his visit: *Ek er svá kominn, herra, at binda við ýðr unaðsamligt eptirlæti, þat sem hvárr okkar má öðrum veita eptir boði náttúrunnar* ("I have come, sir, to bind with you in delightful ecstasy, which we may serve to each other at nature's bidding")[37]. In his obsequious manners, deferential tone, and consistent use of the masculine title *herra* ("sir, my lord"), Hrólfr is validating Þórbergr's royal person – fully befitting a courtly guest at a greater sovereign's court. His petition, given the context, comes across less like a marriage proposal and more like illicit solicitation of same-sex relation. Crossing the line of propriety, Hrólfr gambles on displacing his host's masculinity by the insolence of his request, yet in making this move – in public no less – he puts his own manhood in jeopardy. Þórbergr at once takes advantage of this opening by reinterpreting it as petition for food and drink (an embarassing reminder of suspicion voiced earlier that Hrólfr was driven to Sweden by famine ravaging his homeland), delivering a blow to Hrólfr's dignity and effectively reasserting dominance and control over the scene as "the host with the most". When Hrólfr makes the blunder of provocatively "gendering" Þórbergr as a woman, perhaps not a little exasperated by his own diminishing stature, it bears an air of desperation, which immediately backfires on him as he

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of one's own gender opposite: "As masculinity is brought into relief against a culturally intelligible female body, it is this dissonant juxtaposition and the sexual tension that its transgression generates that constitute the object of desire. In other words, the object of desire is neither some decontextualized female body nor a discrete yet superimposed masculine identity, but the destabilization of both terms as they come into erotic interplay" (*Gender Trouble…*, p. 123). It must be emphasized that queer theory, from Butler and onward, explicitly seeks to theorize individual modes of personhood by highlighting complex rhizomatic motility in gender constructs and identity categories, instead of creating alternative monolithic identity categories. Bringing up the above-cited passage is therefore meant to illustrate the inadequacy of applying conventional category labels to the individual in question, and is by no means intended to generalize this very particular mode of personhood. It is likewise worth noting that conflating gender with sexuality by resorting to discursive essentialist tautologies (as most of the previous scholarship on *meykongar* has done) is epistemologically naive. As a mode of personhood, gender is the sum of enacted iterations of a social identity which consequently emerges through the performance of those acts. It is therefore a socio-cultural product, and not innate. Instead of presupposing some "core identity that exists prior to performance", it becomes more accurate to observe that it is rather "through the performance of identity scripts that identity is produced" (Gareth Lloyd Evans and Jessical Claire Hancock, *Introduction*, [in:] *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, ed. by G.L. Evans, J.C. Hancock, Cambridge 2020, pp. 1–18, p. 3; see also R. Alsop, A. Fitzsimmons, K. Lennon, *Theorizing Gender: An Introduction*. Cambridge, UK, Maldon, MA 2002, pp. 97–100).

[37] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, p. 87.

is shamefully routed from the hall and forced to make a humiliating escape – yet with his transgressive attraction intact, for he will return again.

While the maiden kings' misogamy and trading rounds of humiliation are common tropes in medieval romances, the saga narrator artfully turns the tables on conventional formulae by inverting gender expectations and recasting this scene in another literary motif: an upstart visitor challenging the more powerful host in his own hall[38].

The Þórr factor

The irony of the cross-dressing, temperamental, posturing *Svíakonungr* calling himself by the most masculine-prefixed name, Þórbergr, could not have gone unnnoticed by saga-audiences familiar with Norse mythological matter. The symbolism of this name prefix escalates from remembering how Þórr, enshrined in popular imagination as the hypermasculine champion of the Æsir, had an awkward and uncomfortable stint with cross-dressing in the Eddic poem *Þrymskviða*: bereft of his hammer, he had to penetrate Jötunheim dressed as Freyja to get it back. The poem carries an obvious layer of slapstick humor, whose entertainment value has not gone unnoticed in previous scholarship[39].

Yet how feminine is Freyja, and to what extent does the audience's assumption of her gender govern the poem's interpretative affordances? It may be auspicious at this moment to consider Freyja's own masculinity, which colors the story as perhaps a little less ironic. Þórr is not dressing up as any ordinary girl: to impersonate Freyja is to immerse oneself into a twisted dimension of otherness and sexual deviance. She is, after all, the mistress of *seiðr* sorcery, which notoriously marks its practitioners with ominous deviance[40]; and from her it was that Óðinn got his own magic powers in this craft[41]. To dress up as Freyja, furthermore, is

[38] Such battles of wits in Old Norse literature were staged as transpiring between two males, whether being grilled with difficult questions (such as in the Eddic *Váfþrúðnismál*), or more broadly engaging in *flyting* which comprised of trading speech acts where each intended to one-up himself by feminizing and othering his opponent. Although contexts and scenes could vastly differ and stem from differing sources, these acts' gendering as a distinctly male activity is notable here. For disambiguation between different verbal contests of *flyting* and debate, see W. Parks, *Flyting, Sounding, Debate: Three Verbal Contest Genres*, "Poetics Today" 7:3 (1986), pp. 439–458.

[39] J. McKinnel, *Myth as Therapy: The Function of Þrymskviða*, [in:] *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, ed. by D. Kick, J.D. Shafer, Toronto, Buffalo, London 2014, pp. 200–220.

[40] For a detailed textual study of deviance (the *ergi* complex) inherent in Old Norse magic practice, see Ármann Jakobsson, *The Trollish acts of Þorgrímr the Witch: The Meaning of Tröll and Ergi in Mediaeval Iceland,* "Saga-Book" 32 (2008), pp. 39–68. For an overview of past scholarship on *seiðr* pertaining to its transgressive qualities, see M. Mayburd, *A reassessment of Hervör...*, pp. 129–140.

[41] *Ynglinga saga*, [in:] *Heimskringla* I, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, Reykjavík 1941, p. 13.

to dress up as someone who receives half of the slain warriors that die in battle (one of Freyja's more sinister attributes, contrasting with the overtly feminized image she bears in popular imagination), on par with Óðinn who receives the other half of the slain[42]. An even more striking, and less-cited, attribute of Freyja is that one of her many by-names happens to be *Göndul* – a word which, apart from its deep entanglement in conceptual imagery of Old Norse *seiðr* sorcery, is a transparent reference to male reproductive anatomy[43]. Suddenly, Þórr's impersonation of this character becomes exactly the opposite of what it seemed at first glance.

This *Þrymskviða* episode is noteworthy for several details in its gender dynamics. Perhaps it was not such a big change for Þórr to dress up as someone who was occasionally known as Göndul. The gods certainly thought he would be convincing enough in Freyja's place to passably get by. Many literary critics interpret the theft of Þórr's hammer as the cause of his impotence and effeminacy even before the female dress was put on, reading his famous Mjöllnir as a symbol of his virility or a physical representation of his manhood[44]. Þórr may indeed be rendered passive and impotent from the very beginning of the poem (including his idle wait while Loki gathers news; obeying Loki's order to effectively "shut up" when Þórr

[42] Snorri Sturluson offers this depiction of Freyja in *Gylfaginning (Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by A. Faulkes, London 2005, p. 24) citing a stanza from *Grímnismál* as its source (Finnur Jónsson ed. *Eddukvæði...*, p. 77. *Halfan val / hón kýss hverjan dag / en halfan Óðinn á*. "Half of the slain / she chooses each day / and half does Óðinn own"). Apart from the valkyric connotation, her association with the dead casts her as an ominous chthonic being.

[43] Freyja appears under this name in *Sörla þáttr eða Heðins saga ok Högna,* whose only extant copy is preserved in the fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbók* codex but whose narrative content is based on older legendary matter (see *Sörla* þáttr *eða Heðins saga ok Högna*, [in:] *Flateyjarbok. En Samlong Af Norske Konge-Sagaer*, Vol. 1, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. Unger, Christiania 1860, pp. 275–283). The name *Göndul*, along with its close cognate *göndull*, are derived from Old Norse word *gandr* and rife with occult and transgressive underpinnings. Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon interpret *gandr* as "anything enchanted or an object used by sorcerers, almost like *zauber* in Germ[an], and hence a monster, fiend" (*An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, Oxford 1874, p. 188). Semantic links between *gandr* and magic staffs (in their capacity as ensorceled implements) have opened it to phallic connotations, as evideced by *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* using the word *göndull* in explicitly sexual context (*Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, [in:] *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, Vol. 2, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík 1944, p. 486. This scene is tellingly absent from Rafn's 1830 edition). For a survey of scholarship on g*andr*'s deviant connotations, see M. Mayburd, *A reassessment of Herv*ör..., pp. 133–136; for an in-depth study of the same, see Eldar Heide, *Gand, seid og andevind,* Bergen 2006, especially pp. 79–155.

[44] R. Perkins, *The Eyraland Image: Þrymskviða*, stanzas 30–31, Sagnaþing II, Reykjavík 1994, pp. 653–64; J. McKinnell, *Myth as Therapy*… Snorri's comment in *Skáldskáparmál* that Þórr keeps his hammer inside his coat and that it shrinks when not in use (ed. by A. Faulkes, p. 42) does not help the mental imagery: few have dared to cite it in context of Þrymskviða within a scholarly publication.

complains he will be called a pervert; and uttering no words for the remainder of the poem after hearing that notorious *Þegi þu, Þórr*!)[45] – yet if the poem takes his impotence as a point of departure, then dressing up as the most sexually deviant (and active) goddess in Norse mythology may be seen as a sure step of progress towards recovery[46]. As Jón Karl Helgasson notes, Þórr's protestations of *ergi* perversion and Freyja's own retort that she will be called *vergjarnasta* if they ride to Jötunheim seem to echo a common notion that Jötunheim was a place where sexuality warped into weird dimensions beyond even Ásgarðr's supra-human standards[47]. Þórr is effectively assimilating the opposite extreme of the proverbial gender gradient spectrum, as it were, in order to restore his fractured wholeness. His act of transvestism is already the means towards this end, a means without which the end result (recovery of his masculinity and reaching his personal equilibrium) is impossible to achieve. Þórr's embodied masculinity, then, is not a fixed status quo, but always in progress. His reliance, dependence even, on his hammer, and his anxiety when familiar arrangement of his attributes is interfered with, reveal his constructed identity to be "a discontinuous, nontotalized series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, intensities, and durations"[48].

Returning now to the *Svíakonungr* in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, it becomes possible to observe similar dynamics playing out. Þórbergr's entrenchment in masculine identity is not an iteration of some monolithic masculinity, nor is it static. It contains multiple gender variables within itself, inherently blurring boundaries between them in the ungendered liminality of its kaleidoscopic motility. This assumed identity is so hypermasculine that it paradoxically comes across as effeminate in its very public display of dominance and insecurity; the power act is so overbearing it paradoxically borders on desperate and shrill. The presence of Þór- in the name Þórbergr fortifies the king's formidable image – yet

[45] Jón Karl Helgasson, *Þegi þu, Þórr! gender, class, and discourse in Þrymskviða*, [in:] *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. by S.M. Anderson, K. Swenson, New York 2002, p. 164.

[46] Freyja's obsessive promiscuity may be gauged by Loki's statement in *Lokasenna* that she slept with every god presently in attendance at a rather crowded feast; yet as a fertility goddess it is in her nature not to be bound by any perceived limitation or sexual taboos.

[47] Jón Karl Helgasson, *Þegi þu, Þórr!...*, p. 161, where *vergjarnasta* is translated as "nymphomanic".

[48] E. Grosz, *A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics*, [in:] *Gilles Deleuze and Theater of Philosophy.* ed. by C.V. Boundas, D. Olkowski, New York 1994, pp. 187–212, pp. 193–194. The Norse god Þórr has been subject to extensive revaluations in recent years in efforts to disentangle his extant archaeological and folkloric source material from popular mythological stereotypes still prevalent and seldom-questoined to this day. See, for instance, R. Perkins, *Thor the Wind-Raiser and the Eyraland Image*, London 2001, where Þórr's under-represented connections with wind are explored. See also D. Taggart, *How Thor Lost his Thunder: The Changing Faces of an Old Norse God*, London, New York 2018, which challenges Þórr's presumed association with thunder.

at the same time adds a dimension of apprehension and alarm. It reminds this is a masculinity in need of perpetual maintenance and reassertion lest it be stripped away. It is simultaneously threatening and under constant threat[49].

In assuming this male kingship, complete with haughty provocations and public displays of power, Þórbergr controls and directs his own destiny by ensuring the only road to femininity he leaves open for himself passes clear through the masculine layer of gendered normativity. As noted earlier, Þórbergr's public acts do not deter but in fact draw potential candidates for partnership, who in this aspect are cast not so much as marriage suitors but as political rivals and potential allies. Emphatic in this entire embodiment of masculinity is how Þórbergr sets it up. The only way for this character to assimilate the feminine is through undergoing gender displacement by a stronger invading conqueror in open war, on equal terms, man to man. To put it more colloquially, Þórbergr wants to be effectively rendered as someone's male bitch, as it were, and Þórbergr's present capacity as an alpha monarch is both a challenge and a test to weed out lesser and weaker callers. On one hand, gender becomes desexualized and reduced to power on a sliding scale[50]. Yet on the other hand, and at the same time, this unraveling of gendered normativity casts all involved in ambiguously transgressive light tinged with suggestive tension.

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[49] Þór-prefixes in personal names are disproportionately popular in Icelandic sagas. While far from all such name-prefixes are portentious, a number of supernaturally-empowered female characters do notably contain Þór- in their names. Consider, for instance, the prophetic Þórbjörg litilvölva from *Eiríks saga Rauða*; the cross-dressing witch Þórhildr from *Ljósvetninga saga*; the shape-shifting witch Þórdís from *Kormáks saga*; and the incestuous battle-ogre Þorgerðr Hólgabrúðr from *Jómsvíkinga saga* (a figure explored in J. McKinnell, *Þórgerðr Hölgabrúðr* and *Hyndluljóð*, [in:] *Mythological Women: Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz (1922–1997)*, ed. by R. Simek, Wien 2002, pp. 265–90, and more recently in Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir, *A Normal Relationship?: Jarl Hákon and Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr in Icelandic Literary Context*, [in:] *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland, 1150–1400*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, M. Mayburd, Boston 2020, pp. 295–310) – all of whom have explicit connections with sorcery and/or otherworldly powers. An exhaustively thorough documentation of Old Norse textual references to these and other supernatural empowered magic figures in medieval Iceland may be found in F.X. Dillmann, *Les magiciens dans l'Islande ancienne: Études sur la représentation de la magie islandaise et de ses agents dans les sources littéraires norroises*, Uppsala 2006.

[50] Equating gender with power may appear somewhat reminiscent of Carol J. Clover's theory of a one-sex model, which perceives gendering system in the Old Norse world as *hvátr* (sharp) versus *blauðr* (weak). However, she inadvertently subverts her own argument by reading *hvátr* as "masculine", effectively bringing this model back into a polarized and sexist gender binary narrative with its implicit assumption of female disadvantage (*Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe*, "Speculum" 68 (1993), pp. 363–87, p. 379). Clover's argumentation has gone unchallenged for decades in saga scholarship and only recently started drawing criticism for its ahistoric depiction of gender as a monolithic hierachy: see M. Mayburd, *A reassessment of Herv*ör..., p. 123 note 3; and G.L. Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*, London, New York 2019, pp. 14–15.

Þórbergr's gender displacement in action

When Hrólfr defeats Þornbjörg/Þórbergr in a large-scale military campaign and physical battle, the latter character is often regarded by critics as being overpowered and subdued in her female capacity[51]. What is remarkable, however, is that Hrólfr recognizes her masculinity and essentially yields to her self-construct. In his exchanges with her on the battlefield – even after his victory – he continues to respectfully address her using masculine terms as a fellow king, and the saga narrator continues to call this character *Svíakonungr* along with the male pronouns, thwarting the notion that a "discovery of female sexuality" has somehow managed to take place.[52]. Their dialogue is more reminiscent of a stalemate between equals in its reconciliatory tone, rather than banter between a victor and his downtrodden foe:

> *Hrólfr konungr mælti:* "*við, herra, erum nú svá samankomnir, at ek vil yðr í öllu sæmdar leita, ok bið ek orskurð okkar máls í umdæmi föður þíns, ok mun þat mælt, ef hann skipar okkar í milli, at þér halðið fullum veg yðrum með sóma*"[53].
>
> "King Hrólfr spoke: look, sir, now that we have come together thus, I seek only for your dignity, and bid you take our case to your father; and it will be said, if he judges between us, that you keep your honor fully intact".

Suggestion for seeking intervention of the maiden king's father to settle their strife is put forth not as imposition of authority but as a concession favoring her position with his familial bias, allowing her to save face. Þórbergr's reaction to her captor likewise does not resemble that of a humiliated prisoner; without missing a beat the *Svíakonungr* steps up to the conqueror and grandly declares that *viljum vér nú, Hrólfr konungr, svá gera sem kurteisir menn eru vanir, ef þeir verða sigraðir ok yfirkomnir; at vér viljum bjóða yðr við öllu yðru liði til náða ok veizlu vegligrar, ok launa svá yðr, er þér gefið grið vorum mönnum* ("we wish now, king Hrólfr, to do as is customary for gentlemen who've been vanquished and overcome, namely we wish to invite you and all your retinue to peaceful rest and glorious feast, and thus repay you for giving mercy to our men")[54]. This lavish generosity echoes Þórbergr's earlier display of public dominance over Hrólfr from their first meeting. The posed invitation to enjoy rest and food together may perhaps echo Hrólfr's transgressive advance from that first visit, in which case the double entendre is no less transgressive in current context as one king publicly bids another to share a round of pleasure and delight. The saga narrator never

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[51] J. Jochens, *Old Norse Images*...; L. Norrman, *Woman or Warrior?*...; W. Layher, *Caught Between Worlds*.

[52] L. Norrman, *Woman or Warrior?*..., p. 381.

[53] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, p. 102.

[54] Ibidem, p. 102.

breaks immersion of the scene, going on to inform that *bundu kónungar þetta sín í millum með sterkum trúnaði* ("the kings tied this agreement between them with strong bonds")[55]. Had the reader not known the maiden king's background and happened on this exchange, one wouldn't have found the slightest indication of this scene being anything other than words shared between two martial champions of equal stature when one bests another in open fight; perhaps indeed because there isn't. To borrow a line anecdotally attributed to Freud, sometimes a pipe is just a pipe[56].

The gender transformation from Þórbergr to Þornbjörg unfolds before the saga audience only after both step off the battlefield, and the detailed context is worth quoting at length:

> *...Svíakonungr ríðr til Uppsala með öllu sínu föruneyti, ok svá sem hann var þar kominn, gekk hann fyrir Eirek konung, föður sinn, lagði skjöldinn niðr fyrir fætr sér, tók hjálminn af höfði sér, hneigði konunginum ok kvaddi han ok mælti: "Minn kæri faðir, ek em orðinn farflóta ríkis þess, er þér gáfuð í mitt vald, ok sökum þess at ek varð yfirunnin af sterkum bardagamönnum, þá bið ek, at þér gerið þat ráð fyrir mína hönd, sem yðr er nú mest at skapi". Konungr mælti: "Gjarna viljum vér, at þú hættir styrjöld þessi, ok viljum vér, attu takir upp kvenligar atferðir ok farir í skemmu til móður þinnar. Síðan viljum vér gifta þik Hrólfi konungi Gautrekssyni, þvíat vér vitum enga hans jafníngja híngat á Norðrlönd". Konungs dóttir mælti: "Eigi viljum vér bæði gera at vera komin á yðvarn fund til umráða, enda vilja þá eigi hlíta yðvarri forsjá". Eptir þat gekk hún til skemmu, en gaf í vald Eireki konungi vápn þau, er hún hafði borit...*[57].
>
> "The Swedish king rode to Uppsala with all his retainers, and as he arrived here, he came before Eirek his father, laid the shield down before his feet, took the helmet off his head, bowed to the king and greeted him and spoke: "My dear father, I have been chased out of the kingdom that you gave into my power, on the account of me being beaten by strong warriors; I bid that you advise as pleases you the most concerning my hand". The king said: "We gladly want you to stop this war, and we want you to take up feminine pursuits and fare to your mother's chamber. Afterwards we want to marry you to Hrólf Gautreksson the king, for his equal is not known to us across the Northern land". King's daughter spoke: "Both of us would not have wanted to come before you for counsel, had we not wanted to take your advice". After that she went to the chamber, and gave the weapons that she bore into Eirek's custody".

The mid-paragraph gender switch is striking, but under what circumstances does it occur? The given set-up is rare in visual detail even by this saga redaction's long-winded standards: the Swedish king takes off his weapons, kneels, and ad-

[55] Ibidem, p. 102.

[56] This often-cited, yet documentally unverifiable, quip gained wide circulation in popular media no doubt due to its alleged attribution; an exaple of such reference may be found in J. Hobsbawm, *Where the Truth Lies: Trust and Morality in PR and Journalism,* London 2006, p. 144.

[57] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, pp. 103–104.

mits his utter defeat at the hands of stronger men – precisely the scenario that he was gambling with, the outcome of the game whose rules he himself had set. It is neither a lament nor a complaint, but an open proclamation of a fair result, having gotten what he had coming. Overcome by a more powerful king, the Swedish king is ready to become his vassal and submit to Hrólfr's dominance. Already pushed out of power, there is no shame for the defeated king in assuming a feminine role, given this feminitity is being willingly embraced. There is no patriarchal tyranny here; in asking for king Eirekr's advice, the Swedish king already knows what it will be and is anticipating it. The transformation from *Svíakonungr* to *konungs dóttir* is smooth and effortless – this is not a "there and back again" regression to femininity, nor is it a sudden "discovery of sexuality" (though the fact that it happens through her father would undoubtedly make Freud happy). Þornbjörg is not retracing her steps back towards her maidenhood status quo, but attaining femininity as a direct result of her masculinity. In other words, this is an illustration of gender displacement wherein the masculine Þórbergr is rendered effeminate (and female) by virtue of Hrólfr's greater comparative masculinity, no longer managing to be an alpha wolf[58].

This is what Þornbjörg wanted all along, setting herself up in a dominant position of power liable to get overthrown – but only by one who is brave, cunning, and audacious enough to defeat her in an open military campaign on equal terms, man to man. In this position, it is easy to deal with those weaker than herself, and the only way to be overcome is by someone with both superior battle strategy and physical fighting strength. In Hrólfr, she more than meets her match. As noted earlier, Þornbjörg resists being pushed into the perceived feminine sphere as it would spell negation of the masculine, and the greater the effort to "gender" her as female, the more powerful is her entrenchment in masculinity – in effect, destabilizing both extremes. The only acceptable way for her to integrate into feminine normativity is to appropriate it through the prism of masculinity – a similar dynamic that Þórr conversely illustrates in *Þrymskviða*.

Having already been made Hrólfr's vassal (the proverbial male bitch) by the military defeat, *Svíakonungr* can now flawlessly absorb the feminine not as an imposition, but as direct consequence that does not threaten nor negate this character's self-construct. In other words, Þornbjörg/Þórbergr is fulfilling the "most masculine of fantasies", the weapon-brotherhood, as Joseph Harris puts it; the "fantasy [...] of a man's meeting his match in battle and, after fighting to a draw, creating a brotherhood of arms"– where the couple becomes "the warrior male and his double"[59]. Þornbjörg does not relinquish her masculinity: it is only in

[58] The irony of the personal name "Hrólfr" assigned to this champion lies in its derivation from "Hróð-úlfr", its alpha-wolfish association fully intact.

[59] J. Harris, *Gender and Genre: Short and Long Forms in the Saga Literature*, [in:] *"Speak Useful Words or Say Nothing" – Old Norse Studies by Joseph Harris*, ed. by S.E. Deskis, Th.D.

comparison to Hrólfr that she is as feminine as she appears. Hrólfr, by continuing to address her in masculine terms even after overcoming her in battle, acknowledges this fact, thus removing from her the need for further reassertion.

While Þornbjörg's masculinity is displaced by Hrólfr's, it is nevertheless not an absolute one-off superimposition, and their gender dynamic remains fluid and fluctuating in a give-and-take of contrasts and comparisons. When Hrólfr falters, she takes a step forward, such as his earlier stumble in calling her a woman, or such as his captivity in the later part of the saga which renders him passive and prompts her to amass an army for his rescue:

> *Tók hún þá skjöld ok sverð ok réðst til ferðar með Gautreki, syni sínum... Ok í ákveðnum stað fundust þau öll saman með miklu liði. Hafði drottning ráð ok skipan fyrir liði þeirra"*
>
> "she then took shield and sword and rode out on the journey with Gautrekr, her son ... and in agreed-upon place they all met together with a great army. The queen had authority and command over their army[60]".

In the end, it is no trouble for Þornbjörg to put on war gear and be an active leader of military campaign in coming to Hrólfr's aid, as her masculinity remained fully in place (after bearing him a son, no less). By his incapacitation she is ascendant once more as the most dominant character on the scene.

E unum pluribus

Becoming a vassal within a homosocial courtly framework does not equate servile subjugation for Þornbjörg. Continental European chivalric literature, upon reaching medieval Iceland, has brought with it a "radical re-envisioning of masculinity and heroism" that stems from this literature's own Christian cultural roots, as noted by David Clark[61]. Contrary to the prevalent assumption that medieval Catholicism implicitly denotes stricter gender delineations, quite the opposite may in fact be noted once careful distinction is drawn between doctrinal stipulations on one hand and situationally specific enactments on other, conditioned as the latter are by cultural constructions and interpretations of multiple masculinities and femininities in simultaneous circulation[62]. This resulted in reimagining of the

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Hill, Ithaca 2008, p. 266. As Harris further notes, illustrations of this motif are reflected in other cultures and literatures as well, such as the bond between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, or Robin Hood and Little John.

[60] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, p. 175.

[61] D. Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature,* New York 2009, p. 150.

[62] See Caroline Walker Bynum's seminal collection of essays for the thought-provoking explorations of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century spirituality (*Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality*

masculine heroic ideal through a new set of gender variables which medieval Catholicism brings. To assume the masculine identity of a warrior, Clark goes on to note, "is to submit to being feminized, impotent, placed in the passive and subject position by Christ". The medieval Christian perspective, where "passive masculinity" is revalued "as a positive and indeed heroic attribute", has inevitably left a mark on continental chivalric romances, in which the act of submission (before a lord or a lady) becomes regarded as noble and virtuous[63]. Such revaluations of masculinity and femininity effectively imbue the former with distinctive aspects of the latter, and this dynamic goes the opposite way as well. In a recent study, Védís Ragnheiðardóttir draws parallels between maiden kings and virgin martyrs from medieval Icelandic hagiographies (*heilagra meyjar sögur*), noting a number of similarities in their characterizations, not least that their very being is predicated upon their refutation of "gendering" attempts[64]. These parallels may be deepened further by recent historical scholarship on medieval female saints, which reads their rejections of embodied femininity as effectively reaching a state of gender-exemption, noting that these figures' self-narrated images tend to be androgynous[65]. As such figures were no longer definable by standard female

of the High Middle Ages, Berkeley 1982), a period distinctly marked by the rise of laity in reaction and opposition to religious authorities. This resulted in many reconfigurations of past doctrines and practices, including rise in affective spirituality with its often radical reimaginings of gender and gender roles. This broader cultural context of medieval Europe is not infrequently overlooked in literary saga scholarship, which has a history of perpetuating tendentious reduction of medieval Christianity to political church power and monolithic authority of its clergy.

[63] D. Clark, *Between Medieval Men*..., p. 150, in his interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Dream of the Rood* within context of homosocial desire. By reading the Cross, from whose perspective the poem is presented, as male, Clark sees in it a destabilization of gender identities as they merge to form new fusions and possibilities: "there is neither male nor female, but individual men and women can, like the Cross, be a bride of Christ. In a poem constructed upon a paradox [where Christ is presented as both a human warrior and a divine figure] ... it should perhaps not be surprising that gender is also a fluid and paradoxical characteristic" (ibidem, pp. 150–151).

[64] Védís Ragnheiðardóttir, *Kynjuð yfirnáttúra...*, pp. 60–62. For more on literary contexts of medieval Icelandic hagiographies of female martyrs, see Sverrir Tómasson, *Kristnar trúarbókmenntir í óbundnu máli*, [in:] Íslensk bókmenntasaga I, 2nd edition, ed. by Vésteinn Ólason, Reykjavík 2006, pp. 419–479; as well as K. Wolf, *Transvestism in the Sagas of Icelanders*, [in:] *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience. Sagaene og Noreg. Preprints for 10th International Saga Conference*, Trondheim 1997, pp. 675–84.

[65] J.E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, London 1991, p. 109; C. Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York 1991, pp. 165–171. Describing female crossdressing saints from Apocryphal Acts, J.E. Salisbury writes "they became androgynes, embodying the principles of both male and female; this neutralized their gender, making them asexual. Furthermore, this new asexual being would be so complete that he/she would need none of the social structures that supported and completed imperfect sexual beings. Indeed, the androgyne is exempt from such structures" (*Church Fathers*…, p. 109). Such conceptualization of androgynous identity is in line with the broader motif of supernatural empowerment present across many eras, cultures, and beliefs, namely "that a union of male and female elements in

terms, their hagiographers were left no choice but to imbue their qualities with masculine terminology, necessarily limited by language constraints yet portraying them not as transgressive but noble[66].

In light of these nuanced gradients, it becomes innacurate to assume that gender identities became any more monolithic or any less fluid with the arrival of Christianity (and eventually, romance literature) to Iceland, opening further discourse on, and inviting reconceptualizations of, how medieval European selfhood was constructed and understood. It reveals innumerate new gender (or perhaps more accurately, agender) identities that fall entirely outside standard modern binary polarities; indeed, to attempt interpretation through the prism of the latter is to miss them entirely[67].

The same observation may be drawn for development and growth of saga literature in Iceland, as for development and growth of the historically contingent

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one person would create a superior being" (L. Motz, *The Magician and His Craft*, [in:] *Samtíðarsögur – The Concemporary Sagas. Preprint for the Ninth International Saga Conference*, Akureyri 1994, p. 596). For this dynamic of gender liminality in Old Norse context, see M. Mayburd, *A reassessment of Hervör*..., pp. 140–142. See also W.A. Meeks, *The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity*, "History of Religions" 13:3 (1974), pp. 165–208, which explores deep conceptual entanglements of the androgyne archetype in Christian gnosticism.

[66] E.M. Harney, *The Sexualized and Gendered Tortures of Virgin Martyrs in Medieval English Literature.* Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2008, p. 58. Available at: https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/16804/1/Harney_Eileen_M_200811_PhD_thesis.pdf (accessed: 18.08.2020).

[67] See M. Mayblin, *People Like Us: Intimacy, Distance, and the Gender of Saints*, "Current Anthropology" 55:10 (2014), pp. 271–280, especially p. 278 where she draws attention to stylistic tendencies across medieval visual art for dressing saints and other sacred figures in free-flowing robes, underlining their asexual aspect and "intensify[ing] the ambiguous nature of sacred bodies". Bestowal of androgynous facial features upon such figures in traditional icongraphy and manuscript illumination may be seen as extension of the same paradigm. Some recent studies of Old Norse masculinity have attempted to depart from strict binary gender polarities and take into account multimodal complexities inherent in the culturally dynamic constructions of gender. See for instance Bjørn Bandlein, *Man or Monster?Negotiations of Masculinity in Old Norse Society,* Oslo 2005 and Védís Ragnheiðarsdóttir,´Meir af viel en karlmennsku': Monstrous Masculinity in Viktors saga ok Blávus, [in:] *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150–1400*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, M. Mayburd, Boston 2020, pp. 421–432 where masculinity is repositioned on a sliding scale with the monstrous; and G.L. Evans, *Men and Masculinities*…, which cautiously avoids gender absolutisms in favor of positing a model of multiple concurrent masculinities. This emerging multiplicity of concurrent masculinities is the focal point of the recent edited volume which emphatically features this plurality in its title and calls for an "urgency" in studying the titular subject as plural and multimodal (G.L. Evans, J.C. Hancock, *Afterword: The Ethics and Urgency of Studying Old Norse Masculinities*, [in:] *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature,* ed. by G.L. Evans, J. C. Hancock, pp. 237–240, p. 237). Only a greater critical focus on the multimodality of concurrent masculinities can collapse the problematic and oft-stereotyped paradigm of monolithic masculinity "as an umimpeachable, 'natural' category" so that it may come "to be recognized as socially constructed" (ibidem, p. 238). The awareness of historical contingency inherent in any model of masculinity is critical for shedding light on these models' "socio-political effects" upon their respective cultural climates insofar as privileging certain gender configurations at the expense of others (ibidem).

concept of gender itself. Both are "culturally specific process[es] of becoming... a kind of alchemy" brimming with "multiple transubstantiations, equations that map trajectories of perpetual motion rather than models that trace the contours of closed and lifeless systems"[68]. As recently noted by Gareth L. Evans, "an individual's relationship to the hegemonic is situationally specific", as are the gender parameters that are "produced for each situation and for any given point in time"[69]. To put it another way, constructions of gender identities are always informed by their historical contexts and pragmatic circumstance, and their solidity and stability (themselves products of cultural narratives) are illusory.

Multiple saga variants and plot permutations for the above-examined maiden king narrative were in active circulation in thirteenth and fourteenth century Iceland: some entering the stage earlier, some later, but each experimenting with a set of different literary variables to see how different configurations of gender dynamics play out within each variant of the story. The ominous, supernatural, indigenous motifs are still alive and flickering within this rich tapestry of interwoven matter, yet to unravel these strands in attempts to categorize them is to lose sight of the very images these tapestries depict. The longer version of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is clearly playing on these ambiguities, rapidly and rabidly shifting frames of reference to the point that any attempt at static gender demarcations becomes absurd. This is summarily illustrated in partnering Hrólfr (an 'alpha wolf' yet a temperate, courteous hero of continental romance) with Þornbjörg/Þórbergr (who is fully fleshed out as an active and dominant war king, yet who yields when yielded to) in a bond where marriage itself may be metaphoric of a brotherhood in arms. The dynamic and malleable masculinity of both throws into question the discursive boundaries of gender identity categories by revealing their contingency. The dialogic relationality of these characters itself remains but one of innumerate possibilities and permutations, as the saga narrator directly acknowledges in a conscious stance against rigid absolutism when approaching this work: *Man svá um þessa sögu sem um margar aðrar, at eigi segja allir ein veg* ("it may be said of this saga as of many others, that there's not one way of telling them"), consequently advising an audience of critics *at finna eigi til, þeir eigi umbœta* ("to find no fault that you're unwilling to improve")[70].

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[68] J.J. Cohen, B. Wheeler, *Becoming and Unbecoming*, [in:] *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. by J.J. Cohen, B. Wheeler, New York and London 1997, p. xi.

[69] G.L. Evans, *Men and Masculinities…*, p. 19.

[70] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, p. 189.

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„CZŁOWIEK JEST ROZKOSZĄ CZŁOWIEKA”: DZIEWICZY KRÓL W DŁUŻSZEJ WERSJI *HRÓLFS SAGA GAUTREKSSONAR*

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł na ma celu zmianę pozycji dyskusji na temat płci w średniowiecznej literaturze islandzkiej poprzez podejście do płci nie jako stałych kategorii tożsamości, ale jako serii dynamicznych procesów. Biorąc pod uwagę, że tożsamość społeczna w średniowiecznej Skandynawii była niestabilna i trzeba ją nieustannie renegocjować, uważam, że staronordyckie koncepcje płci nie były zgodne z ustalonymi rolami binarnymi (jako przedstawienia stabilnych męskości/kobiecości), ale były raczej aktami władzy wywierającymi zróżnicowane dynamiki społeczne w przestrzeni publicznej. Biorąc dłuższą wersję *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* jako studium przypadku, skupiam się na jej twórczym przekształceniu motywu literackiego dziewiczego króla, a zwłaszcza na męskości tej postaci, która żywo ilustruje te wielopłciowe zagrania. Wyraźnie staram się „pozbawić płci” męskość sag, interpretując ich prowokacyjną dynamikę jako wyzwalacz zmian społecznych dla zaangażowanych postaci, które mają również wpływ na ich własne konfiguracje tożsamości. Choć to produkt fikcyjnej rozrywki, a nie rzeczywistości historycznej, twierdzę, że postać *meykóngr* w tej sadze odzwierciedla podwyższoną wrażliwość opinii publicznej na zmiany klimatu kulturowego średniowiecznej Skandynawii, wskazując na społecznie i historycznie uwarunkowaną naturę normatywności płciowej.

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STUDIA I MATERIAŁY Z DZIEJÓW EUROPY ŚRODKOWO-WSCHODNIEJ

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THE SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE OLD ICELANDIC LAWS

An article on the social status of women in the old Icelandic laws may seem out of place in a book devoted to the concept of manliness in the medieval Norse society. However, the role men played in the old Nordic society, their preferred occupation, and heights to which they aspired to, is only partially attributable to the archetypal qualities of their gender. The medieval Nordic culture might have been especially focused on physical prowess, valor, emotional balance, cunningness, and open-handedness, but these qualities are not gender specific, and on their own they could only explain the advantaged status of *some* men.

If one is to uncover the reason for which the old Nordic communities depicted in the extant narrative sources appear to us as "a man's world"[1], one needs to look at the customs, norms and institutions that gave shape to the Saga Age societies. It is especially revealing in this regard to focus on the legal standing of women, since the numerous and vast differences between the rights of Nordic men and women, provide us with a clear perspective on the former privileged social status. It is in these old laws that we find the reason why men and women appear to operate in different social realms in the sagas, and why personal honour – the main currency of individual's worth in the old Norse society – was gained and lost differently by people of different genders.

Our main source of investigation will be *Grágás* – an old Icelandic law-compilation, described by one eminent legal historian as the giant bird among the old Norse normative sources. The so called "Grey Goose" is not only the largest,

[1] R. Frank, *Marriage in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, "Viator" 4 (1973), pp. 473–484.

and the most comprehensive of all Nordic law-books, but it also contains a large number of very detailed provisions concerning the rights and duties of women. By collecting the norms dealing with the inner workings of families and households, the unknown thirteenth-century Icelandic law-compilers gave us an opportunity to supplement the narratives about the saga-worthy individuals, with a set of extremely detailed rules regulating the behavior of all people living in Iceland. Examining these texts we can gain a deeper understanding of the medieval Icelandic society in general.

The paper is organized as follows. Part 1 contains basic information on *Grágás* and its value as a source for the laws of early Iceland. Part 2 deals with the legal status of unmarried women. Part 3 contains rules concerning betrothal, marriage, separation, husband's death, and their legal consequences for a woman. Part 4 is concerned with women's political and procedural standing. Part 5 discusses actions deemed offensive towards women or their families. The sixth part concludes the paper.

I. Our main source for the early Icelandic laws are two large vellum codices, collectively known as *Grágás*[2]. The name translates into "Grey Goose", and first appears in this context in the middle of the sixteenth century. Most of the modern scholars considered the name a misunderstanding of a scribe, who mistakenly transferred it from an early Norwegian code into the old Icelandic laws. The manuscripts themselves are of much earlier date than the aforementioned name. The older of the two – Ms. No. 1157, currently held in the Danish Old Royal Collection, and called *Konungsbók* – isbelieved to be written around the year 1260. The younger – Ms. no. 334 in folio at the University of Copenhagen, and commonly referred to as the *Staðarhólsbók* – has been written around year 1280.

Both codices are believed to be derived from an earlier, long gone, source. They are mostly concerned with similar matters, but differ in internal organization, style and content. *Konungsbók* contains a large section on constitutional matters, that is not available in *Staðarhólsbók*, but the later is more detailed. When dealing with similar issues, the manuscripts are usually in agreement with regard to the essence of the law, but the wording and sequence of matter can be quite different. Seen *in toto,* both codices are fairly consistent with the substance of the norms found in both of them. They even contain the same scribal mistakes, which suggest that both are based on the same ancestral source[3].

The manuscripts compile what is purported to be the laws of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth. Some of the norms contained therein are formulated in a way

[2] M. Stein-Wilkeshuis, *Laws in Medieval Iceland*, "Journal of Medieval History" 12 (1986), pp. 37–54.

[3] P. Foote, *Oral and Literary Tradition in Early Scandinavian Law: Aspects of a Problem*, [in:] *Oral Tradition, Literary Tradition: A Symposium*, ed. H. Bekker-Nielsen, Odense 1977, p. 52.

suggesting that they have been transcribed from the recitations, which according to an old Icelandic custom, the Law Speaker was to deliver yearly from the Law Rock at the Þingvellir. Readers are thus told what they are to do "here [at the Thing Fields]", informed that some actions should be undertaken by the assembly of participants "today", others "tomorrow", and reminded what "I" – that is the Law Speaker – have just said. Overall the reader is clearly led to believe that the norms compiled in the manuscripts genuinely represent "our laws" (*var lög*), as the medieval Icelanders called the legal system of the Commonwealth.

Grágás provide us with a fascinating though somewhat obscure insight into the inner workings of an early Icelandic Society. The Old Icelandic law-books are elaborate, detailed and at times extremely casuistic. There are hardly any areas of individual or collective lives that did not attract meticulous interest of the Icelandic law-compilers. One can find in *Grágás* very thorough norms on the rights and duties of individuals – interpersonal relations, family obligations, care of one's dependents, running farms and hiring workers, herding animals, fishing, cultivating fields and using pastures, sale and acquisition of property, driftage, riding horses, dogs that bite, raging bulls and tame polar bears, reciting poetry, feasting and fasting, religious observance, as well as on legal consequences of various dangerous, harmful or offensive deeds. By combining the norms contained in the old Icelandic law-compilations with the descriptions of social rules and customs found in the narrative sources, modern scholars are able to offer a fairly detailed, though still speculative reconstruction of the daily lives of common Icelandic men and women.[4]

Grágás as a historical source is not without its problems however. The extant manuscripts have been reliably dated by paleographers to the second half of the thirteenth century. This was a crucial time in the history of medieval Iceland. After several decades of inner struggle between its most powerful families, the country became a tributary land of the Norwegian Crown, and started undergoing radical institutional changes.[5] Some of its most distinct and unique political institutions were abolished or underwent a fundamental alteration in their functions, resulting

[4] See e.g. J.L. Byock, *Viking Age Iceland*, London 2001; W.I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking. Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland*, Chicago 1990; T.M. Andersson, W.I. Miller, *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland: "Ljósvetninga Saga" and "Valla-Ljóts Saga"*, Stanford 1989.

[5] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Changing Layers of Jurisdiction and the Reshaping of Icelandic Society c. 1220–1350*, [in:] *Communities in European History: Representations, Jurisdictions, Conflicts*, ed. J. Pan-Montojo, F. Pedersen, Pisa 2007, pp. 173–187; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Becoming a Scat Land: The Skattgjafir Process Between the Kings of Norway and the Icelanders c. 1250–1300*, [in:] *Taxes, Tributes and Tributary Lands in the Making of the Scandinavian Kingdoms in the Middle Ages*, ed. by S. Imsen, Trondheim 2011, pp. 115–131; Helgi Þorláksson, *Ambitious Kings and Unwilling Farmers. On the Difficulties of Introducing a Royal Tax in Iceland*, [in:] *Taxes, Tributes and Tributary Lands...*, pp. 133–147. On the institutional evolution of Iceland in general see Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000–1300*, Oxford 2000.

in a thorough redesign of Iceland's constitutional structure. This background has to be taken into account while using Grágás as a source for the reconstruction of the legal system of the old Icelandic Commonwealth, as we do not know the purpose the extant manuscripts were to serve.

Scholars agree only in that *Grágás* did not have the status of the official code of the land. The *Konungsbók* and *Staðarhólsbók* were private law collections, without the binding force of public institutions behind them. The manuscripts are skilfully written and beautifully ornamented and their production must have been very expensive.[6] Their content however lacks proper structure, contains repetitions, many abbreviations, and references to other sources. There are also some inconsistencies between the two manuscripts. The somewhat disjointed nature of the norms contained in the two codices suggests that the compilation itself may had been prepared in a hasty manner.

Two main hypotheses can be formulated regarding the origin of *Grágás*. They can be viewed as a result of an effort to preserve the Old Icelandic laws in the face of radical institutional changes, and/or an attempt to influence the expected Norwegian legislation. The later hypothesis, if valid, poses some problems for our analysis, since it could imply that the law described in the extant manuscripts, does (at least to some extent) not necessarily reflect the actual laws of the Icelandic Commonwealth, but the views of the compiler on what the laws should have been. While this possibility cannot be excluded, it seems more worrying for scholars who are trying to reconstruct the constitutional features of the old Icelandic Commonwealth, than to authors who are interested in laws pertaining to private matters. Given the circumstances, it is more likely that the law-compilers would have been much more concerned with the prospective changes to public law in the immediate aftermath of the submission to the Norwegian Crown, than to changes in private law, which were probably less pressing.

This uncertainty about the extent to which *Grágás* preserve the actual old Icelandic laws could have been reduced substantially if it was possible to reliably date the norms contained therein. Dateable references however are very few, and mostly related to the norms established by the Church. There have been some attempts at establishing the historical origin of some of the secular norms contained in *Grágás* based on their linguistic features but they are regarded as inconclusive. The task of dating the norms is further complicated by the fact that few earlier legal manuscripts have come down to us, and all of them exist nowadays only in small fragments. Therefore no substantial comparative historical analysis is possible. It is however generally agreed in the scholarly literature that at least some sections of *Grágás* represent the genuine twelfth-century Icelandic law.[7]

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[6] Páll Eggert Ólason, *The Codex Reguis of Grágás: Ms. no. 1157 in the Old Royal Collection of The Royal Library Copenhagen, Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Ævi*, Vol. 3, Copenhagen 1932.

[7] J.L. Byock, *Viking Age...*, pp. 308–316.

Another important caveat when using *Grágás* as a source for the legal norms of the Icelandic Commonwealth is its non-official and in most cases non-binding status. As previously noted, none of the extant legal manuscripts can be regarded as *codex receptus*. It is further necessary to recognize that most of the secular rules contained in the manuscripts were not regarded as unconditionally binding. The laws only provided default rules that could be negotiated by the interested parties unless this possibility was specifically excluded by the law itself. As William Miller explains "most rules, such as those governing land, livestock, marriage, driftage, were not intended to be absolute. Their purpose was to provide a default setting that would govern unless the parties to the transaction preferred to bargain out of the ambit of the rule. Presumably many of these rules were intended to codify standard practice and hence to relieve the parties of the burden of hashing out a multitude of particular terms for each transaction"[8].

Finally, before attempting to reconstruct the old Icelandic legal system on the basis of *Grágás*, it is important to recognize that prior to the submission to the Norwegian Crown Iceland was a stateless society that lacked any public law-enforcement mechanism[9]. Therefore, breaking the legal norms was punishable only in case someone – usually the wronged party or another person close to him/her – felt injured, threatened or disrespected so much as to initiate retaliatory action against the wrongdoer. Moreover, with the exceptions of fairly rare cases in which no private settlement was to be made without a prior leave from the Law Council, the person trying to enforce the law had a lot of leeway in deciding on which course of actions to take. The avenging party could not only bring the suit before a public court, but also use various methods of private adjudication based on mediation and arbitration (or if he was powerful enough, ignore the law altogether and relay on self-help). In fact, judging by the conflicts referred to in the narrative sources, it was the extra-court and *extra legem* methods of dispute settlement which were the most frequently used by the feuding parties in medieval Iceland[10]. Therefore the law preserved in the extant manuscripts – even if indeed the law of the land – may not necessarily reflect the actual realities of everyday life.

II. *Grágás* contain a large number of references to the rights and duties of Icelandic women. According to the extant manuscripts, women's legal status was determined mainly by their age and marital status.

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[8] W.I. Miller, *Bloodtaking*..., p. 208.

[9] J.L. Byock, *Governmental Order in Early Medieval Iceland*, "Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies" 17 (1986), pp. 19–34; J.L. Byock, *State and Statelessness in Early Iceland*, [in:] *Samtíðarsögur: The Contemporary Sagas*, Vol. I, Akureyri 1994, pp. 155–169; D.D. Friedman, *Private Creation and Enforcement of Law: A Historical Case*, "Journal of Legal Studies" 8:2 (1979), pp. 399–415.

[10] J.L. Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*, Berkeley 1982; W.I. Miller, *Bloodtaking*..., pp. 179–220.

An unmarried woman was placed under the care of a legal administrator until she reached the age of twenty. In the extant law books the term "legal administrator" (*lögráðandi*) refers mainly to a person who had a right to give a woman in betrothal. This right belonged to the woman's male next of kin, who was legally capable of taking care of his own property "to the last unit". To be capable in this regard a male had to be at least sixteen-winters-old[11], freeborn and intelligent enough to know how to saddle a horse (GII, 144_{53})[12].

If a woman had several capable male kin, the right to give her in betrothal belonged to the male who stood closest to her in the inheritance sequence – first her son, than her father, and after that her brother born of the same father. Only in a rare case when none of her lawful prospective male heirs were alive, an unmarried woman younger than twenty-years-old could have been betrothed by her mother. Otherwise the right belonged always to her male relative – a close kinsman or a husband of a kinswoman (GII,144_{53}).

An unmarried woman's legal administrator was responsible for taking care of her property (provided he was at least 20 years old). He could keep all the yields from her estate to himself, but was barred from diminishing her wealth unless a legally stipulated case of hardship occurred. Upon reaching the age of sixteen an unmarried woman acquired the right to keep the income from her estate and the right to claim inheritance. At the age of twenty the care of property returned to her as well (GII, 118_{8}).

The man taking care of an unmarried woman's property was responsible for her maintenance for the whole time she was his ward. He provided her with boarding and logging in his own household or settled on a keep for her by an agreement with another householder. If a girl had no property and was incapable of earning a living, she became a dependant of the first kinsman in the inheritance sequence who could afford to provide her with logging and boarding. In cases where a girl could not be maintained within a family, her keep became a responsibility of the local commune.

At twenty an unmarried woman could arrange her own residence. Every Icelander was required by law to be in "settled logging", i.e. to have a legal domicile. Minors usually resided with their legal administrators, most typically parents. Adults who were not householders were responsible for arranging their own log-

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[11] The Icelandic year was divided into two seasons – winter and summer. The age of a person was counted by the number of winters she or he survived.

[12] All references to *Grágás* are to the standard English editions – *Laws of Early Iceland Grágás The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from Other Manuscripts*, Vol. I & II, ed. A. Dennis, P. Foote, R. Perkins, Winnipeg 1980. For the ease of use, the following method of citation is used, the large Roman numeral refers to the volume, the Arabic numeral that follows to the paragraph in that volume, and the subscripted numeral after that to the page where the cited norm can be found. Thus GII, 144_{53} refers to the paragraph 144 that can be found on the page 53 in the second volume of *Grágás.*

gings by contract. Two classes of people were considered householders according to the old Icelandic law – landowners and tenants who owned milking stock (GI,81_{132}).

Contracts between a householder and someone who wanted to join his household were entered into for a year at a time, and stipulated the duties of both parties, including the type of work required from the person entering the household and the amount of payment the latter was to receive for her services. The typical return for ordinary farm work was lodging and boarding, only some special task enumerated in the law books, like catering for ten people, commanded extra payment.

One's legal residence could be changed during the Moving Days (*fardagar*). The Moving Days were four consecutive days at the end of May, established to enable parties to negotiate contracts with regard to household attachment. A person who had not entered into a valid domicile contract with a householder by the end of this period risked a fine of three marks.

III. Marriage resulted in a multifaceted change in a woman's legal status. Upon marriage the husband became a legal administrator of the woman and the sole guardian of her property. At the same time, however, the woman acquired the right to claim inheritance and have care of her dependant's property, even if not yet sixteen. She was expected to manage the couple's household, employ and control the domestic servants, and take charge of the milking stock.

The narrative sources suggest that marriage was first and foremost a business transaction. Its main goal was to strengthen the social and economic position of two families, by forming alliances, joining forces and combining their wealth (see e.g. *Njálssaga*, chap. 97). The surviving law-compilations confirm this idea, as all the therms used to denote social and legal institutions connected to marriage have economic connotations. The old Icelandic word for wedding (*brúðhkaup)* literally means "bride purchase", the dowry is called "property that follows the bride from home" (*heimanfyljga*), the word for bride token is "bride price" (*mundarmál*), the betrothal (*festar*) stands for "attachment", and the betrothed woman is an attached-woman (*festarkona*). The economic importance of betrothal agreement is further stressed by the fact that it was enumerated among the very few transactions that required the presence of witnesses (the others being: the sale of land, chieftaincy or an ocean-going ship, GII, 169_{94}).

There is no minimal age prescribed for a bride or a groom in *Grágás*, and from the evidence contained in the narrative sources we know that women as young as thirteen were being married. As previously noted, the right to give a woman in betrothal belonged to her legal administrator. If someone else tried to betroth her, the resulting marriage was not "warrantable" and could be broken off by any person without penalty. The man who set up the marriage without having the right to do so and the groom who accepted his offer faced lesser outlawry at the suit of the wom-

an's legal administrator. The women's legal administrator could also sue the men who had unlawfully betrothed the woman for personal compensation (GII, 144_{58}).

For the betrothal to be legal several other requirements had to be met. The betrothal had to be witnessed by at least two witnesses named specifically for this occasion. The parties to the prospective wedding could not be related to each other by blood or spiritual kinship, they had to jointly own a minimum amount of property prescribed by the law, and the match had to be "sound".

Marriage between kin who were second cousins or closer constituted a major incest (*frændsemisspell*) and was penalized with full outlawry. Minor incest with kin (*sifjaslit*) was from these degrees to fourth cousins, and with affine to third cousins once removed. The penalty for minor incest was lesser outlawry. The surviving law compilations prescribe that following the marriage a newlywed man had to swear an oath at the spring assembly and declare that he knows of no family link between him and his wife that would impede the marriage. Failure to follow this rule was punished with the penalty of six marks at the suit of anyone who wanted to prosecute (GII, 147_{60}).

A couple who were related to each other in the fifth and sixth degree could legalize their marriage upon payment of the capital tithe (*meiri tíund*), and for the remoter degree on payment of 120 or 60 ells of homespun. The payment had to be made at the next General Assembly following the marriage, and the money went to the Law Council. In 1217 a new rule was introduced in Iceland which relaxed the rules concerning incest by implementing the canons of the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council into the Icelandic law. From then on the limit of minor incest with kin became the fourth and fifth degree.

Spiritual kin were also barred from marriage. A person entered a spiritual relationship (*guðsifjar*) with another by standing sponsor for her or for her children at any of the ceremonies of primesigning, baptism or confirmation. Marriage between spiritual kins was considered to be equivalent to minor incest and could be punished with lesser outlawry.

Grágás also prescribe a minimal property requirement for a couple joining in marriage provided the woman was not past childbearing (GII, 148_{61}). For the marriage to be legal the newlyweds had to jointly own property valued at least at 120 ounce-units in legal tender (equivalent of 15 marks or 720 ells of homespun), beside their every day clothing, and not counting the property set aside for the keep of their dependants. Newlyweds who did not follow this rule faced lesser outlawry. In opposition to the general rule concerning the treatments of outlaws, no confiscation court was held for married couples sentenced for disregarding the minimal property qualification. The outlawed couple could come back to Iceland only when they amassed at least 120 ounce units in property.

The minimal property requirement was no doubt seen as a way of preventing couples without means necessary to support dependents from forming families. It is impossible to tell how strictly this rule was followed. However, if it was

observed literally, then only the householders could afford to marry. For a typical landless farm worker it would take around 20 years of work to save enough wealth to qualify for marriage.[13] In any case, the extant narrative sources include several examples of household men and women forming families without facing any legal consequences, which suggest that while not necessarily common, marriage between people other than householders was possible and did not always lead to outlawry and banishment from the country. It is however also possible that poor people who did not own enough to enter into marriage took out loans. The extant law books contain several references to encumbered capital on marriage though their meaning is uncertain (see e.g. GII, 153_{67}).

The amount of property owned by the prospective married couple was also important for deciding on the value of bride price and dowry to be exchanged between the parties. The payment of the bride price was a necessary condition for marriage to be lawful. Without the exchange of the agreed bride price the marriage would be invalid and the children born from it would be prevented from inheriting from their parents. The value of the bride-price was set by the agreement between the parties. However, for the match to be legally sound the bride price could not be lower than the customary price for a slave woman (GII, 144_{59}). This would set the minimal value of bride price between one and one and a half mark. Unlike the bride price, the dowry was considered to be a nonessential feature of a betrothal agreement, though the narrative sources suggest that it was a common practice to match the bride price with the equally valued dowry. The extant law books treat dowry as an advance of inheritance. A woman could not claim more property in dowry than any of her brothers could expect to inherit at the time of the betrothal (GII, $118_{4–5}$).

At the betrothal the parties would also typically decide on whether to form a partnership (*félag*). By putting their property into a partnership the prospective married couple agreed to combine all their wealth (unless specifically excluded) into a common pool and to divide it between themselves according to an agreed upon ratio. The only condition set by law for forming partnerships was that it had to be a fair agreement and could not be detrimental to their prospective heirs. Such an agreement was bidding as long as the betrothal witnesses who remembered its terms were alive and the married couple did not make any changes to the agreement. A change in the terms of the partnership agreement was possible providing at least two of the original witnesses were still alive and able to pass on their testimony. Entering into partnership was voluntary as long as the married couple was able to provide keep for themselves and their dependants. However, if they fell into a state of destitution the law imposed a partnership between them by diving their wealth in such a way that the husband gained the control over two-thirds of it, and the wife over the rest (GII, 153_{67}).

[13] J.L. Byock, *Viking Age...*, p. 323.

The other items to be resolved at the betrothal were the exact date of the wedding, the place where the wedding ceremony would be held and how the cost of the wedding ceremony should be split between the parties. The surviving law compilations leave the specifics of those issues to the discretion of the parties, except forbidding them to organize the wedding on certain days connected to religious holidays or during an established fast (GII, 148_{62}).

The woman's legal administrator and a prospective groom negotiated all the aforementioned aspects of the betrothal agreement. The extant law compilations confer almost no rights to the woman herself in this regard, not even her consent was required for the betrothal to be legal. Only the woman who wanted to enter a covenant had the right to refuse marriage, and a leeway in negotiating with her male relatives on the choice of a husband was given to a woman whose father died (GII, 144_{53}). Careful reading of the sagas of Icelanders, however, leaves one with the impression that in practice it was prudent to get the woman's consent. Marriages into which women were forced almost always end up badly in sagas[14]. This divergence between the legal and the narrative sources however may be explained by the fact that some of the extant copies of the *Íslendingasögur* are younger then *Grágás*.[15] The sagas, thus, may reflect a change in social attitudes resulting from the growing insistence of the church on consent being the decisive criterion determining the legality of the marriage.

A betrothal agreement was binding for a year, unless the parties themselves stipulated otherwise. The wedding could be postponed if the groom became ill, and could not join his prospective wife in one bed. If his illness proved to be serious, and he did not recover within a year of falling ill the betrothal agreement lost its binding force, unless both parties decided to wait longer. In case the betrothed woman became ill, it was up to the prospective husband to decide if he wanted to proceed with marriage or wait until she regained her health (GII, 144_{56}).

Parties to a betrothal agreement could cancel the wedding without any of them incurring financial consequences, only if following the betrothal they discovered close kinship. In such case the man who took or the man who gave the woman in betrothal had to meet the other, and enumerate the kinship before witnesses.

If the parties had second thoughts about the marriage they could withdraw from the wedding contract by handing over the agreed bride price or dowry to the other party. However, if it was the legal administrator of the woman who had second thoughts about the wedding, the would-be groom had two choices. He could either summon the former for the dowry and for the sum he himself was to

[14] A very different situation is depicted in the contemporary sagas however. One can find many descriptions of marriages in the *Sturlungasaga*, but not one case in which women's wishes were taken into consideration. See J. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, Ithaca 1995, p. 44.

[15] Vésteinn Ólason, *Family Sagas*, [in:] *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by R. McTurk, Oxford 2007, pp. 114–116.

contribute to the cost of the weeding, or summon him for withholding the woman. In the latter case the legal administrator faced lesser outlawry. The same penalty was also prescribed for anyone else who obstructed the marriage, by keeping the betrothed woman away from the groom (GII, $144_{57–58}$).

When the day of the wedding arrived the parties met at the farm they had chosen at the betrothal as the place of the marriage ceremony (if the evidence of the sagas is to be trusted, the weeding usually took place at the bride's house). While traveling to this place the wedding guest enjoyed the rights conferred upon the people traveling to assemblies. Householders were required by law to give board for up to five persons if there was a bride or groom among the traveling party, and up to three otherwise (GI, 10_{43}).

The importance of the wedding ceremony was also stressed by the special protection given by law for the horses the guest used for this occasion. Ill treatment of other people's horses usually resulted in a fine. If however the mistreated horse belonged to someone on a wedding journey, the penalty for "docking the tail" was lesser outlawry (GII, 164_{86}).

The extant law books do not indicate whether the wedding had any religious aspect. There is no indication that a marriage was administered by a priest, and the only explicitly mentioned action that had to take place during the wedding ceremony was a properly witnessed bedding. According to *Grágás* for a couple to become a man and wife at least six men had to see the bride and the groom enter the same bed (GII, 147_{243}).

Married couple belonging to the householder class was expected to live together in the same household. If both the husband and the wife were householders it was up for a man to decide where the couple should reside (GI, 82_{134}). If none of the couple were householders it was the duty of the husband to find a domicile for his wife before the end of the Moving Days. Failure to follow this duty resulted in a fine, and in such a case the wife could freely choose her own residence for the next year (GI, 78_{126}). If the marriage took place before the Moving Days and the couple lived in different households where they were tied to particular jobs, they were to spend two-thirds of the time at his lodging and one third at her lodging (GI, 80_{131}).

A married woman had limited rights in her property. Following the bedding the bride price and the yield from it constituted her own property, but was administered by her husband, who could set the income from the bride price against her keep. She could, however, claim inheritance and take care of her dependants' property even if she was not of full age. The husband was barred from hiring her livestock or any other "object of value" (*gripr*) that rightfully belonged to her (GII, 231_{271}), and could not leave the country with wife's property without her consent (GII, 150_{66}).

More importantly, if the wife had a share in the household she could take charge of the domestic affairs, and the dairying. This meant, among a number of

other things, that she could employ and control the domestic workers, as well as buy any necessary equipment for the household while her husband was away from home. With the consent of her husband she could also make deals with ship-merchants and enter into biding formal agreements concerning their "joint money matters" at assemblies (GII, 152_{67}). Otherwise however her financial and contractual rights were strictly limited.

A married woman could only spend half an ounce-units in a year without her husband's approval. Had she spent more than that, the husband could cancel the deal, take the property in question away from her and summon the seller for selling the property to his wife for a price higher than prescribed by law. A wife was also barred from selling half or more of a land with an inhabited farm on it without the consent of her legal administrator. The same applied to selling chieftaincy or an ocean-worthy ship, even if all the wealth constituted her own property. In case a woman disposed of her husband's property, the deal she had made was void and the husband could sue the men who had taken the property over for theft or appropriation (GII, $152_{66–67}$).

These legal limitations, notwithstanding, the narrative sources, strongly suggest that the day-to-day operations of "indoor households" (*innan stokks*) were mostly managed by married women. A common sign of women's authority over a household was a number of keys they carried on their belts. These keys opened the locks to rooms and boxes in which most of the family possessions, tools and valuables were safely stored. Such keys are frequently described in sagas and are among common archaeological findings in women's burials[16].

Marriage could end in two ways – due to the spouse's death or the separation of the couple (*lögskilnaðr*). If one is to believe the saga authors, the only action required during the pagan times for a separation to be effective was a public declaration renouncing the marriage. The most famous example of such an action comes from *Heiðarvígasaga*. "So it befell one morning, as they were both together in their sleeping loft, away from other folk, that Bardi would sleep on, but she would be rousing him, and so she took a small pillow and cast it into his face as if for sport. He threw it back again from him; and so this went on sundry times. And at last he cast it at her and let his hand go with it. She was wroth thereat, and having gotten a stone she throweth it at him in turn. So that day, when drinking was at an end, Bardi riseth to his feet, and nameth witnesses for himself, and declareth that he is parted from Aud, saying that he will take masterful ways no more from her than from anyone else. And so fast was he set in this mind herein, that to bring words to bear was of no avail". (*Heiðarvígasaga*, chapter 41). Similar accounts can be found in *Njálssaga* chapter 34, *Eyrbyggjasaga* chapter 14, and *Laxdælasaga* chapter 34. It is impossible to tell whether these stories faithfully preserve long gone pagan customs or if they are a creation of biased Christian saga-writers,

[16] A. Winroth, *The Age of Vikings*, Princeton 2014, pp. 73–74.

however the extant legal sources dealing with times after the religious conventions depict a completely different picture (GII, $150_{64–66}$).

According to *Grágás* separation could be brought about only for the four enumerated causes: 1) if it was discovered that the marriage was in the forbidden degree, 2) if one of the spouses inflicted a major wound on the other, 3) if the husband wanted to take his wife out of the country under compulsion, or 4) if the couple "proved to be at variance" and the bishop for the Quarter where they lived gave leave (GII, 234_{272})[17]. Only in the first of the aforementioned cases separation was obligatory, and could be imposed on the married couple by a judgment or a bishop's decree (if they did not separate on their own accord). In all other cases the decision on whether to press with the separation was left to the wronged or dissatisfied party.

To become legally separated, the couple had to receive a leave from a bishop. To receive bishop's permission they had to meet with him personally, preferably at a General Assembly and bring before him their testimony as well as testimonies of their witnesses. A woman could also transfer her case to an agent, who could then represent her before a bishop. The parties were to present their case on the first Friday of the assembly, following the ordinary rules of testimony. After their testimony was properly delivered, the bishop had one day to decide whether to give them leave to follow with a separation or not.

Except for the separation on the grounds of incest, there was one more cause that could bring about a separation without the involvement of a bishop – an interspousal violence resulting in a major wound.[18] *Grágás* do not contain any specific procedures that should be followed in such cases, therefore it is most probable that general rules of pressing with an assault case were used on such an occasion.

No matter how the lawful separation was brought about, it was up to the bishop to decide whether the separated parties could enter into another marriage. Second marriage made without bishop's leave constituted bigamy (*tvíkvæni*) and was punished by lesser outlawry at a suit of anyone who wanted to prosecute (GII, 250_{278}). Children born from a bigamous marriage were not lawful heirs and were barred from claiming inheritance.

The surviving law compilations also contain rules for dealing with situations of ceased conjugal cohabitation. If a husband neglected his wife for six seasons by "sleeping elsewhere than in her bed" she could ask a bishop for a leave to

[17] *Konungsbók* contains also a paragraph according to which the separation of man and wife could be brought about if they became destitute and did not have the means to maintain their dependants. According to *Staðarhólsbók* this possibility was however abolished by a new law of unspecified date (GII, 232_{271}).

[18] A major wound was a wound that involved breaking of a bone, knocking out someone's teeth, and irreversible injuries to tongue, eye, nose or ears, as well as castration and a "shame-stroke across someone's buttocks" (GI, 86_{141}).

claim her own property from a husband and press for personal compensation (GII, $158_{77}235_{272}$). If it was the wife who caused the cessation of conjugal cohabitation then the husband was to meet her at the place where she was staying, and in the presence of other male residents invite her to return to his settled home. He could also invite her back publicly, by delivering the invitation from the Law Rock at a General Assembly or from an assembly slope at a local *Þing*. He was to repeat this invitation every spring, for three consecutive years. If after his third invitation the wife chose not to come back to him, he could claim personal compensation from her, unless she had received a leave from a bishop to be responsible for her own domicile (GII, 250_{280}).

There is no indication in the extant law books that a cessation of conjugal cohabitationalone could be used as a ground for bringing about legal separation. However, one can assume that at least sometimes this cessation was a result of marital incompatibility, and in such case the parties could obtain a leave from a bishop to separate (GII, 234_{272}).

Upon separation from her former husband a woman had the right to claim her bride price and dowry. Any inheritance she claimed during wedlock was also to be given to her, and if the couple had formed a partnership, the witnesses to their partnership were to testify to the terms that had been stipulated for it. Following the testimony, the separated couple was to divide their property according to the previously agreed allotment (GII, 150_{65}).

Considering the attention separation received from saga writers, and the duty to obtain a bishop's leave for it to become legal, one can assume that in most cases an end to a marriage was brought about by death, not separation.

Widows and widowers were not listed among those who were to inherit from their dead spouses (GII, 118_{3}). Therefore, after the death of her husband the woman could only claim her bride price, dowry and any inheritance she had claimed from her kin while the marriage lasted. If however her husband died with unsettled debts, part of the bride price could go to the creditors, provided that he had made the bride price payment with borrowed wealth. The dowry was not to be reduced in such circumstances (GI, 62_{114}). Had the couple made partnership upon their marriage, then widow was to meet all debts in proportion to the share she had in their joint property. If there was no partnership between the two, but the woman owned a share in the household, she was to meet her part of all the sums that were spent on their joint household and her own needs (GII, 223_{164}).

A widow had stronger position than unmarried and married women alike. She could decide her own domicile, even if she was under twenty years of age. She could not be betrothed against her will by anyone other than her father, and at least in some cases she had enough wealth, from bride price, dowry, and inheritance, to be economically independent. Therefore, it should not be surprising that widows were very prominent among the strong women described in the narrative

sources.[19] This image of independent widows managing their own household is, however, tempered when one looks closely at the economic realities of the pre-modern agricultural societies. Given the amount and the backbreaking hardship of work, which went into subsistence farming, it is rather unlikely that there were many householders who could afford to manage their farms singlehandedly. As Andreas Winroth observes, in the old Norse societies, the daily work at farms required constant participation of both men and women, therefore a household could not really function if it was not headed by a couple. For this reason both widows and widowers had to remarry very quickly.[20]

IV. Women who were the head of her own household (most likely widows) were counted as householders. They could enter into domicile contracts with people wanting to join their household, and were responsible for words and actions of their household men and women. If women householders owned enough wealth to be able to pay the assembly attendance dues, they could also choose a chieftain for themselves and for all the people who were legally attached to their household. Otherwise however their "political" rights were severely restricted.

Unlike male householders, women householders could not actively participate in assemblies. They were not allowed to be named as witnesses, and they could not serve as juries or members of verdict-giving panels (*kviðr*). There is no indication in the extant law compilations that women were even allowed to speak publicly at assemblies.

Women were expressly forbidden from prosecuting cases of killing (GI, 66_{216}). The supposed reason for this restriction is given in the *Eyrbyggjasaga*. "On Arknel's death, the legal heirs to his estate were all women, and it was their responsibility to take action over the killing. As a result the case was not followed up as vigorously as people might have expected after the killing of so great a man. […] Because the action over the killing of this great man had gone so badly, the leading men of Iceland made a law that neither a woman, nor a man under the age of sixteen, should ever again be allowed to raise a manslaughter action, and this has been the law ever since" (*Eyrbggjasaga*, chapter 38). In a few instances where the old Icelandic law did grant women the right to act as principals in a case (e.g. GI, 94_{158}), they had to be substituted by a male relative who had a legal domicile in her household. In this regard women were treated in the same way as minors and male householders who were not assembly-fit, that is too poor of health to personally participate in assemblies.

Similarly women could own a chieftaincy, but could not act in it. A woman that owned chieftaincy had to turn it over to a man (GI, 84_{137}). It is very unlikely

[19] J. Jochens, *Women*..., pp. 61–62.
[20] A. Winroth, *The Age of*..., p. 165.

that the man who acted as a chieftain on her behalf was in any way restricted by her wishes and opinions regarding the proper use of her chieftaincy.

The fact that even women who were householders – and thus belonging to a very privileged strata of the Icelandic society – had very limited rights in a public sphere should not be interpreted in a way suggesting that they had no saying in political matters. As Helgi Þorláksson rightfully notes, there was no clear distinction between the private and the public sphere in the Middle Ages, and a lot of what went on in a household had serious political implications. "Such matters as the seating order at tables for feasts, the food and drink provided, and the gifts presented to guests were of the utmost political importance, since they raised questions of social honor, rank, and prestige among males that were constantly being debated and revised. In the political context, respect and popularity were matters of life and death for ambitious males, and it was the women who dealt with such matters"[21].

Strong female characters abound in sagas. Women might have lacked the right to vote on formal judgments or issue verdicts, but they frequently acted as peace-makers, mediators and arbitrators. In *Sturlungasaga* we even meet a heiress to a powerful chieftain who acted as an arbitrator together with the bishop of Skálholt on the condition that she alone would decide if they could not agree on the verdict. And while Steinvör's position was exceptional, sagas leave no doubt that women's voice carried weight.[22] The bases for women's significance in society, however, were very different than those set for men. Lacking legal, political and in most cases economic power, women had to rely on their personal qualities and "sexual politics" alone. Therefore, any social advancement was only attainable for women through men.

V. *Grágás* contain several provisions concerning various legally liable behaviors towards women which were liable at law. The most extensive of these provisions deal with unlawful intercourse and fathering an illegitimate child.

The preserved law compilations differentiate between two different kinds of unlawful intercourse – consensual and non-consensual. If a woman was forced to have sex, the man who had forced himself on her forfeited his immunity and could face death from several of her male kin. The extant law compilations enumerate six women on whose account "a man has the right to kill" – a man's wife, daughter, mother, sister, foster-daughter and foster-mother. The right to kill was

[21] Helgi Þorláksson, *Historical Background: Iceland 870–1400*, [in:] *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature...*, p. 141.

[22] Numerous examples of women householders with strong social standing can be found in Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, *Saga World and Nineteenth Century Iceland: The Case of Women Farmers*, [in:] *The Cold Counsel: The Women in Old Norse Literature and Myth*, ed. by S.M. Anderson, K. Swenson, London 2002, p. 283.

limited in time and place depending on whether the "wrongful intercourse" did indeed take place or was only attempted. If the offender was caught while forcing himself on woman, but before a "wrongful intercourse" took place, he could be killed, but only at the place of action (GI, 90_{154}). If, however, the assailant was successful in his attempt, then "the right to kill" him extended up until the next General Assembly (GI, 63_{216}). For the killing to be lawful, the man who took part in it had to obtain a clearing verdict from the panel of five neighbors living closest to the place of assault. If the avenging party was unsuccessful in their pursuit of the offender, and/or the time during which the right to kill could be acted upon passed, the woman's assailant was to be summoned to full outlawry (GI, 90_{155}).

Consensual unlawful intercourse took place outside of marriage and is defined in the surviving law compilations as "laying with a woman and going so far that the man could have expected that they would have a child if that was destined for them" (GII, 157_{74}). The prosecution principal in such case was the woman's legal administrator or if she was married her husband (GII, 156_{70}). The man accused of intercourse faced full outlawry and had to pay personal compensation to the principal. As for the woman, her legal administrator had the right to take forty-eight ounce units (six marks, an equivalent of the standard personal compensation) from her, and if she did not have enough means to pay him, take her into a debt-bondage (GII, 158_{75}).

If the parties involved in a consensual unlawful intercourse were kin or affine (i.e. the intercourse also constituted an incest), or if the accused man had lain with a married woman, there could be no settlement without a prior leave from the Law Council (*alþingislof*). The penalty for an unlawful settlement in such case was lesser outlawry and the case was at hands of anyone who wanted to prosecute (GII, 156_{73}). In all other cases the parties involved in the dispute were allowed to make settlement without asking for a leave. However, no one was to take or award personal compensation smaller than the one prescribed by law, i.e. forty eight six-ells ounce units. Failure to observe this rule could result in six marks. Moreover, the intercourse case was then balked and anyone who wanted to prosecute could do so, to the limit of law (GII, 245_{275}).

Aside from the unlawful intercourse case, a man who fathered a child outside of marriage could also face a paternity suit. A paternity suit was separate from an unlawful intercourse suit, although the prosecuting principal in both cases was the same. It was possible for the woman's legal administrator to summon the offender first for the unlawful intercourse, and the following summer again, on the ground that he "has lain with the woman – and name her – and gone so far that he could expect that he might be the father of the child she had had" (GII, 157_{74}).

If the man charged with fathering the child was found not guilty, another suspect could be summoned the following summer. A fathering case was never "out of date". The old Icelandic law explicitly forbade charging more than

one man for fathering the same child in any single summer though. This was different from the intercourse case which was a "three assembly case" (*þriggja þinga mál*, i.e. it could be prosecuted only until the end of the third General Assembly from the moment the principal had learned of an offense), and in which the principal had the right to prosecute as many men during the summer as he chose to on grounds of having an unlawful intercourse with the same woman (GII, 158_{75}).

A pregnant unmarried woman was required to tell her legal administrator who the father of her child was. If she tried to withhold this information from him, the administrator was legally allowed to use force on her, provided he did this in front of five neighbors, and no lasting injuries or visible marks were suffered by the woman (GII, 161_{79}). The ultimate penalty for concealing the name of the father was full outlawry. The same punishment applied to a man who knowing that he had fathered a child out of wedlock did not come forward with this information. Lesser outlawry was prescribed by law for a man who was found guilty of false identification, that is for either ascribing another's man child to oneself, or knowingly ascribing his own child to someone else. A woman who falsely identified the father of her child also faced lesser outlawry (GII, 158_{77}).

The law also allowed for ordeals (*skírsla*) in paternity cases[23]. In fact, paternity and incest cases were the only instances for which the extant old Icelandic law books prescribe the use of ordeals (GII, 143_{49}, 156_{71}). For a man an ordeal consisted of carrying a rod of red-hot iron at a stipulated distance, and for a woman picking stones out of a pot containing boiling water (GII, 261_{282}). Following the procedure the wounded hand was bandaged and examined at the set latter date. If the wound healed cleanly the accused was found innocent. The whole procedure was conducted under clerical supervision and if the bishop supervising it found it necessary, he could choose to impose several ordeals on the same person in the same case (GII, 264_{233}).

A man who formally acknowledged an illegitimate child, or was found guilty of fathering one due to the results of an ordeal or a verdict from a panel of neighbors became responsible for the child's maintenance. The man could also be made a bounded-debtor if someone else made a lawful settlement on his behalf (GII, 249_{276}).

Unlike children born of parents married without betrothal, illegitimate children were "law-listed to inherit" (*taliðr til arfs at lögum*), that is they were included among lawful heirs. However, illegitimate children were unlikely to inherit after their parents or siblings. This is because misbegotten children were listed in the inheritance sequence after eight other classes of lawful heirs, and a single heir in any precedent class excluded all succeeding classes (GII, 118_{3}).

[23] It must be noted however that trial by ordeal was abolished by order of the Lateran Council of 1215.

Aside from intercourse and fathering a child the extant law compilations list several other behaviors deemed offensive towards a woman or her family that constituted punishable offenses.

Abducting a woman from her home carried a penalty of full outlawry. The person who took part in such a raid forfeited immunity in respect of all injuries inflicted by men who had legal claims to the woman (e.g. her legal administrator and kin). Not only the abduction (*konunám*) itself, but also plotting it was punishable by full outlawry. Full outlawry was also prescribed for a man who married the abducted woman, even if he himself had not participated in the abduction. People who knowingly shared quarters with the raiding party faced lesser outlawry (GII, $159–160_{78–79}$). A householder who had not been involved in the abduction, but whose house was used by a raiding party for harboring the abducted woman could avoid a penalty only if at the next public gathering – an assembly, a commune meeting, or after a mass – he announced that she stayed at his house and kept her there until someone who had claim in her came and fetched her (GII, 242_{275}).

Abduction was defined in the extant law-books as taking a woman away under compulsion. A woman could also leave her domicile on her own accord. Such consent however had a very limited exculpatory effect on men who accompanied her (GII, $156_{72,}$ 257_{281}). A man who traveled with a woman knowing that she had not received the permission to leave her domicile from her legal administrator was liable to lesser outlawry, and the same punishment applied to a ship's captain who gave her passage (his crew members were only fined).

Composing a love-poem on a woman was punishable with full outlawry. The principal in such case was the woman, however if she was younger than twenty, or did not want to prosecute, the case could be undertaken up by her legal administrator (GII, 238_{198}).

Secretly kissing an unmarried woman carried a penalty of three marks or lesser outlawry, depending on whether the woman in question had consented to the kiss or not. In the former instance the woman's legal administrator was the principal, in the latter the case lied with the woman herself. If the woman who was secretly kissed was married, her consent or the lack of it was irrelevant in the eyes of law – a person who kissed another man's wife always faced lesser outlawry (GII, 155_{69}).

The compilers of the old Icelandic law were concerned not only with sexual mores but also with cases of gender-bending. *Grágás* prescribe the punishment of lesser outlawry for all men and women who became "so deviant" that they started wearing clothing commonly associated with the other sex. For men that implied "putting on a woman's headdress [*faldr*] or women's clothes" in order to beguile a woman, and for women wearing male fashion in "order to be different" or cutting their hair short, or carrying weapons (GII, 155_{69}, 254_{219}). Anyone who was offended by a deviant deed could be a principal in such case. The offender had to be summoned locally at his or her legal home, and five neighbors of the

accused were to be called for an assembly to deliver verdict on the facts surrounding the case.

Lesser outlawry prescribed for transvestism – as the editors of the modern edition of the preserved old Icelandic law-compilations choose to call the aforementioned offense – was a severe punishment. However, even harsher legal consequences were faced by anyone who publicly mocked another man for his lack of manliness. Reciting poetry about another man containing lines suggesting that he is "womanish or has been buggered" was not only punishable by full outlawry but it could be avenged by death. Killing or inflicting injuries in such case was not punishable, although the mocked person had to bring a suit against his slanderer in order to clear himself (GII, $238_{198,}423_{354}$).

Grágás also mention women, though only in passing, in the wergild ring list section. The so-called *Baugatal* is an extremely complex set of rules concerning the atonement to be paid for killing a person who had not forfeited immunity (GI, $113_{175–183}$). According to the old Icelandic laws the killer's kin, up to forth cousins, were required to pay blood money to the corresponding member of the victim's family. This payment was mandatory irrespective of the end result of the lawsuit the victim's kin had brought against the killer. The atonement took form of wergild rings (*baugr*) and its value was calculated in ounces of silver, though the payment itself could also be made in other legal tender. In order to claim the wergild rings, the victim's family was required to formally guarantee truce (*grið*).

The *Baugatal* section is considered to be one of the oldest in Grágás, but due to its extreme intricacy, there are serious doubts as to whether it was ever in actual use. There are more than one hundred examples of atonement payments for killing in the old Icelandic narrative sources, but not one of them follows the rules set up in the extant law compilations. Therefore, modern scholars are inclined to believe that the wergild ring list section was more likely an exercise in complex legal reasoning, so beloved by the medieval lawyers, than an accurate account of existing societal norms.[24] The *Baugatal* is nevertheless worth adducing as another example of women being treated differently than men in the early Icelandic society.

In general, men alone were both the payers and receivers of the wergild ring. A woman could claim the atonement payment for the killing of her kin only when four requirements were fulfilled: 1) she was unmarried, 2) it was her father who was killed, 3) there was not one male who could claim the wergild ring, and 4) she did not enter into private settlement with the killer. In such rare case the victim's daughter was called the "ring-lady" (*bauga-hlín*), and she was to receive one wergild ring worth of three marks, just like a living son would. Similarly, the killer's unmarried daughter was required to make the atonement

[24] W.I. Miller, *Bloodtaking*..., p. 144.

payment to the victim's family, if no proper male payer existed. Once the killer's daughter became married however "she tossed the outlay into her kinsmen's lap" (GI, 113_{183}).

VI. Even a cursory reading of *Grágás* can explain why it is mostly men who were saga-worthy in the old Norse societies. They alone were active participants in the realms most interesting to the saga audiences. Travel, trade, feud, law and politics were quintessential male activities in the old Norse world not because they required gender specific attributes that were unattainable for women, but because women faced numerous and sometimes insuperable legal obstacles, that barred them from entering these fields.

Only men who reached the age of maturity could move about freely in the country and abroad. Only adult men could enter into unhindered deals concerning their wealth – sell a farm, an ocean-worthy ship or buy property valued at more than half an ounce-units. Males were the only ones who could carry weapons, avenge certain close family members who fell victim to killing, and prosecute all cases at a Thing. Men alone could be named as witnesses, serve as juries or members of neighbor-panels. And while women were allowed by law to own a chieftaincy, only men could act in it.

In all the aforementioned spheres women were subordinate to men, to their fathers, brothers, and husbands. Even when the law did provide the women with the ability to act within these realms, in order to be valid, most of their actions had to be sanctioned by a male – a legal administrator, a husband, or an agent. In general, wherever *Grágás* discuss norms pertaining to women, it does so mainly in relation to men. One of the clearest examples in this regard is the section on sexual assaults which is mainly concerned with the rights of the victimized woman's male kin over the assailant (GI, $90_{154–155}$). While it can be reasonably claimed that the purpose of such treatment of women was to shield them from violence, which was a very possible though not unavoidable part of the legal proceedings in the Icelandic Commonwealth[25], one cannot avoid the impression that the law-compilers, if not the actual law itself, saw women as the responsibility of male relatives and not legal persons in their own right.

The institutional structure and the power dynamics of the Icelandic Commonwealth also favored men over women in their quest for social advancement. The lack of central power and the executive authority created an environment characterized by a high level of social mobility, but the climb up the social ladder was strongly connected to success in feuds (though other routes for advancing in society were also available, if less often used). Notwithstanding the fact that not all conflicts were violent, and that many of them have found a peaceful res-

[25] J.L. Byock, *Viking Age*...., p. 317.

olution through private mediation and/or arbitration, the ability to mobilize and use force was a very important factor in determining their outcome. Men had clear upper hand over women in this regard. This is probably the reason why the saga writers associate powerlessness with being female[26], and why the old Icelandic law allowed the man accused of being "womanish" to avenge this insult with death.

It should thus not be surprising that women, not being able to attain prestige in wider societal context, found their realm in the private sphere. It is in the inner walls of the Icelandic households that the women had the greatest influence. Being a mistress of the house was a very important and highly responsible position in the subsistence economies of the early Norse societies. By hiring and managing workers, taking care of the milking stock, overseeing the preparation of food, and organizing the production of *vaðmál* (a homespun wool cloth), a householder's wife had a major part in the success or failure of the whole family[27].

The fact that women lacked proper legal standing that would enable them to enter formally into the realms of law and politics did not preclude them from having a say in these matters. Wives, mothers, mistresses and concubines had various ways to influence their husbands, sons, and partners. Through men women could insinuate themselves into affairs reaching far beyond the inner households. This influence however was indirect, and very informal in nature. More importantly, a woman's sway was most significant within marriage, and when it came to deciding whom she should marry, her own voice was less audible, than that of her male kin.

The old Icelandic legal system was clearly more favourable to men than women. One should not, however, overlook the fact that Icelandic women, both single and married, generally had more rights than their sisters in contemporary continental Europe. This high legal status of medieval Icelandic women is nowhere more visible than in *Grágás*' section on law dealing with property, as *Grágás* consistently confers more ownership rights on women, than any other European code of similar age.[28] The ability of the Icelandic women to independently hold property, even if it came with substantial limits, had far reaching consequences, since the ownership of property was one of the more significant bases for achieving influence in the medieval society. And some women in the old Icelandic Commonwealth did indeed achieve it, as can be ascertained from numerous examples of strong female characters found in the sagas.

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[26] C.J. Clover, *Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe*, "Speculum" 68:2 (1993), pp. 363–387.

[27] Some eminent scholars claim that this very high level of involvement in the household economics gave Icelandic women a high social standing, though this is a contested issue in the scholarly literature. See e.g. J.L. Byock, *Viking Age...,* p. 319, J. Jochens, *Women*..., pp. 141–160.

[28] T.M. Andersson, W.I. Miller, *Law and Literature*..., pp. 19–20.

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STATUS SPOŁECZNY KOBIET W STAROISLANDZKIM PRAWIE

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest rekonstrukcja statusu społecznego kobiet w średniowiecznej Islandii dokonana w oparciu o zachowane prywatne zbiory staroislandzkiego prawa zwane *Grágás*. Zbiory te stanowią kompilację treści dwóch fragmentarycznych manuskryptów spisanych około 1260–1280 roku, znanych jako *Konungsbók* i *Staðarhólsbók*. Jakkolwiek we współczesnej literaturze przedmiotu zgłaszane są wątpliwości, co do wiarygodności struktury konstytucyjnej opisanej przez redaktorów *Grágás*, zebrane przez nich normy społeczne uznawane są przez badaczy za relatywnie wierne odbicie autentycznych średniowiecznych islandzkich zwyczajów i praw. Wiele z tych norm odnosi się do obowiązków i uprawnień kobiet. Liczne jednostki redakcyjne dotyczące małżeństwa, spadków, rozporządzania własnością prywatną, zawierania umów, czy zwłaszcza funkcjonowania rodzin i gospodarstw domowych zawierają wiele obszernych paragrafów odnoszących się do statusu kobiet. Dokonując rekonstrukcji prawnej pozycji kobiet w społeczeństwie islandzkim, zamierzam wskazać źródła uprzywilejowania islandzkich mężczyzn.

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Ásdís Egilsdóttir, *professor emeritus* Uniwersytetu Islandzkiego, gdzie wykładała literaturę średniowiecznej Islandii. Opublikowała wiele opracowań na temat współczesnych i tłumaczonych żywotów świętych, badań nad pamięcią i badań nad płcią, zwłaszcza męskością. Redagowała *Hungrvaka*, *Þorláks saga* i *Páls saga* dla renomowanej serii edycji źródłowych *Íslenzk fornrit* (t. 16), Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag 2002. Niektóre z jej artykułów zostały przedrukowane w jej Festschrifcie, *Fræðinæmi*, Reykjavík 2016.

Ármann Jakobsson jest profesorem Uniwersytetu Islandzkiego badającym dzieje średniowiecznej Islandii. Jest autorem i redaktorem kilku książek dotyczących średniowiecznej literatury i kultury islandzkiej, ostatnio *The Troll Inside You* (2017).

Csete Katona uzyskał tytuł magistra historii na Uniwersytecie w Debreczynie na Węgrzech, a także dodatkowy tytuł magistra w zakresie badań wikingów i średniowiecznej kultury nordyckiej na Uniwersytecie Islandzkim. Jego zainteresowania badawcze przeniosły się na relacje między wikingami i wschodnimi nomadycznymi plemionami tureckimi w IX–X w. Jego praca obroniona była na Wydziale Studiów Średniowiecznych w CEU w 2018 r. Katona studiował również archeologię na Uniwersytecie Eötvösa Loránda w Budapeszcie. Jest także zaangażowany jako pracownik naukowy w projekt badawczy „Lendület" Węgierskiej Akademii Nauk pt. „Węgry w średniowiecznej Europie". Obecne badania Csete w CEU są interdyscyplinarnym badaniem porównawczym, które koncentruje się na tworzeniu i funkcjonowaniu wojsk w Europie Wschodniej i Skandynawii w okresie od IX do XI wieku.

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artykuły i rozdziały w książkach, w tym w przygotowywanej do druku książce zatytułowanej *Wulkany w mitologii staronordyckiej* (2020). Jako wykładowca na University of Colorado uczy historii wikingów, mitologii nordyckiej, literatury sag, skandynawskiego folkloru i kultur Arktyki. Prowadzi również kanał na platformie YouTube poświęcony mitologii nordyckiej i załączony do niego podcast.

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Jakub Morawiec, dr hab. – adiunkt w Instytucie Historii Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Zakładzie Historii Średniowiecza. W swych badaniach koncentruje się na dziejach Skandynawii we wczesnym średniowieczu i rozwoju średniowiecznej historiografii skandynawskiej. W szczególny sposób interesuje się skaldami islandzkimi, ich poezją oraz sagami na ich temat. Jest autorem licznych książek, publikowanych w kraju i za granicą, m.in. *Vikings among the Slavs* (Wiedeń 2009), *Wolin w średniowiecznej tradycji skandynawskiej* (Kraków 2010), *Saga o Hallfredzie skaldzie kłopotliwym* (Wrocław 2011), *Między poezją a polityką. Rozgrywki polityczne w Skandynawii XI wieku w świetle poezji ówczesnych skaldów* (Katowice 2016), *Norwegia. Początki państw* (Poznań 2017), *Dania. Początki państw* (2019).

Marion Poilvez jest doktorantką na Uniwersytecie Islandzkim, zajmuje się funkcją i dynamiką wyjęcia spod prawa w okresie Wspólnoty Islandzkiej.

Tommy Kuusela jest doktorem historii religii. Pracuje jako badacz folkloru i archiwista w Instytucie Języka i Folkloru w Uppsali. Napisał ponad 25 artykułów na temat swoich zainteresowań badawczych: religii staronordyckiej, folkloru skandynawskiego (zwłaszcza wierzeń ludowych i magii), historii kultury zwierząt oraz J.R.R. Tolkiena.

Łukasz Neubauer obronił doktorat z filologii angielskiej na Uniwersytecie Łódzkim. Jako pracownik naukowy Wydziału Humanistycznego Politechniki Koszalińskiej prowadzi wykłady obejmujące zakresem tematycznym literaturę staroangielską, romanse arturiańskie, a także twórczość J.R.R. Tolkiena i C.S. Lewisa. Obok publikacji traktujących m.in. o średniowiecznych i chrześcijańskich wpływach we *Władcy Pierścieni* w swojej pracy badawczej bierze pod lupę również wybrane staroangielskie utwory poetyckie, takie jak *Bitwa pod Maldon*, *Beowulf* czy *Sen o Krzyżu*, starosaski poemat *Hêliand* oraz sagi islandzkie. Jest także człon-

kiem brytyjskiego oddziału Międzynarodowego Stowarzyszenia Arturiańskiego oraz organizatorem i koordynatorem naukowym spotkań w ramach Medieval Fantasy Symposium, organizowanych co roku w Mielnie-Unieściu.

Yoav Tirosh odbywa post-doc w projekcie badawczym na Uniwersytecie Islandzkim „Niepełnosprawność przed niepełnosprawnością". Jego praca doktorska dotyczyła zagadnień pamięci, gatunku i autorstwa w rękopisach *Ljósvetninga saga* z XV wieku. Opublikował artykuły o literaturze staronordyckiej w Skandynawii, m.in. w „Średniowiecze Polskie i Powszechne", „European Journal of Scandinavian Studies", a także kilka rozdziałów książkowych dotyczących problematyki płci, pamięci zbiorowej i interpretacji literatury.

Miriam Mayburd jest doktorantką na Uniwersytecie Islandzkim, której rozprawa doktorska koncentruje się na związkach starych islandzkich sag ze średniowieczną filozofią i teologią mistyczną, aby rzucić światło na średniowieczne nordyckie ontologie doświadczenia siebie. Oprócz prezentacji literackich przedstawień zjawisk paranormalnych w badaniach nad osobowością i płcią staronordycką Mayburd jest autorką artykułów na temat ekologii postludzkich, przednowoczesnych zmian poznawczych, a także synestetyki wymyślonych języków J.R.R. Tolkiena; ostatnio współredagowała tom (z Ármannem Jakobssonem) *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150–1400*.

Włodzimierz Gogłoza, PhD, jest adiunktem na Uniwersytecie Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie. Jest współautorem jednej książki, współredagował siedem tomów naukowych i opublikował dziesiątki artykułów naukowych na tematy od polityki społeczeństw przedpaństwowych i prawa średniowiecznego po nowoczesne praktyki organizacyjne i zarządcze.