

**Pre-print papers**

**of**

**THE 18TH INTERNATIONAL  
SAGA CONFERENCE**

**SAGAS  
AND THE CIRCUM-BALTIC  
ARENA**

**Helsinki and Tallinn, 7th–14th August 2022**

Edited by

Frog, Joonas Ahola, Jesse Barber and Karolina Kouvola

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## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Keynote lectures</b>	
<b>The vernacular scribe in medieval Iceland: On the transmission of texts in a living language vs. “relic texts”</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>Haraldur Bernharðsson, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Revisiting ‘Folkminnesforskning och filologi’</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Stephen A. Mitchell, Harvard University</i>	
<b>Viewing the Vikings: An interdisciplinary challenge</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>Neil Price, University of Uppsala</i>	
<b>Paper presentations</b>	
<b>Into the unknown: Contextualizing the <i>Finnar</i> of the sagas</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>Sirpa Aalto, University of Oulu / Hanken School of Economics, &amp; Anna Wessman, University of Bergen</i>	
<b>Religious lives away from home in the Viking Age: Animal sacrifice</b>	<b>26</b>
<i>Lesley Abrams, University of Oxford / University of Cambridge</i>	
<b>Otherness and similarity of <i>Glæsivellir</i>: Rhetorical and intertextual implications</b>	<b>28</b>
<i>Virginie Adam, Sorbonne Université</i>	
<b>Writing classical antiquity in mediæval Iceland: The interpolations of <i>Trójumanna saga</i></b>	<b>29</b>
<i>Malo Adeux, Université de Bretagne Occidentale (UBO)</i>	
<b>From Circum-Baltic brothers to Atlantic antagonists: Orcadian and Norwegian agendas in the <i>Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum</i> origin tradition</b>	<b>30</b>
<i>Ben Allport, University of Bergen</i>	
<b><i>Skáld</i>, vates, נביא (poet, seer, prophet): A cross-cultural study of separate charismatic traditions</b>	<b>31</b>
<i>David Ashurst, Durham University</i>	
<b>Kolskeggur hinn fróði og landnám: Bera formúlukenndar landnámsfrásagnir merki um upphaflegt mót?</b>	<b>32</b>
<i>Auður Ingvarsdóttir, Reykjavíkuraðemían</i>	
<b>What Snorri saw but never told: Material and textual sources to the early medieval history of Tønsberg</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>Bjørn Bandlien, University of South-Eastern Norway</i>	
<b>Encircling serpents: Cosmological timelines and the example of the world serpent</b>	<b>34</b>
<i>Jesse Barber, University of Helsinki</i>	
<b>Norse notions of labour</b>	<b>43</b>
<i>Santiago Barreiro, CONICET – Universidad of Buenos Aires</i>	
<b>The Old Icelandic uses of the WEAVING and SPINNING of FATE metaphor and their provenance</b>	<b>50</b>
<i>Grzegorz Bartusik, University of Silesia, Katowice</i>	
<b>Sickness and emotion in Old Norse prose: Exploring somatic experience</b>	<b>51</b>
<i>Caroline Batten, University of Oxford</i>	

<b>A digital conversation: Applying data analysis to Viking Age symbols in archaeology and mythological literature</b>	<b>52</b>
<i>Katherine Beard, University of Oxford</i>	
<b>Towards a reoriented global North Atlantic: Race and captivity in the stories of Geirmundr Heljarskinn</b>	<b>53</b>
<i>Jacob Bell, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign</i>	
<b><i>Mun aldri fyrnask í þýðverskri tungu ok á Norðrlöndum</i>: Centering Denmark and erasing the Baltic through supernatural geographies in <i>Völsunga saga</i> and <i>Ragnars saga Loðbrókar</i></b>	<b>54</b>
<i>Adam Bierstedt, Simmons University</i>	
<b>Hallgerðr's hair and breeches: The original meaning of Hallgerðr Höskuldsdóttir's nicknames</b>	<b>58</b>
<i>Bjarni Gunnar Ásgeirsson, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Resonant motion in the poems of Eyvindr Skáldaspillir Finnsson</b>	<b>59</b>
<i>Isobel Boles, University of California, Berkeley</i>	
<b>The othered woman: Language changes in the translation of the supernatural in <i>Rómverja saga</i></b>	<b>60</b>
<i>Natasha A J Bradley, University of Oxford</i>	
<b>Disruption in <i>Hárbarðsljóð</i></b>	<b>61</b>
<i>Manu Braithwaite-Westoby, University of Sydney</i>	
<b>Hybridity and selfhood in Einarr Skúlason's <i>Geisli</i></b>	<b>62</b>
<i>Daniel Brielmaier, University of Toronto</i>	
<b>Women, trolls, and manuscripts: Female aspects of saga production, character drawing and transmission of the <i>fornaldarsögur</i></b>	<b>63</b>
<i>Valerie Broustin, University of Bonn, &amp; Rudolf Simek, University of Bonn, em.</i>	
<b>Iceland, Baltic, Turkmenistan: The archaeological connections of the Mosfell excavations</b>	<b>66</b>
<i>Jesse Byock, University of Iceland / University of California, Los Angeles</i>	
<b>'Eg hørde på dæn hundegaul i míne langsomme dagar': The otherworldly dogs of Medieval Europe</b>	<b>67</b>
<i>Ashley Castelino, University of Oxford</i>	
<b><i>Ok þá kvað hann vísu</i>: Sagas and the ongoing history of skaldic reception</b>	<b>68</b>
<i>Ben Chennells, University College London</i>	
<b>Narratological functions of geography in <i>Göngu-Hrólfs saga</i></b>	<b>77</b>
<i>Kathrin Chlench-Priber, University of Bonn</i>	
<b>Knowledge is power: The limits of acceptable magic use in medieval chivalric <i>rímur</i></b>	<b>80</b>
<i>Lee Colwill, University of Cambridge</i>	
<b>Alternative models of community formation in <i>Jómsvíkinga saga</i></b>	<b>81</b>
<i>Jonathan F. Correa-Reyes, The Pennsylvania State University</i>	
<b><i>Garðarshólmr</i>: Exploring the social networks of eastern Scandinavians in <i>Landnámabók</i></b>	<b>82</b>
<i>Cassidy Croci, University of Nottingham</i>	
<b>Of <i>vinðr</i> and <i>vargar</i> – Exploring a motif in medieval literary tradition</b>	<b>83</b>
<i>Carina Damm, Leipzig University / GWZO Leipzig</i>	

<b>Maritime cultural geographies in <i>Örvar-Odds</i> saga and the alliterative <i>Morte Darthur</i></b>	<b>84</b>
<i>Rebecca Drake, The University of York</i>	
<b>Heroes, trolls, and ‘fan fiction’: Saga characters in the landscape of folklore</b>	<b>85</b>
<i>Matthias Egeler, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich</i>	
<b>Kinsmen, friends or mercenaries? Problematising the existence of ‘international’ forces in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scandinavia</b>	<b>86</b>
<i>Beñat Elortza Larrea, Nord University</i>	
<b>Man’s best friend? Re-evaluating canine-human relationships in Viking-Age multispecies communities</b>	<b>87</b>
<i>Harriet Evans Tang, Durham University</i>	
<b>Three sons in the third generation: A cosmogonic genealogy echoing through history</b>	<b>88</b>
<i>Frog, University of Helsinki</i>	
<b>The backgrounds and early careers of Swedish bishops in the late Middle Ages</b>	<b>97</b>
<i>Michael Frost, University of Gothenburg</i>	
<b>Sagas in the digital age: Comments on the digital interpretation of saga literature</b>	<b>98</b>
<i>Gregory Gaines, University of Maine</i>	
<b>Representations of poetical performances in the <i>skáldsögur</i>: A review from a pragmatical approach</b>	<b>99</b>
<i>Inés García López, Universitat Rovira i Virgili</i>	
<b>On wings of death: Ibn Faḍlān’s “angel of death” as a <i>valkyrja</i> and/or <i>völva</i></b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>“I travel around in the West” fjords: <i>Fóstbræðra</i> saga as a mapping device</b>	<b>101</b>
<i>Gísli Sigurðsson, The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies</i>	
<b>The mode of retelling: <i>Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa</i> in <i>Bæjarbók á Rauðasandi</i></b>	<b>102</b>
<i>Daria Glebova</i>	
<b>The travels of Haraldr Sigurðarson: <i>Gamanvísur</i> and other stories</b>	<b>106</b>
<i>Erin Goeres, University College London</i>	
<b>Born of snow: The development of Snær <i>inn gamli</i> and his family in Scandinavian sources</b>	<b>107</b>
<i>Tom Grant, Utrecht University</i>	
<b>Adam of Bremen’s <i>Descriptio</i>: Is it just an ethnic-geographic portrayal of Scandinavia?</b>	<b>115</b>
<i>Lukas Gabriel Grzybowski, State University of Londrina</i>	
<b>High seat pillars and settlement: Fact, fake news or folklore</b>	<b>116</b>
<i>Terry Gunnell, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Some comments on the construction of <i>Guta</i> saga</b>	<b>117</b>
<i>Viktória Gyönki, Eötvös Loránd University / Klauzál Cultural House, Budapest</i>	
<b>On the origins of things: Finnic <i>syntyloitsut</i> and cultural constructions of the material world</b>	<b>118</b>
<i>Alaric Hall, University of Leeds</i>	
<b>King Redbad of the Frisians: A posthumous Viking</b>	<b>123</b>
<i>Simon Halink, Fryske Akademy</i>	
<b>“A bag of words” – Stylometry and authorship attribution for Old Norse texts</b>	<b>124</b>
<i>Haukur Porgeirsson, The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies</i>	

<b>Polaris and the world pillar in Northern tradition – and the god Heimdallr</b>	125
<i>Eldar Heide, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences</i>	
<b>Nú er at segja frá: Narratorial comments in <i>Jómsvíkinga saga</i></b>	126
<i>Anna Katharina Heiniger, University of Tübingen</i>	
<b>‘Least moved out of place’ (<i>sízt ór stað færð</i>): Writing down the skalds</b>	127
<i>Kate Heslop, University of California, Berkeley</i>	
<b>[Dixit] <i>non se carere posse consortio praedecessorum suorum</i>, ‘He said he was unable to be without his predecessors’: Attitudes towards the damnation of heathen ancestors in Old Norse-Icelandic literature</b>	128
<i>Thomas Andrew Hughes, Durham University</i>	
<b>Redemption in the Rus’: The motif of the lost-and-found hand and ring in three medieval Icelandic romances</b>	135
<i>Jonathan Y. H. Hui, Nanyang Technological University</i>	
<b>Loki the blood-sibling of Óðinn in Japanese interpretations: A lean and lithe, philosophical and mutable, father-mother figure of monsters</b>	144
<i>Tsukusu Jinn Itó, Shinshu University</i>	
<b>The archaeology of text: Digging into <i>Orkneyinga saga</i></b>	147
<i>Judith Jesch, University of Nottingham</i>	
<b>Norse depictions of the Sámi: Stereotypes and implications</b>	148
<i>Brent Johnson</i>	
<b>Harðar svefnfarar? Medieval Icelandic conceptions of unpleasant nocturnal experiences</b>	149
<i>Kirsi Kanerva, University of Helsinki</i>	
<b><i>bera Botta tilði</i>: A Gaelic phrase in Holm papp 4 4<sup>ox</sup>?</b>	150
<i>Merrill Kaplan, The Ohio State University</i>	
<b>Flesh, feathers, bones: Birds in the Viking Age funerary rituals</b>	151
<i>Klaudia Karpińska, Museum of Cultural History University of Oslo</i>	
<b>Place-making in the codex – The geographies of *Vatnshyrna and Pseudo-Vatnshyrna</b>	152
<i>Nora Kauffeldt, University of Basel</i>	
<b>Presenting <i>Jómsvíkinga saga</i> (and <i>Stýrbjarnar þáttir Svíakappa</i>) to an English-speaking audience</b>	154
<i>John Kennedy, Charles Sturt University, Australia</i>	
<b>Magic and magic-handlers: Categories of knowledge between past and present</b>	156
<i>Gwendolyne Knight, Stockholm University</i>	
<b>The sea(s) in Old Icelandic sagas and Circum-Baltic folklore: The case of Rán/rán and the rá</b>	157
<i>Jonas Koesling, University of Iceland</i>	
<b><i>Jómsvíkinga saga</i>: Constructing a memory of the past</b>	159
<i>Lucie Korecká, Charles University</i>	
<b>Fettered by feathers: The bird transformations of Völundr and Óðinn</b>	167
<i>Jan Kozák, Charles University in Prague</i>	
<b>The death year of Óláfr Eiríksson and its influence on the dating of Yngvarr’s expedition</b>	168
<i>Annett Krakow, Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach</i>	



<b>Språk- og kulturmøter i østerled</b>	169
<i>Gunhild Kværness, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (INN University)</i>	
<b>Hurtful words: Verbal and physical dimensions of wounding in Old Norse laws and sagas</b>	170
<i>Sean Lawing, Bryn Athyn College</i>	
<b>Birgitta: Study of her political and religious influence in the Baltic world in the 14th and 15th centuries</b>	171
<i>Ella Le Peltier-Foschia, Sorbonne University</i>	
<b>Fóstbræðra saga and its author, Ingimundr Einarsson (†1170)</b>	179
<i>Yves Lenzin</i>	
<b>Esja, the fostermother in <i>Kjalnesinga saga</i></b>	184
<i>Anne Lind, Oslo Metropolitan University</i>	
<b>Bones, back-breaking and magical creatures</b>	185
<i>Maria Cristina Lombardi, University of Naples 'L'Orientale'</i>	
<b>The first and second life of a trilingual psalter palimpsest: Latin, French and Icelandic in AM 618 4to</b>	192
<i>Tom Lorenz, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)</i>	
<b>Where did Þórólfur go? Multicultural interactions and genre development in <i>Egils rímur</i> and the “Younger Egla”</b>	198
<i>Nikola Macháčková, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Words of a wizard: The lexical relationship between <i>Merlínússpá</i> and <i>Breta sögur</i></b>	207
<i>Alicia Maddalena, University of York</i>	
<b>Die Interrelationen der Guðmundar sögur mit besonderem Fokus auf Guðmundar saga C</b>	208
<i>Magnús Hauksson, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel</i>	
<b>Hávamál: Date, internal coherence and context of composition</b>	217
<i>Mikael Males, University of Oslo</i>	
<b>Shaping courtly identity: The transformation of the werewolf in Old Norse-Icelandic adaptations of Marie de France's <i>Bisclavret</i></b>	218
<i>Matthew Malone, Durham University</i>	
<b><i>Hér er bleikr kallaðr hræddr, þvíat bliknan kemr eptir hræzlu</i>—Fearless to fearful: Reconstructing fear in Old Norse literature</b>	219
<i>Teodoro Manrique Antón, University of Castilla-La Mancha</i>	
<b><i>Eitt sinn skal hverr deyja</i>: On the relationship between kinship duties and the cursed treasure in <i>Völsunga saga</i></b>	220
<i>Mario Matín Páez, Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (Spain) / Complutense University of Madrid</i>	
<b>Is Valhøll a paradise? Adaptations of Norse myths in modern Japanese fiction</b>	221
<i>Sayaka Matsumoto, Fukui Prefectural University</i>	
<b>“Maðr þóttumk ek mennskr til þessa”: Rethinking “female” (?) warrior figures in medieval Norse sources: Material engagement, composite personhoods, and the value of archaeological theory for literary studies</b>	222
<i>Miriam Mayburd, University of Iceland</i>	

<b>Women's wisdom as prophetic ability in <i>Ívens saga</i> and <i>Hærra Ivan</i></b>	228
<i>Holly McArthur, University of Wisconsin, Madison</i>	
<b>'Oldtids tunge': Nineteenth-century antiquarian research into the sagas and the politics of language</b>	229
<i>Ciaran McDonough, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Motif as a form of the representation of the past in the legendary sagas</b>	230
<i>Elena Melnikova</i>	
<b>Troll culture: Alterity and the shifting spatiality of the paranormal in the 'post-classical' <i>Íslendingasögur</i></b>	231
<i>Rebecca Merkelbach, University of Tübingen</i>	
<b>What it takes to make a knight: Modes of representation and narrative function of the Baltic regions in <i>Sigurðar saga þögla</i></b>	232
<i>Michael Micci, University of Iceland</i>	
<b><i>Knýtlinga saga</i> as source for political and military encounters in the Danish/German/Slavonic borderland</b>	233
<i>Jakub Morawiec, University of Silesia</i>	
<b>Relationship and exchange between the northern elites in the Viking and medieval Baltic area: The case for the Baltic psalteries' origins</b>	234
<i>Andris Mucenieks</i>	
<b>Origins and impact of the first printed collections of sagas</b>	243
<i>Ermenegilda Müller, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Representations of the witch: The ongoing narrative of Scandinavian nation building</b>	244
<i>Clare Mulley, University of Oxford</i>	
<b>Theodoric on the Rök stone</b>	245
<i>Klaus Johan Myrvoll, University of Stavanger</i>	
<b>Severed heads as sacred objects</b>	246
<i>Timothy Nancarrow, University of Newcastle, Australia</i>	
<b>Morphology of the saga: André Jolles on the <i>Sage</i> as a "simple form"</b>	247
<i>David Nee, Harvard University</i>	
<b>Involuntary physical manifestations of emotions: implications for concept of the body and saga style</b>	248
<i>Marie Novotná, Charles University, Prague</i>	
<b>Transpersonal identities: Old Norse childbirth in literature and life</b>	249
<i>Katherine Olley, University of Oxford</i>	
<b>First-person feuds: A digital humanities approach to the use of medieval Icelandic literature in video games</b>	250
<i>Luca Panaro, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Extremes of the <i>Austrvegr</i>: Cultural diversity between the Circum-Baltic and Byzantium</b>	251
<i>Agni Agathi C. Papamichael, University of Birmingham</i>	
<b>The stylistic function of the <i>vreiðr/vega</i> collocation in the <i>Poetic Edda</i></b>	252
<i>James Parkhouse, University of Oxford</i>	
<b>Murder in the <i>baðstofa</i></b>	253
<i>Katelin Parsons, University of Iceland / Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies</i>	



<b>How formulaic is a skaldic formula?</b>	254
<i>Bianca Patria, University of Oslo</i>	
<b>Death and burial in the <i>Biskupasögur</i>: The cases of Oddr and Solveig</b>	255
<i>Ryder Patzuk-Russell, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>From the Baltic Sea to the farthest North: <i>Finnar</i>, magic and imagined geographies in Old Norse literature</b>	263
<i>Gaïa Perreaut, Sorbonne Université</i>	
<b>What is <i>Knýtlinga</i> saga and why does it matter?</b>	264
<i>Alexandra Petrulevich, Uppsala University</i>	
<b>Disenchanted world: Euhemerism and the Old Norse cosmology</b>	265
<i>Jules Piet, University of Strasbourg / University of Iceland</i>	
<b>‘A sorrowful stone of the shore of thought’: Exploring concepts of heart, mind and emotion in skaldic diction</b>	266
<i>Edel Porter, University of Castilla-La Mancha</i>	
<b>The prophecies of <i>Drauma-Finni</i>: Queer indigenous relationality in <i>Finnboga saga ramma</i></b>	267
<i>Basil Arnould Price, University of York</i>	
<b>Scandinavians and muslims in the mediterranean: A case study of <i>Orkneyinga saga</i></b>	269
<i>Eduardo Ramos, Penn State University</i>	
<b>How good is king Magnús? The picture of the King in <i>Knýtlinga</i> saga and <i>Heimskringla</i></b>	270
<i>Marta Rey-Radlińska, Jagiellonian University</i>	
<b>The archaeological eye: Antiquarianism and medievalism in Icelandic paper manuscripts of the <i>Prose Edda</i></b>	271
<i>Friederike Richter, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin / Universität Zürich</i>	
<b>Útlegð – Outlaw(ry): A comparison between early Iceland and Norway</b>	272
<i>Anne Irene Riisøy, University of South-Eastern Norway</i>	
<b>“En þat þickir mer askorta er ek se þik eigi”: Emotions, gender, and the body in the Old Norse translation of <i>Partonopeu de Blois</i></b>	273
<i>Meritxell Risco de la Torre, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>The negation of male sexual volition in Old Norse-Icelandic depictions of rape: The case of <i>Adonias saga</i></b>	274
<i>Matthew Roby, University of Toronto</i>	
<b>Learned and imagined geographies in the <i>fornaldarsögur</i></b>	281
<i>T. P. Rowbotham, Durham University</i>	
<b>Assembly sites and non-violent intercultural interaction in the viking diaspora</b>	289
<i>Alexandra Sanmark, University of Highlands and Islands, &amp; Irene García Losquiño, University of Santiago de Compostela</i>	
<b><i>Riddarasögur</i> and saga style</b>	290
<i>Daniel Sävborg, University of Tartu</i>	
<b>Jómsborg as a heterotopia: Law in <i>Jómsvíkinga saga</i></b>	291
<i>Roland Scheel, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen</i>	
<b><i>Finnar</i>, Freyr, or Fate in <i>Vatnsdæla</i> – (Over-)mapping Iceland in Scandinavian cultural geography</b>	292
<i>Andreas Schmidt, Independent Scholar / Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich</i>	

<b>The wisdom of the sagas in post-medieval Icelandic proverb collection</b>	293
<i>Christine Schott, Erskine College</i>	
<b>Law: What is it good for?</b>	298
<i>Ela Sefcikova, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin</i>	
<b>St. Óláfr's <i>Miracula</i> in Eastern Europe revisited</b>	299
<i>Daria Segal, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Óðinn's ale-bearers: Masculinity and the mead of poetry</b>	300
<i>Ann Sheffield, Allegheny College</i>	
<b>Old Norse <i>seiðr</i> and Old Russian <i>volkvy</i>: Sub-arctic shamanism in Rus'?</b>	309
<i>Leszek P. Śtupecki, Rzeszów University</i>	
<b>Putting the past on display: Museological approaches to the interpretation of the past in saga literature</b>	310
<i>Olivia Elliott Smith, University of Oxford</i>	
<b>“Grei þetta er fullt flærdar og falskleita”: The many ghosts of Hamlet in sagas and folklore</b>	311
<i>Thomas Spray, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin</i>	
<b>The medieval North in 19th century French literature</b>	319
<i>Pierre-Brice Stahl, Sorbonne University</i>	
<b>Trouble will find me: Narrative structure and character development in <i>Króka-Refs saga</i></b>	320
<i>Zuzana Stankovitsová, University of Bergen</i>	
<b>What (missing) part of Eyja-fjalla-jökull don't you understand: Truncated compounds in Icelandic saga landscape</b>	321
<i>Ilya Sverdlov, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies</i>	
<b>Morality, communal action and pre-Christian religion in the North</b>	322
<i>Declan Taggart, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>The long road home: Veteran identity and the Varangian guard</b>	323
<i>Rue Taylor, University of California, Berkeley</i>	
<b>I know you are but what am I? Film studies and genre in <i>Finnboga saga</i> and <i>Vatnsdæla saga</i></b>	324
<i>Yoav Tirosh, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Bolli's choice: Female inciters and social constraint in thirteenth-century Iceland</b>	325
<i>Torfi Tulinius, University of Iceland</i>	
<b>Creating the medieval saga</b>	326
<i>Úlfar Bragason, Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies</i>	
<b>“Who will die with him?": Gender and sacrifice in Arabic accounts of the Rūs</b>	327
<i>Tonicha M. Upham, Aarhus University</i>	
<b>Mediums of storytelling in late fifteenth-century Iceland: A study of AM 586 4to and AM 589a-f 4to</b>	328
<i>Alisa Valpola-Walker, University of Cambridge</i>	
<b>“Alheil(l)”: Miracles, cures, and constructions of disability in the <i>byskupa sögur</i></b>	329
<i>Natalie M. Van Deusen, University of Alberta</i>	

<b>Inspiration Between Two Worlds</b>	336
<i>Bob Oscar Benjamin van Strijen</i>	
<b>The Lady Aud, a lifelike word-picture: Reinventing the foremother figure in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Icelandic folklore and Victorian travelogues</b>	344
<i>Sofie Vanherpen, Independent scholar, Ghent University</i>	
<b>Kinship, community and gender relations in the <i>Saga of the Jónsvikings</i> and in Wolfram von Eschenbach's <i>Parzival</i></b>	353
<i>Annette Volfing, University of Oxford</i>	
<b>Humiliation and situational ethics: A proverbial motif in some Sagas of Icelanders</b>	354
<i>Eugenia K. Vorobeva, University of Oxford</i>	
<b>Canon law and violence against clerics in the contemporary sagas</b>	355
<i>Elizabeth Walgenbach, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum</i>	
<b>Yngvar's expedition to Serkland: From historical event to cultural memory to fantastic literature in 15<sup>th</sup>-century Iceland</b>	356
<i>Sabine Heidi Walther, Universität Bonn</i>	
<b>Tertiary worlds of the <i>Eddas</i>: Imaginary space and narrative in Norse legend and myth</b>	357
<i>Timothy Liam Waters, University of California, Berkeley</i>	
<b>“Hví ertu svá snimma á fótum, sonr?” Negotiating fatherhood in <i>Þorsteins þáttr stangarhöggs</i></b>	358
<i>Jan Wehrle, University of Freiburg</i>	
<b>The Old Norse prosimetrum – Looking for parallels</b>	359
<i>Jonas Wellendorf, University of California, Berkeley</i>	
<b>Towards a literary history of the court skalds</b>	360
<i>Eirik Westcoat</i>	
<b>“The quest of Seth” in Icelandic literature: The ecology of evil in Eden</b>	369
<i>Tiffany Nicole White, University of California, Berkeley</i>	
<b>Pendant figurines and pocket deities: Material culture as marker of public and private beliefs</b>	370
<i>Nancy L. Wicker, University of Mississippi</i>	
<b>Finland and Poland in the margins of Scandinavian runic culture</b>	371
<i>Kendra Willson, University of Turku</i>	
<b>Code-switching and other kinds of Latin – Old Icelandic language contacts in the Bishops' Sagas</b>	375
<i>Yekaterina Yakovenko</i>	
<b>Rigmaroles on the margins of the Nordic countries</b>	376
<i>Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum</i>	
<b>Is there an “other” in <i>Orvar-Odds saga</i>?</b>	377
<i>Jonas Zeit-Altpeter, University of Bonn</i>	
<b>Textual and oral re-composition: The case of the younger <i>Bósa saga</i></b>	380
<i>Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum</i>	

### Poster presentations

- From Bálagarðssíða to *undirheimr*: The fantastic journey of Þorstein bæjarmagn from the Baltic Sea region to the underworld and beyond** 381  
*Valerie Broustin, University of Bonn*
- Body and cosmos: The logic of mythical transformation in Old Norse religion** 382  
*Jan Kozák, Charles University in Prague*
- Liturgical fragments of Medieval Iceland (1056–1402)** 383  
*Tom Lorenz, Norwegian University of Science and Technology*
- Sagas aus der Vorzeit: Producing a German translation of the *fornaldarsögur*** 384  
*Valerie Broustin and Jonas Zeit-Altpeter, University of Bonn*

### Roundtable discussions

- Conceptualising emotions and bodies in Old Norse** 385  
*Carolyn Larrington, University of Oxford, Caroline Batten, University of Oxford, Marie Novotná, Charles University, Prague, Edel Porter, University of Castilla-La Mancha, & Teodoro Manrique Antón, University of Castilla-La Mancha*
- Better late than never: Olga Smirnitskaya's *The Verse and the Language of Old Germanic Poetry* appears in English** 386  
*Ilya Sverdlov, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Haukur Þorgeirsson, Árnastofnun, Mikael Males, University of Oslo, Michael Schulte, University of Agder, & Maria Volkonskaya*
- The centenary of Hermann Pálsson** 387  
*Session led by Torfi Tulinius, University of Iceland*
- The new ONP: Multifaceted approaches to medieval texts** 388  
*Tarrin Wills, University of Copenhagen, Simonetta Battista, University of Copenhagen, Ellert Þórr Jóhannsson, University of Iceland, Johnny F. Lindholm, University of Copenhagen, & Pernille Ellyton, University of Copenhagen*

### Special sessions

- Finnish for total beginners** 389  
*Alaric Hall, University of Leeds*
- Why are Finnic traditions interesting for Old Norse research?** 390  
*Special exhibit sponsored by the Kalevala Society*

## The Lady Aud, a lifelike word-picture: Reinventing the foremother figure in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Icelandic folklore and Victorian travelogues

Sofie Vanherpen, Independent scholar, Ghent University

In the afternoon my host accompanies me across the sands, to another remarkable place of sepulture. Auda the Rich, widow of Olaf the White, king of Dublin, settled at Hvamm a thousand years ago. [...] S]he died; and her body being placed with many valuables in a ship, she was interred with it, as she requested, on the sands, below high-water mark. For, having been baptized a Christian, she would not let so much as even her remains lie in a land profaned by idolatry. [...] Great must have been the rejoicing among the spirits of darkness when her light was quenched. (Metcalf 1861: 280–281)

In the summer of 1860, the Reverend Frederick Metcalfe (1815–1885), an accomplished Scandinavian scholar and most fervent of Victorian Icelandophiles, undertook a two-month journey to Iceland. He chronicled his experiences in *The Oxonian in Iceland; or, Notes of travel in that island in the summer of 1860, with glances at Icelandic folk-lore and sagas*, which was published the following year. In the quote above, he recalls his visit to Hvammur in West Iceland, where he visits the tomb of the Christian Auda. This “Auda the Rich” is none other than the foremother and *landnámskona* [female settler] Unnr *djúpúðga* [of a profound mind], also known in literature as Auðr *djúpauðga* [the deeply wealthy]. As a memory figure in medieval literature, Unnr, the heathen foremother from *Laxdæla saga*, is slightly different from Auðr, the Christian settler woman from *Landnámabók*. However, later texts merge the heathen foremother into the Christian founding mother such that the distinction between the two becomes blurred. This holds also true for Metcalfe’s depiction of the famous foremother.

Like many of his contemporaries, Metcalfe was drawn to Iceland for its literature, as apparent from the title of his work. Moreover, he takes an interest in the encounter between the literature of the Middle Ages—the sagas, and popular literature—the folktales, a genre long ignored by Old Norse scholars. In the preface to his travelogue, he reveals that the referenced legends are collected “from the mouths of the natives; partly are taken from a little work called ‘Islenzk Æfintýri,’ by Messrs. Grimsen and Arnasen, published at Reykjavik; partly are due to Professor Maurer’s valuable work ‘Isländische Volkssagen der Gegenwart,’ Leipzig, 1860” (Metcalf 1861: vii). Early in the chapter on his visit to the Hvammur saga-stead, Metcalfe contrasts Auðr’s Christian burial to that of the heathen Gullbrá: “On the introduction of Christianity here, one old lady Gull-brár, stuck to the gods of her youth, and after death, by her own request, she was buried in that dark gill in Skeggidal ‘where the sun never shines’ [...]” (Metcalf 1861: 279). In this way, the foremother figure from Old Norse-Icelandic literature becomes cross-pollinated with nineteenth-century Victorian responses to these medieval texts as well as with local lore. Travelogues such as Metcalfe’s therefore give us a unique insight into how local folklore contributed in shaping the image of the foremother figure in Iceland of the nineteenth century, the period when these folktales were collected and published for the first time.

In the same year as Metcalfe was traveling across Iceland, 1860, the Reverend Jón Porleifsson (1825–1860) recorded the Icelandic folktale *Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi*, which was collected by Jón Árnason (1819–1888) and published two years later, in 1862, in his *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* [Icelandic folktales and fairy tales]. Though not apparent from its title, the first part of the tale centers on the struggle between the foremother figure Auðr and a young woman named Gullbrá. As the scholar Paul Hermann remarked in *Zweite Reise Quer Durch Island*, “[d]as Bild, das die Volkssage von dieser grossartigen Frau [i.e. Auðr] entwirft, entspricht durchaus der alten Überlieferung, bringt aber insofar neue Züge, als sie ihr eine andere Frauengestalt, die Gullbrá, und den Skeggi gegenüberstellt” [the picture, that the folktale paints of this magnificent woman [i.e. Auðr], corresponds entirely with the old tradition, but brings new features insofar as when the folktale confronts her with another female figure, Gullbrá, and with Skeggi] (Hermann 1910: 155).



This paper explores the different word-pictures of the foremother figure Unnr *djúpúðga* / Auðr *djúpauðga* in nineteenth-century Icelandic folklore and Victorian travelogues, with recourse to the medieval literary figure preserved in *Laxdæla saga* and *Landnámabók*.

### 1. The genesis of the foremother figure

The oldest text to mention Auðr is *Íslendingabók* [Book of Icelanders]. Written between 1120 and 1133 by Ari Þorgilsson (1068–1148), Auðr is introduced as the only female out of four most prominent settlers of Iceland (*Íslendingabók* 6). Ari designates her as the founding mother of the Breiðafjörður area in western Iceland as well as the foremother, not only of himself, but also of the prominent bishop of Skalhólt, Þorlákur Runólfsson (1086–1133).

Auðr landnámskona, es byggði vestr í Breiðafirði í Hvammi, vas móðir Þorsteins ens rauða, fœður Óleifs feilans, fœður Þórðar gellis, fœður Þórhildar rjúpu, móður Þórðar hesthœfða, fœður Karlsefnis, fœður Snorra, fœður Hallfríðar, móður Þorláks, es nú es byskup í Skálaholti, næstr Gizuri. (*Íslendingabók* 26)

Auðr the female settler, who settled in the west of Breiðafjörður at Hvammur, was the mother of Þorsteinn the Red, father of Óláfr Little-Wolf, father of Þórðr the Yeller, father of Þórhildr Ptarmigan, mother of Þórðr Horsehead, father of Karlsefni, father of Snorri, father of Hallfríðr, mother of Þorlákr, who is now bishop in Skálholt after Gizurr.

Ari created a backcloth and prototype for all the later representations of the foremother figure, Auðr *landnámskona*, to come. Rather than slavishly follow Þorgilsson's literary prototype, two thirteenth-century sources, namely *Laxdæla saga* and *Landnámabók*, move beyond the archetype of the foremother and construct their own version of this figure.

The first new image of Auðr can be found in the mid-thirteenth-century text *Laxdæla saga*. The saga opens with the immigration of the *hersir* [chief, lord] Ketill Flatnose from Norway to the southern isles of Scotland. His daughter, Auðr—named Unnr *djúpúðga* here—accompanies him on his journey, and shortly afterwards marries Óláfr the White, the first Viking king of Dublin. After the treacherous deaths of her husband and only son, she cleverly devises a plan to escape to Iceland with a large retinue of family and followers, emerging, finally as a formidable political player in her own right. It is here, when Auðr takes charge of the situation, that the saga's author overlays the image of the foremother with mythological overtones; *Laxdæla saga* with the *Edda*, and, Auðr—the foremother of the Breiðafjörður area with Óðinn—the Allfather of the heathen pantheon. Here we have an example of what Haraldur Bessason terms mythological overlays—that is, “parallels between the Eddas and the Sagas in the use of literary technique and imagery” (Bessason 1977: 275). Indeed, there are a number of strong similarities between *Snorra Edda*'s Óðinn and *Laxdæla*'s Auðr (Vanherpen 2018: 750–55). Like Óðinn in the “Prologue” to *Snorra Edda* (*Snorra Edda* 8–11), Auðr is described as possessing both foresight and wisdom (*Laxdæla saga* 11). Auðr is known under more than one name (Auðr—Unnr), as is Óðinn in *Snorra Edda* (Óðinn—Wodden) (*Snorra Edda* 8–9). Furthermore, Auðr's journey to and settlement in Iceland (*Laxdæla saga* 6–11) mirrors the migration of Óðinn from Asia to the North (*Snorra Edda* 8–11). The foremother figure Auðr is compared to the “father of all” from the Old Norse-Icelandic mythology and depicted as a matriarch “in heathen style,” who secures the future of all her offspring and founds a dynasty (Vanherpen 2018: 750–55).

The *Laxdæla* author describes her achievements as “mikit afbragð annarra kvenna” [much superior to (that of) other women] (*Laxdæla saga* 7). *Laxdæla* continues that at the end of her life Auðr arranged a lavish wedding feast for her grandson. The following morning she was found dead in bed sitting “upp við hægendin” [up against the pillows] (*Laxdæla saga*, 13). The saga goes on:

Ok inn síðasta dag boðsins var Unnr flutt til haugs þess, er henni var búinn; hon var lögð í skip í hauginum, ok mikit fé var í haug lagt með henni; var eptir þat aptr kastaðr hauginn. (*Laxdæla saga* 13)



And on the final day of the feast Unnr [i.e. Auðr] was carried to the grave mound that was made for her. She was laid in a ship in the mound, and much treasure was laid with her in the mound, and after that the mound was closed up.

What begins as a wedding ends as a funeral, and she is interred with a ship in a funeral mound—a pagan custom (Vanherpen 2013: 71–3). Here, Auðr’s story concludes. At her death, she is a woman who has successfully fulfilled her role of foremother. The anonymous author of *Laxdæla* uses the prototypal image of founding mother as a springboard from which to create a more detailed and complex rendering of this figure. He created the foremother in heathen style, called Unnr. In the remainder of this paper, I will refer to *Laxdæla*’s representation of Auðr as “the heathen Unnr”.

A few decades later, Sturla Þórðarson (1214–1284), presents us with a more elaborate portrayal of Auðr in *Sturlubók*, the eponymous version of *Landnámabók*—the first preserved version of this text. Like his contemporary, Sturla draws on the prototypal depiction by Ari Þorgilsson, but elaborates on the story of the foremother figure in a slightly different way. Like its correspondent passage in the saga, *Landnámabók*’s account on Auðr is centred around her migration to Iceland and her subsequent settlement there. The *Landnámabók* narrative likewise concludes with a wedding turned funeral, when the *veizla* [feast] becomes Auðr’s *erfi*—a term comprising both funeral feast and inheritance ceremony (Sundqvist 2016: 476; Vanherpen 2013: 65; Vanherpen 2017: 577).

There are two major distinctions between the two renderings of the foremother figure. Firstly, *Landnámabók* is devoid of mythological allusions; our heroine is no longer compared to a pagan god (see above; Vanherpen 2018: 750–752). Secondly, Auðr is described as “vel trúuð” [a true believer], i.e. a Christian, holding prayers and erecting crosses at Krosshólar (*Landnámabók* 139; Vanherpen 2017: 573–574). Here, her internment takes place in consecrated ground on the shore where the waves wash over the sand, alluding to a Christian-style burial (Vanherpen 2017: 575–592; Vanherpen 2018: 751–752).

Þá nótt eptir andaðisk hon ok var graffin í flœðarmáli, sem hon hafði fyrir sagt, því at hon vildi eigi liggja í óvígðri moldu, er hon var skírð. Eptir þat spilltisk trúa frænda hennar. (*Landnámabók* 146–147)

The night after (the feast) she passed away and was buried at the flood-mark, as she had instructed earlier. Because she was baptized, she did not want to lie in unconsecrated earth. After that the faith of her family was corrupted.

These minor additions and alterations do influence the audience’s interpretation of the story as a whole, and in turn, the role of the foremother figure in it. The presentation of Auðr here seems to suggest that she was the “founding mother” of Christianity in Hvammur. By introducing and emphasizing a specifically Christian tradition, *Landnámabók* transformed the heathen Unnr into the Christianized foremother Auðr. Consequently, two competing memories exist side by side from the mid-thirteenth century onward: the heathen Unnr, as manifested in *Laxdæla saga*, and, the Christian Auðr, as manifested in Sturla’s redaction of *Landnámabók*.

From the fourteenth century and in subsequent eras, the older “heathen” foremother figure became overshadowed by her Christian counterpart. The fact that these texts and later saga literature would favour a portrayal of the foremother Auðr as a Christian, underlines that *Landnámabók* became the dominant vehicle for shaping the memory of the foremother figure. As a result, the heathen foremother is turned into a “counter-memory,” a term coined by Jan Assmann in his seminal work *Moses the Egyptian* to describe “a memory that puts elements to the fore that are, or tend to be, forgotten in the official memory” (Assmann 1997: 12). Even so, the figure of the heathen Unnr persisted through time in numerous copies of *Laxdæla saga*. Over time, it came to function as “counterhistory,” when counter-memory becomes “codified in the form of a traditional story or even in a work of written historiography” (Assmann 1997: 12). The Christian foremother figure will come to dominate later saga literature and versions of

*Landnámabók*, a trend that at first glance was to continue well into the nineteenth century.

## 2. The foremother, the witch and Hvammsland

In the nineteenth century, the folktale *Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* was recorded by Reverend Jón Þorleifsson in 1860 as two separate stories, entitled “Gullbrá” (Lbs 531 4to, ff. 66r–69r) and “Skeggi í Hvammi” (Lbs 531 4to, ff. 69r–70v), which were then collected by the Icelandic writer and librarian Jón Árnason and first published in his well-known collection *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri* (1862–1864). The tale, however, is much older than this written version and was transmitted orally as early as the late-seventeenth century (Kålund 1916: 66).

The first part of the tale (Lbs 531 4to, ff. 66r–69r; *Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* I: 146–149), the only one of relevance here, is set at the turn of the eighth to ninth centuries, at a time when Auðr resided at Hvammur. She has set aside a certain portion of her farmland as sacred, upon which no crops should grow and no livestock should graze. When Auðr has grown very old, a young woman named Gullbrá wishes to purchase this sacred piece of land, because, she says, “því mér segir svo hugur um, að hér muni sá siður tíðkast, og það hús byggjast, sem mér er verst við” [I have a foreboding that a faith (i.e. Christianity) will be practiced here and a house (i.e. a Christian church) built that I hate most] (*Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* I: 147; Malone 1942: 58). Gullbrá is able to trick Auðr’s overseer into selling her the land for a bag of gold. Auðr then abandons that plot of land, stretching from the sea up to *Krossgil* [Cross Gully], where she had three crosses raised. The beautiful Gullbrá then reveals her true nature as a wicked witch, and she builds her own heathen temple on her recently acquired “sacred” land.

And so the battle begins between these two women. The two never meet in person and the story informs us that a light from Hvammur and from Auðr’s crosses make Gullbrá forget her pagan practices. After Auðr’s death, Gullbrá’s land is hemmed in by Auðr’s grave on the shore on one side and the three crosses at Krosshólaborg on the other perimeter. In her struggle against Gullbrá, Auðr created these landmarks to protect the land, each of which were situated at an extremity of her land claim. So that even in her death, she could continue to protect the land and the members of her clan. The Christian foremother becomes the personification of a protecting spirit attached to the land of the *Hvammverjar* [the men of Hvammur]. Because of this, Gullbrá moves away from Akur to a remote part of the Dales. Whenever she has to traverse the Dale, she does so blindfolded. One day the blindfold falls off and she is blinded by the light emanating from the three crosses. Soon afterwards Gullbrá dies and becomes a ghost. In this rendition of her story, Auðr—a force of light, an agent of goodness and virtue, is contrasted to Gullbrá—a force of darkness, an agent of evil.

However, the folktale is much more complex than this simple dichotomy of good and evil would suggest. The memory of Auðr—the strong, authoritative, and exceptional *landnámskona* known from *Landnámabók* and *Laxdæla saga*—is preserved here in the folktale, and yet new elements are added to the picture of her. Already in these medieval accounts, Auðr’s religious affiliation is contested, with the oldest sources depicting her as a foremother in ‘heathen style,’ and later stories portraying her as a devout Christian woman. In the folk legend, Auðr acts out this religious duplicity by assuming a heathen persona when she calls upon the spirit of the land while she publicly embraces her Christian faith. As Eric Bryan corroborates, “[i]n one instance, she [i.e. Auðr] seems to rely on more than just Christian divine strength, for she states that no harm will come to Hvammur because the land is protected by a good spirit, a *fylgja* to use her exact word – a term that conjures memories of pagan attendant spirits by the same name” (Bryan 2011: 173; Bryan 2021: 53). I go a step further in suggesting that Auðr is depicted as a tutelary spirit or deity and propose a reading of the foremother figure based on both Christian and Nordic mythological traditions.

Written in the style of a hagiography or saint’s *vita*, the folktale describes the deeds and miracles performed by Auðr before and after her death (Malone 1942: 63). Marian resonances can be found in the tale’s portrayal of her. In Catholic theology, Mary is a pivotal figure in the salvation history as she redeems Eve’s fall (Reumann 1987: 249–252). Similar to the Virgin

Mary, Auðr is a key figure in the downfall and defeat of evil, represented here in the character of the sorceress Gullbrá. Like the mother Mary, the foremother Auðr acts as an intercessor and protectress of both her people—Hvammverjar, and her land—Hvammsland.

During her life, she raises crosses to serve as a place of worship for lack of a church on her land. As the text reveals later, these crosses also mark one boundary of Auðr's estate, of the ancestral land of the Hvammverjar. The crosses were placed at the so-called Krosshólar, "þaðan sást eigi til hofsins á Akri" [from there the temple at Akur could not be seen] (*Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* I: 147), to ward off Gullbrá's witchcraft: "[P]ar lét hún setja krossa þrjá á fjallsbrúnina og heitir það síðan Krossgil, og kvað hún fjölkynngi Gullbrár eigi mundi yfirkomast krossa þessa, að sér lifandi" [there she had three crosses erected on the edge of the mountain and that is since called Krossgil (Cross Gully), and she said that Gullbrá's witchcraft would not be able to get past these crosses while she was alive] (*Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* I: 147). Not only do the crosses serve as a visible token of God's protection, there are three of them according to the folktale—a likely reference to the three crosses on the Mount of Calvary, representing the crucifixion of Jesus (McKenzie 1995: 115, 319; Ries 1987: 4, 155, 161–165). The Christian symbolism is reinforced by the crosses giving forth a radiant light perceived only by Gullbrá whenever she practiced her lore, and which consequently failed her.

Even in death, Auðr will continue to protect her offspring and her land from Gullbrá. Similarly, as in *Landnáma*'s account, Auðr stipulates her burial wishes in life.

Áður Auður andaðist mælti ún svo fyrir, að hún eigi vildi liggja í óvígðri moldu, en kvaðst óttast yfirgang heiðninnar og bað því að grafa sig í flæðarmáli. Heitir þar nú Auðarsteinn, er hún liggur, og er það enn í dag almennt fjörumark á Hvammsfirði, að þá er um stórstraum rétt hálfvallinn sjór út eða að, þegar first brýtur á Auðarsteini. (*Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* I: 148)

Before Auðr died, she ordered it thus that she did not want to lie in unconsecrated earth, but she said she was afraid of the heathendom's domination and asked to be buried at the floodmark. It is now called Auðarsteinn [Auðr's stone], where she [i.e., Auðr] lies, and to this day it is a familiar landmark in Hvammsfjörður, that the sea is at half flood or half ebb, when it first breaks on Auðarsteinn.

Auðarsteinn serves as a memorial stone and a token of Auðr's Christian faith; it might also have served as a precautionary measure for the protection of her settlement. Later in the text, we are told that Gullbrá only lived on at Akur for a short time after Auðr's passing and moved to the narrowest and darkest part of the dale. The text reasons that "þá festi hún ekki yndi, þar sem legstaður Auðar var fram af landi hennar í flæðarmáli, en krossar hennar innar við gilið á hlíðarbrúninni. Var hún þar í nokkurs konar úlfakreppu" [she did not feel happy, where Auðr's grave was in front of her land by the floodmark, and her crosses further inland by the gully on the brow of the mountain. She found herself in a kind of tight spot] (*Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* I: 148). Gullbrá is literally hemmed in by Christian symbols strong enough to check her advance on Hvammur and Hvammsland. The crosses are a visible reminder of God's presence and protection, while Auðr's stone serves as a visible reminder of her ancestral presence, protection, and influence. Feeling hemmed in, Gullbrá decides to abandon the land at Akur and seeks refuge in the innermost part of the dale, "þar sem hann er mjóstur og skuggalegastur" [where it is narrowest and darkest'] (*Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* I: 148).

Towards the end of the tale, Gullbrá is struck by a blinding light from Auðr's crosses and literally knocked right off her horse. Light in the Bible is conceived as a sign of the presence of God, and, particularly in the Old Testament, is a symbol of His saving power, and therefore a part of the theophany (McKenzie 1995: 510–511; Werblowsky 1987: 8, 549). The crosses and the radiant light emanating from them clearly denote the presence of God and his protection. Auðr not only acts as protector of Hvammsland and its people, but also as intercessor for the Hvammverjar.

Interestingly, the folktale Auðr also shares many characteristics with ancient mythical figures such as *fylgjur* [guardian spirits], (*land*)*dísir* [landgoddesses, ladies] and *landvættir* [land-spirits]. Earlier on in the text, Auðr calls on “Hvammslandi fylgja” to guard and protect the land and its people (*Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* I: 147). In Old Norse literature, specifically, *fylgjur* are attendant spirits or guardian spirits connected to individuals or families (Mundal 1974; Mundal 1993: 624–625; Simek 1984: 115; Lindow 1987: 5, 460). Mundal even speculates that the *fylgja* motif might be remnant of female ancestor worship (Mundal 1974; Mundal 1993: 625).

From the start, the “Hvammslandi fylgja”, as its name implies, is connected to the land of Hvammur and the family of the Hvammverjar, although it is primarily associated with the foremother Auðr. Called upon by Auðr herself, the *fylgja* is a guarding and helping spirit that protects not only herself, but her whole family and retinue. The *fylgja* here appears in the shape of an unbearable light, a light that appears to be quenched with the death of Auðr.

[K]vaðst hún ávallt sjá ljós mikið á einum stað í Hvammstúni, og væri sér óþolandi birta þess, enda gleymdi hún þá og ruglaðist í fræðum sínum. Álíka ljós lagði móti henni af krossum Auðar á fjallsbrúninni, þó kvað hún þá ei verða mundi sér eins meinlega, og ljósið í Hvammstúni. (*Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* I: 147).

She [i.e. Gullbrá] said that she always saw a great light in a particular place on the field in front of Hvammur and that this light was unbearable to her, since she became forgetful and confused in her lore. A similar light shone towards her from Auðr’s crosses on the brow of the mountain; however, she said they were not as harmful to her as the light from the field at Hvammur.

Gullbrá appears to be even more sensitive to the light coming from the field at Hvammur, than that emanating from the three crosses. After Auðr’s death, no more mention is made of the *fylgja* nor of the unbearable light coming from the field at Hvammur. It is a further indication that this character or guardian spirit is primarily connected to Auðr herself and with her death ceases to exist.

Auðr’s memorial stone could likewise be linked to other tutelary figures, such as *dísir* and *landvættir*. As many female figures in Old Norse literature and mythology possess the same qualities, it is not surprising that the folktale incorporates many of these shared characteristics in its portrayal of Auðr. Like the *fylgjur*, the *dísir* and *landvættir* are protective guardian spirits (Naumann 1993: 624; Simek 1984: 69–70, 228). The nineteenth-century *landdísir*, in particular, were believed to dwell in stones and were worshiped there, a practice which in its turn could represent a form of ancestor worship (Simek 1984: 228; Turville-Petre 1963: 201). Auðr has traits in common with the *fylgja*, the ancient female spirit protecting a clan, with the *landdísir*, representing the dead female ancestor who “lived” in a stone, and, finally, also with the *landvættur*, the guardian spirit who protects the land. Although Auðr is physically absent as she is deceased at this point of the narrative, her spiritual presence as a dead ancestral figure—betokened here in Auðarsteinn and Auðr’s crosses—affects the living. Auðr’s presence disturbs and drives away Gullbrá into the darkest corner of the valley.

What all these ancient figures—*fylgjur*, *dísir*, and *landvættir*—have in common is their connectedness to land and place. In some of their names—for example, the “Hvammslandi fylgja”, the *landdísir* and *landvættir*—the substantive “land” is suggestive of strong links to a specific territory. Indeed, if anything, the folktale deals with the protection, preservation, and perpetuation of ancestral land. The benign mythical spirits—*fylgjur*, *landdísir* and *landvættir*, were incorporated in the figure of Auðr, who is associated with light and radiance. Her landtake is soaked in sunlight and protected by divine light, both Christian and mythical in origin. On the other hand, the evil *tröll* is assimilated in the figure of Gullbrá, who seeks out the remotest and darkest corner of Hvammsland. She only abides in darkness and finds refuge in places devoid of sunlight or other natural light.

More than a simple story about the battle between Christianity and paganism, the tale of Auðr and Gullbrá is above all a rich and complex story about the struggle over ancestral land between



two strong women characters, personifying two ancient opposing forces—those of light and darkness, of good and evil, of divine and demonic. The foremother of old transcends into a powerful guardian spirit.

### 3. A Victorian tourist in Hvammur

Two years prior to the publication of the folktale, the self-named Oxonian Frederick Metcalfe, who was an accomplished Scandinavian scholar and was extremely interested in Icelandic folklore and sagas, undertook a two-month journey to Iceland during the summer of 1860. In his travelogue, Metcalfe, among several other things, also gives a detailed account of his visit to Hvammur in Chapter 19, entitled “Hvamm—The tombs of the pagan and the Christian [...]”. In this case, the title is already telling in that it refers to the tombs of Gullbrá—the pagan, and, Auðr—the Christian.

The account begins on the day after Metcalfe’s arrival at Hvammur, on which his host, the Reverend Þorleifur Jónsson (1794–1883)—father of the folktale’s informant Jón Þorleifsson, gives him a tour of the grounds:

Next morning, (Sept. 2), archdeacon Thorleifr takes me before the service to the site of the old judicature, which must have been of oval shape, and about 42 paces round. Close by are the traces of a castle. The ring on the church door is reputed to have belonged to the old heathen temple. On the introduction of Christianity here, one old lady Gull-brár, stuck to the gods of her youth, and after death, by her own request, she was buried in that dark gill in Skeggidal ‘where the sun never shines’ [...]. (Metcalfe 1861: 279).

Metcalfe’s account mentions “the old judicature” and “the traces of a castle”. The first might refer to what Ásgeir Ásgeirsson describes in his essay “Hvammur í Hvammssveit” as “forn, aflangur hringur suðvestur í túninu, nefndur “Lögrétta”” [ancient, oblong circle southwest of the field, named the court of law] (Ásgeirsson 1944: 16). The latter might refer to the ruins of Auðr’s farmstead, which is called *Auðartóftir* [lit. Auðr’s ruins] in *Landnámabók*. Besides these archaeological sites of interest, Metcalfe also refers to the folktale and Gullbrá. However, he does not connect Gullbrá to Auðr. In his portrayal, Gullbrá is a pagan, not an evil witch or *tröll*. Furthermore, she is “one old lady,” instead of a beautiful young woman.

In the afternoon of the same day, Þorleifur guided his guest to the shoreline, where he showed him “another remarkable place of sepulture,” namely, that of Auðr. Following a brief summary of her life, the text goes on:

And the following night she [i.e. Auðr] died; and her body being placed with many valuables in a ship, she was interred with it, as she requested, on the sands, below high-water mark. For, having been baptized a Christian, she would not let so much as even her remains lie in a land profaned with idolatry. And here, sure enough, is the spot, marked by a great stone covered with mussel-shells, now measuring 2½ ells in length, but doubtless much longer, before it sank so deep into the sand. (Metcalfe 1861: 280–281)

Metcalfe appears to have his sources mixed up here. The internment in a ship is taken from *Laxdæla saga*, whereas the location on the beach below the high-water mark is taken from *Landnámabók*. What follows, then, is a description and localization of her grave marker. Although he does not mention by name Auðarsteinn, Metcalfe does provide a detailed description of Auðr’s stone itself.

Metcalfe ends his entry on visiting the sepulchre of Auðr as follows:

Great must have been the rejoicing among the spirits of darkness when her [i.e. Auðr] light was quenched. The worshippers at the heathen temple would congratulate themselves that there was some chance of Thor having his rights again; while those goblins who had cowered into their cave near the church of Saelingsdal, yonder, again raised their hideous hum of mockery of the solemn tones which issued from the sacred edifice. (Metcalfe 1861: 281)

Here, once again, Metcalfe blends different sources together. He begins with referring to the folktale's dichotomy between darkness and light, with the "spirits of darkness" and "the goblins who had cowered into their cave" alluding to Gullbrá. Then he turns to *Landnámabók*, which narrates how Auðr's descendants relapse to the old faith and build a heathen temple.

About four years after Metcalfe's visit to the parish of Hvammur and its vicars, the folktales recorded by Jón Þorleifsson—"Gullbrá" and "Skeggi í Hvammi"—were published for the first time in the Icelandic language under the title "Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi." What a work like this by Metcalfe has shown is that through the form of a travel diary, folktales have circulated orally and been eagerly shared by locals, like Þorleifur Jónsson, with Iceland enthusiasts some time before they were printed. Moreover, travelogues illustrate the cross-pollination of various sources on Auðr to come to a hybrid picture of her.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper offers a contribution to the debate over post-medieval popular genres—such as folktales and travelogues—and the ways in which they represent figures from the Icelandic past. As a case in point, I have chosen the foremother figure Auðr *djúpauðga* Ketilsdóttir.

In the section on medieval texts, we saw that the figure of 'the Lady Aud' has her roots in the twelfth-century depiction of Auðr *landnámskona* in *Íslendingabók*. In this work, Auðr is portrayed as the foremother of its very author—Ari Þorgilsson—and the people of Breiðafjörður. The literary archetype of the foremother figure thus was born. Just a century later, two distinct characters are derived from this common archetype: the heathen Unnr and the Christian Auðr, two figures differing in interpretation of the same woman. *Laxdæla*'s foremother Unnr represents the noble heathen *landnámskona*, who is *djúpúðga*—intelligent—and, a conscious and astute political player. Her ship burial is fit for a heathen king. *Landnáma*'s foremother Auðr, on the other hand, is *djúpauðga*—profoundly wealthy, and one of the early Christian settlers in pre-Christian Iceland. She was buried, as she wished, *í flæðarmáli* [at the flood-mark]—a Christian ritual according to *Landnámabók*. Each author takes a radically different attitude toward the character. Consequently, two competing memories co-exist from then on.

In the nineteenth century, Jón Árnason began to collect and record folkloric texts, such as folktales, and Victorian Iceland enthusiasts started traveling to the land of the sagas. Both the folktale *Gullbrá og Skeggi í Hvammi* and the travelogue *The Oxonian in Iceland* build on various earlier depictions of Auðr and transform the Christian heroine from *Landnámabók* into a hybrid figure. In the folktale, the Christian heroine turns into a protective spirit guarding the people and the land of the Dales district. The travelogue paints her as the Christian foremother of old, with light brushstrokes of the being of light as pictured in the folktale.

In conclusion, across various genres—in the *Íslendingasögur*, in the historiographical works such as *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, as well as in folktales and travelogues—Auðr is remembered in a multitude of word-pictures. Even so, she remains the foremother—"the Lady Aud."

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