



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS STUDENT CONFERENCE ON THE MEDIEVAL NORTH

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Finding the Norse in Medieval Orkney

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The 'invisible centuries' are commonly associated with the late-medieval period and postmedieval period. This gap in archaeological knowledge is most keenly felt in the rural areas of the North of Europe where metanarratives ensure the focus is always on the centers of power, namely the urban strongholds. By applying the interdisciplinary approach of landscape archaeology to the Late-medieval period of Orkney, some pivotal questions can be answered. Firstly, an exploration of the relative lack of Norse archaeological sites in Orkney contrasted with the contemporary connectedness to Scandinavia. Scandinavian influence is still felt so strongly in Orkney in contrast to the lack of material evidence which begs the question, where were the Norse in the landscape?

Aside from Kirkwall, the Brough of Birsay attests to a unique and elite Norse settlement spanning into the Late-medieval era but originating with the preceding Pictish settlement. Here we can interpret ongoing processes in the landscape, perhaps governing settlement patterns into present day Orkney. Moreover, we need to consider regional differences or variation on a much broader geographic scale. The richness of prehistoric sites in Orkney has meant the more well documented eras in Orkney's very long anthropogenic history have been overlooked, despite their obvious social appeal. Additionally, there are clear gaps in what the documentary evidence can tell us. Archaeology is uniquely placed to fill this gap. By asking the right questions and applying an archaeological approach, the past of farmers and farming will be illuminated. Consequently, the later Norse landscape of Orkney will be enriched.

Introduction:

The relative lack of upstanding rural medieval features in the Orcadian Landscape has meant the topic has been sidestepped in the archaeological literature. The focus remains of metanarratives, the power center of Kirkwall and high-status sites such as the Brough of Birsay and Brough of Deerness and other Viking Age finds that are numerous across the Orcadian landscape. An examination of the literature alongside the archaeological evidence can lead to a more holistic understanding of the rural medieval Orcadian landscape. A landscape in which Norse culture long outlived Orkney's bequeathment to the Kingdom of Scotland from the Danish-Norwegian king, Christian I.



Figure 2 Brough of Birsay from above. Author's own image

Viking or Norse?

There is chronological confusion in the literature. Orkney's chronology seems torn between more localized changes and a wider European chronology. Although localized chronologies are important, the Viking Age most likely came to an end in Orkney around the same time as it did in Scandinavia, approximately AD 1050 (Østmo & Hedeager, 2005: 435).

From AD 1050, Medieval power structures came to dominate the landscape. Power is centralized and moves away from dispersed coastal settlements. Consequently, high-status sites are abandoned by approximately AD 1300. The Brough of Birsay (Figure 2), Brough of Deerness and Snusgar Castle are key examples of this trend. All are high status, coastal sites exhibiting mound-like structures that overlay the existing Pict remains.



Figure 5 Image of Quoygrew from above showing medieval settlement at the top and later settlement remains below © Historic Environment Scotland



Figure 1 Map of Orkney including places names in text. © Crown copyright and database rights 2021 Ordnance Survey (EDINA Service)

Environmental Evidence

The landscape of rural medieval Orkney is the rural landscape we have in Orkney today. Deforestation intensified through the Iron Age and Viking Age culminating in the largely treeless, willow shrub and heathland covering much of the Orcadian landscape today (Figure 3).

Palaeoenvironmental evidence from Tuquoy, on the Orcadian island of Westray, suggests land use continuity (Timpany et al. 2020). Mixed agriculture continued from the Viking Age with the two main cultivators being barley and oats while coprophilous fungal spores indicate the presence of grazing animals (Ibid.).



Figure 3 Orcadian heathland. Author's own image

Molluscan Evidence

Middens full of molluscan evidence also, from Tuquoy on Westray, suggests fishing was intensifying into the medieval period. Mostly limpets were found which are associated with fishing cod and saithe. The limpets decrease in size and age towards the top of the midden implying an intensification of fishing concurrent with the eminence of marine resources in Northern Europe (Milner, Barrett & Welsh 2007). This is telling of the expansion in the medieval fish trade, especially dried fish like cod (Barrett et al. 2011).



Figure 4 Archaeological limpet showing three growth checks. (Milner, Barrett & Milek, 2005)

Geoarchaeological Evidence

Evidence from Quoygrew, also on Westray, reveals anthropogenic soils virtually identical to parts of Shetland and Northern Europe in 12th to 13th centuries AD. Evidence of 'arable land improvement, probably associated with the intensification of arable agriculture' was preceded by specialised maritime activity (Simpson, Barrett & Milek, 2005: 374). It is probable that the economic landscape of this rural settlement largely followed on from Norse precursors.

Conclusion

It is evident that Norse culture persisted in rural medieval Orkney. A mixed agrarian society with an emphasis on fishing continued into the medieval period as a continuation from the Viking Age. These practices are reflected in the landscape. The dominance of heathland and scrubs in place of forests, shell middens aside rural settlements, these features shaped the Orcadian landscape to something recognizable today. Far from 'invisible centuries' the Medieval Norse on Orkney were interconnected through maritime trade routes and the prominence of high-status farms on seemingly remote islands such as Westray are a testament to the success of the medieval agrarian society.

A Crossroads

Figure 1 shows Orkney in relation to the rest of Great Britain as a marginal archipelago far removed from any geographic importance. In contrast, Figure 6 demonstrates how Orkney can be perceived as a 'crossroads in Northern Europe' (Fenton 1997). In connection with other maritime cultures across Scandinavia, Orkney was not marginal but central in a broader medieval landscape. Therefore, in order to understand a more local rural landscape, we must keep in mind how those who lived within that landscape were part of a much larger and integrated culture.



Figure 6 Orkney and Shetland in their Northern European crossroads setting. (Fenton 1997: 3)

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Further Information

This is part of a broader study regarding the absence of post-medieval archaeology on the Orkney Islands.

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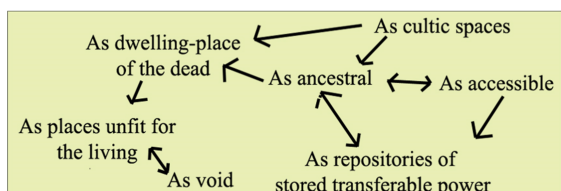
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Holy *hǫrgr*, *haugr* horror: Interactions with Passage Tombs in the Viking Age

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Continental Scandinavia and the British Isles are littered with monumental tombs from the Stone and Bronze Ages. These passage tombs, referred to as *haugr*, were still noticeable, and, in some cases, accessible to the people of the Viking Age, despite being abandoned centuries or even millennia earlier. Once considered benign or even holy parts of the landscape, later literature suggests that the *haugar* left behind by pre-Viking Age inhabitants of Scandinavia came to be considered as spaces of dread and fear. Here, I identify several tombs mentioned in Old Norse literature as pre-Iron Age passage graves and analyze the attitudes of the writers towards them. I focus especially on the Kárr gamli incident in *Grettis saga*, the Orkahaugr episode in *Orkneyinga saga*, and the description of Freyr's death in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* to argue a shift in mentalities towards these tombs. Passage tombs mentioned in Snorri's works are central to his depiction of the *Vanir* and *álfar*, while in *Grettis saga* and *Orkneyinga saga* they have become accursed. The later "horrible" elements of these pre-Viking Age tombs inspired folklore that in some cases persists today. Additionally, I contextualize these stories with archaeological evidence of post-hoc use of passage tombs to explore Viking Age mentalities towards these spaces.

How were passage graves received by people in the early medieval North?



Reuse of prehistoric passage tombs has been noted all over Europe. Marta Diaz-Guardamino identifies a trend wherein the continued use of prehistoric monuments justified an right to the area or the monument itself: as these places were seen as ancient but embedded in a landscape, they became ancestral and a way of accessing power. Having mapped out some nodes of these perceptions on a simple schematic (left, own work), trends of usage may be noted in the literature.

Freyr: the dead king and the elf-cult

In *Heimskringla*, *Snorra Edda*, and the Eddic poems, Freyr, as a Vanir, is connected to the *álfar* and thus to their apparent cults in natural features – were these monuments perhaps considered to be built by *alfar* ancestral to the. *Heimskringla* describes Freyr being shut up in a *haugr* and fed after his death, in the same way that continued caretaking of tombs – sometimes for hundreds of years and into the present day – has been noted. Freyr is still able to maintain the *helzt ár ok friði* after his death and entombment. His presence in the *haugr* is similar to that of the dead *vǫlvur* in both *Vǫluspá* and *Baldrs draumar*, who can be roused from their own graves to dispense advice at the cost of tribute. Freyr is also considered in the *Heimskringla* episode to be ancestral to the Swedish Ynglinga dynasty, marking a trend in post-hoc use of pre-Iron Age mounds and funerary landscapes that emphasizes the ancestral connection to the land and to the monument.

Kárr inn gamli: the accessible ancestor

Grettis saga (14th century) describes an incident where Grettir fights Kárr the Old, who has returned as a *haugbúi* and protector of the island but (unjustly) keeps his sword and treasures from his son Þorfinnr. The description of Kárr's tomb indicates a specificity of experience – horse bones, perhaps from a sacrifice; a terrible smell; description of the interiority of the space – as well as motifs present in other Germanic literature. As well as being present in other sagas, the formula *brynni affé* used by Grettir to describe the treasure on the island parallels the formula *fyr on flode* in *Beowulf*: a guarded treasure, visibly glowing, stored by water (Christopher). Þorfinnr praises Grettir for breaking into the *haugr* and recovering treasure, even at the cost of Þorfinnr's dominion over the island. Þorfinnr remarks on the uselessness of grave goods, which Williams describes as "[s]tored, chthonic, inactive...prevented from re-entering circulation...[a] device for mourning" (Diaz-Guardamino/Williams 87). The physicality of the tomb, the treasure, and the guardian within emphasizes the connection to the landscape and to the line of Þorfinnr Kársson.

Maeshowe, expectations, and emptiness

Maeshowe, on Mainland, Orkney, is a Neolithic Grooved Ware Culture tomb dating from the 3rd millennium BCE and marked by 11th century CE runic graffiti. In the 12th-13th c. CE *Orkneyinga saga*, two of the crusader Jarl Harald's men go mad after their stay in "Orkahaugr" over Christmas. Ragnhild Ljosland (21-22) gives possible glosses of *Orkahaugr* as "Orki's mound," "treasure mound," "mound of the Orks [pre-Norse inhabitants]"*: in all cases, the mound would be assessed by Norse settlers as a place of treasure. The runic graffiti within the tomb expresses disappointment in the lack of treasure, mentions other tombs and *haugbúi*, and seems to confirm presence of crusaders (*iorsolafarar brutu orkhaug*). The tomb is treated much differently in the saga than it is in the inscriptions: there is no *haugbúi*, nor an association within the text with other grave mounds erected by Orkney jarls, and the event is placed within a liminal timespace present in later Icelandic folklore (in this case, Christmas and Thirteenth Night). The mound was understood as acceptably accessible by earlier settlers, including crusaders, but became differentiated as a disconnected void and place of madness in later texts. There is no ghost to wrestle for loot.

*Ljosland notes that prehistoric dwellers appear in later local folk etymologies of the name *Maeshowe* as "maidens' *haugr*," interpreted as temple to the goddesses or Norms – but always associated with Norse, not Picts/pre-Norse.

Conclusions

In all cases: these tombs are described as visible in the landscape, but there are *no passage tombs* in Iceland. Saga composers retained cultural memory of the monumental landscape of Scandinavia. After the practice of grave offerings died out, intrusions into tombs seemed to be acceptable even if, one's overprotective father lives there, as long as there is treasure to be recirculated. The Maeshowe graffiti shows that loot and *haugbúar* were expected encounters, and graverobbing acceptable conduct even for crusaders. In literature, burial mounds become inaccessible and useless if they are disconnected from lineage; when there is no family or power connection or treasure to recirculate, they become places of terror.

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The Burial Mound and its Occupant in Old Norse-Icelandic Saga Literature

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Mound-breaking narratives appear time and again across the Icelandic saga corpus, and are interesting from a number of perspectives. However, much of the scholarly attention they have received has been of a literary nature, discussing the significance of the scene within that particular saga, as well as exploring what the *draugr* residing in the mound may represent, both to the protagonist and the audience. Very little has been done to compare the descriptions of these mounds with actual sites known to archaeology, with which they are perhaps surprisingly consistent.

It is remarkable that a Christian scribe writing in medieval Iceland was able to describe the characteristics of mainland Scandinavian funerary monuments from the Viking Age or earlier with such accuracy. This paper explores possible solutions to the problem posed by the distance of both time and space between the sources: whether their similarities can be attributed solely to cultural memories of much older beliefs and practices, or whether there may have been some contemporary source of information available to saga writers.

This paper will take examples of mound-breaking scenes and largely shift the focus away from the protagonist, onto the *draugr* and his earth-hall, in order to explore the medieval perception of the burials of earlier periods, the kinds of people they contained, and the implications of their continued presence in the physical and mental landscape.

The sun will rise tomorrow; 'twill be a glad morning.

But keep well to the green grass.

Don't you go a-meddling with old stone or cold Wights or prying in their houses,
unless you be strong folk with hearts that never falter!

-Tolkien, J.R.R., 'The Fellowship of the Ring', *The Lord of the Rings* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004)



Part 1: Introductory Caveats

I focus my literary analysis on three main case studies – *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Grettis saga* and *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja* – although other examples are considered in the full version of this thesis.

These represent a range of saga genres, as well as a considerable amount of eddic poetry. This is because my analysis largely disregards genre division, in favour of a focus on the thematic genre of mound-breaking episodes.

My lack of interest in genre division is based on the assumption that all sagas, to some extent, are based on poetry and oral tradition, reaching back to the memory of the funerary traditions which culminated in these monumental burials.

Part 2a: Literary Sources

In 2011, Ármann Jakobsson published *Vampires and Watchmen*, in which he divides the *draugar* of saga literature into those two categories. He defines the latter as being 'attached to a treasure or their land', and as 'rarely aggressive outside of their own mound, which they defend with foul-smelling witchcraft.'

In this and other studies, Ármann argues that the undead represent the universal human fear of death, as well as the terrifying Other that humanity becomes in the absence of death.

The figure of the watchman is also particularly significant because of his social status and origin as a human *individual*, increasing the impact of this particular kind of monster, as well as serving to present him as an image of human corruption.

Kirsi Kanerva has written extensively about the importance of an individual's strength of will in determining their likelihood of becoming posthumously active. It is therefore interesting that my examples consist of Angantýr, the leader of twelve legendary

berserkir; Kárr inn gamli, a wealthy chieftain; and Sóti the Viking, who was *mikit tröll í lífinu, en hálfu meira, síðan hann var dauðr*. All of these individuals are of a high enough status to realistically have been buried in mounds, as well as having the kinds of powers or personality that would allow them to be able to return of their own free will.

The mental strength of the mound breaker is also important, as only a certain kind of person is able to withstand the mound dweller, overpower him, and symbolically inherit his status.

The confrontation with the mound dweller is also an opportunity for the mound breaker to renegotiate their status in a space which is symbolically removed from their own usual social rules and norms.

It is common for these encounters to occur early in the life of the hero, much like Beowulf's fight with Grendel (which is strikingly similar to a mound-breaking episode in a number of ways), as well as instances of dragon-slaying. This raises the possibility that these early, career-defining monster-slayings may be reminiscent of initiation rituals.

Part 2b: The Archaeological Evidence

Burial mounds (and other richly furnished graves) of this type exist across north-western Europe, from a wide range of periods throughout pre-history. These burials often contain impressive grave goods, of a remarkably similar type to those described in the literary sources.

Swords in particular often have an interesting spatial relationship with the body in the grave, reflecting their special status as a highly personal weapon. This emphasis is corroborated by written sources, including my case studies, all of which make note of a valuable sword or other distinctive personal weapon.

Part 3: Possible Sources of Information – A Discussion

Cultural memory is often attached to a particular place, and liminal spaces (like burial mounds!) are particularly prone to retaining a sense of meaning. Burial grounds often occupy liminal areas of the landscape in relation to human settlements, as well as the interior of the grave itself being potentially seen as a gateway to the otherworld, or as a space between this world and the next.

The idea of the dead living on inside the mound, retaining interest and involvement in their society, may be a remnant of ancestor worship. This may relate to the role of the mound-dweller as symbolic (or literal) parent.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that the sagas were written in the Middle Ages, and are also reflective of this context. Christianity in particular had a huge impact, both in creating a more explicitly demonic view of the undead, as well as in the influence of learned Christian ideas about the relationship between body and soul. Medicine, philosophy, and Latin necromancy would all have further contributed to the distinctly medieval nature of these episodes. It is also possible that, by this time, the mound-breaking episode had simply become a genre trope, indicating the generally pagan vibe of the setting.

Finally, there is extensive archaeological evidence of prehistoric graves across Scandinavia having been reopened, many of which can be precisely dated to the medieval period, which indicates that medieval writers may have had more immediate source material than initially thought.

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War or peace?: Viking settlement in 10th century North-West England

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This paper attempts to establish the level of hostility or peacefulness of the Viking presence in north-west England during the early 10th century. The north-west is lacking in both the historical and archaeological record for the Viking-Age, but place-name studies show that there was a large immigration of Scandinavians to the area during this time. Many of the few historical records that could confirm Viking activity are of an inconclusive nature, and the lack of settlement archaeology means conclusions must be drawn from hoards, sculpture, and burials rather than settlement or structural archaeology.

This paper examines the most important pieces of both historical and archaeological evidence that can tell us how far this settlement was a violent incursion or peaceful assimilation. In particular, a study of the origins of Scandinavians who participated in conflicts such as Brunanburh reveal the north-west a victim of its location in the centre of several powerful outside forces. Recent scholarship on the battle of Tettenhall suggests the possibility of some organised military force that could have originated from the Scandinavian settlers in the north-west. Stone-sculpture, however, reveals a non-homogenous population of Scandinavians with no singular background or set of cultural connections, and a great degree of cultural interaction with the native Anglian populations that suggests a quick and peaceful process of assimilation. Additionally, both historical and archaeological records show evidence of legal purchases of land, offering an alternative explanation to raid and violent conquest for the Scandinavian acquisition of land in north-west England.

Raiding in the historical record

In the *Fragments of Irish Annals*, Ingimund, a Scandinavian, landed on the English west coast. He was expelled from Britain, but Æthelflæd then granted him lands to settle, most likely some part of the Wirral. Ingimund became tempted by the wealth of Chester, and attempted, with 'Norsemen and Danes,' to take it by force. (Wainwright, 167-169) This story is the only direct reference we have for the North-West to something like the usual viking raids seen in other areas of the British Isles.

Two Anglo-Saxons are said in the *History of St. Cuthbert* to have left the North-West, one 'fleeing from the pirates,' (Whitelock(b), 285) almost certainly meaning Scandinavian raids.

Lack of participation in Brunanburh

The Battle of *Brunanburh* took place at Bromborough on the Wirral in 937 (Cavill, 106). Æthelstan's Mercian and West-Saxon forces were fighting a coalition of Scots and Norse from Dublin. There is no mention of Northumbrians taking part (Whitelock(b), 39). This battle seems to have been a coalition of external forces fighting an opposing force of outsiders. Some may argue that the Norsemen from Dublin are one and the same with the Scandinavian settlers of the North-West. However, this battle takes place approximately 25 years if not longer since the beginning of the Scandinavian settlement of the North-West. It is unlikely that after a long period of settlement with minimal conflict that settlers would be identified as a foreign force hopping in their boats 'back to Ireland.' (Whitelock(a), 70)

An alternative Tettenhall theory?

John Quanrud, has put forward that the usual understanding of the Battle of Tettenhall in AD 910 as being between the English and the Danes of eastern Northumbria is reliant on assumptions. He suggests instead that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* could refer to Scandinavians from the North-West settlements. This would fit with the timeline of further conflict mentioned in the *Irish Annals* after Ingimund's attack. Quanrud shone a light on the ambiguity of the phrasing in the *ASC*, the fact that Edward's motives for sending his troops were unclear, and that the origin of the kings who were named by Æthelweard as being slain at Tettenhall is in question (Quanrud, 77). If his theory is correct, this battle would represent the peak of Viking violence in the North-West during the early settlement period.

Stone sculpture and cultural integration

Stone sculptures found in the North-West often portray Christian and pagan imagery side-by-side. This connected the Scandinavians to their past, using their traditional figures and stories to match Christian parallels (Bailey, 59). There was also a significant amount of Anglian imagery and style remaining in these monuments. The unique schools of sculpture across the North-West blended all this cultural imagery, seen in examples such as the Gosforth Cross, suggesting a strong integration between Scandinavian settlers, Anglian natives and their Celtic and Scottish neighbours. The variation in these monuments suggests a variety of influences from settlers of a range of backgrounds.

Conclusion

Settlement in the North-West appears to have taken the form of some small conflicts and raids, but nothing that could be considered a full-scale invasion. There were clearly higher priorities for both the chroniclers and the English royals that suggests the threat posed by Scandinavian settlers in the north-west was rather minimal. This may have been because the settlers were going about legal means of acquiring land through purchases, and because the settlers were a patchwork of immigrants with varying backgrounds and influences, and not a singular hostile force.

The north-west was in the centre of a power struggle between the Vikings of Dublin and east Northumbria, the English, and the Scots. It had been used strategically in other ways; Æthelstan had the Scottish king Constantine submit to him at Eamont Bridge in Westmorland (Griffiths, 44). At Brunanburh, the Wirral seems to have also become a victim of this central, strategic location, rather than a result of local violence.

Quanrud's Tettenhall theory remains an outlier within this picture. Such a theory of an organized military force originating in the North-West is generally contradictory to much of the other evidence presented here.

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April 15th – 17th 2021

The Historicity of the *Völva*: a Comparative Analysis

AUTHOR: Luna Polinelli, University of Iceland

ABSTRACT:

Throughout the years scholars have attempted to reconstruct a historical pre-Christian counterpart for the *völur* found in Norse literature. In particular, several studies have been conducted on chapter 4 of *Eiríks saga Rauða*, which provides us with the most detailed description of a *völva* and her *spá* found in the sagas. The interpretation of this account, however, proves problematic in investigating its historicity since the *völva* might merely be a stereotypical figure employed by the authors as a narrative device to entertain their audience and not an actual representation of pre-Christian beliefs. Moreover, scholars as Jóhanna Friðriksdóttir have argued that it is unlikely that the memory of such beliefs could have survived for centuries after the Christianisation. Nevertheless, archaeological research conducted in mainland Scandinavia has shown significant similarities between the saga accounts of *völur* and female graves dating to the Viking Age. As such, this paper seeks to investigate whether or not these burials can be interpreted as the remains of actual historical counterparts for the literary *völur*. Drawing on a set of various sources such as saga literature, secular law codes and archaeological finds, and building on the previous work of scholars such as Neil Price and Leszek Gardela, this paper will consist of a comparative analysis of the account found in chapter 4 of *Eiríks saga Rauða* and the contents of related Viking Age grave sites. It is concluded that, while the primary goal of the authors was to convey didactic Christian messages and entertain their audience through the inclusion of the *völva* and her *spá* ritual, the account also proves to be a valid source in investigating pre-Christian beliefs relating to female *spá* practitioners.

Chapter 4 of *Eiríks saga Rauða* describes Þorbjörg lítilvölva: this old woman who performs *spá* is treated with the highest regards by others and many special arrangements are made for her. She is richly clothed and carries a staff with her.

This account has been used to reconstruct a historical equivalent for the literary *völva*, which archaeological research seems to support. In Scandinavia, several female burials (fig.1) which contain some of those objects described in *Eiríks saga Rauða* have been discovered and have therefore been identified as possible *völur* graves. The objects taken into consideration are staffs associated with *seiðr*, lavish grave goods, rich garments, and charms.

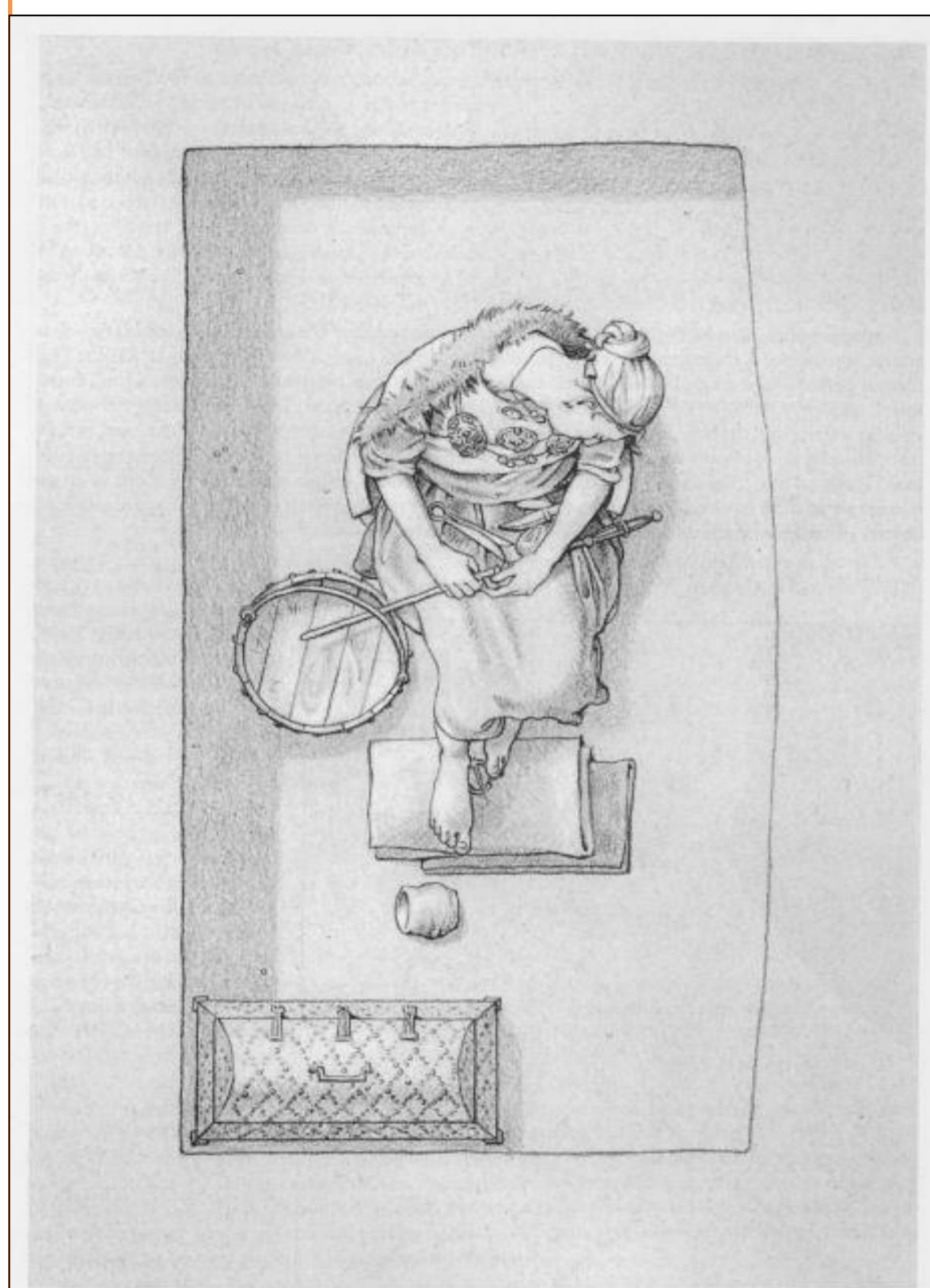


Figure 2: Artistic reconstruction of chamber-grave Bj.845 (after Price: 2019:97; drawing by Þórhallur Þráinsson).

For example, the Birka graves Bj.660 and Bj.845 (fig.2) contain female remains, which present rich brooches, exotic grave goods (e.g.glass), a staff (fig. 3) placed in the hands of the corpses, as for ready use.

Likewise, Fyrkat grave 4 contains the wealthiest clothes and goods among the other graves in the area. Among these grave goods, wealthy clothes, an impression of a wooden staff, pendants and henbane seeds (possibly used in the ritual?).

In Norway, the Oseberg burial presents two female skeletal remains, along with lavish grave goods such as a ship, in addition to two staffs, and cannabis seeds.

Overall, these burials are all connected by the same items, whose richness indicates a likelihood that these women belonged to the high social class and were held in high regards by the living.

Although it cannot be argued with certainty whether these women were actual *völur* and that they behaved similarly to the description of *Eiríks saga Rauða*, the several similarities between the archaeological evidence and the saga descriptions, such as the staff, wealth, and social standing, indicate that the literary *völva* was at least constructed on the recollection of a prominent group of pre-Christian women, who lived in the 9th and 10th century AD. However, whether magical abilities were ascribed to these women as they are attributed to the *völur* of the sagas is a question that remains open.



Figure 3: Iron fragments from the staff found in chamber-grave Bj. 660 (rediscovered by Gardela and Andersson in 2012 in the Swedish History Museum; photographed by Gabriel Hilderbrand, Swedish History Museum, Creative Commons).



Figure 1: Distribution of staff-graves in Scandinavia.
1: Birka graves Bj.760, Bj.660, Bj.834, Bj.845, Björkö, Uppland, Sweden.
2: Ancient monuments 59:2 and 59:3, Klinta, Köpings parish, Öland, Sweden.
3: Aska, Hagebyhöga parish, Östergötland, Sweden.
4: Grave 4, Fyrkat cemetery, Jylland, Denmark.
5: Ka. 294-296, Bilkjolberget, Kaupang, Larvik k., Vestfold, Norway.
6: The "Gausel queen", Hetland sogn, Rogaland, Norway.
7: Oseberg on the Oslofjord, Vestfold, Norway.

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

This section was part of my 2020 MA thesis "*En mēr eru nú margir þeir hlutir auðsýnir*": Prophecy as Literary Motif and Historical Source in the *Vínland sagas*. I wish to thank my supervisor Luke John Murphy for his constant support and encouragement.

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Of Legomancy and Magic Song – Words of Power. Law, Magic & Poetry in Old Norse Saga Literature

Jan Martin Juergensen, MA Viking and Medieval Norse Studies, Háskóli Íslands

Law, poetry and magic often intertwine in Old Norse saga literature. While they are very distinct concepts for the respective scholar, the borders are not separate at all if you look at the occurrences of these issues in the sagas.

All three concepts are, ultimately, based on the spoken word; the law-speaker, the sorcerer and the poet are all highly specialized craftsmen of language. All three professions use words to shape reality: the law-speaker is responsible for the shape of social reality – ,með lögum skal land byggjast.‘ The sorcerer shapes reality with ritual, causing harm or good in a magical worldview. The poet crafts memory: ,ek veit einn, at aldrei deyr: dómr um dauðan hvern.‘ There are also the provisions of Grágás which treat poetry more extensively than any issues of magic for its much more serious influence.

There is also a case to be made that the oaths to be taken before a court resemble magical spells, a notion that was most recently proposed by Lucie Korecká in 2019: “Some of the legal formulas, such as those used in oaths that guaranteed truce and reconciliation (*gríðamál*, *tryggðamál*), existed in verse form and were strictly ritualized. They almost resemble incantations or magical formulas, and their meaning actually equals a curse to anyone who would break the oath.” (279)

The connections don’t end at this level, though. In this paper I will show how magic is used in legal context in the sagas (for example in *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Færeyinga saga*), how magic mimics legal punishment (in *Egils saga*) and how poetry itself can be classified as magic (as in *níð*).

The Law deals with supernatural matters: *Eyrbyggja saga*

The restless dead are set before a law court and banished through legal authority:

„Síðan var nefndur duradómur ok sagðar fram sakar ok farið at öllum málum sem á þingadómum; váru þar kvíðir bornir, reifð mál ok dæmd; en síðan er dómsorði var á lokit um Þóri viðlegg, stóð hann upp ok mælti: „Setit er nú, meðan sætt er.“ Eptir þat gekk hann út þær dyrr, sem dómrinn var eigi fyrir settir. Þá var lokit dómsorði á sauðamann; en er hann heyrði þat, stóð hann upp ok mælti: „Fara skal nú, ok hygg ek, at þó værrir fyrr sœmra.“ [...]“ ÍF IV 1935, p. 151/152.

The Law uses magic to convict the accused: *Færeyinga saga*

A chieftain summons the ghosts of a murder victim to convict the killer of the crime:

„Þrándr lætr þá kalla á þá Leif ok Sigurð ok biðr at Þorgrímr ok synir hans sé fjotraðir, ok svá var gert, at þeir eru fjotraðir ok ríkt bundnir. Þrándr hafði þá látit gera elda mikla í eldaskála ok grindr fjórar lætr hann gera með fjórum hornum, ok nú reita rístr Þrándr alla vega út frá grindunum, en hann sezk á stól milli elds ok grindanna. Hann biðr þá nú ekki við sik tala, ok þeir gera svá. Þrándr sitr svá um hríð. [...] Ok er stund líðr gengr maðr inn í eldahuðit; hann gengr at eldi ok réttir til hendr sínar ok gengr út síðan. Þeir kenndu at þar var Þórir. Brátt eptir gengr hinn þriði maðr í eldaskálann. Þessi var mikill maðr ok mjök blóðigr. Hann hafði höfuðit í hendi sér. [...]“ FS, ÍF 2006, p. 88/89.

Magic is used as legal recourse: *Egils saga*

Egill loses a law case and uses curses and a níðstong as legal recourse; land spirits are cursed like outlaws if they don't do Egill's bidding:

„Þá sneri Egill aprtr ok sagði: „Því skírskóta ek undir [...] alla þá menn, er nú megu orð mín heyra, lenda menn ok lögmennt ok alla alþýðu, at ek banna jarðir þær allar, er Björn hefir átt, at byggja ok at vinna. Banna ek þér, Berg-Öundur, ok öðrum mönnum öllum, innlenzkum ok útlenzkum, tígnum ok ótígnum, en hverjum manni, er þat gerir, legg ek við lögbot landsréttar ok gríðarok ok goðagremi.“ [...] [Þ]á tók hann hrosshöfuð ok mælti svá: „Hér set ek upp níðstong, ok sny ek þessu níði á hönd Eiríki konungi ok Gunnhildi dróttningu [...]. [S]ný ek þessu níði á landvættir þær, er land þetta byggva, svá at allar fari þær villar vega, engi hendi né hitti sitt inni, fyrr en þær reka Eirík konung ok Gunnhildi ór landi.“ ÍF II 1933, p. 158/171.

Poetry is used as magic: *Þorleifs þátr jarlsskálds*

A disguised poet – a kraftaskáld – casts a spell upon an unfriendly jarl through a níð-poem:

Karl hét góðu um ok hóf þá upp vísur, ok heita Þokuvísur ok standa í miðju Jarlsníði, ok er þetta upphaf at: „Þoku dregr upp it ytra/ él festist it vestra,/ mökkur mun náms af nokkvi,/ naðrbings kominn hingat.“ En er hann hafði úti Þokuvísur, þá var myrkt í höllinni, ok er myrkt er orðit í höllinni, tekr hann aprtr til Jarlsníðs, ok er hann kvað inn efsta ok síðasta þriðjung, þá var hvert járn á gangi, þat er í var höllinni, án manna völdum, ok varð þat margra manna bani. Jarl fell þá í óviti, en karl hvarf þá í brott at luktum dyrum ok óloknum lásum, en eptir af líðit kvæðit minnkaði myrktir ok gerði bjart í höllinni. Jarl raknaði við ok fann, at honum hafði nær gengit níðit; sá þá ok veggsummerkí, at af var rotnat skegg allt af jarli ok hárit öðrum megin reikar ok kom aldri upp síðan. ÍF IX 1956, p. 222/223.

These examples should make clear that there is a clear intersection between the fields of law, magic and poetry. Legal formulas resembling poetry, which are basically magical curses upon oathbreakers, exist; other written sources give examples of how legal matters were involved with magic and the supernatural. The areas of magic, law and poetry form a triangle in which *Níð* can be placed in the middle. *Níð* is deemed as poetry in the law codices, but the literary examples of *Egils saga* and *Þorleifs þátr jarlsskálds* make it clear that it could also exist as magic and as a legal formula. The latter is evidenced by the ancient truce formulas of *Tryggðamál* and *Griðamál*, which are deemed to be far older than the extant written sources of Old Norse and which name the breaker of the oath *níðingr* and *vargr*.

While early lawspeakers were often also poets, with Christianization and the writing of law codices the field of law became more clearly separated from the other two. Due to law codices, the mnemonic techniques of poetry were not that necessary anymore, and the Christian view of ,heathen‘ magic was clearly negative, as seen in the laws that were set up against magic usage. The office of the *goði* took a sweeping turn from religious to a political office focused on matters of law.

Excerpts from *Grágás Kónungsbók*:

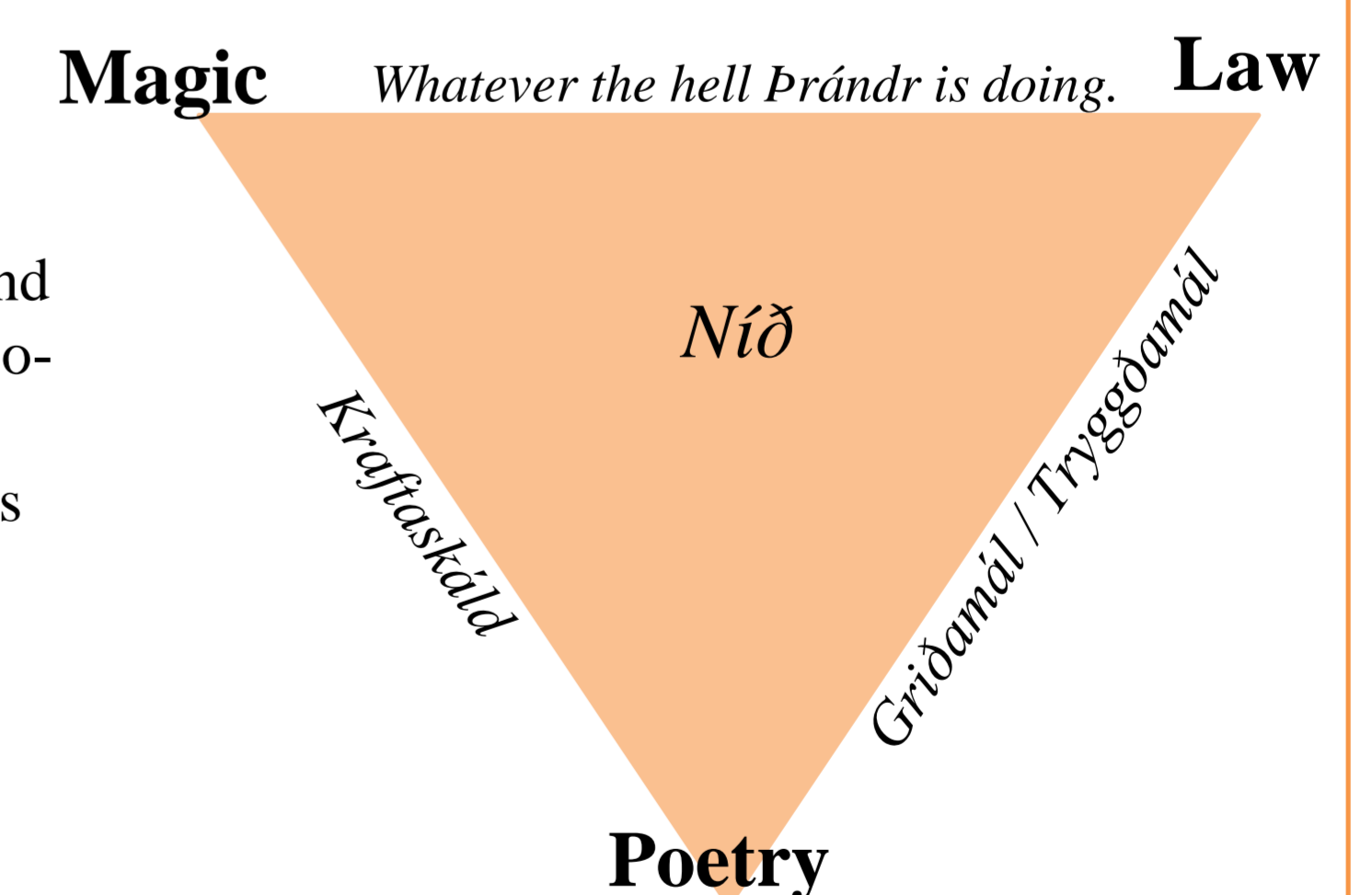
Griðamál

Nú heldr iðrð gríðum upp,
enn himinn varðar fyrir ofan
enn hafit rauða fyrir útan,
er liggr um lönd öll.
þau er vér höfum tíðendi af,
Enn á milli þessa endimarka,
er nú hefi ek hér talt fyrir
mönnum, þrífisk sá maðr
hvergi, er þessi gríð rýfr, er
ek hefi hér nefnd,
ok bindi hann sér svá höfga
byrð, at hann komisk aldregi
undan; en þat er guð dróttins
gremi ok gríðbítis
=gríðnóðings nafn.

Tryggðamál

En sá ykkar,
er gengr á gorvar sáttir
eða vegr á veittar
tryggðir –
þá skal hann svá víða
vargr,
rækr ok rekinn,
sem menn víðast varga
reka,
kristnir menn kirkiur
sækia,
heiðnir menn hof blóta,
eldr upp brennr,
iðrð grœr,[...]
sól skínn, snæ leggr, [...]
himinn hverfr, heimr er
byggðr,
vindr þytr, vötn til sævar
falla,
[...]
hann skal firrask
kirkiur ok kristna menn,
guðs hús ok guma
heim hvern nema helvíti.

The violet passages address the oathbreaker as a person.
The green passages are highlighting the physical boundaries of the world.
The yellow passages issue a curse upon the oathbreaker.
The blue passages push the oathbreaker outside of society and incur divine wrath.
In red are references to *níð*; a *níðingr/vargr* is a person belonging outside of society.



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FURTHER INFORMATION:

This presentation is part of my MA thesis in Viking and Medieval Norse Studies at Háskóli Íslands under the supervision of Margaret Cormack.

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Vikings in Gaming, Gaming with Vikings

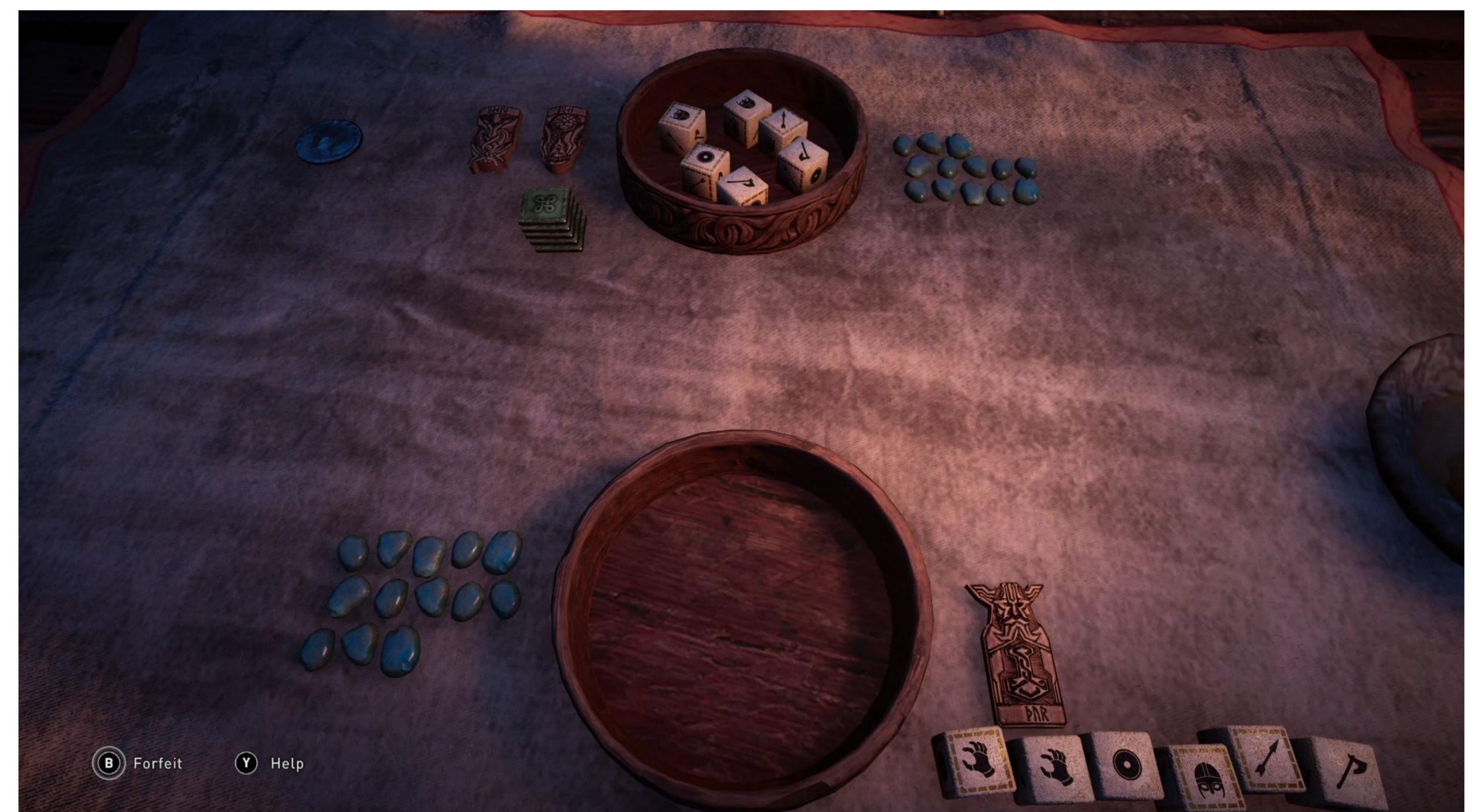
AUTHOR: Lysiane Lasausse, University of Helsinki, Finland.

ABSTRACT:

The video games' world is the stage of a Vikings renaissance since 2015: from AAA games to indie studios, many are appropriating Viking history, culture and folklore to weave stories and create characters. For a long time portrayed as relentless warriors, fighting deranged gods and monsters, Vikings have been shown in a bloodthirsty light, often as the enemies: Vikings and their mythology have a rich, but dark role in many video games. However, new Vikings are on the horizon: games are beginning to show them as regular folk, with everyday trials and tribulations. With these new Vikings also come an important aspect of human life everywhere: entertainment. This presentation aims to offer a glimpse of how video games include and utilize history to create, re-create or implement games within games. By working with Ubisoft's 2020 release *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, I will show how the developers have implemented mini games based on Vikings traditions and folklore, going as far as inventing a board game (Orlog) to play within the game. The inclusion of such mini games poses the question: are we playing as Vikings, or with Vikings? Utilizing cultural heritage, history, and video game studies, this presentation aims to first provide an insight on the influence of cultural heritage and medieval history in re-creating Viking environment from a historical point of view. The second goal is to delve deeper into the creation of games-within-a-game, by game developers, utilizing historians' knowledge and video game design. The third and final goal is to open a discussion on the influence of created games such as Orlog, and what it means in terms of cultural heritage and understanding of medieval history.



A screenshot from *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* showing two characters playing Orlog. Taken by Lysiane Lasausse.



Screenshot of the game *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, showing the game of Orlog. The image shows dice, rocks, tokens and carved figurines of Norse mythology gods. Taken by Lysiane Lasausse.

A game within a game.

Assassin's Creed: Valhalla (shortened *AC:Valhalla* from this point) is a video game created by Ubisoft, released in November 2020. During the game's development, Ubisoft insisted on the franchise's improvement on historical accuracy. Ubisoft hired historians and experts on Viking culture and history to create a virtual environment that would match as closely as possible to real-world archaeological findings and historical reconstructions. As part of introducing historical culture and Viking traditions, *AC:Valhalla* has multiple mini-games, one of which is a tabletop strategy game called Orlog.

Vikings in gaming, gaming with Vikings.

Tabletop strategy games existed during Viking times, with archaeological findings of game pieces and writings in sagas mentioning games demonstrating it was a popular pastime. However, Orlog is a game that was invented especially for *AC:Valhalla*; the game itself does not have any historical value, so to say. It was created to "look realistic" rather than to recreate existing games, for which rules are missing or non-existent. Orlog contains Viking elements, such as carved figurines of Norse mythology gods (Odin and Freyja for example), and dice (existent during Viking times). These elements allow the game to fit in well with the rest of *AC:Valhalla*'s environment and create an additional layer of immersion for the player.

History or capitalism?

While Orlog may be an additional feature to create a sense of historical accuracy and immersion for the player of *AC:Valhalla*, the creation of this game-within-a-game poses the question of intent on the game's developers' part. A few weeks after the release of *AC:Valhalla*, Ubisoft announced the release of Orlog as a separate, physical board game in 2021. Was Orlog created to promote historical culture and cultural heritage of the Vikings, or to be sold for profit? It is important to remember that game developers create video games firstly for profit, and that as academics, it is important to stay critical of marketing and public relations announcements surrounding digital games.

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

This presentation is part of a lecture I developed for the University of Helsinki, taught as part of the History and Popular Culture (2020) and Kultuurens digitala dimensioner (2021) courses.

It is also part of an article written for an anthology to be published by Routledge in 2022, *Viking Heritage and History in Europe: Practices and Recreations*.

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April 15th – 17th 2021

The Role of Memory in Viking and Anglo-Scandinavian Identity

AUTHOR: Olivia Little, University of York

ABSTRACT:

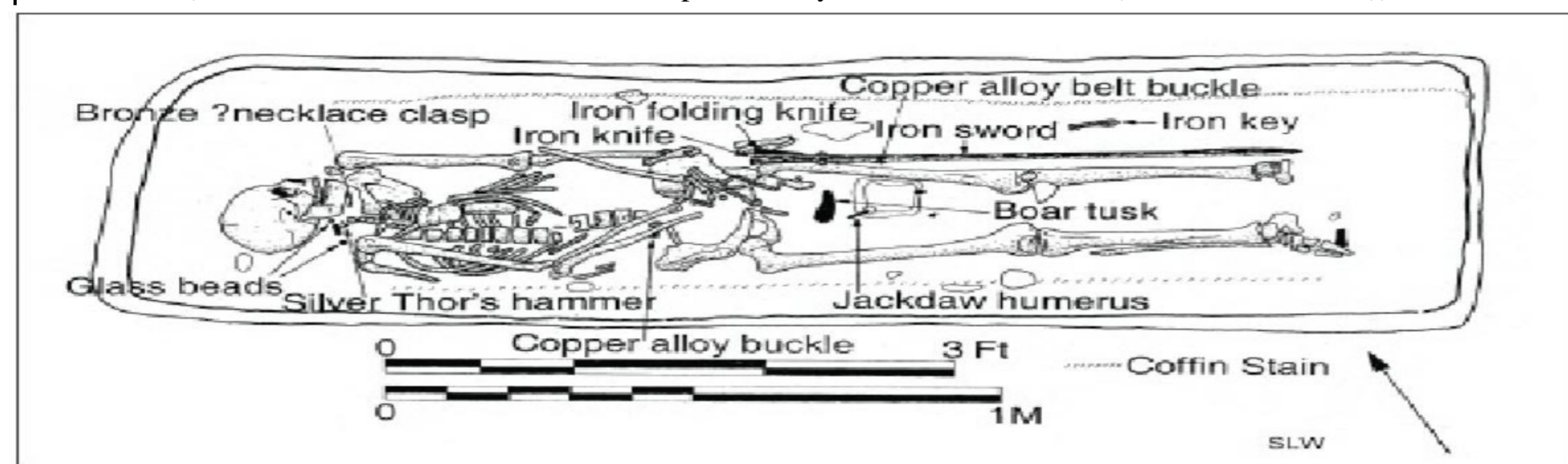
The relationship between identity, memory and physical commemoration in Viking (Scandinavian) and Anglo-Scandinavian culture is heavily intertwined. Burial sites, funerary rites, and physical form of commemoration are excellent physical demonstrations of the commingling of identity and memory across medieval Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon cultures and the later hybrid Anglo-Scandinavian culture.

Commemoration and memory are vital to sustaining identity, but equally can reflect the changing nature of identity. Burials are the most common form of physical commemoration (though varied wildly), however there are few burials of Scandinavian style within England (Richards 2007, 189) following their settlement. It is therefore inferred by archaeologists that the native Anglo-Saxon style of burials overtook the Scandinavian (Richards 2007, 205). Burials, funerary rites, memory, and commemoration were interlinked throughout the Scandinavian world (Price, 2010). High-status burials are a good example of this, many high-status individuals were buried, but not merely deposited in the ground, some were placed in ship burials, chamber graves or even burials mounds (Price 2008, 258). These depositions would be accompanied by lavish funerary rites (Price, 2010) witnessed by entire communities, with guests and visitors expected (Price, 2014). These rites would commemorate the power not only of the deceased but also their identity and importance. The presence of witnesses would ensure the legacy of the deceased lingers not just through physical remains but by word of mouth.

Monuments were quite rare but adept at sustaining social identity and even reflecting the identity of a new community such as Thorwald's cross (BBC, 2018); a monument depicting both Norse and Christian iconography which demonstrates a mingling of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon identities into a new Anglo-Scandinavian identity. Hogback tombstones and Anglo-Scandinavian crosses (Richards 2008, 370) were useful in perpetuating Anglo-Scandinavian identity but were naturally rare due to their high-status nature.

Anglo-Scandinavian burial record

As demonstration of the intermingling identity of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian identities the funerary practices varied also. Notably within Scandinavian burial practices also varied (Price 2008 258), with cremation and inhumation the most popular. As previously mentioned inhumation appears to have adapted to the Anglo-Saxon style fashion (Richards 2007, 205) with Repton as a notable exception. Scandinavian burials are often inferred from the presence of grave goods, such as those at Cumwhitton, but as with Repton, these are presumed to be first-generation settlers. Due to the absence of grave goods in later burials within areas of Scandinavian settlement it has been assumed that settlers rapidly assimilated and adopted Christianity (Richards 2008, 370). Though it must be noted that our interpretation of Anglo-Scandinavian remains is nearly fully reliant on high-status remains due to the varying quantity (and quality) of material to work with throughout England (Price 2008, 258). Heath Wood at Ingleby appears to be the only known Scandinavian cremation site in England (Richards, et al., 2004) with burial being preferred both amongst Scandinavians and native Anglo-Saxons. Cultural contact and contrast also play a role, the early interment site of Repton, show high-status Scandinavian individuals and crucially first-generation settlers already associating themselves with sites of religious cultural influence (Richards, et al., 2004), see figure below. (Grave 511 with male remains from Repton, Derbyshire, north of church (Richards 2004, 111))



Alongside increasing Christianization, the relative wealth of the deceased would play a part. More ordinary Scandinavian settlers are far less likely to occur in the archaeological record under 'traditional' Scandinavian burials as they would be far less likely to have grave goods compared to the elite. Thomas (2000, 240) argues that as Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon cultures intermingle and Anglo-Scandinavian families developed and became settled, the form of wealth shifted from portable wealth, objects that could be used as grave goods, to land ownership, so Anglo-Scandinavians would manifest their identity and power in land ownership rather than funerary wealth.

Anglo-Scandinavian Commemorative Monuments

When Anglo-Scandinavian identity is present amongst deceased individuals so too is the role of Christianity. Scandinavian artwork is demonstrated upon Anglo-Scandinavian crosses (Richards 2008, 370). The most famous example is Thorwald's cross (BBC, 2018), shown below, which shows both Christian and Norse iconography such as the Norse god Odin but also a cross and book. Hogback tombstones common throughout northern England and Scotland (Richards 2008, 370), are strongly associated with indigenous British and Scandinavian cultural admixture, though as noted above this is limited to elite individuals. The likely reason for such elite sparsity in the archaeological record is that elite settlers would be far less common in England is that elite individuals would have less reason to depart a secure home in Scandinavia for an uncertain one in the British Isles.

(Thorwald's Cross depicting Norse and Christian iconography (BBC, 2018))



Scandinavian Identity abroad

The Scandinavians also had cultural contact with northern France, France demonstrates an absence of Scandinavian style burials. In France only an inhumation at Pîtres with oval brooches and a suspected boat burial at Brittany is present (Roesdahl 2003, 208). Due to lack of archaeological evidence in France, rapid cultural assimilation has been assumed (Thomas, et al., 2016). By contrast England, due to the excellent state of preservation, comparatively rich record of Scandinavian style graves and rich variety of artefacts, is able to look at post-invasion Scandinavian settlement and can discuss integration, identity and assimilation.

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April 15th – 17th 2021

Warriors of Odin: Fighting for A God Before *Militia Christi* in Medieval Scandinavia

Victor Barabino, CRAHAM – Université de Caen Normandie



Did Scandinavian warriors of the Middle Ages perceive themselves as servants of the pagan gods the way Christian crusaders saw themselves as *milites Christi*? On this poster, I wish to present results of my research on the evolution of the warrior-god relationship at the turn of Christianization in Scandinavia (10th-13th c.). The paper focuses on the main pagan god associated with war, i.e. Odin, and explores three main aspects of his relationship with pagan warriors.

I will first study the figure of Odin as a war chieftain who gives orders to attack, advises warriors with military tactics and has his own specific war strategies. I will then show how Odin helps warriors on the battlefield, providing strength and a longer life to them, as well as military support and even victory. Lastly, I will consider the hypothesis of pagan Scandinavian warriors as Odin's servants. In fact, libations to Odin before combat are common practice and some elite warriors, such as *berserkers* and *einherjar*, seem to be the "warriors of Odin" *par excellence*, among humans and in Valhalla.

Using evidence from the narrative sources, as well as some runic inscriptions and skaldic poetry, I hope to show that before and after Christianization, fighting was considered both a military and spiritual activity that implied service to the gods and a specific relationship with them, while underlying crucial differences between serving Odin and serving Christ.

Warlike God or Supernatural War Chieftain?

Odin is sometimes described as the "god of war" in popular imagination and was deemed the "lord of hosts" by scholars until well in the middle of the twentieth century (Ellis-Davidson 1964, 48). But even though Odin is indeed a warlike god, his status as the quintessential god of battle is questionable. At the beginning of the *Ynglinga saga* (Laing 1961, 7-43), Snorri Sturluson depicted Odin not as a god but as an extraordinary war chieftain who was victorious in all his battles thanks to magic (incantations, sacrifices, use of herbs). This is confirmed in other sources such as Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, where Odin gave strategical advice to Danish king Harald against Ingi, king of Sweden (Elton 1905, 226-7). Some military tactics, e.g., concerning the disposition of troops on the battlefield, are even specifically associated with Odin, who is called "the inventor and teacher of these tactics" further in the *Gesta Danorum* (Elton 1905, 242-3).

Odin's Help on The Battlefield: A God Amongst Warriors

Serving Odin meant being rewarded with various advantages at war. According to Saxo, Odin embodied a "divine patronage" for warriors as he gave them "the privilege of insuperability" on the battlefield (Elton 1905, 110). In skaldic poems from the tenth century by Einarr Helgason Skálaglam, Odin even granted victory to king Håkon the Good because of his loyalty to pagan gods (Turville-Petre 1976, 59-63). However, because of conversion, allegiance to the ancient gods was progressively forbidden and replaced by *militia Christi*. Thus, in the thirteenth century, when Scandinavian kingdoms were completely Christianised, the Lord replaced Odin in the warrior-god relationship. As a matter of fact, Magnus VI's *Law of the Hird* (*Hirðskrá*, c. 1263) was perhaps the first text to convey the concept of a war in the name of God in Scandinavia.

Servants of Odin: Elite Warriors Only?

Warriors were sometimes described as Odin's own men, fighting under his command. Such was the case of the Berserkers, a type of elite "bear" or "wolf" warriors who are mentioned in some myths and sagas, but whose historical existence has not yet been proven (Samson 2011). This link between elite warriors, Odin and fury (*berserkrsgang*) is ancient in Scandinavian war culture, as some runestones show, for example the funerary inscription of Tune which reads <Woduride> (Marez 2007, 197-233) thus referring literally to a "horseman of Odin" (**Wotan*) or a "horseman of fury" (**Wut*). In the times of conversion, this association was also present in skaldic poetry, for example in a poem by Kormákr Ögmundarson (Turville-Petre 1976, 45-50), where warriors are called "Odins of the sword" (*hjarar Pundar*). Even after conversion, references to ancient mythology remained important when praising the merits of warriors and warlords. For example, in the poem *Eiriksmál* (Jónsson 1929), Odin and the warriors who sit at his table, the *Einherjar*, welcomed king Erik Bloodaxe in Valhalla, though the king was Christian in his lifetime.



Reproduction of Torslunda plate D, 6th-8th c.: the one-eyed warrior recalls Odin and the wolfman accompanying him is interpreted as a Berserker.

Before and after Christianisation, fighting was considered both a military and spiritual activity that implied service to the gods and a specific relationship with them. However, crucial differences between serving Odin and serving Christ must be stressed. In pagan times, warriors held a more personal relationship with the gods, whose attitudes and attributes were closer to those of humans: such was the case of Odin, who was seen as a war chieftain and a god who gave direct help to warriors on the battlefield, rather than a divine entity whose commands should be obeyed in the name of a specific religious doctrine. This idea, along with the concept of the "just war", would later develop in Christian times with the diffusion of *militia Christi* in Scandinavia.

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Picture: *Kongl. Vitterhets Historie och Antiquitets Akademiens Månadsblad*, 1872, fog. 39, p. 90 (copyright-free: CC-PD-Mark).

FURTHER INFORMATION:

This presentation includes aspects of my PhD project at the University of Caen Normandie (France), under the supervision of Alban Gautier and Pr. Ryan Lavelle (2019-2022).

I wish to thank Alban Gautier and Jean-Claude Fossey for the conception of this poster, as well as the people who were kind enough to proof-read it.

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April 15th – 17th 2021

Fluid Valkyries: Roles and Personalities of the Women in Beowulf

AUTHOR: Eliza Megan Bond



Within the *Beowulf* text, women are categorized in two predetermined boxes – that of the peace weaver as portrayed by Wealhtheow, or that of the monster, like Grendel's Mother. However, closer analysis of the text will bring forth the idea that Scandinavian women also inhabit a more obscure third category, that of the Valkyrie woman. These women exist both within and without the liminal space of acceptable society and incorporate into their identity's aspects of both the docile peace weaver, and the outcasted woman-monster. By incorporating ideas from Shari Horner's "Voices from the Margins: Women and Textual Enclosure in *Beowulf*" and Helen Damico's "The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature", we can begin to understand that some of the women in the text, such as Modthryth and Wealhtheow herself, do not fit so nicely within their assigned roles, and often branch out into the roles of men – that of the warrior. However, because they are able to return to the accepted limits of society where they are deemed successful peace weavers, they take on the role of the Valkyrie, instead of the monster like Grendel's Mother, who cannot return to society and so is named "monstrous". Adding this third role for women in the *Beowulf* text not only allows them more agency but classifies them as powerful characters in their own right, not only as pawns for a man to place where needed. By labeling them as Valkyries, we are recognizing their strengths and roles in a society that is primarily male oriented.

Fluid Valkyries

Contemporary studies have given us a rather limited scope in which the women in *Beowulf* can be interpreted – they are either the peace-weaving gentle queens, or the monstrous and horrifying creatures. There seemed to be no in-between, no grayscale to the polar black and white. But by looking at the characteristics of each woman in the epic tale of the monster killer, it can be seen that they do not all fit nicely into their proposed boxes. This brings forth the idea of the third category – the Valkyrie-figures. Like Brunhilde, these Valkyrie-women were not tied down by the gender roles of Anglo-Saxon society – not limited by their male kin – and were able to easily change from warrior to peace-weavers when it suited them or when it was necessary by their community.

Friþwebba

"The dominant critical model for women in *Beowulf* has typically been the peace-weaver, *friþwebba*. The metaphor refers to a women's arranged marriage to a member of a hostile tribe, as a means of securing peace between feuding factions. Such peace might be the result of either childbearing or verbal diplomacy. In either event, the peace-weaver is framed symbolically between two groups of men, confined by strict kinship systems, enclosed and exchanged between the groups."



Woman and Monster

Grendel's Mother inherits the role of warrior and avenger from a kingdom in which there are no men, as far as we can tell. *Grendel's Mom has no thanes nor men in her court, so it could be that the peace-weaving aspect of a woman only comes out in the presence of men, whereas alone she has to take on all the roles, not just her own but also those of the men that would normally be present in a hall – the avenging of kin.*



Female Body, Male Soul

In Old Norse literature, two distinct, antagonistic perceptions of Valkyries essentially exist: they are seen as fierce, elemental beings and as benevolent guardians... They are said to possess the bodies of women and the souls of men..." Carol Clover argues that for the early Scandinavians, the crucial distinction between "male" and "female" was not grounded in the body, but in power. Scandinavians viewed sexual differences less as a biological given than as a product of cultural assumptions about the body based on social rank and gendered social roles.



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Art

Peter Nicolai Arbo (1831–1892), Valkyrie (1869), oil on canvas, 243 x 194 cm, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo. Wikimedia Commons.

Yoann Lossel (1985 – present), Grendel's Mother (2017), Graphite, Watercolor, Gold Leaf, & Hydrangea Petals, 30.5 x 40.5 cm, Yoann Lossel and Easton Press - 2017

Yoann Lossel (1985 – present), Wealhtheow (2017), Graphite, Watercolor, Gold & Silver Leaf, & Hydrangea Petals, 30.5 x 40.5 cm, Yoann Lossel and Easton Press - 2017

FURTHER INFORMATION:

This on-going project is part of my studies into the roles and representations of Women in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian legends, sagas and poems. I am grateful for my professors at St Thomas University to sparking and encouraging my love of *Beowulf* and other Northern texts, and my professors and colleagues at Queen's University for not judging my obsession. I am also grateful for my husband for feeding said obsession by finding more books for me than I could ever hope to read in a lifetime.

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April 15th – 17th 2021

‘If Necessity Drives Him to It’: Legal Culpability in *Hrafnkels saga*

AUTHOR: Alisa Heskin, Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University

ABSTRACT:

When conflict arises in the Icelandic family sagas, as it does frequently, Icelanders tend to not just reach for their weapons to settle disputes, but for the law as well. Prioritizing the legal consequences of characters’ actions in *Hrafnkels saga* offers a substantive change in how one reads the inciting incident of the saga’s conflict, Einarr’s choice to ride the forbidden horse Freyfaxi. The coercive nature of Einarr’s situation and Hrafnkell’s regret over the killing effectively generate sympathy for the hapless herdsman and drive a characterization of Einarr as innocent, his decision to ride Freyfaxi as minor, and Hrafnkell’s response as disproportionate at best. Legal texts such as *Grágás* and *Jónsbók* reveal that Einarr’s decision does have significant repercussions, potentially enough to outlaw him and allow Hrafnkell to uphold his oath and kill him without the prospect of legal reprisal. Riding another man’s horse without permission is accounted for in both *Grágás* and *Jónsbók*, and factors including the distance of the ride, subterfuge, the ownership of the horse, the reason for riding it, and Einarr’s employment with Hrafnkell can all be considered in measuring the severity of the shepherd’s single transgression. Of course, Hrafnkell does not pursue legal action and instead confronts Einarr directly and kills him. The chieftain has a reputation for frequently killing other men and never offering any compensation. That reputation as an ‘ójafnaðarmaðr’ (unjust man) is ultimately what he pays for, rather than what has been perceived as the gross injustice of Einarr’s death. The same pride that drives Hrafnkell to eschew the law, whether aggressor or aggrieved, also drives his downfall, temporary though it may be. Einarr’s offense was not trivial, but Hrafnkell takes the law into his own hands and is punished for it when he becomes vulnerable to the law himself.

Opening Statements:

In the saga, Þorkell Þjóstarsson describes Einarr as ‘saklausan’ (without an offense), but examination of Icelandic legal texts support charges of appropriation and major horse-riding.¹ Permission, intensity/distance of the ride, and intent to conceal all play a role in the severity of the charges. Factors that could potentially mitigate the consequences include Hrafnkell’s joint-ownership of Freyfaxi with Freyr, Einarr’s employment as both shepherd and Freyfaxi’s caretaker, and the supernatural circumstances resulting in only Freyfaxi being available to ride. Necessity can also cancel out the legal consequences of a crime that would normally result in outlawry (i.e., theft of food to prevent starvation).²

The Evidence:

Did Einarr have permission to ride Freyfaxi?

X No. Hrafnkell stipulates that his new herdsman should not resort to riding Freyfaxi ‘however great the need that is upon you.’³ Einarr is also aware of the oath Hrafnkell swore. Even if the supernatural circumstances surrounding Einarr’s decision are read as Freyr giving ‘permission,’ all parties of jointly-owned property must consent.⁶

Does Einarr’s role as caretaker grant permission?

X No. *Grágás* K§226 distinguishes between hired out livestock where the borrower has full responsibility and use of the animal, as opposed to kept stock where the caretaker is responsible for upkeep and not privileged with use. For the latter, the owner can prosecute unlawful use.⁷

Did necessity drive Einarr to ride Freyfaxi?

X No. Einarr frames the decision to ride a horse as a matter of expedience.⁸ Hrafnkell made clear that no need would be great enough to warrant riding Freyfaxi. Doing so also violates the agreement Einarr made with Hrafnkell upon employment.

Was it a major horse-ride?

✓ Yes. Einarr exceeds the distance of riding past three farms outlined in *Grágás* K§164. The saga provides an estimate for that distance when Þorbjorn rides from his home at Höll to Aðalból, Laugarhús, and Leikskálar. Freyfaxi’s muddled and exhausted condition after the ride convey the intensity of the ride as well.⁹

Did Einarr intend to conceal the act?

✓ Yes. Right before he saddles Freyfaxi, ‘he thinks that Hrafnkell would not know, even if he should ride the horse.’¹⁰

The Law: ‘On Horse-Riding’ in *Grágás*

‘If someone jumps onto the back of a man’s horse without leave, the penalty for that is the seizure mullet of six ounce-units. If he rides it from where it was standing, then the penalty for that is a fine of three marks.

There are three horse-rides which carry full outlawry as the penalty. One is if a man rides where there are three farms on the same side of him and he rides past them. The second is if a man rides over mountains that make a watershed between districts. The third is if a man rides from one Quarter into another.’⁴



Figure 1: Map of Hrafnkelsdalur and the surrounding area in eastern Iceland with black arrows indicating the approximate path of Einarr’s search for the lost sheep starting at Grjótárgill and a white arrow that shows the distance of traveling to three farms.³

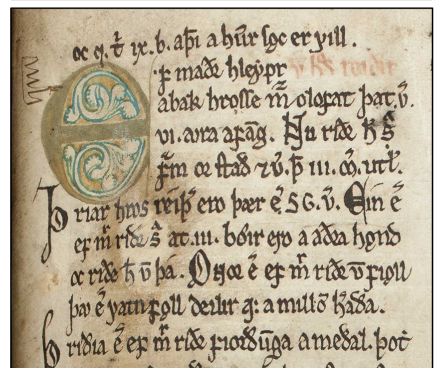


Figure 2: The law ‘On Horse-Riding’ in the Konungsþók manuscript containing *Grágás*, GKS 1157, fól. 61ra, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.

The Verdict:

Einarr is sympathetic but guilty. Hrafnkell is guilty, too, but of being an ‘ójafnaðarmaðr’ (unjust man) and skirting the system that determines what is just.

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⁵*Hrafnkels saga*, ll. 95. ‘Inversu mikil nauðsynsem þær er á’
⁶*Jónsbók*, pg. 213, IX, 16.
⁷*Grágás II*, pg. 174-75 (ch. 226).
⁸*Hrafnkels saga*, ll. 115-17. ‘ham mundi fjótara yfir bera, ef ham riði heldr en gengi’ (he thought himself to know that he would advance faster if he should ride rather than walk).
⁹*Hrafnkels saga*, ll. 137-38. ‘Hestrim var vátr allr af sveita, svá at draup ör hverju hári hans, var mjök leirstokkinn ok móðr mjök ákaftiga.’ (The horse was all wet from sweat, so that he dripped from his every hair. He was very mud-spattered and very exceedingly exhausted).
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Liturgical Books in Icelandic Palimpsests

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ABSTRACT:

Although the majority of manuscript from Medieval Iceland that survive today are written in the vernacular, most manuscripts produced and used in Medieval Iceland would have been written in Latin. The largest group of these manuscripts would have belonged to the different types of liturgical books required for Mass and the Holy Office. During the 16th century, the introduction of printing in Scandinavia, the Reformation and the increasing significance of the vernacular for the liturgy caused the old liturgical books, written in Latin and according to Catholic doctrine, to become obsolete. As these books were no longer used, their parchment could be reused for new manuscripts, either in book bindings or, after scrapping off the original text, as writing material, thus creating a palimpsest.

This poster presents examples of liturgical manuscripts from Medieval Iceland that have survived as part of palimpsests. The study of these palimpsests offers new insights in the production, ownership, use and reuse of liturgical books in Medieval and early Modern Iceland.

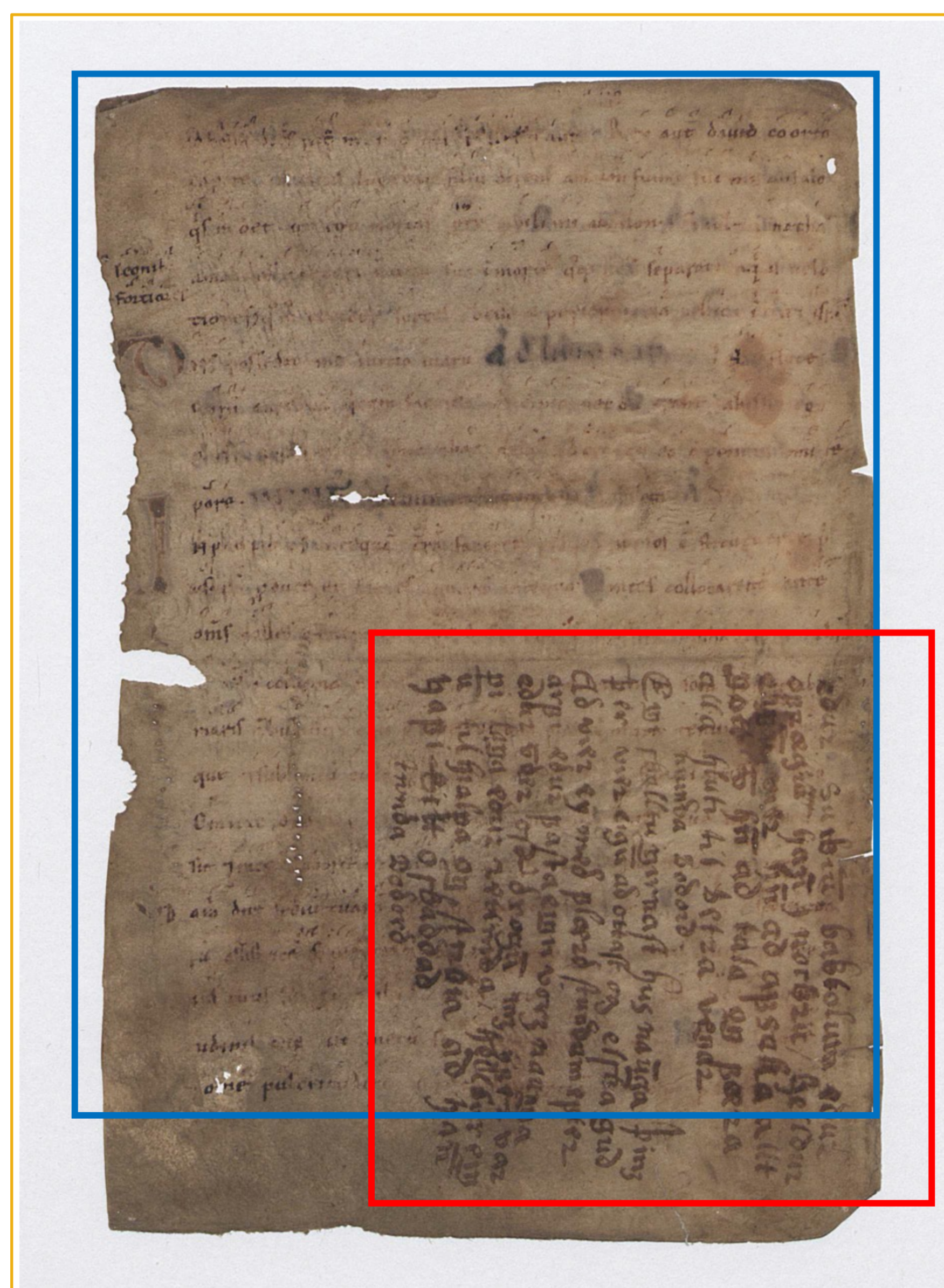


Figure 1: Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands, Lbs fragm 29, 1v
Blue: underlying elements; Antiphonale (Latin), ca. 1100
Red: overwritten elements; excerpt of Luther's commentary on the Ten Commandments (Icelandic), 16th century
Photo: handrit.is

INTRODUCTION

The term “palimpsest” refers to a specific type of manuscript recycling in which the original content of a manuscript is partially or completely erased (scraped or washed off) and substituted with new content at a later point of time, creating a new, multi-layered artefact (Hødnebo 1968, 82–84).

TYOLOGY

There are two distinctive subtypes of palimpsests, both of which are present in the Icelandic material:

Type 1: “Reuse of the Material”

The more common type of palimpsests is the reuse of the material (parchment) of the old manuscript for a new manuscript of unrelated content. This type of palimpsest manuscript consists of both the underlying elements (scriptio inferior), which derive from the old manuscript, and the newly added overwritten elements (scriptio superior).

Example 1: Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands, Lbs fragm 29 (Figure 1) is a single folio belonging to an Antiphonale, written around 1100 AD. The folio has been folded in the middle and reused for an excerpt of Martin Luther's commentary on the Ten Commandments in the 16th century (Lárus H. Blöndal 1959, 8).

Type 2: “Adaption of the Artefact”

Less common is the incorporation of the artefactual features of the original manuscript in a newly created manuscript. This type of palimpsest manuscript consists of both the underlying elements and the overwritten elements as well as a number of retained elements which derive from the old manuscript and are reused in the new one.

Example 2: Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Collection, AM 618 4to (Figure 2) is a bilingual Latin-French parallel psalter from late 12th century England. The French text in the right column was erased and substituted with an Icelandic translation of the psalter in 1586 (Kålund 1994, II 31–32).

OUTLOOK

Icelandic manuscript collections include ca. 30 manuscripts containing palimpsests, many of which are liturgical books (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 84). The study of these palimpsests offers new insights in the production, ownership, use of liturgical books in Medieval Iceland as well as their preservation, reuse and destruction in early Modern times.

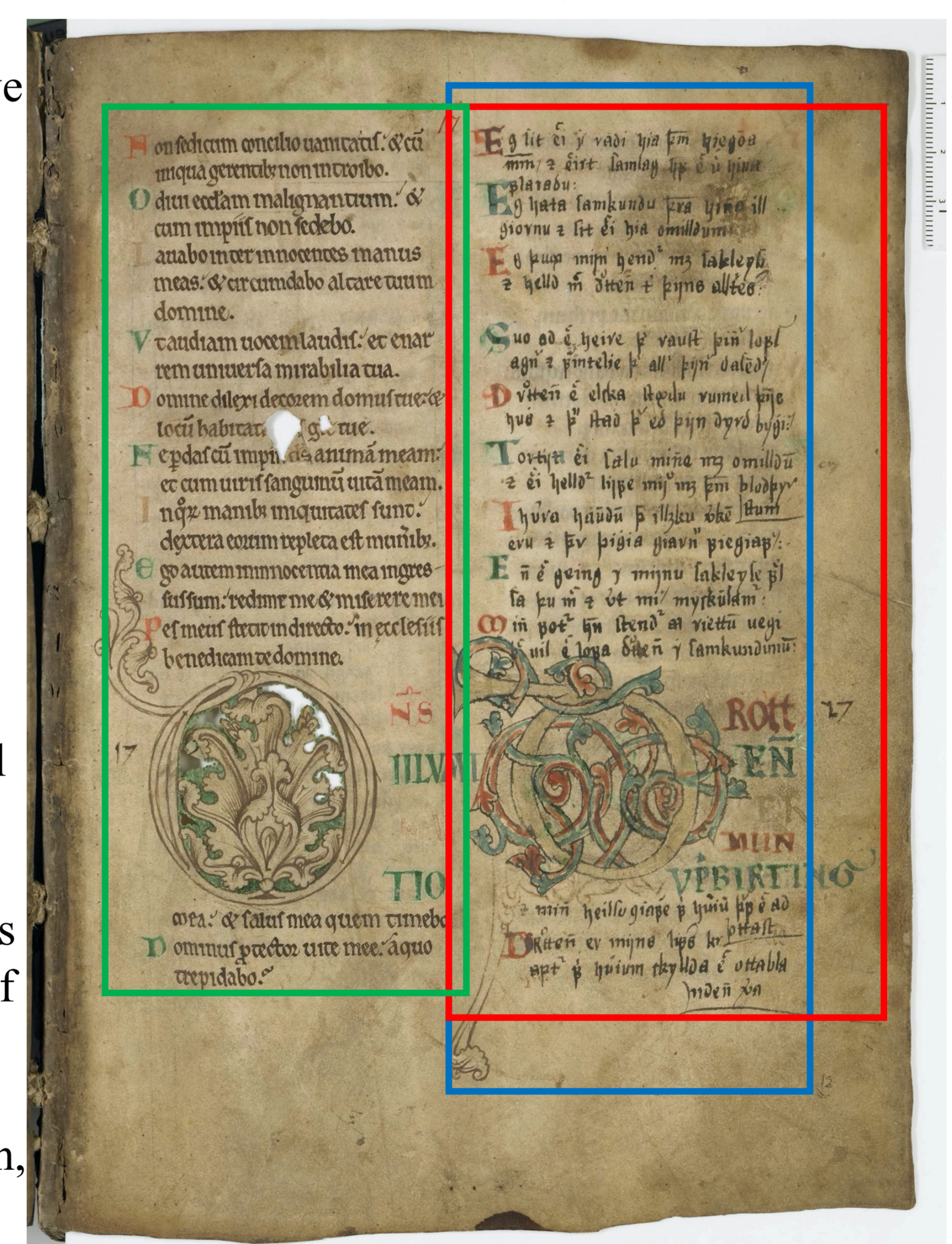


Figure 2: Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Collection, AM 618 4to
Blue: underlying elements; Psalter (French), late 12th century
Red: overwritten elements; Psalter (Icelandic), 1586
Green: retained elements; Psalter (Latin), late 12th century
Photo: handrit.is

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

This ongoing case study is part of my PhD project ‘Liturgical Manuscripts of Medieval Iceland (1056–1402)’. The project joins methodological approaches of material philology, fragment studies, historical sociolinguistics and book history to investigate the production, ownership and use of liturgical books in Medieval Iceland.

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The image of Scandinavia in the European cartography of the XV and XVI centuries

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The paper is focused on the analysis of maps of the XV-XVI centuries which illustrate the territory of the Scandinavian peninsula. As contrasted with the continental Europe of this period, Scandinavia was relatively unknown. In essence, on the medieval maps the north of Europe basically looked like a rough drawing based on guesses and mythological speculations. The interest in the Ancient «Scandia» in European cartography sprung from publication of the «Geography» by Claudius Ptolemaeus in the XV century. The Roman geographer described Scandinavia as an island. The development of previously little-known territories of the north of Europe in the Age of Exploration provided a means of going behind information presented by ancient authors. In the space of two centuries since publication of the work of Ptolemaeus the ideas of Scandinavia in the European mapping tradition underwent changes. The maps of the XV century showed a synthesis of new knowledge and traditional mythological picture. The geographic description of the peninsula became more detailed: coastline and place-names are defined more accurately. In the first half of the XVI century in geography of northern countries an ambiguity was reigning and the layout of the Scandinavian peninsula followed no particular pattern. The first artistic rendition of the inland peninsula entered the picture: a hydrographic system and a mountain range. During the latter stages of the XVI century the image of Scandinavia on the maps to a great extent met modern ideas about this region which was due to the involvement of the northern Europe into commercial relations, intensification of its economic and political life. As a consequence, the maps of the Northern Europe became a practical tool of politics. However, for other purposes – navigational, diplomatic and trade – it was necessary to create a detailed topographic map of Scandinavia, which would only happen in the next century.

The first type

The first type (the first half of the XV century) presents Scandinavia in simplified form without clear coastal frontiers. The lack of place-names is pieced out by legends and iconographic details. Such type of presentation is notable for a sufficiently correct localization of the peninsula. It borders upon the European continent and ranges west and east. Some maps simultaneously reflect both insular and peninsular theories of «Scandia».

The second type

The second type (the second half of the XV century-the first half of the XVI century) is a compromise between ancient views («Scandia» is depicted as a group of islands) and the medieval idea of peninsular Scandinavia (the Isthmus linking Scandinavia with the continent and Greenland). The spatial orientation remains the same: the Scandinavian Peninsula ranges west and east. The beginning of perception of Scandinavia as a geopolitical space in the north of Europe is observed (relation to Denmark, increased number of place-names, documentation of names of several Swedish provinces, clearer coastline).

Introduction

The ancient and early medieval authors advocated a theory of the insularity of Scandinavia. In the Early Middle Ages, in the cartographical tradition there came along the idea of peninsular Scandinavia. The ancient name of «Scandia» was incorporated with Norway or Sweden depicted as a peninsula. The XV-XVI centuries marked an important period in the studies of Scandinavia when the reinterpretation of earlier knowledge and the appearance of new information about the region took place.

Based on the analysis of European maps, four generalized types of the geographic description of Scandinavia were identified turned out through early XV to late XVI. The typology is based on specific features of orientation and layout of the peninsula, characterization of its external borders and inland (level of detail, toponymic row). The methodological foundation is based on the cartographical method of study and the J. Harley's critical analysis where a map is considered as a cultural text which requires a close reading.

The third type

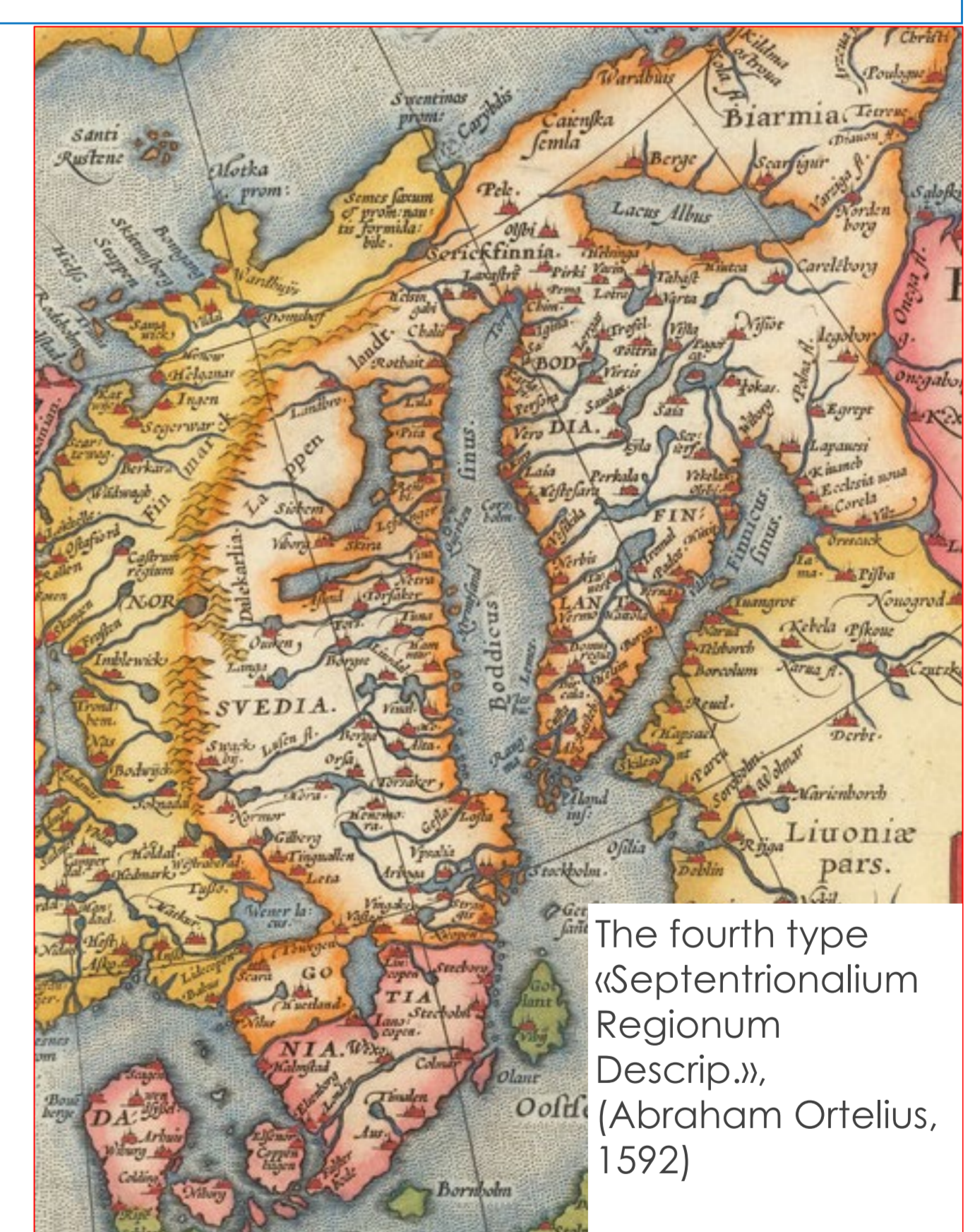
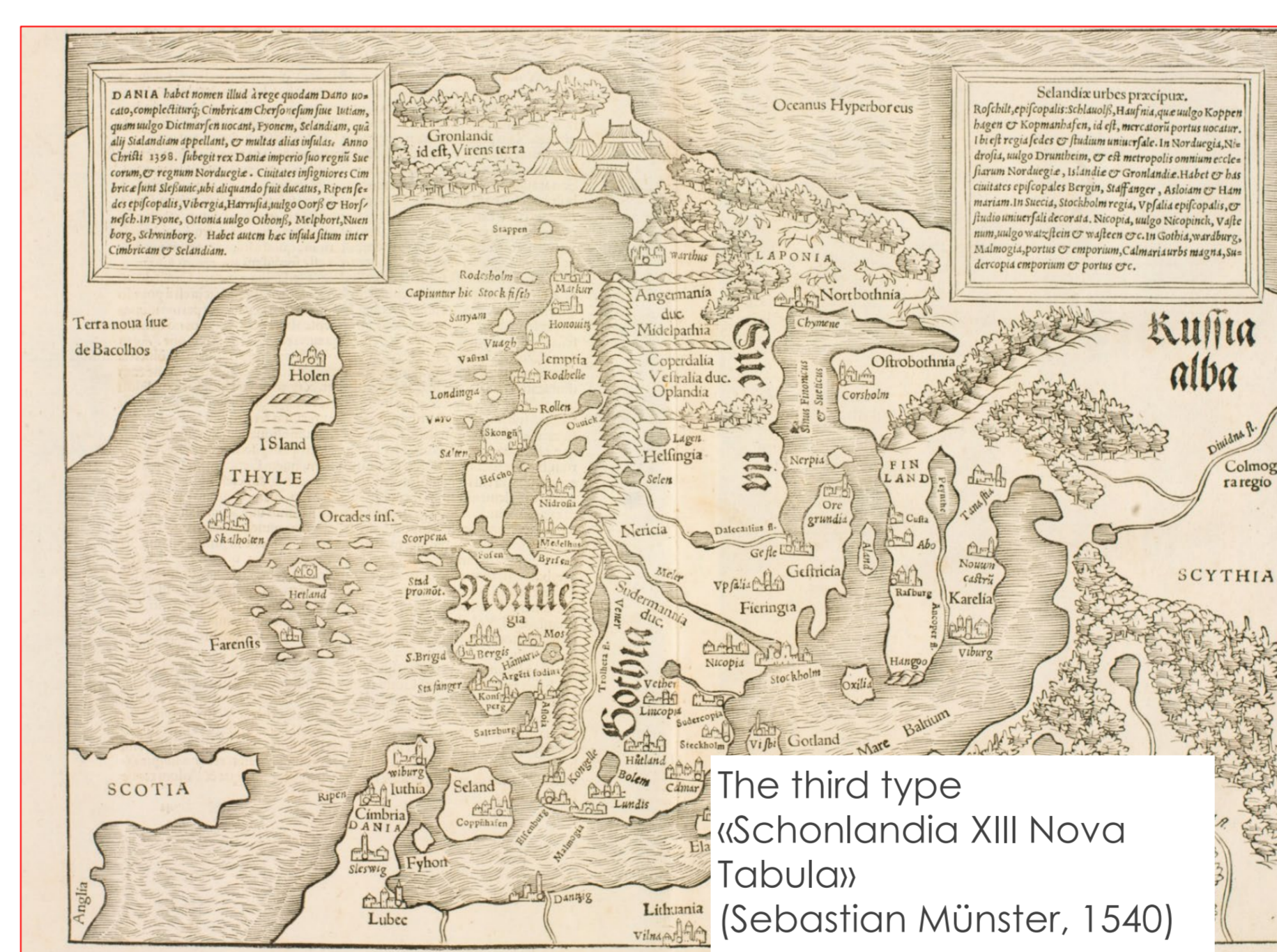
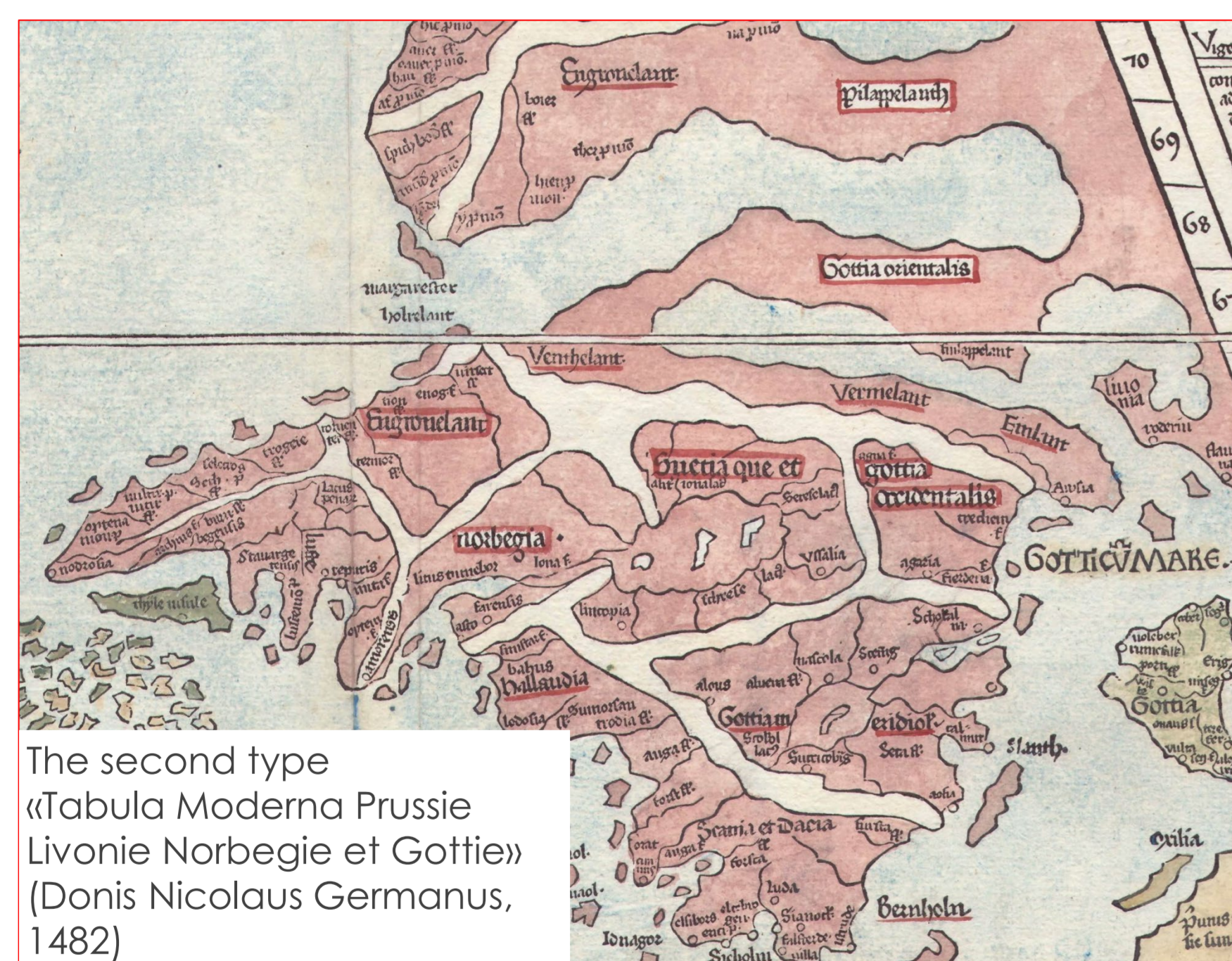
The third type (the first half of the XVI century) is represented by maps where peninsular «Scandia» is attached to the continent, has a meridian direction and retains the link with Greenland. Scandinavia became a part of the European-wide space. A more detailed description of the interior area and the exterior outline of the peninsula is compatible with the description of Continental Europe: borders are formed (division into Sweden, Gothia, Finland and Norway is confirmed), hydrographic and mountain system are shown schematically; maps show a smaller peninsula with the legend of Finland to the east of the Gulf of Bothnia (continental Scandinavia).

The fourth type

The picture of the fourth type (the second half of the XVI century) is closer to a contemporary view (correct orientation of the peninsula, loss of link with Greenland). Concepts of the northeast part of Scandinavia (the Kola Peninsula) have been formed, the legend of the Gulf of Finland has come into being. Compared to the first type, the territory of «Scandia» just about has no empty spaces. Emblems of states, color symbolism are used for political purposes (indicating the sovereignty of a certain territory).

Conclusion

In the space of two centuries a significant transformation of depiction of Scandinavia have occurred: from terra incognita at the edge of the world to the territory with formalized external and internal borders, having its own political strivings and relations with neighboring countries.



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