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# THE 18TH INTERNATIONAL SAGA CONFERENCE

# SAGAS AND THE CIRCUM-BALTIC ARENA

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

Edited by

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**THE 18th INTERNATIONAL SAGA CONFERENCE: SAGAS AND THE CIRCUM-BALTIC ARENA** is an international, multidisciplinary event to be held 7th–14th August 2022, at the University of Helsinki and University of Tallinn. The event is is organized by Folklore Studies, Department of Cultures, and the Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies, University of Helsinki, the Centre for History, Archaeology and Art History, University of Tallinn, and the Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Tartu.

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Cover image: an 8th–9th century bronze pendant decorated in Broa style, excavated at the Mullutu harbour site, Saaremaa; drawing by Indrek Jets.

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# The Lady Aud, a lifelike word-picture: Reinventing the foremother figure in 19th-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. (Metcalfe 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 Æfintyri,' by Messrs. Grimsen and Arnasen, published at Reykjavik; partly are due to Professor Maurer's valuable work 'Isländische Volkssagen der Gegenwart,' Leipzig, 1860" (Metcalfe 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' […]" (Metcalfe 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 Þorleifsson (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, fǫður Óleifs feilans, fǫður Þórðar gellis, fǫður Þórhildar rjúpu, móður Þórðar hesthǫfða, fǫður Karlsefnis, fǫður Snorra, fǫður 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 hœgendin" [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 lǫgð í skip í hauginum, ok mikit fé var í haug lagt með henni; var eptir þat aptr kastaðr haugrinn. (*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, *Landnáma*'s account on Auðr is centred around her migration to Iceland and her subsequent settlement there. The *Landnáma* 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 eight 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 mèr segir svo hugur um, að hèr muni sá siður tiðkast, og það hús byggjast, sem mèr 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: "[Þ]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 hálffallinn 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 of 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 *landdís*, 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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