



Turun yliopisto  
University of Turku

# POROUS BODIES, POROUS MINDS

Emotions and the Supernatural in the *Íslendingasögur*  
(ca. 1200-1400)

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## Abstract

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KAVERVA, KIRSI: Porous Bodies, Porous Minds. Emotions and the Supernatural in the *Íslendingasögur* (ca. 1200–1400)

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In my PhD Thesis, I study the conceptions and representation of emotions in medieval 13th and 14th-century Iceland. I have used Icelandic saga literature as my source material and Icelandic Family sagas (*Íslendingasögur*) as my main sources. Firstly, I wished to explore in my study the medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotions: what emotions were thought to be, from what they originated and how they operated? Secondly, in earlier research it has been shown that emotions were seldom described in *Íslendingasögur*. They were mostly represented in dialogue, poetry or in somatic changes (e.g. turning pale). Consequently, I examined whether medieval Icelanders had alternative emotion discourses in literature, in addition to the usual manner of representation. My study consists of qualitative case studies, and I have analysed the sources intertextually. I suggest that medieval Icelanders regarded emotions as movements of the mind. The mind existed in the heart. As a consequence, emotions were considered physical in nature. The human body and therefore also the human mind was considered porous: if the mind of the person was not strong enough, supernatural agents and forces could penetrate the boundaries of his/her body as winds or sharp projectiles. Correspondingly, minds of strong-willed people could penetrate the minds of others. As a result, illness and emotions could upspring. People did not always distinguish between emotions and physical illnesses. Excessive emotions could cause illness, even death. Especially fear, grief and emotions of moral responsibility (e.g. guilt) made people vulnerable to the supernatural influence. Guilt was considered part of the emotional experience of misfortune (*ógæfa*), and in literature guilt could also be represented as eye pain that was inflicted upon the sufferer by a supernatural agent in a dream. Consequently, supernatural forces and beings were part of the upspring of emotions, but also part of the representation of emotions in literature: They caused the emotion but their presence also represented the emotional turmoil in the lives of the people that the supernatural agents harassed; emotions that had followed from norm transgressions, betrayal and other forms of social disequilibrium. Medieval readers and listeners of the *Íslendingasögur* were used to interpreting such different layers of meaning in texts.

Keywords: Sagas – cultural history – emotions, history of –fear (emotions) – grief (emotions) – anger (emotions) – guilt (emotions) – emotions, folk theory of – reanimated dead – supernatural beings – dreams.

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Tarkastelen väitöstutkimuksessani tunnekäsityksiä ja tunteiden representaatiota kirjallisuudessa 1200–1300-lukujen Islannissa. Käyttämäni aineisto koostuu keskiaikaisesta kansankielisestä saagakirjallisuudesta. Päälähteenäni ovat islantilaisaamat (*Íslendingasögur*). Tutkimuksessani pyrin ensinnäkin selvittämään, millainen oli keskiajan islantilaisten kansanomaisen tunneteoria: mitä tunteet heidän käsityksensä mukaan olivat sekä miten ne syntyivät ja toimivat? Aiemmassa tutkimuksessa on tuotu esille tunneilmaisuuden vähäisyys saagoissa. Tunteita ilmaistiin hahmojen suorassa puheessa, runomuodossa tai kuvailemalla kehollisia muutoksia (esim. kalpenemista). Toiseksi tutkinkin, oliko keskiajan islantilaisilla muita vaihtoehtoisia tapoja kuvata tunteita kirjallisuudessa yllä esitettyjen lisäksi. Olen tarkastellut lähteitä kvalitatiivisesti tapaustutkimusten kautta ja analysoin tekstejä intertekstuaalisessa suhteessa muuhun aikalaiskirjallisuuteen. Tutkimuksessani esitän, että keskiajan islantilaiset katsoivat tunteen olevan sydämessä sijaitsevan mielen liikettä. Tunne nähtiin keholliseksi. Ihmiskehoa ja siten myös mieltä pidettiin huokoisena: jos mieli ei ollut riittävän vahva, kehon ulkopuoliset yliluonnolliset toimijat ja voimat saattoivat tunkeutua siihen pistosten ja nuolien avulla tai tuulen ja hengityksen välityksellä. Vastaavasti vahvatahtoisten ihmisten mielet saattoivat läpäistä yksilön mielen rajat. Mielen läpäisy aiheutti kohteessa tunteita tai sairautta. Tunteita ei aina eroteltukaan fyysisestä sairaudesta. Liian voimakkaat tunteet saattoivat aiheuttaa paitsi sairautta, myös kuoleman. Erityisesti pelko, suru ja moraalista vastuuta ilmentävä syyllisyydentunne altistivat ihmisen yliluonnollisille voimille. Esimerkiksi syyllisyydentunne liitettiin epäonnena tunnetun ilmiön kokemukseen, ja kirjallisuudessa sitä voitiin kuvata myös silmäsäryllä, jonka yliluonnollinen olento aiheutti kokijalle unessa. Yliluonnolliset olennot olivat osa sekä tunteen syntyä että myös sen representaatiota kirjallisuudessa: ne aiheuttivat tunteen ja toivat olemassaolollaan esille, että ne kohdanneet yksilöt ja yhteisöt olivat syyllystyneet normirikkomukseen tai petokseen, tai että yhteisö oli muuten joutunut tunnekuohunnan ja epätasapainon tilaan. Keskiajan islantilaiset kuulijat ja lukijat olivat tottuneet tulkitsemaan tekstien eri merkityskerroksia.

Asiasanat: Saagat – kulttuurihistoria – tunteet, historia – pelko (tunteet) – suru (tunteet) – viha (tunteet) – syyllisyydentunne – tunteet, teoria (kansankulttuuri) – elävät kuolleet – yliluonnolliset olennot – unet

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Vichtis, December 2014

Kirsi Kanerva

## List of Original Publications

This thesis is based on the following publications that are referred to in the text by the abbreviations marked in brackets after the bibliographical information.

- I. Kanerva, Kirsi. *Ógæfa* (misfortune) as an Emotion in Thirteenth-Century Iceland. *Scandinavian Studies* 84 (2012) 1: 1–26. (MISFORTUNE)
- II. Kanerva, Kirsi. ‘Eigi er sá heill, er í augun verkir.’ Eye Pain as a Literary Motif in Thirteenth and Fourteenth-Century *Íslendingasögur*. *ARV – Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 69 (2013), 7–35. (EYE PAIN)
- III. Kanerva, Kirsi. Disturbances of the Mind and Body: The Effects of the Living Dead in Medieval Iceland. *Mental (dis)Order in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa & Susanna Niiranen. *Later Medieval Europe* 12. Brill: Leiden 2014, 219–242. (DISTURBANCES)
- IV. Kanerva, Kirsi. The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland: A Case Study of *Eyrbyggja saga*. *Collegium Medievale* 24 (2011), 23–49. (ROLE OF THE DEAD)
- V. Kanerva, Kirsi. Rituals for the Restless Dead: The Authority of the Deceased in Medieval Iceland. *Authorities in the Middle Ages. Influence, Legitimacy and Power in Medieval Society*, ed. Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola & Tuija Ainonen *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture* 12. De Gruyter: Berlin & Boston 2013, 205–227. (AUTHORITY)

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Paper I: Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study

Paper II: The Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy

Paper III: Koninklijke Brill Nv

Paper IV: Collegium Medievale, Forening for Middelalderforskere

Paper V: Walter de Gruyter GmbH

## Abbreviations

<i>AJHG</i>	<i>The American Journal of Human Genetics</i>
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Arkiv för nordisk filologi</i>
<i>ANYAS</i>	<i>Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences</i>
<i>ARV</i>	<i>ARV – Nordic Yearbook of Folklore</i>
<i>CGV</i>	Cleasby, Richard & Gudbrand Vigfusson. 1957. <i>An Icelandic-English Dictionary</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press.
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>JPSP</i>	<i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>
<i>JRCPE</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh</i>
<i>LSE</i>	<i>Leeds Studies in English</i>
<i>MOSAIC</i>	<i>MOSAIC – A Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas</i>
<i>NAR</i>	<i>Norwegian Archaeological Review</i>
<i>NOWELE</i>	<i>North-Western European language evolution</i>
<i>NTNU</i>	Noregs teknisk-naturvitskaplege universitet
<i>PNAS</i>	<i>Proceedings for the National Academy of Sciences</i>
<i>RMN</i>	Retrospective Methods Network
<i>SKS</i>	Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura



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# 1 Introduction

Egill uard stórhreðdr er hann sa mennina hlaupa eftir sér herklædda. ok er hann uard handtekinn gerr þa skalf j honum leggr ok lidr firir hrætzslu sakir. *Oll bæin hans skulfu þau sem j voru hans likama. en þat voru .cc. bæina ok .xiiij. bæin. ten(nr) hans nótrudu. Þær voru .xxx. allar ædar j hans borunde píprudu firir hrætzslu sakir. Þær voru .ccc. ok .xv.* En er þeir kendu manninn huerr var þa þottuzst þeir vita at hann munde ægi drepit hafa Þorgrim þuiat Egill uar æinge madr. rann þa af honum hræzsla sem hita af jarni.<sup>1</sup>

Egill was terribly frightened when he saw the men dressed for battle running after him. And when he was seized, he trembled for fear in legs and limbs [or: joints]. *All the bones in his body shook—214 bones that was; his teeth chattered—there were 30 of them. Every vein in his flesh quivered with fear—415 in all.* But when they saw who the man was, then they felt sure that he would not have killed Þorgrímur, for Egill was not a man at all. Fear then left him as heat leaves iron.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 Towards the History of Medieval Icelandic Mind and Emotions

In this study I have examined medieval Icelandic conceptions of emotions. I have explored how medieval Icelanders represented emotions and mental functions in literature. The passage in *Fóstbræðra saga* quoted above illuminates the ‘otherness’ of the culture I have studied and points to issues I had to consider during the research process. Firstly, mental functions were thought to be physical in nature, and emotions were represented as somatic reactions. Secondly, the sources I used, the *Íslendingasögur* (Icelandic Family sagas), were multi-layered in that they were based on oral tradition but included both native elements and foreign influences. In addition, the extant manuscripts of the sources are invariably of much later date than the time of writing, and there are often varying versions of a single saga.

For instance, the text of the manuscript from which the *Fóstbræðra saga* excerpt above was taken is not the original version of the saga from the beginning of thirteenth century, the era to which the saga has usually been dated. Instead, it is a later version of the saga in the so-called Flateyjarbók manuscript, written in late fourteenth-century Iceland. Other, earlier versions of the saga survive as well. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Flateyjarbók* II, 211. My italics.

<sup>2</sup> Translated by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, cf. Willson 2009. My italics.

sentences marked in italics in the excerpt do not appear in earlier surviving versions of the saga. The text in the early fourteenth-century Hauksbók manuscript, for example, reads as follows: “Egill became utterly frightened when he saw men who carried weapons running after him. And when he was seized, both his legs and limbs [or: joints] shivered because of fear.”<sup>3</sup> Nothing is mentioned of Egill’s bones, teeth or veins or their number; the information on this in Flateyjarbók may thus be a later addition.

Moreover, the additional sentences in the Flateyjarbók version bring forth in an intriguing manner the foreign influences on saga writing. The Christianisation of Iceland had taken place in 1000. Icelandic sagas did not arise in a vacuum, but absorbed influences from Europe or through the rest of Scandinavia—such as knowledge of medical doctrines, of which the text highlighted in italics is a good example. Earlier studies have shown that the number of bones, veins and teeth mentioned in the Flateyjarbók version correspond closely to the information on this in well-known medieval European medical tractates.<sup>4</sup> If assessed quickly, it can be speculated that the excerpt represents the learned, or snobbish, attitude of either the scribe or the commissioner of the work. It demonstrates that one or both of them were very much aware of foreign learning—of how many bones and veins the human body contained, and how many teeth a person should have. Such specialised knowledge may have been highly respected as mastered by only a few more prominent members of the society. On the other hand, the writer may simply have felt a need to explicate more thoroughly the cause of Egill’s shivering.

None of these hypothetical explanations, and there may be many more, substantiate whether the writer or the commissioner had internalised the foreign medical knowledge given in Flateyjarbók, or whether the scribe looked up the information in some other source in order to add it on the vellum he was writing on.

Accordingly, right at the beginning of my study it was evident that I could not examine medieval Icelandic sources in isolation from medieval European culture, since the theme of my research, emotions, and connected phenomena such as ‘mental’ illness, were also widely discussed in medieval foreign literature. If medieval Icelandic conceptions revealed through sagas appeared to show traces of European learning, this need not automatically indicate that those European influences were recent or that they had or had not been socially established. Instead they could derive from the so-called Viking Age (ca. 800–1050) when Scandinavians travelled widely. Alternatively, I could be dealing with knowledge and conceptions that had been part

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<sup>3</sup> Egill varð stórum hræddr, er hann sá manna fjr eptir sér ok með vápnum. Ok er hann var handtekinn, þá skalf á honum leggr ok liðr sakar hræzlu. *Fóstbræðra saga*, 233.

<sup>4</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson 1972, 238–249.

of Scandinavian culture for centuries, even millennia. They might resemble those of medieval Europe, but only because they were based on universal conceptions deriving from the everyday experience and observations of the Scandinavians themselves, or on conceptions that had an Indo-European or even wider origin.

When I started my PhD study it was clear to me that studying such a peripheral and small-scale society was important since thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelandic (or: Scandinavian) conceptions of the emotions were not necessarily similar to those of the medieval Europeans. It might be expected that in the culture of the north there might be something distinct from mainstream European culture, or at least from the views and reality of the European ecclesiastical and scholarly elite. In addition, it was clear that it would sometimes be necessary to attempt to distinguish the foreign, perhaps superficial influences in the sources from indigenous ideas, those that held sway in medieval Iceland and determined the lived experience of ordinary people (and not merely the elite), the medieval Icelandic reality.

Moreover, sagas are rather laconic in nature and contain surprisingly little of what would nowadays be defined as emotional discourses, but this need not indicate that emotions were rarely depicted in sagas. In Icelandic culture it was usual to depict only what could be seen and heard. Thus abstract states and phenomena, such as emotions and other mental processes, could only be described through somatic changes, in dialogue or through more indirect and sophisticated means, such as poetry.<sup>5</sup> The saga excerpt above is a good example of this; it merely recites how Egill starts to feel fear and how, as a consequence of this, his body quivers as both his legs and limbs tremble—a physical experience which, if not a universal component of severe fright, might still be experienced in the modern western world and which was recognizable as fear by the medieval Icelandic saga audience.

Through the description of the number of bones and veins a depiction of Egill's 'inner state' does appear in the text, but as a 'fact', that the trembling associated with fear (possibly even the fear itself) is a result of the 'vibration' of these body parts. Perhaps it was impossible to explain, because of a lack of the proper emotional discourses or existence of societal norms and expectations that regulated the expression and even the literary representation of emotion. Moreover, in real life there was (is) no means of seeing into (reading) the human mind. The question of whether medieval Icelanders would have had alternative ways to represent the 'unseen', the inner state of a human being in literature, is the prime motivation for this thesis.

As the passage above shows, the body was not expected to conceal everything—the body could even 'leak' and thus reveal something of its owner's inner

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<sup>5</sup> Miller 1992; Miller 1993; Larrington 2001; O'Donoghue 2005; Kanerva 2007.

state. At the beginning of this study I was not certain whether letting out the emotions was considered some kind of purification of the mind or whether such metaphorical expressions as fear leaving Egill's body like heat leaving iron might unveil something unexpected. If fear was dissipated from the body into the surrounding air, where had it come from in the first place (and how?) and what was its essence? In addition, the passage emphasises that there is clearly a connection between emotions and the body: indeed, the representation of emotions as corporal in the texts is of central importance in this study.

Last but not least, it was important to take language into account; after all, this is a study of Old Norse-Icelandic sources that were produced several centuries ago. Anyone who has learnt a foreign language, even from a similar culture to her or his own, will be aware that words in different languages rarely have direct equivalents; when trying to understand a language from a very different and much older culture this problem is accentuated, and a word or passage may imply a cultural more that is quite alien or even unknown to a speaker of Finnish, my native tongue, or English, the language of this work. The description of fear in the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter is a case in point: if Egill's experience actually was associated with such a powerful movement of his veins and bones as the excerpt suggests, was fear considered an 'emotion' at all, or was the concept of emotion so different from ours that it involved something more, perhaps even implying a concept of the surrounding culture that is difficult for us to comprehend?

## **1.2 The Structure of the Thesis**

In the following chapters, before I discuss my research and conclusions concerning medieval Icelandic conceptions of emotions, I will introduce the articles that this study consists of and briefly summarise their contents in chapter two. After this, I will define the subject of my study and introduce its aims (chapter 3). I will then elaborate further the methodological choices of this cultural historical study. In chapter four I will illuminate the cultural and historical context of the phenomena under scrutiny, the medieval Icelandic emotions, and the special characteristics of the culture that produced the sources used here. The main sources and other auxiliary sources, restrictions on their use and other source-critical issues are handled in chapter five. In chapter six, I will review earlier research on the subject and aspects of it they have not covered, and explain how my own study will contribute to the field. I have combined the results and discussion based on the articles in chapter seven. Finally, chapter eight

summarizes the conclusions arising from the discussion and suggests themes and perspectives for future studies.

The bibliography is followed by facsimilia of the five articles which have all been peer-reviewed. The articles were published in 2011 (one), 2012 (one), 2013 (two) and 2014 (one). I will refer to these articles by using a short title that links with the main theme of the text; thus, articles ROLE OF THE DEAD, MISFORTUNE, EYE PAIN, AUTHORITY and DISTURBANCES.



## 2 The Articles

This PhD Thesis consists of five articles that have been published in academic journals in 2011–2014. They have all undergone a peer-review process. The sources used in the articles will be introduced in greater depth in the chapter “The Sources”. The inferences reached in the articles will be elaborated in the chapter “Results and Discussion” and brought together in “Conclusion”. The contents of each article, the methods and main sources used in each article and the dates of publication are given below.

The first article, “*Ógæfa* (misfortune) as an Emotion in Thirteenth-Century Iceland,” studies the concept of *ógæfa* and its connotations and meanings, and the essence of the experience of *ógæfa* in thirteenth-century Icelandic culture. This is done, firstly, by analysing the use of the word and its derivatives in sagas to examine its connotations, and secondly, by studying the motivation behind the behaviour of the *ógæfumenn* (men of misfortune) and how the emotional experience inherent in *ógæfa* was represented in the *Íslendingasögur*. The sagas *Brennu-Njáls saga* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar* are in focus in this study. I suggest in my article that, like emotions, *ógæfa* was considered a phenomenon that could be perceived in somatic changes of the body and in a person’s physical appearance. I argue that *ógæfa* did not refer merely to a state of affairs but had emotional connotations as well. I also suggest that *ógæfa* was used to represent the inner struggles and feelings of guilt in literature in a culture that did not yet have a word for this kind of affective state, but which can nevertheless be characterized as a ‘culture of gratitude’, often held as the predecessor of cultures of guilt in cultures whose relations were based on principles of reciprocity. Thus, in spite of the lack of the word ‘guilt’ representing an emotion (instead of a state of affairs) in saga literature, guilt-like emotions were felt in medieval Iceland. *Ógæfa* was not synonymous with guilt, however, but also involved feelings of distress, anxiety and hopelessness as well as fear of the dark, and signified absence of approval and forgiveness or the lack of the blessing of one’s kin. The article was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Scandinavian Studies* 84 (2012) 1: 1–26, and will hereafter be cited in the text as “MISFORTUNE”.

The second article, “Eye Pain as a Literary Motif in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century *Íslendingasögur*” was published in the peer-reviewed ARV – *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 2013, 69 (2013), 7–35, and will be referred to here as “EYE PAIN”. The article discusses the episode of eye pain that occurs in *Fóstbraðra saga*, and uses as auxiliary sources in its intertextual analysis eye pain episodes in the following three *Íslendingasögur*: *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Bjarnar saga Hítadalakappa* and *Ljósvetninga*

*saga*. The aim of this study is to examine the meanings given to the eye pain motif in medieval Iceland by examining the texts intertextually and by using comparative material from different geographical areas and historical eras. In the article I discuss how eye pain in *Íslendingasögur* was an external punishment for social misdemeanor, often caused by an agent skilled in magic. I have considered this argument in the medieval western Scandinavian context, where the view of the human mind and body in relation to the social and physical environment was quite different from our modern view. Consequently, I argue that the boundaries of the body (e.g. skin etc.) were not considered ‘closed’, but ‘open’, so that the individual was exposed and sensitive to external influences originating from the social and physical environment. These agents could appear as forces, for instance in the shape of a wind, penetrate the human body and thus cause a condition that could be labelled an illness. Moreover, the consequences of eye pain, such as the bursting out of the eyes, for which the verb *spríngja* is used, suggest that eye pain also had emotional connotations such as guilt, as *spríngja* is often employed to depict conditions associated with physical over-exertion or excessive emotions. As a result, the article also proposes new outlines for the medieval Icelandic conceptions of emotions, or the medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotion.

The third article is entitled “Disturbances of the Mind and Body: Effects of the Living Dead in Medieval Iceland.” The article has been published in a peer-reviewed anthology *Mental (Dis)Order in Later Medieval Europe*, edited by Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Susanna Niiranen (Leiden: Brill, pp. 219–242), in 2014. In this article, hereafter referred to as “DISTURBANCES”, I concentrate on the effects that reanimated dead have on the living people in sagas. I use examples in such *Íslendingasögur* as *Flóamanna saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Laxdæla saga*. I have concentrated on two aspects of the influence of the dead on the living in these sagas, fear and physical illness, and discuss medieval Icelandic conceptions of mental disorder by examining the meanings given to fear and illness intertextually. Consequently, the article also contributes to the study of the medieval Icelandic conceptions of mind and emotion, and emphasises the problems inherent in using modern concepts in historical studies. I also give special emphasis to two diverse discourses extant in medieval Iceland: indigenous folk conceptions and foreign medical theories. I show that these views sometimes overlapped but were sometimes in conflict, which makes the definition of a single concept of ‘mental disorder’ held by medieval Icelanders difficult. In this article, I argue that for medieval Icelanders ‘mental’ was something rather physical, and, although the symptoms caused by the restless dead—fear, insanity, illness and death—could be categorized by us as mental or physical, in the sagas these were all considered bodily in nature. Moreover, I also

suggest that medieval Icelanders did not make a clear distinction between emotions and physical illnesses, since emotions could be part of the illness or even its actual cause. I argue that both emotions and (physical) illness encompassed state of disequilibrium and were dependent of external agents and forces that had the power to influence the bodily balance and trigger the onset of ‘mental disorder’. Consequently, ‘mental disorder’ could be manifested also in physical illness.

The fourth article, “The Role of the Dead in Medieval Iceland: A Case Study of *Eyrbyggja saga*,” concerns the reanimated dead story of *Eyrbyggja saga*, the so-called ‘wonders of *Fróðá*’ (*Fróðárundr*), and examines the meanings of this episode as they were interpreted in medieval Iceland. The analysis presupposes that, although the restless dead could be understood as ‘real’ by medieval readers and as part of their social reality, the heterogenic nature of the audience and the varying degree of learnedness of saga authors made possible various interpretations of the reanimated dead-scene, both verbatim and symbolic. I argue that the living dead in *Eyrbyggja saga*, which are decidedly malevolent rather than benevolent in nature, act as agents of order whose restlessness is connected to past deeds of those still living that have caused social disequilibrium. In *Fróðárundr* these actions involve expressions of disapproved sexuality and birth of offspring with indeterminate social status. It is also shown how the hauntings present an opportunity for the reanimated dead -banisher to improve his own indeterminate status. The article was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Collegium Medievale* 24 (2011): 23–49, and in the discussion of results will be referred to as “ROLE OF THE DEAD”.

The fifth article, “Rituals for the Restless Dead: The Authority of the Deceased in Medieval Iceland,” concentrates on two scenes of actual or anticipated posthumous restlessness in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* and *Eyrbyggja saga*. Both are countered with special and similar rituals, but have different consequences, as the corpse in *Egils saga* remains peaceful but some restlessness occurs in *Eyrbyggja saga*. The episodes are examined from the perspective of power and authority. The article includes a discussion of the way in which some of the deceased who were expected to have “strong minds” were ascribed authority over the living in sagas. In this role the reanimated dead could interfere in the lives of the living, and occasionally adopt a moral function in that they could rectify injustices, although they were sometimes malevolent in nature. Nevertheless, some individuals could contest their post-mortem power and use various means, such as rituals, to control it or modify it according to their own needs. It is suggested that such a capability was possessed by a certain kind of character, one whose mind was strong enough to bridle the powers of death, but which could in turn be counteracted by magic. The article has been published in a peer-reviewed anthology *Authorities in the Middle Ages. Influence, Legitimacy and Power in*

*Medieval Society*, edited by Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola and Tuija Ainonen. (Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture 12. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2013, pp. 205–227). The article will be cited in the text as “AUTHORITY”.

## 3 Research Objectives and Methodological Concerns

### 3.1 Aims of the Study

In my study I examine conceptions of emotions (*bugarbræringar*, ‘movements of the mind’) in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland and their representation in Icelandic Family sagas, *Íslendingasögur*. My emphasis is on conceptions of emotion in general, but also on the exceptional and the unfamiliar: representations and emotion discourses that may escape our modern eyes. For this reason I pay particular attention to the representation of emotions which modern readers would not immediately recognise because of the temporal distance between saga production and our own era. In addition to this, I am interested in finding emotion discourses which at first sight do not appear as such.

The study can be divided into three themes in which I have investigated various aspects of medieval Icelandic emotion culture.

1. The view the medieval Icelanders held of those mental activities nowadays defined as emotions. To this purpose I have outlined what could be labelled the medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotions, that is: what emotions were thought to be and how they operated. In order to succeed in this, I have also considered the medieval Icelandic view of the origin of emotions: how and from what part of the body, for instance, were they thought to originate. I was also interested in the extent to which the conceptions of emotions in sagas reflected medieval European learned discussion and whether it was possible to distinguish native ideas. Since emotions were often portrayed as physical, as the introduction above has shown, I needed to consider this bodily aspect and how it affected conceptions of emotion and attitudes to them carefully. I have discussed these issues in *EYE PAIN and DISTURBANCES*.
2. Whether there existed words, concepts, motifs and phenomena in medieval Icelandic literature which at first sight do not appear to refer to emotion-related states, but nevertheless had emotional connotations in the medieval Icelandic context. Bearing in mind the earlier studies on saga emotions, which will be discussed further in the methodological discussion and in chapter six, in which the earlier research is introduced, I was especially concerned with the representation of emotions of moral responsibility,<sup>6</sup> in this case guilt, for which there existed no

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Emotions of moral responsibility’ is a concept used in this study to distinguish between the two self-conscious emotions, shame and guilt. See also p. 81, footnote 262.

word in the Old Norse-Icelandic language. Since such emotions often involve awareness and understanding of causing harm to others, I also explored the relationship between the individual and society. In the medieval context, these parties of social communication could also be referred to as ‘microcosm’ and ‘macrocosm’, in the broad sense of the words.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, I hypothesised that they could include not only the other living people but also the deceased or other otherworldly beings (i.e. ‘supernatural’ beings in the modern sense).<sup>8</sup> Hence I was interested in the role of the supernatural ‘others’ in the upspring of emotions as medieval Icelanders understood it; whether these ‘others’ were necessary to induce emotions and what kind of people, if any, were capable of rejecting their influence. To put it more concisely, I was concerned with the role, if any, that other agents and beings, both natural and supernatural, had in mental functions. The articles MISFORTUNE, EYE PAIN, DISTURBANCES, ROLE OF THE DEAD and AUTHORITY have contributed to these aims.

3. The third theme of my study is related to the second: did medieval Icelanders have alternative emotion discourses, in addition to the usual manner of representation in literature—that is, in dialogue or poetry<sup>9</sup> or by description of somatic changes? Concerning this last question, I am aware that this study can reveal only the tip of the iceberg, if there is indeed an iceberg under the extant texts. Nevertheless, one has to start with what is visible, and it is hoped that I and others can discover more in the future. Consequently, I investigated other motifs and means of representing emotions, emotion-like states, moods and other related phenomena in saga literature that might have existed whenever there were no ordinary emotion discourses available. The emphasis is also on the social contexts in which the motifs employed in such alternative discourses occur, how they vary, and what meanings the motifs acquire in these different contexts. I have discussed these issues in EYE PAIN and ROLE OF THE DEAD.

I have studied the above-mentioned issues in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelandic context. This initial setting naturally raises the question of change and continuity in the conceptions under scrutiny. This aspect has been given some

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<sup>7</sup> For these concepts, see e.g. Wayman 1982.

<sup>8</sup> It is, naturally, widely accepted that emotions are social in that they relate to other people and animals, for instance. However, the role of the supernatural as an ‘other’ that is part of this social interaction has not been widely studied in earlier research.

<sup>9</sup> Some poetic genres that were oriented to emotive expression, such as laments, have not been recorded in medieval Iceland, although there is evidence that such a poetic tradition existed in Scandinavia. See e.g. Mundal 2013. Because of the lack of sources, this genre, which would benefit from further study, has not been discussed here.

attention to in the “Results and Discussion” section, but it is not the main focus of my study.

### 3.2 The Rationale for the Use of the Word ‘Emotion’

Studying the history of emotions raises the question of terminology for the concept I wish to convey. Throughout this study I have chosen to use the word ‘emotion’ to mean a conscious experience characterized by psychophysiological expressions, biological reactions, and mental states. This will be explained more fully below. At first sight this choice may appear anachronistic and ‘passion’ might seem the most appropriate medieval expression for the concept. The Stoics and later Augustine of Hippo regarded passion as a force that caused movement within the body. However, the definition of the concept ‘passion’ is not as clear as it may seem at first sight. Building on the work of the Stoics, Augustine had clearly distinguished between the “troubling movements of the soul—appetites, lusts, desires, passions—that the good Christian should avoid, and those more virtuous and Godly affections of love and compassion to which they might rightly aspire.”<sup>10</sup> Eight hundred and fifty years later Thomas Aquinas ascribed passions and affections to different parts of the soul. The bipartite division into more violent appetites and passions on the one hand and more intellectual and “enlightened” sentiments and (more virtuous) affections on the other continued to exist for several centuries. This typology eventually faded in the nineteenth century after the adoption of ‘emotion’, but the term ‘passion’ remains, carrying as its historical burden if not pathological, at least abnormal and somewhat passive connotations.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in the medieval context and in Christian discourse the English word ‘passion’ also refers to suffering, as in the passion of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the word emotion, which originally denoted bodily movement and physical disturbance and continued to do so until the 1700s, began to encompass to a great extent the meanings of the earlier mentioned passions and affections.<sup>13</sup> Yet it did and does not imply all the connotations extant in various folk psychologies of emotion and in diverse historical and cultural contexts.

In this study only emotions that are now considered somewhat negative, such as grief, fear, anger and guilt, have been handled, so it is not possible to argue here that medieval Icelanders would have ascribed emotions to various parts of their mind,

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<sup>10</sup> On the historical origin and definition of this concept by the Stoics and Augustine of Hippo, see Dixon 2012, 339.

<sup>11</sup> Dixon 2012, 339–340; Charlard 2011, 88–89.

<sup>12</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of English* (see Stevenson 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Dixon 2012, 339–340.

in a similar fashion to Augustine. Moreover, the concept of soul that Christian writers adopted belongs, in medieval Icelandic terms, to a recent cultural layer that presumably reached Iceland with Christianity and its associated writings, and that has not been studied in this connection.<sup>14</sup> We may expect that some knowledge of the Christian soul existed in medieval Iceland, but the bodily nature of emotions does not encourage speculation that souls were the seat of emotions (divided in two categories, bad passions and good affections) in folk conceptions.

In this study, I have chosen to use the word emotion<sup>15</sup> because, despite its adoption from French into the English language relatively recently and although it is not a word that originates in the time and culture that has been studied here, it has a variety of connotations and is generally used as an umbrella term for the mental phenomenon in question. Since the eighteenth century, when the everyday term became a theoretical scientific concept, ‘emotion’ has increasingly come to mean activity and thus involve a cognitive aspect. At the same time, it has also frequently been thought to comprise an aspect of change or movement, even to have a bodily constituent. Moreover, modern theories and scientific definitions of emotion vary considerably, are often heatedly debated, and occasionally criticized<sup>16</sup> which makes the concept of emotion as such slightly vague, yet wide in its connotations. Additionally, the word emotion has less of a historical burden than the other words listed above, since it has normally “belonged within [the] secular, morally neutral, and scientific register,”<sup>17</sup> although some have argued that active and secular as they may be, neither emotions nor passions can be disassociated from values and norms.<sup>18</sup>

Although I employ the word emotion in its strict and narrow sense, I have no wish to neglect other aspects of emotional and affective states and conditions. In this study I have tried to bear in mind that medieval ‘emotions’ might consist of various elements—of feelings, sentiments, affections, passions, moods, states and conditions—and ‘stretched’ the concept accordingly. Though not applying the phenomenological concept of ‘attitude’ based on the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I have chosen to include other elements of affective life in my study of ‘emotions’. The Merleau-Pontian attitude contrasts the requirements of intentionality, according to which moods and bodily feelings and sensations, for instance, are categorised as

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<sup>14</sup> On the concept of (Christian) soul in the Old Norse-Icelandic language after Christianisation, see e.g. Turville-Petre 1964, 229. See, however, also Tolley 2009, 176–199.

<sup>15</sup> Neither have I employed the concept ‘affect’ in order to distinguish myself from the modern Affect studies, but I have chosen ‘emotion’ as a suitably neutral concept for my purposes in this study.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Izard 2010; Dixon 2012, 340–343.

<sup>17</sup> Dixon 2012, 342. On the normative burden of ‘passion’, see also Charland 2011, 84–85.

<sup>18</sup> Charland 2011, 85 and 90.



non-emotions, since they cannot be associated with any specific and clearly portrayed object such as those that are often attributed to emotions. As argued by Merleau-Ponty, however, the body orients itself towards the world in all its actions; this ‘orientationness’, or: intentionality, is the body-subject’s fundamental manner of being in the world. Thus, the phenomenological attitude, since it regards intentional objects as neither definite nor indefinite but as implementing diverse degrees of definiteness, liberates us from the necessity to differentiate emotions, feelings, moods and other affective categories in separate groups.<sup>19</sup> In this study, the word ‘emotion’ also has connotations similar to the phenomenological ‘attitude’: ‘emotion’ also includes moods and bodily feelings.

Moods, feelings, emotions and passions are often defined on grounds of duration.<sup>20</sup> What is usually examined when emotions are studied are thus short-term emotional states (as aberrations from the ‘normal’, i.e. emotionless state of mind or equilibrium). This view of emotions, according to Anna Wierzbicka, reflects the Anglo-cultural view, whereas in other cultures there is no conception of any such state of intermittent emotionlessness and affective states exist at every moment of *normal* human existence.<sup>21</sup> I have not allowed myself to be restricted by the categorizations of emotion as a short-term or long-term states, as it would be impossible to justify use of such a concept for the study of saga sources.

Although I have used the word emotion in my study, I wish to accentuate that ‘emotion’ in this connection is only a reader-friendly concept. I have also chosen to ignore the word ‘passion’, even if it may appear to correspond to Old Norse-Icelandic emotions in many respects, because it does not, in my opinion, suffice to depict their diversity, not least because of its moral connotations. ‘Emotion’ has also been the object of definition: the contextualization of the term and specifying the meanings given to ‘emotion’ in medieval Iceland has been part of my research process.<sup>22</sup> *Hugarhræring*—the word for the ‘emotion’ in Old Norse-Icelandic (lit. “movement of the mind”)—is thus the medieval phenomenon whose various dimensions, connotations and aspects I have tried to illuminate. To translate it to the modern language of science, what was defined in the process of this research is the term ‘emotion’ itself, the medieval Icelandic conception of ‘emotion’.

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<sup>19</sup> See Heinämaa & Reuter 1996, 132–142.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Charland 2011, 84 and 89.

<sup>21</sup> Wierzbicka 1995, 22–23. See also e.g. on ideas of “chronically accessible” thought material in Reddy 2012, 7.

<sup>22</sup> For the need to contextualize the term emotion and specify its meaning in emotion research because of its ambiguity, see Izard 2010.

### 3.3 The Translation of Saga Emotions through Motivation

As I focus on the motivation of saga agents in my study to ‘translate’ the saga emotions for modern readers, I have chosen to utilise the method employed by William Ian Miller.<sup>23</sup> This method is useful because of the special nature of the sagas: they are laconic in that they only describe what could be seen while ignoring abstract inner states. For this reason, the saga writers often appear to remain silent about the inner state of the protagonists. This silence applies especially to prose, in which emotions rarely appear in words, whereas poetry may sometimes operate as the arena for the expression of emotions,<sup>24</sup> be it veiled or unveiled. However, in episodes with an intense emotional charge emotions may be described in somatic changes, sometimes in great detail, as has been shown above. What emotion each of these somatic changes corresponds to is not always explicitly indicated in the text, but requires interpretation within the narrative context of the saga itself and in its historical context. Through the examination of motivation—what people have said and done, what has caused the emotional reaction and where it leads<sup>25</sup>—I have ‘translated’ the medieval Icelandic somatic emotions into words.

Despite the lack of direct portrayal of the inner state it cannot be argued that medieval Icelanders did not feel extreme emotions or that they did not represent them in literature. Carolyne Larrington has shown how the somatic signs of emotion diminish the importance of words. No words are needed when a young man in a rage remains silent, but cuts his finger all the way to the bone with his knife without showing signs of pain, or when the colour of his face changes from red to white and his features become swollen.<sup>26</sup> The physiological symptoms were apparently easily recognized by medieval Icelandic readers and listeners.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, silence need not indicate that nothing is there in the text.

The search for motivation in both Miller’s and Larrington’s work is based on modern cognitivist and social constructionist theories of emotion,<sup>28</sup> and to some degree on universalism, and ideas of basic emotions.<sup>29</sup> In this study my point of

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<sup>23</sup> Miller 1992; Miller 1993.

<sup>24</sup> O’Donoghue 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Therefore, in accordance with the cognitivist theory of emotions, the appraising cognitive component of emotion and the behavioural component as *action readiness* contribute to the interpretation of motivation behind the somatic changes. Larrington 2001, 254–255; Miller 1992, 98–99. On the importance of the saga’s own context, see also Tulinius 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Larrington 2001, 254–255; *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, 161–162.

<sup>27</sup> Larrington 2001, 254–255; Miller 1992, 97–98.

<sup>28</sup> On cognitivist and social constructionist theories of emotion, see e.g. Rosenwein 2002, 836–837; Larrington 2001, 251–253.

<sup>29</sup> See Miller 1992, 93–95, 99; Larrington 2001, 251–252. Miller, for instance, holds the view that certain basic emotions are known, experienced and recognised in all cultures (and

departure is that situations which give rise to certain emotions and the ways in which emotions are expressed, restrained or controlled are culture specific. Each culture reinforces and evokes various kinds of interpretations and attitudes towards emotion. It regulates who may express emotion and in what way. Conversely, similar occasions may also elicit diverse reactions because of individual differences.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, concerning the actions and deeds that result from an emotion, certain action tendencies may be related to some emotions, but not to others. These tendencies, which result in action if not held in check,<sup>31</sup> are likewise culture-specific.

Miller also argues that certain bodily reactions are linked to particular emotions, which would make universalistic somatic semiotics possible, or at least that some emotion is always indicated in sagas when somatic changes are described.<sup>32</sup> However, it has also been argued that a particular emotion would not have a distinguishing physiology (including somatic changes), typical only to this emotion. Consequently, identification of an emotion is dependent on the context where the emotion is expressed (or represented).<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, the context of the source in which the emotion is represented has been considered carefully in this study.

The emphasis laid on somatic indicators of emotions naturally affords some space for criticism. As Jesse Prinz has pointed out, not all somatic changes are necessarily emotions. Instead:

[T]he bodily states whose perceptions are experienced as emotions characteristically arise under certain kinds of circumstances. They arise when an organism faces [...] core relational themes: organism/environment relations that bear on well being.<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, I needed to bear in mind that interpretations of somatic changes could be culture-specific and that some somatic changes in sagas may also refer to

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presumably in all historical eras). There is, however, no clear consensus on which of the emotions are basic. Anger, disgust, joy, surprise, sorrow, fear, even shame and interest have been considered candidates. On basic emotions, see e.g. Frijda & Parrott 2011; Panksepp & Watt 2011; Russell, Rosenberg & Lewis 2011. The universalist theory has also been criticised, see e.g. Wierzbicka 1995.

<sup>30</sup> Miller 1992, 93–95, 99; Wierzbicka 1995, 38. See also Larrington 2001, 253–254.

<sup>31</sup> On various action tendencies related to emotions, see also Elster 2004, 151–152.

<sup>32</sup> Miller 1992, 93–95.

<sup>33</sup> Prinz 2004, 51. Additionally, facial or other expressions such as gestures cannot be interpreted universally; laughter in sagas, for instance, does not inevitably represent joy—in fact, it seldom does. See Le Goff 1992, 161–165.

<sup>34</sup> Prinz 2004, 52–53. However, it has also been shown that e.g. moving one's facial muscles may change how a person feels. On this observation made by Paul Ekman and Robert Levenson, see e.g. Keltner, Oatley & Jenkins 2014, 121–122.

conditions other than emotions. To outline the somatic map, Carolyn Larrington has pointed out that some emotion words and expressions may convey integrated information on the somatic portrayal of an emotion. For instance, regularly used Old Norse-Icelandic expressions and words for an angry mood and angry state of mind were *þrunginn móði* and *þrúttinn*, which simultaneously refer to somatic change that could be perceived through the senses—swelling.<sup>35</sup> Expressions which appear metaphorical at first sight may reflect the implicit medieval Icelandic model of anger, which was based on embodied experience and perception of one's own physiology.<sup>36</sup>

Concerning the translation of somatic emotions into words, the view presented by Jenefer Robinson is thought-provoking:

[E]xplaining behavior by reference to ordinary language concepts for emotions [...] is making an after-the-fact cognitive evaluation in the terms of folk psychology, summarizing a particular emotion process, a particular sequence of events.<sup>37</sup>

According to Robinson, the way in which we categorize and name emotions depends on what kind of emotion words our language has to offer. As we name the emotions, we simultaneously recognise and perceive a certain situation cognitively evaluated in a certain manner and in the light of certain needs and interests. Various life situations, different values and interests all influence the way in which each individual names emotions.<sup>38</sup> This applies to researchers as well. In my study I have followed Miller in that I have examined the motivation of the saga characters through modern definitions.<sup>39</sup>

As a result, my point of comparison is in the present; I have explored whether medieval Icelanders would have felt emotions that correspond to those that we recognise today. Whatever its problems, this is a handy tool when a cultural historian attempts to 'translate' the saga culture into research that uses a modern language, in this case English, with the intention that it be understood by other contemporary scholars. Yet the application of a certain language of research brings with it various cultural aspects typical for that language. Simultaneously the application of one language often excludes different aspects of the matter in question typical to other

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<sup>35</sup> Larrington 2001, 254.

<sup>36</sup> White 1998, 136; Kövecses 2000. On emotion metaphors, see also Harris 2001, 67–68.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson 2004, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> See also Garrison 2001.

languages, as words carry culturally constructed meanings.<sup>40</sup> It has been pointed out that in different cultures in diverse historical contexts there may also be emotions that lack correspondences in the English language.<sup>41</sup> To put it another way, equivalents of emotion words in modern vocabularies may not be found in the culture under inspection in the first place.<sup>42</sup> These aspects have all been considered in this study.

### 3.4 Emotional Refuges and Alternative Emotion Discourses

Bearing in mind the laconic nature of sagas and their concentration on what could be seen, I also considered whether there were methods of representing the inner state and communicating the unseen condition that would not immediately meet our modern eye. This idea was prompted by earlier studies in which special emphasis was laid on somatic indicators of emotion and rare emotion words. It was apparent that focusing on these indicators or words overemphasizes the importance of the few emotions that easily attract attention, including anger and violence. Moreover, some emotions would not elicit observable physiological reactions,<sup>43</sup> as they do not necessarily activate visible features of the body.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, visible changes in the body should not be the only thing which is examined.

Emphasis on emotion words also favours the study of those epochs in which emotion vocabulary was large at the expense of eras and cultures in which emotion words and concepts were fewer.<sup>45</sup> Lack of a word for a given emotion does not indicate, however, that it was impossible to experience this particular emotion, or that it did not exist in a particular culture.<sup>46</sup> Rather, it has been suggested that having a word for a concept or an emotion means that the concept or emotion is crucial in this culture.<sup>47</sup> Correspondingly, there may be *hypocognized* emotions, which have not been named in a culture and whose existence may even be denied or hidden. Even then, various means and manners in which the inner feelings and sensations may be

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<sup>40</sup> Not to mention that British and American emphases may differ, as revealed to me when I was exploring the differences between concepts of shame and guilt.

<sup>41</sup> Wierzbicka 1995, 25–26.

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. on how the Ancient Greeks lacked words corresponding to modern concept of depression: *melancholia*, for instance, referred to aggressive fury, madness and mad passion, in Harris 2001, 16–17.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. Haidt & Morris 2009.

<sup>44</sup> As modern research has shown, emotions always change something in the body (e.g. they increase/decrease activation on various regions of the body, see e.g. Nummenmaa, Glerean, Hari & Hietanen 2013), but some of these changes (e.g. to heart rate or muscle tension), are not necessarily discernible to other people.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Rosenwein 2002, 838–839 and footnote 68.

<sup>46</sup> Miller 1992, 93–95.

<sup>47</sup> See e.g. Wierzbicka 1995, 19.

represented may be available, although they do not appear to have any interpersonal significance.<sup>48</sup>

Concentration on the visible and the named reveals only a ‘manifest’ level, that is explicit representations of emotion and emotion words. There may nevertheless be emotion discourses which appear on the ‘latent’ level: that is, emotion discourses whose actual meaning is veiled or not easily visible to modern readers. Various authorities influence the emotional discourses available for members of the community, who never operate in a social vacuum.

William M. Reddy has used the concept *emotional regime* to indicate the authority that offers individuals a variety of normative emotions, rituals and practices for the expression and representation of emotions. Reddy associates these emotional regimes with political governments.<sup>49</sup> However, ‘regime’ may also be considered a less official and less stable community and a smaller social unit, such as the family or village. Barbara H. Rosenwein has named such a unit *emotional community*.<sup>50</sup> The power of this ‘regime’ may also cause social exclusion.<sup>51</sup>

At any rate, these regimes or communities may have either strict or indulgent, and often unwritten, rules and ‘laws’. Especially societies with strict norms and rigid norm-monitoring systems are expected to expose people to goal conflicts.<sup>52</sup> Reddy’s ideas are based on his view of the tight connection between an individual’s emotions and his or her aims and goals, an approach which resembles the importance ascribed to motivation in Miller’s approach. Yet Reddy’s view emphasizes the link even more and considers that emotions are never involuntary, selection and motivation always being interconnected.<sup>53</sup> According to Reddy, individuals usually have several goals of varying importance to them. The goals can at times be in conflict with each other, thus inducing a goal conflict which the person needs to resolve by ‘navigating’ through this network of goals, in order to re-achieve equilibrium. Reddy regards this navigation operation as a universal tendency.<sup>54</sup>

At this point, it is important to note that the tendency to emphasise the roles of goals and contemplation of actions involved in ‘navigation’, and success and achievement as their consequences, have also been criticized and labelled as an

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<sup>48</sup> See on the concept introduced by Robert Levy, in Reddy 2001, 37. *Hypercognized* emotions are those used and practiced often.

<sup>49</sup> Reddy 2001, 55–56 and 129.

<sup>50</sup> Rosenwein 2006, 2, 23–27.

<sup>51</sup> Reddy 2001, 121–129.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Reddy 2001, 120.

<sup>54</sup> Reddy 2001, 21–25 and 120–123.

‘Anglo-attitude’,<sup>55</sup> typical to modern western cultures. However, Reddy does admit that goals and motivation are interlinked and intertwined with the cultural and historical context. People can want only what the culture has taught them to want.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, in the light of the sagas it is probable that medieval Icelanders did have desires, intentions, expectations and other personal interests, which pertained to various life spheres and dealt with various concerns, be it individual, social, material or existential. Therefore, it was possible for the people to experience situations where their desires were not fulfilled, where they could not act according to their intentions, or where they realized that they had several desires which were in conflict with each other—which in this connection have all been categorized as their *goals*.

Navigation between different goals may lead to *emotional suffering*, which Reddy has defined as “an acute form of goal conflict”.<sup>57</sup> In this study, I have excluded ‘acuteness’ as a short-lived condition, but consider emotional suffering as a long-term state a fitting concept. The degree of emotional restraint or liberty in a society does not necessarily affect the degree of this emotional suffering. Freedom to express and represent emotions does not exclude emotional suffering or vice versa. Rather, emotional suffering, according to Reddy, is connected to goals that are found crucial and important.<sup>58</sup>

In very strict emotional communities there may nevertheless exist *emotional refuges*: smaller communities, relationships or different modes of representation, such as poetry, which release the individual from the prevailing emotional norms and restrictions placed on emotion discourses. Consequently, in an emotional refuge an individual is no longer obliged to suffer from the pressures caused by *emotional effort*. In Reddy’s terms, this effort refers to the inconvenience and effort generated as a consequence of the individual’s attempts to maintain his or her goals despite the suffering which follows from goal conflict.<sup>59</sup> In my work, I have defined as emotional refuges the alternative emotion discourses which were available for medieval saga authors if they wished to represent emotions and moods for which no ordinary discourse existed, or which may have been considered unmentionable, a taboo subject.

I have departed from the assumption that emotional refuges include actual or literary spaces but also objects as symbols or as signs in allegory-like systems. My emphasis lies on supernatural beings, which in other cultural and historical contexts

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<sup>55</sup> Wierzbicka 1995, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Reddy 2001, 47.

<sup>57</sup> For the definition of the concept, see Reddy 2001, 129.

<sup>58</sup> Reddy 2001, 123–124.

<sup>59</sup> Reddy 2001, 38–42, 129.

appear to have served as objects through which diverse social or inner conflicts could be communicated.<sup>60</sup>

It is, naturally, well-known that even today people have experiences, either during sleep or when awake, which can be construed as supernatural. The supernatural beings that may be involved in these experiences may appear, for instance, in non-material bodies. Alternatively, as viewed from the perspective of modern science, they may reveal themselves in auditory, tactile or visionary hallucinations. However, it has been suggested that in some cultures various mental disorders, for instance, may be ‘externalized’, that is the disorder is expected to originate from outside the person’s body (i.e. external attribution). In practice, externalisation<sup>61</sup> of disorders could mean ascribing various disturbances to demons, spirits or ghosts. These creatures may often be ascribed with material existence and are then described in material terms. In today’s western culture, these disorders would often be internalized: the origin would be in the individual’s own body (i.e. internal attribution).<sup>62</sup>

Studies in medical anthropology suggest that societies with such externalising belief systems can be found in many cultural and historical contexts.<sup>63</sup> Similar features have been ascribed to medieval and early modern cultures, for instance. It has been argued that people in those historical eras ascribed their undesirable feelings and deeds to the Devil and thus attributed them to supernatural beings. As a consequence, the Devil and demonic spirits became part of the popular psychology and, according to some views, the language was also affected: the distinction between metaphor and reality became blurred. For this reason, it was only natural that people could actually discover “visible proof of the presence of the unseen world”.<sup>64</sup> Similar tendencies to externalise, for instance, socially unwanted emotions, have also been discovered in anthropological studies.<sup>65</sup>

The medieval Icelandic inclination to value emotional restraint, which I have mentioned in my earlier studies,<sup>66</sup> would obviously influence the ways in which emotions could be expressed in literature. In addition to this, for medieval Icelanders words were powerful as they could ‘make things happen’.<sup>67</sup> In the modern sense, they

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<sup>60</sup> For examples, see e.g. Khan 2006; Das 1989, 285–290.

<sup>61</sup> The concept of externalization that I am using here should not be confused with that of externalizing symptoms (i.e. ‘acting out’ as in ADHD), as it is used in modern psychology.

<sup>62</sup> See e.g. Helman 1994, 128–129. See also Knuuttila 2007, 351–352.

<sup>63</sup> Helman 1994, 128–129.

<sup>64</sup> Macdonald 1981, 202–203.

<sup>65</sup> Das 1989, 285–290; Khan 2006; Qureshi 2010; Bourguignon 2003.

<sup>66</sup> I have explored this cultural tendency in Kanerva 2014.

<sup>67</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 120–124.



could be considered performative utterances.<sup>68</sup> Each utterance could be regarded as powerful. Words were potential curses or prophecies. They might cause shame and conflict. For this reason it is entirely comprehensible that some things would remain unspoken or were transmitted in veiled meanings.

I intend to study whether the medieval Icelanders used the so-called restless dead, that is, the reanimated dead (sometimes referred to as ‘ghosts’ in the articles), in sagas to convey veiled meanings. It has been argued that medieval people in general were used to interpreting symbols and allegories,<sup>69</sup> and that medieval Icelanders would also have been aware of the working mechanisms of such signs,<sup>70</sup> which to some extent resembled the composition of the euphemistic kennings<sup>71</sup> in Skaldic poetry.<sup>72</sup> Earlier studies thus suggest that the saga audience did not take everything literally. It is more likely that veiled meanings in sagas could be found and interpreted by at least some members of the society who possessed the skills required for such intellectual effort, an issue that I will explore further in the discussion part of this study.

### **3.5 Dreams and Dream Poetry as Sources of the Invisible Inner State**

Dreams in sagas were another cultural phenomenon by which meanings could be carried by symbols. Some of the saga dreams, their contents and messages to the dreamer are also commented upon in accompanying poetry. In this study, I have also concentrated on dreams and dream poetry to inquire further into the nature of the emotional experiences under scrutiny here. The view that dream poetry was the gate for the study of emotions is supported by cross-cultural studies of dreams.<sup>73</sup> Earlier notions of the role of poetry in sagas also support this view. As noted above, it has been suggested that poetry in the context of the sagas was often used to express emotions.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, in some cultures poetry has also served as an emotional refuge or an honourable manner to articulate emotions.<sup>75</sup>

Dream poetry is special in that its cultural historical interpretation also requires that the contents of the dreams that elicit the poetic response and the cultural understanding of dreams are taken into consideration.<sup>76</sup> Erika Bourguignon, for

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<sup>68</sup> See J. L. Austin’s speech act theory in Austin 1986.

<sup>69</sup> See e.g. Gurevich 1985, 59–60, 82–84.

<sup>70</sup> Mundal 1997; Einar Pálsson 1994; Tulinius 2001.

<sup>71</sup> I.e. metaphorical phrases used in poetry.

<sup>72</sup> Tulinius 2001.

<sup>73</sup> See e.g. Bourguignon 2003.

<sup>74</sup> See e.g. O’Donoghue 2005.

<sup>75</sup> Abu-Lughod 1985; Reddy 2001, 38–44.

<sup>76</sup> Langeslag (2009), for instance, has studied dream poetry in *Gísla saga* in isolation from the prose in which the contents of the dreams are sometimes recited. Since both the prose and

instance, has pointed out that cultural understanding of dreams has an impact on the actual dream experience. This understanding and the contents of the dream, its ‘message to the viewer’, together create the effect that the dream has on the dreamer, in his or her behaviour and attitudes. They also affect the social significance and consequences of the dream. Dreaming and dream experiences, then, are influenced and modified by cultural learning. Traditional interpretations are part of a culture, of its belief systems, rituals, communities and institutions.<sup>77</sup> However, the culture is not closed to external influence, in that it may be affected by cultural currents originating from other cultures.

For the reasons outlined above, dreams and dream poetry in sagas are dealt with from two perspectives. The poetry is considered to represent emotional reactions to the dream that it comments upon. The poetry is also connected to the contents of the dream, which include symbolism. This symbolism has to be interpreted in the cultural historical context of the saga. In addition, conception of the role of dreams that medieval Icelanders had was expected to affect the nature of any experience which followed from dreaming. Meanings that the dreams and their contents were given in medieval Icelandic culture would have been expected to influence the experience of the dreamer.

Medieval Icelanders did not question the origin of dreams. In contrast to the common European practice, they were defined as neither demonic nor divine. Instead, dreams in general were expected to prophesy forthcoming events. In most cases the events foretold in the dreams were considered inevitable: even if people tried to act differently, everything the dreams predicted would occur.<sup>78</sup> However, not all dreams conform to this pattern, and those that do not have not been given the attention that they deserve. They include an exception to the rule of inevitability: in the dream the dreamer is granted a chance to choose between two destinies through his own actions (*Fóstbræðra saga*), or two options which are constantly in conflict are available, but the

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poetry have existed as complementary since the saga as we know it was compiled, I have considered the saga a unified whole. Consequently, I have chosen not to isolate parts of the saga on grounds of style. In this I have followed the example of Torfi Tulinius, who suggests that “the saga is to be read as a whole, every part of it contributing to its general meaning.” (Tulinius 2001, 214).

<sup>77</sup> Bourguignon 2003, 133–135.

<sup>78</sup> See e.g. Turville-Petre 1968. Because of this role as a prophecy, dreams were often used to illuminate the structure of the sagas as they summarised future events. Schach 1971. It has also been shown that dreaming was considered a democratic phenomenon in that everyone could dream important dreams, even if a wiser person might be required to interpret the dream. Bitel 1991. On the medieval European dream theories, see Kruger 1992.

dreamer is not able to choose his fate in the end (*Gísla saga Súrssonar*).<sup>79</sup> These dreams represent a fracture in the dreams' ordinary function as messages which foretell the future. This fracture may reflect a cultural change or emphasis laid on the responsibility of the saga agent, which suggests a link with an emotional experience related to emotions of moral responsibility (including guilt).<sup>80</sup>

Dream descriptions in sagas included, naturally, native elements, but writers could also borrow motifs from European literature. The motifs were either copied directly, or they were shaped and enriched with various native themes.<sup>81</sup> As for the interpretative frame, sagas show traces of both native dream interpretations and explanations that were based on foreign dream books. In cases of borrowed motifs, interpretation of dreams often followed the (Christian) explanations which had been given to the dream in its original foreign context. E. O. G. Turville-Petre has shown, however, that the motifs borrowed from foreign dream books such as the *Somniale Danielis* (which was even translated into the vernacular in Iceland) were not always explained according to the original version. Instead the motifs were given different meanings which presumably followed the native interpretation. There are also occurrences when a clearly native interpretation was rejected in sagas, an explanation which followed the continental interpretation being preferred.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, although the contents of a dream might be the same, the emotional valence<sup>83</sup> of the dream might vary between individuals, and because of this, diverse interpretations of the dream would be produced, which would then give rise to

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<sup>79</sup> In my view, dreams in sagas need not be considered contemporary with the events portrayed in the saga. This view is also enhanced by notions that dreams could serve various ends in sagas, in addition to their role as the portender of forthcoming events. Dreams and dream poetry in sagas have also been associated with the motives of the saga authors. Guðrún Nordal has suggested that the dreams offered the writer an opportunity to comment on ongoing saga episodes or contemporary events. (Nordal 2006.) In other saga genres, such as the *konungasaga* (king's saga) *Sverris saga*, dreams were also used as political rhetoric. (Lönnroth 2006.) They are the 'proof' that Sverrir was of royal blood, rightful king, and destined to be king. He had no other 'proof' apart from his victories (proof of God's favour), so they are vitally important to his claim for the kingship. (Philip Line, personal communication.)

<sup>80</sup> Ármann Jakobsson, who has studied the dreams in *Laxdala saga*, interprets these dreams as reflections of the dreamer's inner state. In his 2008 article he has not, however, problematised the role of the dreams in question in greater depth: they are also prophecies that come true and do not involve poetry. (Ármann Jakobsson 2008.) Consequently, the dreams in *Laxdala saga* differ from those that I have studied here.

<sup>81</sup> Turville-Petre 1968, 19–20; Schach 1971, 59; Strömbäck 1968, 141; Perkins 1974–1977; Langeslag 2009.

<sup>82</sup> See e.g. Strömbäck 1968; Turville-Petre 1968, 27–28; Schach 1971, 59 and 65.

<sup>83</sup> Emotional valence (or: hedonic tone) defines whether an emotional reaction is found pleasant or unpleasant. Reddy 2001, 21–25.

various kinds of arousal.<sup>84</sup> In this study my point of departure is that this diversity of interpretations would have been produced on the level of the saga audience. As the audience heard or read about the dreams of the saga protagonists they would interpret the dreams according to their own insight and knowledge of symbols, myths and other relevant beliefs. In addition, they perhaps made estimations concerning the emotional valence of the dream to the saga dreamer. These interpretations would not necessarily coincide with the intentions of the saga author, nor would all produce interpretations in the first place. There may have been more authoritative interpretations that were pronounced aloud during or after the reading session, comparisons may have been made, disagreements may have arisen, and more individual interpretations may have been made if texts were read quietly and alone.<sup>85</sup> Whatever the process of reading the saga, there would certainly have been a variety of interpretations.

### **3.6 The Cultural Historical Approach**

The ontological nature of thinking styles, ideologies and concepts is that they are culturally and historically determined. Accordingly, the meanings of emotion words produced in certain contexts are not permanent and unchanging, but remain in diverse semantic fields depending on the time and place. Conceptions that are held are not universal, and representations of certain emotions as well as discourses available vary from one culture and historical era to another. Meanings given to words, concepts and objects, and conceptions concerning emotions cannot simply be defined in accordance with our modern views.

In my study I have considered the dialogic nature of historical sources: namely, that the sources have been in dialogue with other texts available in the historical context where the sources were produced and consumed.<sup>86</sup> These texts could include both native and foreign texts. My analysis is based on the principle that meanings are constructed intertextually. They are based on relationships between various texts which are either implicitly implied or explicitly stated, and which have directed both the production and reception of texts. In texts several meanings crisscross, and for this reason each text should be interpreted as a part of a wider network of texts. Meanings arise and exist in an interaction between the text and the

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<sup>84</sup> Bourguignon 2003, 133–135.

<sup>85</sup> For the connection between silent reading and contemplation, see e.g. Carruthers 1990, 170–173. For the effect of silent reading in medieval Europe, see Saenger 1999. Criticisms of Saenger's ideas are presented in Coleman 1996 (pp. 21–23), where the aural nature of medieval culture (i.e. written texts were also read aloud) is emphasized (pp. 20–24, 27–32).

<sup>86</sup> See also Peyroux 1998, 40–43.

reader (or the listener), in which the reader/listener not only reveals these meanings, but also produces them. The meaning of a text, in the broad sense, is always born in relation to other texts. This network of associations affects their production and reception. The producer of texts is not ‘innocent’, but carries with him- or herself earlier influences. A text is also a continuously changing process, in which all of its meanings can never be revealed.<sup>87</sup>

The intratextual<sup>88</sup> aspect of sources also needs to be taken into consideration. Meanings are not shaped and constructed only pertaining to other texts, but also with respect to related works, such as those in the oral tradition—‘texts’ that were never written, but only recited, or whose traces can sometimes be discovered in other contemporary sources or in later folklore.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, my analysis has also necessitated the employment of retrospective methods. These methods require attention to evidence from later folklore of geographical areas and cultures other than the one in question, but which were or may have been connected earlier in history.<sup>90</sup>

As an example of the above, application of pre-industrial Finnic material is supported by notions of earlier cultural contacts, for instance, between the Sami and Scandinavians and the coastal areas of Finland and coastal areas of Sweden and Denmark, areas with a culture closely related to Iceland’s. These contacts existed long before Iceland was inhabited. Following the ideas of Eldar Heide, similar occurrences in areas that are geographically far apart but have an earlier history of cultural contact may not indicate recent borrowings, but they may give evidence of a ‘common, Proto-Nordic heritage’ that has been preserved and remained similar despite the mutual isolation and diverse cultural currents that influenced the two cultures separately during the intervening centuries.<sup>91</sup> Evidence available in these later sources may contribute especially to the study of indigenous cultural aspects that are implicit: that is, meanings that were native, and not influenced by texts from outside the common cultural zone.

As a cultural historian, I will not be able to state certainties about the intentions and interpretations of the saga writer, the copyists and the audience of the

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<sup>87</sup> On intertextuality, see Kristeva 1986; Elovirta 1998, 248–250; Veivo & Huttunen 1999, 116; Chandler 2001 (electronic document); Tulinius 2001. For adaption of the concept intertextuality to aural cultures, see Tarkka 2005, 63–65, 72–74, and to saga literature in particular, see Ahola 2014, 71, 266. On cultural historical perspective, see Kaartinen & Korhonen 2005.

<sup>88</sup> On intratextuality, see Chandler 2001 (electronic document); Shen & Xu 2007.

<sup>89</sup> See also the concept ‘immanent saga’ later in the discussion, on p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> On retrospective methods, see e.g. Heide 2009; Hall 2011; and the electronic journal *RMN Newsletter*. Available through: University of Helsinki, Folklore Studies <<http://www.helsinki.fi/folkloristiikka/English/RMN/archive.htm>>.

<sup>91</sup> Heide 2009, 364. See also e.g. Harvilahti 2013.

text. Texts are not always understood in the manner that the writer, as the sender of the text as *message*, has intended. In more cases than not, the sender is probably unaware of the meanings that his or her message may give rise to. The message has various effects in its recipients (as well as in its sender), and thus interpretations may vary. Although codes to interpretation may be found in the text, the interpretation has never been at the writer's command. The writer (or reciter, in the case of oral sources) may never govern his or her own text in full, nor is s/he aware of all the meanings that s/he expresses. Interpretation is a continuously changing part of the process in which meanings are produced.<sup>92</sup> Consequently, I can find only some of the meanings, still images of interpretations in certain contexts, or brief glimpses of the medieval reality.

In order to succeed in the task I have set myself, I need to be familiar with the culture under inspection, in which a communicative context different from my own has existed. To understand the culturally and historically defined meanings, a historian needs to possess communicative competence in that he or she is aware of the norms, value orientations and knowledge of the culture that is under scrutiny.<sup>93</sup> It is this cultural historical context that I will discuss next.

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<sup>92</sup> Johansen 2002, 46–54, 67; Chandler 2001 (electronic document).

<sup>93</sup> Johansen 2002, 48–49 and 80–81; Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 224–225.

## 4 The Context: Medieval Icelandic Culture

### 4.1 *Íslendingasögur*: Histories of Pagan Men Preserved in the Christian Era

The temporal context of my study is thirteenth and fourteenth-century Iceland. Although emphasis in the study of medieval history in general is often laid on religion and ecclesiastical authority, it has to be borne in mind that from the perspective of the Catholic Church medieval Iceland was a rather peripheral region. Moreover, medieval Icelandic culture was characterised by interaction between Christian and non-Christian, or native, elements.

Christianity was accepted in Iceland at the general assembly (*Alþingi*) in 999/1000,<sup>94</sup> where a decision to convert was made, motivated presumably by the need to guarantee and preserve peace in a society where an ever increasing number of the inhabitants were already Christian, although pagan practices were undoubtedly still followed widely. The conversion was not, therefore, a sudden and unexpected event. Among the immigrants that colonised Iceland from the year 870 onwards there were already people who were acquainted with Christianity. Settlers may have come, for instance, from the British Isles (where there were many people of Scandinavian origin), that is from areas where Christianity had been established for several hundred years.<sup>95</sup> It is also likely that Christian and pagan (native) customs and beliefs were intermingled both before and after the official conversion—although the number of churches and priests gradually increased once the official conversion had occurred, they are unlikely to have been common.

In relation to this, Sverre Bagge has pointed out that Christianity for medieval Icelanders was not necessarily more than a set of actions and customs—for instance, fasting and other religious rituals, different burial practices and building churches. Conversion to Christianity was thus *síðaskipti*, literally a “change of customs”.<sup>96</sup> Conversion did not indicate a radical change of mentality or reshaping of the mental reality of medieval Scandinavians, but the changes, referred to as *medievalisation* rather than *Christianisation* by many researchers,<sup>97</sup> occurred gradually. Diverse aspects of the old thought pattern were preserved, or modified and syncretised with new

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<sup>94</sup> On the Christianisation of Iceland, see e.g. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1978, 16–32; Orri Vésteinsson 2000; Strömbäck 1975.

<sup>95</sup> According to *Landnámabók*, the first settlers in Iceland were Christian. *Landnámabók*, 31–32. See also Sayers 1994.

<sup>96</sup> See Bagge 2005, 122.

<sup>97</sup> On the concept of *medievalisation*, see Clover 1993, 385–386; Hall 2007, 163–166.

ideas. Moreover, the European Christian culture that was transmitted to Iceland was itself a syncretisation of pre-Christian beliefs and Christianity, which had successively absorbed Middle Eastern, Graeco-Roman and northern European elements.<sup>98</sup> The term ‘medievalisation’ (especially as far as Iceland is concerned) thus emphasises the multidimensionality of medieval Icelandic Christianity.

The narratives in my main sources, *Íslendingasögur*, focus on the period 870–1030. This time frame includes the era when Iceland was colonised (870–930) mainly by farming families of Scandinavian origin and their (Scandinavian or Celtic) family members or kin, servants or slaves,<sup>99</sup> and the period immediately following that and the first decades after Christianisation (1000–1030). Despite the settings in a pagan rather than Christian context, or a recently Christianised culture that was still undoubtedly coloured by pagan values and practices, the *Íslendingasögur* appear to reflect confrontation between two different ideologies, old and new, and, on the individual level, the conflicts that arose when attempts were made to adapt the two ideologies to one another. Similar patterns may be traced (on a communal level) in sagas that depict thirteenth-century events, written shortly after those events took place, known as *samtíðarsögur* (Contemporary sagas), where the conflicts between ecclesiastical and worldly authority sometimes come to the fore.<sup>100</sup>

It has long been considered likely that the *Íslendingasögur* mirror the reality and thought of the time when they were written, that is thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Iceland. However, as Vésteinn Ólason has pointed out: “[...] we find in the sagas concrete images of life in the old society which require careful interpretation if they are to answer our questions about the thirteenth century.”<sup>101</sup>

The notion directs us to the origins of *Íslendingasögur*, that they are founded on narrative tradition that was based on oral memory, stories of people who had colonised Iceland and their descendants. In other words, the sagas composed about early settlers and their descendants were not purely fiction, but might have a link to actual historical events. For medieval Icelanders the *Íslendingasögur* were history, stories of their ancestors and their accomplishments, conflicts and hardships. The incidents in the *Íslendingasögur* took place in locations that were largely familiar to their audiences, that is, in Iceland, Norway and occasionally also the British Isles. Description of the areas and local circumstances (at least in Iceland) were often precise, suggesting that

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<sup>98</sup> See also Lehmijoki-Gardner 2007, 38–57; Tenkku 1981; Mäkinen 2003, 13–14 and 27–37.

<sup>99</sup> Magnús Stefánsson 1993, 311–312. For the “Celtic component among the original settlers of Iceland”, see also Sayers 1994.

<sup>100</sup> See e. g. Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 205–206, 330, 368–369; Helgi Þorláksson 1993. On *samtíðarsögur*, see also below p. 46 and 56.

<sup>101</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 37.



the writers knew the district well, although there are sometimes exceptions to this rule.<sup>102</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that saga writers were nevertheless aware that what they wrote did not depict the actual reality of the past, but their view of it. Expressions such as “it is told” acknowledge that alternative accounts might exist, while “some say” and “other people say” acknowledge that they did exist. Some texts included comments which suggested that conceptions and customs might have changed during the long period that separated the time of saga writing from the time of the actual events.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, Gísli Sigurðsson has also pointed out that oral tradition is flexible. Hence the *Íslendingasögur* as they were put in writing may not convey a truthful or accurate presentation of actual ninth- or tenth-century events (even if the original oral tale did). Instead, oral tradition was material on which saga writers drew and which they shaped according to their contemporary needs. Sagas may include characters that have no historical foundation but that fitted in well with the narrative. Characters that appear in several sagas and that fairly definitely did have a paragon in real life, may, depending on the source, be depicted in various ways. A positive attitude towards the character in some sources may have changed to a negative one in others, a shift that points to several different writers and their various evaluations and differing motivation. Moreover, the genealogies of the saga characters may vary from one text to another, they are sometimes lacking altogether, and they cannot always be traced in any of the diverse versions of the Book of Settlement, *Landnámabók*, a text that records the people and families that settled Iceland, which has usually been considered evidence of the actual existence of a person.<sup>104</sup>

My intention in this study is not to reconstruct any immanent sagas by examining descriptions of certain people in various sources and thus reach the ‘immanent whole’<sup>105</sup> that according to Gísli Sigurðsson is:

the conceptual saga as it exists as the sum of its parts at the preliterate stage. This immanent whole is never told in full and exists only in the minds of the members of the traditional culture, and only achieves an integrated form when the story comes to be written.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 105.

<sup>103</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 105. See also Hermann 2009, 293.

<sup>104</sup> Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 191–229.

<sup>105</sup> On the concept ‘immanent whole’, see Clover 1986, 34–36.

<sup>106</sup> Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 45. For instance, information on saga characters, that is, their immanent sagas can in certain cases be reconstructed if the characters appear in several sources. Immanent saga is built up by examining the descriptions and images provided in these

However, the possibility that such immanent sagas existed (in mind or on vellum) cannot be ignored since the shaping of the saga tales was also dependent on the knowledge that the writers, compilers and readers of sagas possessed of their ancestors. This restricted the scope for modification of the oral stories according to authors' needs to some extent. The importance of *Íslendingasögur* as history of the insular inhabitants naturally also restricted authorial inventiveness, since the genealogies of the saga protagonists were usually well known, as well as the districts and farms on which the events in sagas were centred.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, despite the never constant but perpetually changing nature of oral story telling tradition, studies have shown that oral lore may remain surprisingly consistent for hundreds of years.<sup>108</sup>

Although it was not possible to modify the contents of the stories limitlessly, earlier studies have suggested that medieval Icelanders did feel the urge to use texts reciting past events, their history, as the building blocks of their present. Pernille Hermann has emphasised the role of contemporary requirements in shaping the sagas when they were written. She writes that:

Medieval writers remembered the past in more than one way, and their recording of memories also involved a dynamic and creative dimension that not only saved memories from oblivion, but also organized memories according to present needs.<sup>109</sup>

Jesse L. Byock<sup>110</sup> has viewed the *Íslendingasögur* as indicators of the functioning of social memory in medieval Iceland, and has observed them not merely as literature. According to him, social memory can be defined as a process, in which the society uses its past to give shape and meaning to their present. Viewed from this perspective, social memory also shapes the history according to its own needs. Hence the essence of saga literature as social memory also defines the essence of the *Íslendingasögur*: they concentrate on themes and issues that addressed and concerned the contemporary audience. The *Íslendingasögur* therefore reflect the worldview, mentality, thoughts and events of the time of writing, that is, from the thirteenth century onwards, rather than those of the era in which the events described were thought to have taken place.

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sources through which the full picture of the character is created. See *ibid.*, 123–250; Gísli Sigurðsson 2007.

<sup>107</sup> Byock 2004, 299–301 and 314.

<sup>108</sup> See e.g. Gísli Sigurðsson, 2004, 253–302, on the description of the trip to the areas in modern North America around 1000, the earliest information of which can be found not until in thirteenth-century manuscripts.

<sup>109</sup> Hermann 2009, 293.

<sup>110</sup> Byock 2004.

Correspondingly, the saga characters are likely to mirror thirteenth and fourteenth-century Icelandic people, their thoughts, emotions, attitudes, wishes and needs.<sup>111</sup> The demands of these centuries likewise determine the themes brought up in texts and the way in which they were discussed and represented.<sup>112</sup> These needs were, in the light of sagas, largely connected with everyday social interaction; as Vésteinn Ólason summarizes the fundamental elements of *Íslendingasögur*:

The essential basis for the principal constituent elements of the sagas is Icelandic society during the first centuries after the settlement of the country and the methods used by the settlers and their descendants to defend their rights and resolve their differences.<sup>113</sup>

Those who have become familiar with *Íslendingasögur* have undoubtedly noticed how they deal with interaction, relations and interrelations, and conflicts between people and resolving them. These were issues that have always had great importance for individual human lives as well as the maintenance of social wellbeing, balance, order and harmony. These themes were unquestionably crucial in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland, both before and after 1262, the year when the influence of the Norwegian king became officially established in Iceland, and after which the majority of the *Íslendingasögur* are thought to have taken literary shape.<sup>114</sup>

The period antedating year 1262 (including 930–1030, the period when the events of the most *Íslendingasögur* take place) is often called the *Icelandic Commonwealth* or *Icelandic Free State*. This epoch began when the Icelanders established the general assembly *Alþingi* and ended when they swore allegiance to the Norwegian king Hákon IV (1204–1263) in 1262. The submission was preceded by several severe conflicts between ruling families that can be characterized as civil war. These conflicts were exacerbated by the centralisation of power in the hands of a few families, which had begun in the twelfth century. Submission to Hákon was considered preferable to unrest. Moreover, the transition of power was advanced by the Norwegian king's right to regulate the commerce between Iceland and Norway, already established before the submission. Living on an island in the midst of the North Atlantic, the Icelanders were heavily dependent on merchants who sailed between Iceland and Norway and whose trips were controlled by the king. Although the Icelanders had to pay taxes to the Norwegian ruler after 1262, it has been argued that the new government enhanced

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<sup>111</sup> See also Byock 2004, 299–301 and 314; Clover 1985, 262–263.

<sup>112</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 103; Ahola 2014, 64.

<sup>113</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 110.

<sup>114</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 19. Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 102–104.

economic development in Iceland. In politically more stable and harmonious circumstances the export of dried fish and other products thrived. Power was transmitted to the king on many levels: for instance, royal representatives and officials gradually supplanted the earlier offices of the *goði*-chieftain and the lawspeaker (*lögsögumaðr*). Wealth was increasingly concentrated in the hands of royal representatives.<sup>115</sup>

It has been suggested that as Icelanders submitted to the Norwegian king in 1262 the perspective of the *Íslendingasögur* grew wider, one aspect of this being the situation of their events in wider areas of Iceland. Simultaneously, interest in the shared history of Iceland and Norway became once more a current issue, especially during the conflicts between King Hákon V Magnússon (1270–1319) and the Icelandic aristocracy in the fourteenth century. According to Axel Kristinsson, the spirit of common identity and solidarity was also mirrored in saga literature.<sup>116</sup> Ending up under the Norwegian king's rule perhaps made people long for a past, when, according to memories that grew sweeter with time, there was still social equilibrium and conflicts were solved with dignity.<sup>117</sup>

Although *Íslendingasögur* were probably written in Iceland as early as the twelfth century, the oldest surviving manuscript fragments are dated to the thirteenth century. The golden age proper of saga writing was in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The numerous copies of sagas made in later centuries show that they were also popular in Iceland after the medieval period. In the context of upspring of saga literature, the *Íslendingasögur* could also function as tools of power in purely political situations, both before and after 1262. Axel Kristinsson, for instance, has argued that the medieval Icelandic aristocracy, the chieftains (*goði* and *höfðingi*) and wealthy farmers (*stórbændr*), were mainly responsible for commissioning the writing of *Íslendingasögur*. Apart from *Landnámabók*, also *Íslendingasögur* contain information on the areas that the settlers who inhabited Iceland took into their possession. At the time of the saga writing this information may have been crucial with regard to various power struggles, as the sagas provided 'evidence' or propaganda of long-term land rights originating in the settlement.<sup>118</sup>

In this respect, *Íslendingasögur* have been regarded as reports of Icelandic prehistory that were implemented in writing by or for Icelandic chieftains and rich landowners. The purpose of the *Íslendingasögur* was to strengthen and justify the power of the chieftains in the areas that they governed and link their kin and ancestors to

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<sup>115</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 34–37; Magnús Stefánsson 1993.

<sup>116</sup> Axel Kristinsson 2003, 14–15.

<sup>117</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 111.

<sup>118</sup> Axel Kristinsson 2003.

certain districts and positions, and, presumably, also by operating as a unifying factor, that is, by presenting a story of common ancestors and events that had taken place in the region in question to the people living in these districts. The *konungasögur* (Sagas of Kings), many already written in the twelfth century, served as a model for this, since the Norwegian kings had used this saga genre to enhance their power.<sup>119</sup>

The *Íslendingasögur* appear to be located most often to those areas of Iceland where the number of chieftains was highest, and not in the (four) larger districts where one *höfðingi* (chieftain) had amassed greater power. Wider centralisations of power could arise in the more densely-inhabited regions that were physically fairly coherent, such as South Icelandic plain, its various districts divided only by a few rivers, and the valley district in the Northern quarter. In eastern and western parts of Iceland that were split by fjords and mountains communication was more difficult and conflicts between farmers were rarer. Concerning the growth of the power of the *goði*-chieftain, what mattered was how well they could arbitrate these quarrels and disputes. If conflicts were few the power of the *goði* in his region was not likely to grow significantly as a result, in which case they were more likely to turn to the use of sagas as tools of power. The greater political cohesion in the larger districts may well have meant that there was no great political need for narratives that combined legend and history, so that fewer were produced.<sup>120</sup>

The *Íslendingasögur* have often been seen as reflecting the interests of the *goðar* and more powerful farm-owners, and they clearly show signs of aristocratic attitude.<sup>121</sup> The protagonists and heroes portrayed in the saga texts were often the ancestors of the commissioners or compilers of the sagas, and for this reason the actions and motives ascribed to the former were likely to coincide with the values of the latter. The sagas thus presented the forefathers in a favourable light. However, some scholars have suggested that the *Íslendingasögur* still occasionally include criticism of ruling chieftains for their excessively violent actions, which has sometimes been seen as reflecting the writer's ecclesiastical background. In this context, the heterogenic nature of the saga audience, which is often thought to have consisted of all social strata, the role of literature as a didactic and educational text and as mediator of the norms and values of certain interest groups is emphasized. The *Íslendingasögur* have, for instance, been held as representing ideals that were reflected in past events and deeds,

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<sup>119</sup> Axel Kristinsson 2003, 3–14. For the connection between the *Íslendingasögur* and the *konungasögur*, see e.g. Clover 1985, 249; Clunies Ross 2001, 41–42 (also on Skald Sagas); Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 113.

<sup>120</sup> Orri Vésteinsson 2000, 8–16; Axel Kristinsson 2003, 3–10 and 14.

<sup>121</sup> Clover 1985, 267–271; Axel Kristinsson 2003, 10–13.

ideals for which the Church and the legal authorities may have encouraged the people to strive.<sup>122</sup>

The society in which the *Íslendingasögur* were produced and the ideologies cherished in it influenced the shaping of the texts, but this does not mean that they inevitably mirror the reality of this period, only the normative values and ideals held dear in that culture.<sup>123</sup> Since the *Íslendingasögur* were first written down over two hundred years after the events they supposedly depict, by Christian men who told of the pagan ancestors of medieval Icelanders, the texts provide (first and foremost) information on how thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelanders viewed past experiences of their ancestors and their era.<sup>124</sup> In this sense the *Íslendingasögur* differ from the *samtíðarsögur* that recite contemporary twelfth- and thirteenth-century events. By placing events in an earlier era, present troubles could be scrutinized by defamiliarisation, by divesting them of their present reality and setting them in less familiar milieu, inhabited by people long gone.

The definitions introduced above comport especially well with one type of *Íslendingasögur*, the so-called classical sagas, most of which were compiled before the year 1300 (around 1240–1310). It is these sagas that make up the majority of my source material (*Fóstbræðra saga*, *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*). They are distinguished from the so-called post-classical sagas in that they contain far fewer fantastic elements and are not so exaggerative in nature. The post-classical sagas, including *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Flóamanna saga*, which I have used as additional sources, were compiled somewhat later, around 1300–1450,<sup>125</sup> and appear to manifest foreign influences more explicitly and make widespread use of folklore motifs. It is possible that the increase in employment of fantastic elements and exaggerative style in post-classical sagas implies a more flexible use of oral tradition.

Fantastic elements or not, at first sight the narration in *Íslendingasögur* is usually laconic, unprejudiced and formally objective. Actions and deeds are not normatively appraised explicitly, nor are the abstract inner states and feelings of the saga agents or their states of mind described verbally. Instead the *Íslendingasögur* recite what could be observed with one's own eyes—tangible, visible things. Preben Meulengracht

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<sup>122</sup> Clover 1985, 267–271. For similar ideas concerning the educative role of medieval literature, see Jaeger 1985.

<sup>123</sup> See also Ahola 2014, 63–65.

<sup>124</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 102, 110.

<sup>125</sup> Sävborg 2012; Clunies Ross 1998, 50–51.

Sørensen has compared the narrative style of sagas to that of a legal process; the reader is the eye-witness, and what cannot be seen will not be related.<sup>126</sup>

The text, however, is not objective, unbiased or free of the attitudes of the writer. Instead the *Íslendingasögur* convey certain norms and standards, in light of which the actions and events are appraised. Such utterances as “people thought that”, reactions of other saga characters and portrayals of outer appearance and traits of the saga characters as they are introduced into the story, all contribute to the normative aspects of sagas. Through them the readers and listeners could define the heroes and villains of the story, through whose actions the ideology of the saga was conveyed.<sup>127</sup>

The voice that reaches modern scholars through the *Íslendingasögur* is mostly that of the medieval Icelandic elite, those able to read and write, and possessed of the means to produce books. This point of view is likely to have been a narrow one, since the art of writing as well as ecclesiastical and legal power—the posts of priest, bishop and law-speaker—were in the hands of only a few families.<sup>128</sup> Although the producers of these texts were either themselves in ecclesiastical offices or related to clerics by kinship, their worldview was not, as might be expected, that of an orthodox Christian. This may reflect the ‘ancient’ reality that the *Íslendingasögur* depict, a special feature designed to emphasise the difference between the tenth- or eleventh-century past and the thirteenth-century present, but this need not be the case as traces of a syncretic worldview can also be detected in other contemporary secular sources. In earlier research, the moral code prevalent in secular saga literature (especially the *Íslendingasögur*) was defined as ‘*Hávamál* ethics’,<sup>129</sup> meaning that the saga-protagonists would treat their friends well but their enemies badly.<sup>130</sup> Whether someone was a friend or an enemy influenced the decision as to whether the character was shown empathy in the text or not.

The term ‘*Hávamál* ethics’ derives from the (probably) tenth-century gnomic poem with the same name, although it did not attain written form until the thirteenth century. Like other Eddic poems, *Hávamál* is based on pagan or pre-Christian oral tradition, but the existence of foreign even Christian elements cannot be ruled out. However, although the view of *Hávamál* ethics often comes to the fore in *Íslendingasögur*, it is not the only lens through which the actions and events are

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<sup>126</sup> Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, 211. See also Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 106.

<sup>127</sup> See e.g. Lönnroth 1989, 71–98.

<sup>128</sup> Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 86–92.

<sup>129</sup> On ‘*Hávamál* ethics’, see Toorn 1955, 49–84; Irlenbusch-Reynard 2006. See also Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 29–30.

<sup>130</sup> See e.g. Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, 203–206. Of course, being on the friend’s side or being the main character of the saga did not indicate that the person would not have a difficult and non-conflicting personality.

evaluated. At times the *Íslendingasögur* reveal, implicitly or explicitly, Christian attitudes. This leads us to the question of foreign influences and the contexts in which they were transmitted.

## 4.2 Foreign Influences in Medieval Iceland

As already noted, even if the *Íslendingasögur* are based on oral tradition, they still sometimes contain foreign (also literary) influences, while the fluidity of oral tradition and the role of the *Íslendingasögur* as social memory suggest that *Íslendingasögur* were not authentic, historically exact descriptions of Icelandic prehistory based on eye witness observations. Although oral narrative tradition was apparently lively in Iceland, as in Scandinavia as a whole before literacy spread, the inspiration and model for writing down oral stories was likely to be foreign. Still, saga literature as such was and remained distinctive compared to its possible European paragons and inspirations.

The Icelandic tradition of history writing dates back to the late eleventh century, and its first protagonist in Iceland has been considered Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056–1133). He had studied in “Frakkland”, which in contemporary usage could also refer to regions outside the territory corresponding to modern France, and, seemingly inspired by the influences he had absorbed there, he wrote the first saga of the Norwegian kings.<sup>131</sup>

In addition to Sæmundr, the sources mention many other Icelanders who later studied abroad, for instance in Paris and Lincoln.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, it has been considered likely, based on saga evidence, that by the fourteenth century they had also acquainted themselves with contemporary medieval medical theories through their European contacts and visits to universities on the continent,<sup>133</sup> suggesting that foreign learning, be it religious or scientific, was by that time available to wealthier Icelandic families and was presumably adopted and applied to some degree in everyday life.

Religious motives for travels were, of course, important as well, and contributed to the interaction with areas outside Iceland and Scandinavia. Some people followed the expectations of the Christian faith and went on pilgrimage. A medieval Icelandic *itinerarium* was written in the twelfth century,<sup>134</sup> suggesting that some Icelanders had indeed visited many southern European places or at least had

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<sup>131</sup> Turville-Petre 1964, 17; Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 45.

<sup>132</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 45, 52.

<sup>133</sup> See e.g. Høyersten 2000; Høyersten 2004; Jónas Kristjánsson 1972, 238–249; Lönnroth 1965, 24–26, 28, 31–51; Reichborn-Kjennerud 1936, 20–26; Simek and Hermann Pálsson 2007, 326.

<sup>134</sup> *Alfræði íslenske I*, 16 and 19–20.



good knowledge of them. Moreover, Icelandic priests and monks had close contacts with ecclesiastical institutions in Norway, where the archbishopric of Niðaros (modern Trondheim) was established in 1153. Learned men also came to Iceland to teach, for instance, at the school situated in the Hólar Episcopal See.<sup>135</sup>

By these routes, and also many others, foreign influences, both in learned writings and in more secular texts, started to make their mark on Icelandic culture and literature. The relative importance of these influences is emphasised by the probability that Icelanders started to translate religious texts into the vernacular as early as the twelfth century.<sup>136</sup> Possibly this resulted from influence from the British Isles, where vernacular literature had a firm standing, but there is also a hypothesis that this was a consequence of the Icelanders' poor knowledge of Latin.<sup>137</sup>

The first vernacular history of the Icelanders, *Íslendingabók*, was written as early as the beginning of the twelfth century by Ari Þorgilsson, known as Ari the Learned (1068–1148). At about the same time the Icelandic law was put in writing, in 1118. This historical milestone has also been associated with the growth of respect for written texts and their capacity to preserve important information such as law.<sup>138</sup> The last mentioned function also influenced the distribution of power, since certain copies of the law text were considered superior to others.<sup>139</sup> The importance and appreciation shown to written information is likely to have contributed to the will and need to register pieces of oral lore in succeeding centuries.<sup>140</sup>

With respect to religious texts, a significant authority for medieval Icelanders was Pope Gregory the Great (540–604). His texts were partially translated into Old Norse-Icelandic, and late medieval (and post-medieval) inventories of Icelandic monasteries and Episcopal sees included evidence that they had possessed manuscripts of his most important books—although in Latin they may have been widely read as well. That diverse story motifs were borrowed from them is suggested by several passages in the *Íslendingasögur*.<sup>141</sup> Although some of St Augustine's writings did reach Icelandic monastic houses, he was not as popular as St Gregory; presumably

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<sup>135</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 45.

<sup>136</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 113–114.

<sup>137</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 44.

<sup>138</sup> By 'law' I mean law as increasingly practised in Christianised Europe, i.e. derived from Roman Law, Canon Law and customary law. For medieval Icelandic and Norwegian law, see Fix 1993; Rindal 1993.

<sup>139</sup> See Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 44–45; Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 55–66.

<sup>140</sup> However, it has to be noted that instead of a strict oral-literate divide in medieval Iceland there was probably mixed orality and literacy. In addition, medieval Icelandic society was also *aural* in that many texts were not necessarily read privately, but publicly and aloud. See e.g. Coleman 1996, 1–33.

<sup>141</sup> Wolf 2001; Strömbäck 1968; Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 113–114.

because St Gregory’s writings were much easier to grasp than Augustine’s complex theological ponderings and contained narrative material that more easily entered the vernacular folk tradition.<sup>142</sup>

Apart from religious texts and their translations, a range of more secular classical texts or works by clerics that transmitted classical knowledge were available, some of which were probably familiar to writers of the *Íslendingasögur*. These were also transmitted through ecclesiastical channels, again as suggested by the monastic and Episcopal inventory lists where a large number of Latin books are mentioned, for instance those of Isidore of Seville, Albertus Magnus, Aristotle, Ovid and Boethius.<sup>143</sup>

In addition to this, among the popular texts that were translated into Old Norse-Icelandic<sup>144</sup> was *Alexandreis* by Walter of Châtillon, which depicted the life of Alexander the Great, known as *Alexanders saga*. *Alexanders saga* was translated in the thirteenth century by Brandr Jónsson, who was the abbot of the Augustinian monastery of Þykkvabær from 1247 to 1262, the officialis of the Skálholt diocese from 1250 to 1254 and later until his death the bishop of Hólar (1263–1264). The epic poem *Alexandreis* was a popular textbook in thirteenth-century schools in Europe and it is possible that Brandr used *Alexanders saga*—which was in prose form, as was usual in Old Norse-Icelandic translations of foreign texts—in the monastery of Þykkvabær.<sup>145</sup> It is thus also plausible that *Alexanders saga* and other similar popular and widely known texts may have influenced medieval Icelandic literature, especially through the literate inhabitants of the monasteries who were responsible for at least some of the saga production, or the copyists of saga manuscripts.

The extent of the above influences is, however, uncertain, and we have no direct evidence that such famous thirteenth-century saga writers as Snorri Sturluson (1178/9–1241) or Sturla Þórðarson (1214–1284),<sup>146</sup> both men in secular offices with whom several sagas have been connected, had read translations of Latin works. Nevertheless, for several reasons it is probable that story motifs at least would have been transmitted beyond the monastic walls. Firstly, the same families could hold both ecclesiastical and secular power in their hands, and secondly, because Iceland had a newly evolved literary culture and books were still rare, oral transmission of stories had not disappeared.

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<sup>142</sup> Keskiaho 2012.

<sup>143</sup> Halldór Hermansson 1929, 35; *Diptomatarium Islandicum* 3, 612–613; *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 9, 298–299.

<sup>144</sup> Among these were e.g. *Historia regum britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth, known in Iceland as *Breta sögur*, and the historical writings of Sallust and Lucanus, known in Old Norse-Icelandic as *Rómverja saga*. Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 113.

<sup>145</sup> Simek & Hermann Pálsson, 7, 49, 189–190, 323–324; Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 107.

<sup>146</sup> Both Snorri and Sturla will be introduced in greater depth below in chapter “Main Sources”.

Influences may also have spread through other routes, an especially important source of influence being the Norwegian royal court. Guests in the royal court could have heard oral performances, engaged in discourse or read translated saga literature and carried these models back to Iceland. During the thirteenth and the early fourteenth century, for instance, there were several Icelandic authors and commissioners of manuscripts who had contacts with the political authorities in Norway. Among them was the owner and also a contributor to the Hauksbók manuscript, which includes *Fóstbraðra saga*, Haukr Erlendsson (died 1334), who stayed in Norway where he worked as a lawspeaker for several years. The above mentioned Snorri Sturluson,<sup>147</sup> known both as a saga author—probably the author of *Egils saga* studied here—and a politician remained in Norway for several years (in 1218–1220 and 1237–1239) where he developed a close friendship with several important Norwegian figures. Sturla Þórðarson, Snorri's nephew, who was apparently originally responsible for the story of *Eyrbyggja saga*, was in Norway from 1263 to 1271 and 1277 to 1278. During both of his sojourns Sturla stayed with the Norwegian king.<sup>148</sup>

An early transmission for many of the stories that influenced medieval Icelandic literature cannot be ruled out. Family ties had linked Icelanders to the British Isles and Normandy from the Viking Age onwards, and through these paths various narrative motifs or pieces of information of literary origin could be conveyed and transmitted both ways.<sup>149</sup> Links between the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon literary traditions have been demonstrated in earlier studies,<sup>150</sup> and some Celtic tradition is traceable in the sagas, but it is possible that this was absorbed before literary culture began its journey in Iceland, through oral tradition, either directly or via Anglo-Saxon tales. The arrival of the Scandinavians in the British Isles and their interaction with the local cultures occurred long before the birth of literacy in Iceland, and it has also been pointed out that a large number of settlers came to Iceland from the British Isles, not merely from Norway. Among the settlers were slaves from the regions that are now Ireland and Scotland, and some of the wives of the settlers had the same origin, as indicated by studies of modern Icelandic genetic inheritance.<sup>151</sup>

The British Isles had been under the influence of Christianity far longer than Scandinavia, so that material transmitted through the insular culture was possibly enriched with influences from the southern parts of Europe, due to the cohesion of

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<sup>147</sup> See page 50 in this study and e.g. Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 71–72.

<sup>148</sup> Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 257–258, 353–354 and 365–366; Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 53–60.

<sup>149</sup> On connections to Normandy, see White 1999.

<sup>150</sup> On possible connection between the Welsh and Scandinavian literature, see Hall 2001. See also Sayers 1994.

<sup>151</sup> Agnar Helgason et al 2001.

Christendom and, especially later, the importance attached to knowledge after the establishment of universities<sup>152</sup> from the end of the twelfth century onwards. Moreover, the Scandinavian courts—and the Icelandic skalds and Icelanders who were part of the royal *hirð*—had lively contacts with other European courts, whereof literary influences could be distributed to the North. The influences and physical manuscripts that were also transmitted by clerical people who had been trained or came from abroad comprised of, for instance, European romances as well as Latin secular literature in translations and imitations.<sup>153</sup> The European romance literature affected the *Íslendingasögur* especially by giving examples of various courtly customs so that the authors would, in Vésteinn Ólason's words:

elevate their characters above mundane life by describing their colourful outward appearance, including details of clothing and weaponry; these authors will also have noted how in the translated romances feelings were expressed more openly than they could allow themselves to attempt in their own sagas.<sup>154</sup>

The writers could borrow from their foreign examples diverse episodes, motifs, themes or narrative structures.<sup>155</sup> Medieval Icelandic literary production was, despite the distance of Iceland from continental Europe, linked in many ways to both the oral and the literary tradition of the rest of Western Europe.

### 4.3 Studying the *Íslendingasögur* in Their Cultural and Historical Context

When studying the *Íslendingasögur* it has to be borne in mind that despite foreign influences medieval Icelanders did not merely create pastiches and imitations of their foreign models. Instead they produced literature that expressed their own cultural values and indigenous narrative tradition, into which the foreign loans and influences could be absorbed flexibly in the manner of oral story telling. A presupposition of this study is that *Íslendingasögur* reflect the world view and conceptions—among others those concerning the emotions—of the Icelanders of the era when the sources were

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<sup>152</sup> On the birth of European universities, see e.g. Brundage 2008, 221–244; Frova 2000; Mäkinen 2003, 47–53, 73–75 and 79–84.

<sup>153</sup> Mitchell 1998; Vésteinn Ólason 2005.

<sup>154</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 113.

<sup>155</sup> On foreign influence on saga literature in general, see Kalinke 1993a, 451–454.

produced.<sup>156</sup> Some of the loans may consist of only the narrative motifs, and some of the exterior influences may have been ‘made indigenous’ in the sense that only the theme remained but various motifs in it were reshaped to make them familiar to all readers and listeners. Not all the influences were manifested in Icelandic culture and literature in the manner of their original European models, nor would they always follow the meanings and interpretations given to them in other European cultures.

For this reason, analyses of meaning made in the light of European literature have to be made carefully—similar interpretations may not have prevailed in different geographical areas. A good example of this is shown in the interpretations of dreams in sagas: although medieval Icelanders had translated the *Somniale Danielis*, a textbook of the interpretation of dreams that was very popular in medieval Europe, it has been shown that the explicit explanations given to dreams in sagas could at times be in conflict with those given to similar themes in *Somniale Danielis*.<sup>157</sup>

Knowledge of the information written on manuscripts does not automatically indicate that people understood its implications for the original audience. Aspects of the information and some of the new customs may indeed have been socially established and actively practised, so that they became an inseparable part of medieval Icelandic culture and thought. However, much of this knowledge, such as medical lore, was undoubtedly possessed only by the elite, for whom the increasing use and importance of literacy meant that not everything had to be learned by heart. Learning by rote and internalization were henceforth less necessary, but the amount of retained information increased and had to be carefully stored (and often copied) to ensure its survival.

References to and copies of foreign learning in the surviving medieval Icelandic manuscripts may merely inform the cultural historian of a peculiarity; of special knowledge that someone wished to record in writing because it was thought important and interesting. The record does not imply that this material was already adopted as part of the Icelandic worldview, although this may have been the case or, more likely, became so after the saga-writing era. Obviously aspects of non-Scandinavian religious or learned material that were transmitted orally several hundred years before the 1300s, or even in texts during the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, might have been adopted by the saga-writers.

Moreover, studying the *Íslendingasögur* also necessitates that the specific nature of this genre is not neglected; they are texts that convey hundreds of years of oral tradition, but likewise contain elements that were added during the processes of

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<sup>156</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 107–108.

<sup>157</sup> Turville-Petre 1968.

writing, transmission and copying. Distinguishing between these two elements may occasionally be difficult. Consequently, and in spite of this, an essential concept and premise of my study is the deep-structured nature of culture, meaning that the foundation of culture consists of various manners of thought and activity that have become unconscious, but affect the culture and its agents and their thinking and actions. According to this view, in every culture there are self-evident rules that constitute long-term layers of it and which influence people in it, independently of whether they are cognised or not or approved or not, and explain the reasons for certain cultural conditions and behaviour.<sup>158</sup>

The text, that is the saga, as a source may consist of layers of varying age; following the ideas of Fernand Braudel, the text may transmit parts that originate from either long-term, conjunctural or short-term cultural layers. Both the indigenous, long-term (*longue durée*) cultural currents and novel, newly adopted (*courte durée*) foreign influences may thus have been intertwined in *Íslendingasögur*. According to this view, the *Íslendingasögur* are a “polyphonic” fabric,<sup>159</sup> in which even the oldest parts have integrated themselves as a solid part of the text, making distinguishing of each separate strata either a complex process or impossible.

The difficulty of identifying the relationship between the diverse temporal structures at the time when the saga was written has been one of the major stumbling blocks in this study, but something that has always to be borne in mind. In the course of the project, the question of the extent to which the *Íslendingasögur* can be interpreted in the context of non-Christian, indigenous ideology, or in the light of the Christian worldview, has constantly recurred—especially since the *Íslendingasögur* appear to offer a rather wide context that can occasionally be defined as pagan, that is they are texts where pagan gods and apparently non-Christian beliefs have a notable role. The prehistory of the Icelandic people was linked to the mythical gods.<sup>160</sup>

Claims of a ‘pagan’ context apply especially well to the Skaldic poetry that often appears in the *Íslendingasögur*. This poetry includes kennings that cannot be understood unless the reader or listener is familiar with pagan mythology. Old mythical lore was thus probably preserved in literature precisely because this enabled the comprehension of poetry that might have been composed hundreds of years ago, and could contain, for instance, knowledge of historical events that contemporary

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<sup>158</sup> See e.g. Immonen 2001, 20–22.

<sup>159</sup> See e.g. Immonen 1996, 19–21; Immonen 2001, 20–21.

<sup>160</sup> See e.g. *Ynglinga saga*. See also Lindow 1997 on how Icelandic history was constructed through mythic patterns.

people regarded as important.<sup>161</sup> Mythological imagery was an important part in the process of understanding. As far as we can tell from surviving sources, references to mythology were more frequent before the Conversion than in the early days of Christianisation, when they may have been deliberately avoided. In the thirteenth century—the golden age of saga production—kennings based on pagan mythology were once more fashionable,<sup>162</sup> even though the Church intended to control or silence the transmission and evolution of the old pagan tradition.<sup>163</sup>

Still, as Margaret Clunies Ross has pointed out, even mythological texts that have survived in manuscripts were written by Christians. Therefore, they may not always represent authentic pagan lore, but Christian reinterpretations of it.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, secular elements in Christian texts were not a rarity in medieval Christendom.<sup>165</sup>

In my view, existence of pagan elements and pagan mythology in *Íslendingasögur* and in the Skaldic poetry that they contain can be assessed as follows. The pagan, or rather indigenous elements were preserved for their own sake, because they conveyed important information about the past and the ancestors. They were regarded as providing true knowledge, as following contemporary norms and expectations, or they were simply considered a good story or a fascinating narrative detail. The meanings given to these indigenous elements were born through the mythological imagery that was known at the time of writing. They could thus contain also meanings that were not conveyed directly, but were veiled, following the working mechanisms of symbols, allegories, or other similar signs. On the other hand, considering the discursive nature of the texts, they would themselves participate in the creation, enhancement and restriction of the ways in which the existent reality was represented and the manner in which the concepts and phenomena related to it were understood and interpreted.

It is important to note that the confrontation between pagan and Christian worldviews which is often problematised in *Íslendingasögur* was not necessarily a dilemma that faced only the newly converted eleventh-century Icelanders. Rather, it appears that interaction between old and new, religious and secular, foreign and indigenous views, ideas and practices also caused problems in the era of saga writing.

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<sup>161</sup> On the medieval Icelandic view considering the source value of poems, see Meulengracht Sørensen 2001.

<sup>162</sup> Clunies Ross 2000, 127–135; Gade 2000, 74–75. On the idea that a boom in certain belief narratives is a consequence of the fading importance of that belief, see also Valk 2012, 27.

<sup>163</sup> Quinn 2000, 36–41.

<sup>164</sup> See also Clunies Ross 2000, 117–118.

<sup>165</sup> On secular elements in Christian texts in other contexts, see e.g. on the Celtic Lives of Saints in Borst 1983, 1, 5–6, 9 and 15.

As mentioned above (p. 40), this is suggested by some *samtíðarsögur* that were composed at approximately the same time as the *Íslendingasögur* and depict incidents that had taken place in the recent past and may have been witnessed or reported by people who might still be alive at the moment of writing. These sagas occasionally bring forth conflicts that could arise when procedures and customs supported by the Church or laws ratified by the Norwegian king since the submission to his rule in 1262 were often in conflict with the aims and interests of the local chieftains.

The reality that was experienced by the saga authors was thus characterised by old and new, native and foreign aspects of culture that did not always complement one another, but might instead collide, even dramatically. This dilemma is often discussed in *Íslendingasögur*: violence and revenge were considered avoidable, since it was not an accepted part of Christian society (although the attitude of the Catholic Church towards violence was often ambiguous and it was sometimes sanctioned, particularly if carried out on its behalf<sup>166</sup>) yet it might occasionally be important to maintain social equilibrium. Portrayals of feuds in *samtíðarsögur* suggest that the bloodfeud tradition and mentality were not completely forgotten and ignored, although after 1262 the executive power in legal matters concerning killing belonged to the Norwegian king and the practice of bloodfeud was banished. Moreover, the Church was granted the authority to safeguard the sanctity of the churches: they remained as sanctuaries for those whose lives were threatened. Apparently, the threat of excommunication was likewise retained as an effective manner of punishment.<sup>167</sup>

The *Íslendingasögur* that are under discussion here were, as noted earlier (pp. 44–47), to a great extent written from the perspective of the elite and for those who possessed power in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland, to entertain them and to meet their requirements. The sagas were multifunctional: they may have had a didactic purpose as they provided the readers and listeners with models of conduct and reflected the ideal worldview of their writers or commissioners. The sagas apparently also attracted readers and listeners, and offered them objects of identification.

To me, as a twenty-first-century researcher, the realities of medieval Icelanders are unlikely ever to open up entirely, but I have nevertheless departed from the assumption that the representation of conceptions, ideas, phenomena and actions in literature may still reveal various dimensions of that reality; the meanings of concepts, the nature of diverse phenomena, the opportunities of various ways of acting and so forth, at least from the perspective of the medieval Icelandic elite. The

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<sup>166</sup> Kangas 2007.

<sup>167</sup> See e.g. *Íslendinga saga*, passim; Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 35–36.



presumption is based on the principle of the discursive nature of texts; that a text is shaped by the culture in which it has been produced, but that it also simultaneously participates in the shaping of the culture in question. The text is not an uncritical and independent reflection of the material and information that it transmits. The text in itself partakes in the construction of meanings, within the frames of and subject to the boundaries that define the means and manners of representation. The culture thus informs and frames, but does not simply ordain and determine the human actions. Moreover, the text does not merely reflect the incident it describes, but the text in itself is a social act, through which it shapes, modifies and changes information and the message it conveys.<sup>168</sup>

The *Íslendingasögur* could in like manner operate as discourses concerning mental functions, such as emotions and the inner state of human beings that prevailed in medieval Icelandic culture. These discourses could offer a language of symbols and metaphors to them; how people could speak and tell of emotions and other mental functions, how they portrayed the invisible inner state, how they enabled certain perspectives from which they could be viewed, but also restricted the ways in which these experiences could be depicted according to norms of the day, that is, in reference to aspects of power.

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<sup>168</sup> Peyroux 1998, 43–44.

## 5 The Sources

### 5.1 Concerning the Sources

Below I will introduce the *Íslendingasögur* that I have used as my main sources in this study. They include *Brennu-Njáls saga*, *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. After this, I will briefly mention other contemporary sources that I have used as auxiliary sources.

The first problem is the dating of the sagas. In the nineteenth century most scholars still assumed that all the *Íslendingasögur* were written in the twelfth century. Later it was decided that a great number of sagas were written in the thirteenth century, and some not until the beginning of the fourteenth century, categorised as classical and post-classical saga respectively. All of my main sources are labelled as classical sagas, whereas some of my auxiliary sources (e.g. *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Flóamanna saga*) have been categorised as post-classical sagas.<sup>169</sup>

However, only fragments of thirteenth-century manuscripts survive, and most of the manuscripts that contain *Íslendingasögur* date from the fourteenth or even the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For this reason no precise dating can be ascribed to the sources, but those made by other scholars will be followed. Nevertheless, as no original saga texts survive, only copies of them, it has to be taken into consideration that the sources used may not slavishly follow the first written version of the story. Instead, they may partly reflect the mentality of the time when copies and perhaps modifications were made.<sup>170</sup> These modifications may also have reflected the version existing at the time of copying.<sup>171</sup> It is to be expected that medieval Icelandic scribes wished to include in their manuscripts versions and details that they regarded as adequate and correct and thus made amendments in places where this was required. This is echoed, for instance, in the fifteenth-century copy of *Yngvars saga víðförla*, where the scribe writes at the end of the saga: “But they, who think they know in greater detail should add it there where it now appears to be missing.”<sup>172</sup>

Most of the writers of the sagas are anonymous—no mention of their names can be found in sagas. Some hypotheses concerning their identification, societal role or personality have been presented, however, and in the following sections I will introduce some of the speculation in greater detail. I have done this in order to define

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<sup>169</sup> Sävborg 2012.

<sup>170</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2005, 102 and 116.

<sup>171</sup> See also Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 45, 123–250; Gísli Sigurðsson 2007.

<sup>172</sup> En þeir, er vita þykkjast innvirðuligar, auki við, þar sem nú þykkir á skorta. *Yngvars saga víðförla*, 393.

one of the prototypes of a ‘medieval Icelandic saga author’ that sheds light on how learned and how well acquainted with both oral tradition and oral learning they were, and how far they had travelled, perhaps acquiring new ideas in the process.

For this study I have used the standardised editions of the *Íslendingasögur* available in the Íslenzk Fornrit series (ÍF, Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag), unless I have indicated otherwise. Translations of the sagas are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

I have chosen the classical sagas listed above because although they may survive only in later manuscripts I think it probable that they still convey traces of ideas and conceptions that were prevalent in thirteenth-century Iceland. At least three of them (*Egils saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Gísla saga*) have been linked to one important thirteenth-century Icelandic family, the Sturlungs, as will be further discussed below. Moreover, the sources used here also contain motifs and episodes that have been relevant for my study—restless dead, men of misfortune and sufferers of eye pain. Especially concerning the restless dead episodes, the sources may contain, in my opinion, stories that reflect native ideas of the reanimated dead. Unlike some post-classical sagas (such as *Grettis saga*, *Harðar saga*, *Gull-Þóris saga*), which in this sense resemble the so-called *fornaldarsögur* (Legendary Sagas),<sup>173</sup> they do not appear to contain so many elements of fantasy.

The auxiliary sources that I have used in this study, however, include both classical and post-classical sagas. I have chosen also post-classical sagas if they contain motifs that have been explored in this study, and that appear in only a few *Íslendingasögur*. Moreover, the events of these sagas that have been used as auxiliary sources, like the other sagas mentioned above, all take place in Western Iceland and thus make a coherent natural geographical setting for the study.

## 5.2 Main Sources

### 5.2.1 *Brennu-Njáls saga*

*Brennu-Njáls saga* is a story of two friends in the south of Iceland: Njáll and Gunnarr, and their families. Because of the emphasis laid on Christian values in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, it has been suggested that its writer was well-versed in foreign literature. Some of the motifs and story themes in the saga have, for instance, been traced in St Gregory’s works, although some of them have been made indigenous in that the scenario and

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<sup>173</sup> The events in *fornaldarsögur* are usually more fantastic in nature compared to *Íslendingasögur*. On this genre, see e.g. Mitchell 1993.

agents that participated in it—both natural and supernatural—were Icelandic.<sup>174</sup> In addition, the author of *Brennu-Njáls saga* had a good knowledge of the Icelandic oral and literary narrative tradition.<sup>175</sup> Accordingly, it has been suggested that he was either a cleric, a monk who had taken the cloth late in life, or a lay chieftain.<sup>176</sup> The writer was also familiar with medieval Icelandic law. The long descriptions of legal disputes and laws in the saga suggest that the text was written down at the end of the thirteenth century—many of the laws referred to were introduced after 1270, suggesting a date around 1275–1290.<sup>177</sup>

Many saga scholars have considered *Brennu-Njáls saga* a literary masterpiece among the sagas. This may have contributed to its popularity in Iceland in both the medieval and post-Reformation eras. This is suggested by the transmission history of the story: the saga survives in nearly twenty medieval vellum manuscripts and several post-medieval paper manuscripts. The oldest of them dates from around 1300.<sup>178</sup> The Íslenzk Fornrit edition of *Brennu-Njáls saga* is mainly based on the surviving medieval manuscripts, but with the lacunae in these filled with excerpts from the later paper copies.<sup>179</sup> The complete list of the manuscripts, fragments and copies used can be found in Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954 (cxlix–clviii and 3–4), but I will introduce some of the most important here.

The manuscripts that survive from around 1300 include the almost complete Reykjabók (AM 468 4 to) and Kálfalækjarbók (AM 133 fol), and Gráskinna (GKS 2870, 4to), which is incomplete but with supplements added to the manuscript sometime at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Of these, Reykjabók also contains *vísur* (songs) related to *Brennu-Njáls saga* and a hymn to the Virgin in Latin.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, civ–cv, Vésteinn Ólason 1993, 433. This manner of making the stories and motifs indigenous is used also in the medieval Icelandic sagas of bishops (*biskupasögur*). The miracles performed by the bishops in these stories reflected their European models, the saints' lives, but the people and scenarios were strictly Icelandic. Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2013.

<sup>175</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, xxxix–liv; Vésteinn Ólason 1993, 433.

<sup>176</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, cii–cv, cviii–cxii.

<sup>177</sup> On the saga, see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 280–282; Vésteinn Ólason 1993.

<sup>178</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 1993, 433–434.

<sup>179</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, cxlix.

<sup>180</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, cxlix–clvii; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953; and the relevant pages at the *Handrit.is* <<http://handrit.is>>: AM 468 4to <<http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/AM04-0468>>; AM 133 fol <<http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/AM02-0133>>; GKS 2870 4to <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/GKS04-2870>>. Last accessed May 2, 2014.

The scribe responsible for Reykjabók is unknown, but the manuscript is “written in a practiced older Icelandic Gothic bookhand.”<sup>181</sup> The first known owner was Ingjaldur Illugason (1560–1643), known to have been a delegated member of the public court of law that was held during the general assembly (*lögréttumaður*). After him, the manuscript was owned by Jón Ingjaldson, Þorkell Arngrímsson and Jacob Golius (d. 1657), and probably others. After Jacob Golius’ death the codex was purchased by Niels Foss (1670–1751), from whom Árni Magnússon (1663–1730), who was responsible for the assembling of the Arnamagnæan Manuscript Collection, received the manuscript in question in 1707. The name Reykjabók refers to its earliest known home, Reykir. The manuscript is preserved in the Arnamagnæan Collection in Copenhagen.<sup>182</sup>

Kálfalækjarbók, again in an unknown hand, acquired its name from its late seventeenth-century owner, a farmer named Finni Jónsson who lived at Kálfalækur farm in the Mýrasýsla region in western Iceland. Later Þórður Jónsson (d. 1720) received the manuscript from Finni and distributed it to Árni Magnússon. The manuscript was returned to Iceland in 1986.<sup>183</sup> The third of the oldest manuscripts, Gráskinna, received its name from its earlier owner, Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson. In a directory written by Þormóður Torfason (1636–1719), an Icelandic historian, the manuscript was sent to the Royal Library in Copenhagen in 1662. The manuscript was returned to the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar in Iceland in 1980.<sup>184</sup>

Among the most important surviving manuscripts consulted in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition, Möðruvallabók (AM 132, fol) should also be named. Möðruvallabók dates from the middle of the fourteenth century and includes only *Íslendingasögur*. It is considered one of the most important manuscripts. Among the Möðruvallabók sagas that are included and discussed in this study are *Brennu-Njáls saga*, *Egils saga* and *Fóstbraðra saga*. The oldest part of Möðruvallabók was written by a single unknown scribe, presumably in the north of Iceland, although some of the poems in *Egils saga* have been copied in another unknown hand. In *Brennu-Njáls saga* some lacunae have been filled with eleven leaves that date from the seventeenth century. Möðruvallabók is named after Möðruvellir, the farm of its seventeenth-century owner Magnús Björnsson from Eyjafjörður in north-western Iceland, who wrote his name on the manuscript leaf in 1628. At the end of the seventeenth century the codex was brought

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<sup>181</sup> See <<http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/AM04-0468>>. Last accessed May 2, 2014.

<sup>182</sup> <<http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/AM04-0468>>. Last accessed May 2, 2014.

<sup>183</sup> <<http://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/AM02-0133>> Last accessed May 2, 2014.

<sup>184</sup> <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/GKS04-2870>> Last accessed May 2, 2014.

to Copenhagen and Árni Magnússon became its owner. In 1974 the manuscript was returned to Iceland.<sup>185</sup>

These four manuscripts constitute the basis of the so-called X category (Reykjabók, Kálfalækjarbók), Y category (Möðruvallabók) and Z category (Gráskinna) of manuscripts that have been used in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition of *Brennu-Njáls saga*.

### 5.2.2 *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*

*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* has been identified as one of the oldest of the *Íslendingasögur*. Apart from being labelled a classical saga, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* has also been defined as a *skáldsaga* since the protagonist, Egill, is a skaldic poet. The saga dates from the early thirteenth century, and has been attributed to Snorri Sturluson,<sup>186</sup> a learned man who was also a politician, poet and historian. Information about his life has been preserved in the *Íslendinga saga*, a *samtíðarsaga* that was written by his nephew Sturla Þórðarson, and other contemporary sources. Snorri also held the office of lawspeaker in Iceland, and was among the richest men in western Iceland in his time. Snorri was one of the Sturlung family, the descendants of Snorri's father, Sturla Þórðarson of Hvammr, who died in 1183. It was among the most influential families in thirteenth-century Iceland.<sup>187</sup>

Snorri was fostered, however, in another important family, the Oddaverjar. Together with the marriage contracts Snorri arranged for his daughters, whom he married off to various important chieftains, this fosterage contributed to the increase in his wealth and power.<sup>188</sup> Not only did Snorri take part in various power struggles in Iceland, but also in Norway, where he sojourned for some years in the thirteenth-century. He stayed with the Norwegian regents and composed praise poems to the Norwegian sovereigns, while he is best known today for his knowledge of ancient poetry and mythology. Choosing the wrong side in the Norwegian power struggle eventually lead to his death in Iceland, where he was killed by men sent either to kill or to capture him at the king's request.<sup>189</sup> Apart from taking part in politics and travelling

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<sup>185</sup> Stefán Karlsson 1993. Of the auxiliary sources *Ólkoфра saga* and *Laxdala saga* can also be found in Möðruvallabók. Other sagas included in Möðruvallabók but not used in this study are *Finnboga saga*, *Bandamanna saga*, *Kormáks saga*, *Víga-Glums saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga* and *Hallfredar saga*.

<sup>186</sup> This attribution remains speculative. See e.g. Wieselgren 1927; Hallberg 1962; West 1980; Tulinius 2002, 234–237; Tulinius 2004; Ármann Jakobsson 2006. If Snorri did produce the saga as we know it, it is unclear whether he wrote, dictated or commissioned and organised it.

<sup>187</sup> Whaley 1993; Helgi Þorláksson 1993, 615; Tulinius 2002, 234–237.

<sup>188</sup> Whaley 1993. According to Bagerius 2013, 83, this manner of networking became less important as the power of the Norwegian king increased in Iceland.

<sup>189</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 1993; Helgi Þorláksson 1993; Whaley 1993.

widely in the north, Snorri has been known for his literary production. In addition to *Egils saga*, he has been associated with a collection of *konungasögur* (sagas of Norwegian kings), now known as *Heimskringla*, the saga of king Óláfr the Saint (*Óláfs saga Helga*) and the so-called *Prose Edda*, an *ars poetica* filled with myths and quotations of skaldic poetry.<sup>190</sup>

The earliest surviving manuscripts that contain a complete (or almost complete) text of *Egils saga* date from the fourteenth century. There are three main manuscripts in which the saga survives. A slightly defective version can be found in the fourteenth-century vellum manuscript Möðruvallabók, mentioned above.<sup>191</sup> Another almost complete vellum manuscript is that in Wolfenbüttel library in Germany (Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 9.10. 4to, called hereafter the “Wolfenbüttel book”), which dates from the middle of the fourteenth century. The writer of this manuscript is unknown, but he was apparently not familiar with the district where the actions in *Egils saga* take place. The manuscript also contains *Eyrbyggja saga*, which will be introduced below. The manuscript was still in Iceland at the beginning of the seventeenth century, but arrived at Wolfenbüttel library sometime around 1650. It was copied and the copy was in Copenhagen (and thus became part of Árni Magnússon’s collection) at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>192</sup>

The youngest but most complete version of *Egils saga* is in Ketilsbók (AM 453, 4to) which is a paper manuscript dating from the seventeenth century. Ketilsbók was written by Ketill Jörundarson (died 1670), the maternal grandfather of Árni Magnússon. Some of the word forms in this version appear to be older than those in Möðruvallabók, which has often been taken as the main manuscript of the saga. However, fragments of the paragon of Ketilsbók presumably survive in AM 162 A fol, a compilation of manuscript fragments.<sup>193</sup> The oldest of these fragments, θ theta, dates from circa 1240–1260. It stands close to Möðruvallabók and Ketilsbók. Möðruvallabók has, however, shorter versions of the corresponding text passages. Other fragments (ζ zeta, δ delta, γ gamma) date from the end of the thirteenth century or later, like the probable paragon for Ketilsbók, ε epsilon, from around 1390–1410.<sup>194</sup> These manuscripts and fragments have all been used in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition of

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<sup>190</sup> Whaley 1993

<sup>191</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 1993; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 70–72; Nordal 1933, lii–xcix; Stefán Karlsson 1993.

<sup>192</sup> Scott 2003, 43–49; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 70–72; Nordal 1933, lii–xcix.

<sup>193</sup> Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 70–72; Nordal 1933, lii–xcix.

<sup>194</sup> Nordal 1933, lxxxii–lxxxvi, xcv–xcvi. The fragments are part of AM 162 A fol, and named accordingly as AM 162 A *delta* fol and so on. See also at <<http://handrit.is/is/>> and at <<http://www.visindavefur.is/svar.php?id=2260>>, for these fragments.

*Egils saga* that I have employed here, although Möðruvallabók has been used as the main text.

### 5.2.3 *Eyrbyggja saga*

*Eyrbyggja saga* tells of people on the west coast of Iceland, known as Snæfellsnes peninsula. More accurately, it is the saga of the people in Þórsnes, Eyrr and Álptafjörður regions. *Eyrbyggja saga* has survived in three different versions, in four fragmentary vellum manuscripts and several paper manuscripts. The so-called Vatnshyrna manuscript was owned by Jón Hákonarson (1350–ca. 1402) in Víðidalstunga, a rich Icelandic farmer who also owned the Flateyjarbók manuscript that will be introduced below.<sup>195</sup> The original Vatnshyrna manuscript was transported to Copenhagen in 1675, but was lost in the Copenhagen fire in 1728. Paper copies had been made of the text by, for instance, Árni Magnússon and Ásgeir Jónsson, and thus copies of the Vatnshyrna text have survived (e.g. AM 448, 4to; AM 442, 4to). Vatnshyrna was a compilation of *Íslendingasögur*. In addition to *Eyrbyggja saga*, the manuscript also included copies of the following sagas that have been used here as either main or auxiliary sources: *Flóamanna saga*, *Laxdæla saga*, and *Harðar saga*. The Vatnshyrna manuscript as a whole seems to have contained a surprising number of sagas with supernatural motifs.<sup>196</sup>

The Vatnshyrna scribe was presumably Magnús Þórhallsson, who completed his work around 1391–1395. The name Vatnshyrna dates from the seventeenth century and refers to the place where the manuscript was then held, in Stóra Vatnshorn, Haukadalur, in the north-west of Iceland.<sup>197</sup>

Part of another version has survived in a fourteenth-century manuscript in the Wolfenbüttel book mentioned above, which contains the middle part of the saga. Fragments of a related thirteenth-century manuscript, AM 162 E fol, also survive. In addition to this, there are fragments of a third version, the earliest of these in a late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century manuscript, Melabók (AM 445 b, 4to). Melabók also contains copies of *Landnámabók*, *Flóamanna saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga*. The name Melabók refers to a fourteenth-century Melar family whose genealogy is included in the Melabók version of *Landnámabók*. The Melabók manuscript was used by the Icelandic theologian Þórður Jónsson (1609–1670) from Hítardal in the middle of the seventeenth century when he was compiling his version of *Landnámabók*, known as Þórðarbók. After this, it is known that Árni Magnússon received leaves of this

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<sup>195</sup> Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 216–217; McCreesh 1993, 174.

<sup>196</sup> Clunies Ross 1998, 110; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 412–413.

<sup>197</sup> Matthías Þórðarson 1935, lvii; McKinnell 1993; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007: 412–413.



manuscript from Ormur Daðason (1864–1744), a bailiff (i.e. *sýslumaður*), in 1716 and 1724. The manuscript was returned to Iceland in 1976.<sup>198</sup>

As for the dating of *Eyrbyggja saga*, the text goes back to the middle of the thirteenth century, before the year 1262, when the Icelanders came under the rule of the Norwegian king.<sup>199</sup> The writer apparently knew many other *Íslendingasögur* and was interested in supernatural and ancient customs.<sup>200</sup> Although the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* is anonymous like most of the other saga writers, there has been speculation about a clerical origin. It has been suggested that the author was from the Helgafell monastery, although it has been claimed that his knowledge of foreign learning was not of the highest clerical level. The writer was also familiar with the district in which the events of the saga took place, close to Helgafell monastery.<sup>201</sup>

However, it has also been suggested that Snorri Sturluson's nephew Sturla Þórðarson could have been the author.<sup>202</sup> Sturla would have been familiar with the district since the farms (Saurbæ, Hallbjarnarey, Fagurey) that he inhabited while in Iceland were all in the vicinity of Helgafell, while his wife Helga was related to the family of Skarðverjar, which also had connections with Helgafell.<sup>203</sup> Sturla was the illegitimate son of Snorri's brother, born in the north-west of Iceland and raised by his paternal grandmother Guðny Bøðvarsdóttir, presumably a powerful woman who is also named in *Eyrbyggja saga* as the source of some of its oral-based information. Although illegitimacy was considered a disadvantage in medieval Iceland, Sturla was brought up in the manner that made him ready to assume chieftaincy.<sup>204</sup>

The above-mentioned *Íslendinga saga*, which depicts events in Iceland in 1183–1242, has also been ascribed to Sturla. In addition, while he was in exile in Norway he wrote a biographical saga of King Hákon IV, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, and during

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<sup>198</sup> Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 85, 173–174, 268, 365–366; Matthías Þórðarson 1935, lvii–lxii; McCreesh 1993; Scott 2003, 1–27. See also at *Handrit.is* Þórðarbók AM 112 fol <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM02-0112>>; Ormur Daðason <<http://handrit.is/is/biography/view/OrmDad001>>; and AM 445 b 4to <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0445b>>. Last accessed May 2, 2014.

Strictly speaking 'Melabók' refers only to the leaves that contain Landnámabók. The Melabók version of Landnámabók was presumably compiled in western Iceland by Snorri Markússon (died 1313, a descendant of Snorri goði who appears in *Eyrbyggja saga*) or his son Þorsteinn böllótr (died 1353), who was the abbot of the Augustinian monastery established in Helgafell in 1184. Jakob Benediktsson 1968, li, lxxxiii–lxxxiv.

<sup>199</sup> Matthías Þórðarson 1935: lvii–lxii; McCreesh 1993: 174.

<sup>200</sup> McCreesh 1993.

<sup>201</sup> See e.g. McCreesh 1993; Matthías Þórðarson 1935, xlvi–xlix, lv; Scott 2003, 19–27.

<sup>202</sup> Some examples of studies and discussions on Sturla's authorship of *Eyrbyggja saga* can be found in Scott 2003, 21–22; Hallberg 1979; Hallberg 1965a; Heller 1979; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1968. See also Tulinius 2007, 62.

<sup>203</sup> McCreesh 1993. Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, xcvi–cvii.

<sup>204</sup> Ciklamini 1993; Matthías Þórðarson 1935, xlv–xlvi.

his second sojourn another saga of Hákon's son King Magnús Lagabætir (1238–1280), *Magnúss saga lagabætis*. He also is responsible for one of the versions of *Landnámabók*, known as Sturlubók. It is possible that he was the author of other *Íslendingasögur*. Sturla had a good relationship with his uncle Snorri, who contributed to the increase in Sturla's power, and like Snorri Sturla was a historian and a poet as well as a legal expert. Because of political feuds, Sturla had to leave to Norway in 1263. During his exile, as well as the above-mentioned saga of King Hákon, he made revisions to the Icelandic law that he then took to Iceland when he returned in 1271/1272, after which he exercised legal power as a royal official.<sup>205</sup> During his two sojourns in Norway, the second taking place in 1277–1278, Sturla must have had access to the library of Hákon IV. During the reign of Hákon, at the king's instigation, a large number of European romances and Latin literary works were translated into the vernacular.<sup>206</sup> It is thus possible that in Sturla we have a medieval Icelandic author who was not only a talented writer, well versed in ancient poetry and familiar with native story telling traditions, but also familiar with European literature—an issue that has been considered in the analysis of *Eyrbyggja saga*.

I have primarily used the text of *Eyrbyggja saga* that is available in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition series, which is based mainly on the paper copies AM 448 4to and AM 442 4to of the Vatnshyrna manuscript, although the edition takes account of the other versions of the saga. Comparison with other manuscripts available as diplomatic editions, the Wolfenbüttel book, Melabók and the thirteenth-century fragment AM 162 E fol in Forrest S. Scott's (2003) edition shows that the three episodes of posthumous restlessness that have been explored in this study are included in all the manuscripts, although parts of the manuscripts are missing, some including passages belonging to these episodes.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Ciklamini 1993; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 257–258, 365–366.

<sup>206</sup> Ashurst 2011; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 366.

<sup>207</sup> The manuscripts in question are defective; thus the episode discussed in AUTHORITY, the first phase of restlessness of the dead Þórólfr bægifótr, appears only in Melabók and the Wolfenbüttel book (Scott 2003 (ed.), 166–171), whereas the first part of the wonders of Fróðá episode, discussed especially in ROLE OF THE DEAD, appears in Melabók, the Wolfenbüttel book and AM 162 E fol (pp. 228–245), the middle part (pp. 246–256) in Melabók and the Wolfenbüttel book, and the end of the wonders only in the Wolfenbüttel book, pp. 257–261). The second phase of restlessness of Þórólfs bægifótr, discussed in AUTHORITY, is available only in the Wolfenbüttel book, whereas Melabók is defective at this point (pp. 296–305).

#### 5.2.4 *Fóstbræðra saga*

*Fóstbræðra saga* is a story of the sworn brothers, Þorgeirr and Þormóðr. *Fóstbræðra saga* dates back to the beginning of the thirteenth century, perhaps even to the later twelfth century according to some scholars, but survives in three fourteenth-century manuscripts. The earliest is the above-mentioned Hauksbók manuscript (AM 544 4to), written by and for the lawman Haukr Erlendsson. This version, however, lacks the beginning of the saga. Another version survives in the above-mentioned Möðruvallabók, but the *Fóstbræðra saga* text in this codex is defective. Another copy of the saga that represents the same version as in Möðruvallabók can be found in Flateyjarbók (The Book of Flatey, GKS 1005 fol), written by the priests Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson sometime between 1387 and 1390 for the owner of Vatnshyrna, Jón Hákonarson.<sup>208</sup>

Not much is known of the writer of *Fóstbræðra saga*. It has been suggested that he was a learned man, presumably a cleric, who was familiar with other sagas and Latin learning, including medical lore and such texts as William of Malmesbury's description of the Song of Roland. He also knew the district of western Iceland in which most of the action in the saga takes place. The writer has been associated with the Þingeyrar monastery, possibly the place of origin of the texts that were copied in Flateyjarbók (other options include Reynistaðr or the episcopal seat at Hólar). The text in Flateyjarbók may well be closest to the hypothetical 'original' text, as there is evidence that its scribes copied the sagas without adjusting them much.<sup>209</sup>

The history of this Flateyjarbók manuscript, which includes histories of Norwegian kings and tales of contemporary Icelanders and which originally contained 202 folio sheets, is relatively well known. The fifteenth-century owner of the codex, Þorleifur Björnsson of Reykhólar in western Iceland, had 23 sheets added to it. His descendants owned the manuscripts until 1647, when Jón Finnsson from Flatey Island, after whom the codex was named, sent it to the Lutheran bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1605–1675) in Skálholt. The bishop then forwarded the codex to the Danish king, Frederik III (1609–1670, reigned 1648–1670) as a gift, after which the manuscript was situated in the Royal Library in Copenhagen until it was returned to Iceland in 1971.<sup>210</sup>

Not everyone accepts that the Möðruvallabók/Flateyjarbók version of *Fóstbræðra saga* is closest to the supposed original: it has also been characterised as more 'spiritualised' than the Hauksbók version, which is somewhat shorter and, for

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<sup>208</sup> See e.g. Schach 1993; Guðni Jónsson 1943, lxx–lxxvii.

<sup>209</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1943, lxxi–lxxvi; Schach 1993; Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir 1993.

<sup>210</sup> Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir 1993.

this reason considered by some to have been closer to the original.<sup>211</sup> The owner of Hauksbók, Haukr Erlendsson, wrote Hauksbók together with an Icelandic and Norwegian or Faroese scribe at the beginning of the fourteenth century. At that time Haukr resided in Norway, where he held the office of lawman. He died there in 1334. The history of the manuscript is not fully known, but at the beginning of the seventeenth century it was owned by an affluent farmer, whose descendants donated parts of the book to the above-mentioned Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson. The manuscript Árni Magnússon received around 1700 already consisted of the three defective parts that remain today. They are split into three manuscripts, AM 371 4 to, which Haukr wrote himself, AM 544 4to, which contains *Fóstbræðra saga* and is written by another hand, and AM 675 4to.<sup>212</sup>

Besides *Fóstbræðra saga*, Hauksbók also includes other tales and poetry (*Vǫluspá*) originating from Iceland and translated historical and semi-historical works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, including the prophesy of Merlin, theological and philosophical dialogues, medical lore, geographical texts and mathematical treatises. Unlike most other saga manuscripts, Hauksbók was thus an eclectic and substantial personal library.<sup>213</sup> Other saga texts in Hauksbók that Haukr seems to have edited according to his personal needs include a short text of the legendary kings of Uppland (*Af Upplendinga konungum*), a legendary story of the sons of Ragnar Loðbrók (*Ragnarssona Dáttir*) and another *Íslendingasaga*, *Eiríks saga rauða*, which is partly situated in Greenland.<sup>214</sup> These three texts and *Fóstbræðra saga* were presumably important for Haukr personally, since they were regarded as stories of his ancestors—according to them he was descended from the legendary kings of Uppland and the mythic-heroic dragonslayer Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, and had many important Icelandic ancestors as well.<sup>215</sup>

I have used especially the Íslenzk Fornrit edition of the version in Hauksbók, but editions of the other manuscripts available in the Íslenzk Fornrit series have been consulted as well. However, it has to be noted that the eye pain episode in *Fóstbræðra saga* that I have concentrated upon (in EYE PAIN) is similar in all of the three manuscripts discussed above.

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<sup>211</sup> See also Schach 1993.

<sup>212</sup> Gunnar Harðarson & Stefan Karlsson 1993.

<sup>213</sup> Gunnar Harðarson & Stefan Karlsson 1993.

<sup>214</sup> McTurk 1991, 56; Gunnar Harðarson & Stefan Karlsson 1993.

<sup>215</sup> One of the ancestors of Haukr was a woman called Guðríðr who was descended from a freed slave, but who is strongly eulogized in *Eiríks saga*.

### 5.2.5 *Gísla saga Súrssonar*

The saga of the outlaw hero Gísli, *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, has been dated to around 1250.<sup>216</sup> Two versions of the saga exist, the shorter usually being regarded as the more original one, although, once again, not everyone agrees. The shorter version exists in a late fifteenth-century manuscript AM 556a 4to, written by an unknown scribe, presumably in the north-west of Iceland. The scribe also copied into the manuscript two other early fourteenth-century outlaw sagas, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and *Harðar saga*. The manuscript is not particularly decorative, and it has been suggested that it was “intended for domestic use”.<sup>217</sup>

The manuscript is also known as Eggertsbók,<sup>218</sup> after its sixteenth-century owner Eggert Hannesson (1515–ca. 1583). Its later owners included Þorleifur Magnússon (possibly the grandson of Eggert), Gísli Magnússon (c. 1621–1696, a bailiff) and Þórður Steindórsson (c. 1630–1707, a bailiff). It then passed through the hands of someone unknown to Árni Magnússon. The manuscript returned to Iceland in 1978. There is also a later fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century fragment, AM 445c 4to, four of its five sheets containing parts of *Gísla saga*. The scribe is unknown, but two lines on the fifth sheet that contains *Gísla saga* have been ascribed to a priest called Þórður Þórðarson. Árni Magnússon received the manuscript from Magnús Jónsson in 1704, and in 1976 it was returned to Iceland.<sup>219</sup>

The longer version of the saga existed in a fourteenth-century manuscript in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. The manuscript that also contained *Fóstbræðra saga* was among those that the above-mentioned Bishop Brynjólfur sent with Þormóður Torfason to the Danish king in 1662. This manuscript has disappeared, but the text survives in two paper copies, one of which was written in the eighteenth century by Ásgeir Jónsson (AM 149 fol). Another copy that also contains a Latin translation of

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<sup>216</sup> Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 114.

<sup>217</sup> Lethbridge 2012a, 376. See also Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, v; Guðni Jónsson 1943, xliii–xliv; Ahola 2014, 114–118.

<sup>218</sup> The manuscript is nowadays in two parts, but the other part, AM 566b 470, was written by the same scribe as AM 566a 4to. Both are thus considered to be part of Eggertsbók. Lethbridge 2012a, 376.

<sup>219</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, v; Guðni Jónsson 1943, xliii–xliv. See also at *Handrit.is* AM 556a 4to <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0556a>>; AM 445c I 4to <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0445c-I>>. Last accessed March 18, 2014.

For the genealogies, see also *Community Trees* at (Þorleifur Magnússon)

<<https://histfam.familysearch.org//getperson.php?personID=I86027&tree=Iceland>>; Gísli Magnússon

<<https://histfam.familysearch.org//getperson.php?personID=I7991&tree=Iceland>>; Þórður Steindórsson

<<https://histfam.familysearch.org//getperson.php?personID=I64239&tree=Iceland>>. Last accessed March 16, 2014.

the saga was made by an Icelander, Jón Jónsson (Jonas Jonæus), for the Danish historian Peter Frederik Suhm (1728–1798) in 1780 (Ny kgl. sml. 1181 fol).<sup>220</sup>

The two versions differ only slightly: the longer one contains a broader and more elaborate report of the events related to Gísli's family while they still lived in Norway, and contains some fantastic motifs that are more common to the *fornaldarsögur* genre.<sup>221</sup> Otherwise the texts are similar, with only few minor differences in some episodes. In this study, I have used the shorter version as my main source, but I have also consulted the longer version.<sup>222</sup>

The writer of the saga is unknown, but he was apparently familiar with *Egils saga* and *Laxdæla saga* (mentioned below). In *Gísli saga* the cursed weapon called Grásiða has an important role and this same weapon appears in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*.<sup>223</sup> It is thus possible that *Gísli saga* too was somehow linked to the Sturlung family.

Like other *Íslendingasögur*, *Gísli saga* contains skaldic poetry. I have analysed the poetry in MISFORTUNE. In *Gísli saga* most of the poems are attributed to Gísli himself, usually in the last phases of his life. Through poetry Gísli brings out his thoughts and feelings about events and his life as an outlaw in general. Many of the poems relate the contents of the many dreams that Gísli has during his outlawry.<sup>224</sup> Consistent with the functions of Skaldic poetry in other contexts, they also function as proof for the dreams described in the prose and comment on them, or represent Gísli's emotional and intellectual response to them.<sup>225</sup>

Dating the skaldic poetry is difficult; it may be older than the prose text, even perhaps originating from the tenth century when Gísli Súrsson is said to have lived, or the poems may have been composed later, but before the saga was composed. The poetry may have been added to the prose to act as proof of its veracity. Poetry could also have an esthetical function, in that it could create a certain atmosphere or highlight turning points in the saga narrative. However, the poems may also have been composed at the time the saga was compiled.<sup>226</sup> According to the dating made by Peter Foote, the poetry in *Gísli saga* dates from the end of the twelfth century or from

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<sup>220</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1943, xlv–xlv; Kroesen 1993, 227–228; Finnur Jónsson 1929, iii–viii; Loth 1956, v–ix.

<sup>221</sup> Kroesen 1993, 228.

<sup>222</sup> Of the editions, Finnur Jónsson's (1929) and the Íslenzk Fornrit editions take into account both versions, whereas Agnete Loth's (1956) edition follows the shorter version.

<sup>223</sup> Guðni Jónsson 1943, xxxix–xli.

<sup>224</sup> On Gísli's dreams and their role as the narrative element, see e.g. O'Donoghue 2005, 159–169.

<sup>225</sup> See also Lönnroth 2002, 456–457.

<sup>226</sup> On the role of poetry in *Íslendingasögur* and in medieval Iceland, see Meulengracht Sørensen 2001, 173–189. See also O'Donoghue 2005, 1–77 and Gade 2001, 51.

the beginning of the thirteenth. E. O. Gabriel Turville-Petre has suggested that the poetry was written by the thirteenth-century author of the saga.<sup>227</sup> The poetry cannot, therefore, be regarded as an authentic description by an ‘eye witness’, but it may be a text that the author used, edited or composed for his own purposes.

### 5.3 Other Contemporary Sources

In my analysis I have also used as auxiliary sources other contemporary texts that were known in Iceland during the period under scrutiny here. For the sake of my intertextual analysis, especially other *Íslendingasögur* with similar motifs to those discussed in my study—eye pain, restless dead and *ógæfjumenn*—have been considered. I will introduce the *Íslendingasögur* that I have used to assist my analysis briefly at this point. In all cases, standardised editions for scholarly purposes have been used.

*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* has contributed to my study of eye pain. It is one of the post-classical sagas that date from the fourteenth century, and like most of this group it includes many folklore motifs. The story also has some resemblances to such stories as *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—the influence of which cannot be completely excluded. *Bárðar saga* has been connected to Haukr Erlendsson, the writer and owner of the above-mentioned Hauksbók manuscript, and his sons. The saga may have been written in the Helgafell monastery in Iceland, which the author must have known.<sup>228</sup> Despite this connection to Haukr, however, it has been shown that the genealogical information given at the beginning of *Bárðar saga* is based on the Sturlubók version of *Landnámabók*, written by Sturla Þórðarson sometime around 1275–1280, which cannot be found in the Hauksbók version of *Landnámabók*. This omission would be somewhat surprising if Haukr and his sons had a strong connection to this particular saga. As mentioned earlier, connection with Helgafell monastery could also point to Sturla.<sup>229</sup> The saga survives in five manuscripts fragments that date from the late fourteenth or fifteenth century (AM 564a 4to<sup>230</sup>; AM 162 fol<sup>231</sup>; AM 489 4to<sup>232</sup>; AM 551a 4to<sup>233</sup>) and appears in several contexts, either with

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<sup>227</sup> On their views, see Meulengracht Sørensen 2001,188.

<sup>228</sup> Pulsiano 1993, 35; Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, xcix–cvii.

<sup>229</sup> Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, xcvi–cvii.

<sup>230</sup> The manuscript (ca. 1390–1425) contains also the *Íslendingasögur Þórðar saga breðu*, *Bergþúa þátr*, *Kumlþúa þátr*, *Draumur Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*, *Viga-Glúms saga* and *Harðar saga* which all contain episodes with supernatural beings. <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0564a>>. Last accessed March 23, 2014.

<sup>231</sup> Ca. 1400–1450 <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM02-0162H>>. Last accessed March 23, 2014.

<sup>232</sup> Written ca. 1450, the manuscript also contains a *riddarasaga*, *Kirialax saga*, and has presumably contained other *riddarasögur* as well.

other *Íslendingasögur* or with more *Märchen*-like *riddarasögur*.<sup>234</sup> There are also several later paper copies of the saga.<sup>235</sup> Four of the five fragments and the most important paper copies have been used in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition of the saga that I have used here.

*Bjarnar saga Híttdalakappa* has been regarded as one of the earliest *Íslendingasögur* and is among the poets' sagas which have contributed to my study of the eye pain motif. The saga was presumably written before 1230 in western Iceland, probably in Hítardalr. The author has been connected to the Þingeyrar monastery and the saga shows traces of hagiographical learning. There is a late fourteenth-century vellum fragment (AM 162 F fol) that also contains part of another poet's saga (*Kormáks saga*), but otherwise the saga has survived only in incomplete paper copies. The main text employed in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition of the saga has been AM 551 d 4to, a paper manuscript that Árni Magnússon received from Þormóðr Torfason. No information about the seventeenth-century scribe has survived. Another important copy used in the edition is the seventeenth-century copy (AM 488 4to) written by Ásgeir Jónsson of the above-mentioned AM 551 and the so-called *Bæjarbók á Rauðasandi* (AM 73 b fol, ca. 1370–1390). Only four sheets of *Bæjarbók* survive today, but in addition to *Bjarnar saga* it has also contained passages of the above-mentioned *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Laxdæla saga*, which will be introduced below.<sup>236</sup>

*Eiríks saga rauða* was written in western Iceland sometime after 1264. It describes expeditions to Greenland and Vinland and has contributed to my study of the restless dead motif. The restless dead episode in the saga (discussed in DISTURBANCES) is situated in Greenland, but the story resembles that of the hauntings in *Eyrbyggja saga*. The oldest versions of *Eiríks saga* survive in the fifteenth-century *Skálholtsbók* (AM 557 4to), which contains sagas from various genres (*Íslendingasögur*, *konungasögur*, *riddarasögur*), and in the above-mentioned *Hauksbók*,

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<<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0489-I-II>>. Last accessed March 23, 2014.

<sup>233</sup> The manuscript (ca. 1490–1510) also contains other incomplete *Íslendingasögur*, *Víglundar saga* and *Grettis saga*. <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0551a>>. Last accessed March 23, 2014.

<sup>234</sup> On these "Chivalric sagas", see Kalinke 1993b; Barnes 1993.

<sup>235</sup> Pulsiano 1993, 35.

<sup>236</sup> Finlay 1993; Sigurður Nordal 1938, lxiii–lxiv, xcv–xcvii; see also AM 162 F fol

<<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM02-0162F>>; AM 551 d 4to

<<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0551d-alfa>>; AM 73 b fol

<<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/da/AM02-073b>>. Last accessed March 23, 2014.



which are both followed in the saga's Íslenzk Fornrit edition. Haukr himself was a descendant of the people who are portrayed in *Eiríks saga*.<sup>237</sup>

*Flóamanna saga* dates back to the years 1290–1350 and is likewise among the post-classical sagas. It too has contributed to my study of the restless dead. The saga focuses on Þorgils Örrabeinsstjúpr and his life in Iceland, as well as on his trips to Norway and Greenland, in both of which he encounters restless dead. The saga compiler was presumably a cleric from southern Iceland, although some scholars have suggested a link with Haukr Erlendsson, whose ancestor Þorgils was. The saga was influenced by romance and hagiographical literature, as well as the Bible and the *Dialogues* of St Gregory. The writer relied on the Sturlubók version of the *Landnámabók*, and presumably knew *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* well. The saga survives in two versions, which are both available in one Íslenzk Fornrit edition. When possible, in my study I have followed the edition of a seventeenth-century paper copy (AM 515 4to) of the longer and more original version of *Flóamanna saga*. When used, this is always indicated in the footnote as “AM 515 4to”. Paper copies and fragments of a shorter and more complete version survive, and editions of them have been used when lacunae exist in the longer version of the saga.<sup>238</sup> The Greenland ghost story was probably influenced by the story of the wonders of Fróðá in *Eyrbyggja saga*.<sup>239</sup>

*Laxdæla saga* has also been used to assist in my study of the restless dead. It was compiled in the middle of the thirteenth century and the oldest surviving fragments of the saga date to the last quarter of that century. The writer of the saga may have been a member of the Sturlung family, Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld, or possibly a female scribe who was influenced by European romance literature. *Laxdæla saga* survives in two versions. The earliest fragments of the saga date to the end of the thirteenth century (e.g. AM 162 D2 fol, AM 162 D1 fol). The longer version, followed here, is found in the above-mentioned Möðruvallabók and in a copy of the Vatnshyrna manuscript, of which a late seventeenth-century paper copy IB 225 4to, written by Ásgeir Jónsson, is used in the Íslenzk Fornrit series. Other incomplete texts and paper copies of a shorter version survive, as well as excerpts in other manuscripts (e.g. Flateyjarbók).<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> On *Eiríks saga*, see Kjartan G. Ottósson 1983, 39–40; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 76–77 and 164; Matthías Þórðarson 1935, lxxvii–lxxxv; Wahlgren 1993. See also AM 557 4to <<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0557>>. Last accessed March 23, 2014.

<sup>238</sup> Björn Sigfússon 1959; Heizmann 1993a; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 94–95; Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, cxxxiv–clxvii.

<sup>239</sup> On this, see Kjartan G. Ottósson 1983, 40.

<sup>240</sup> Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 244–245; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, lxxvi–lxxx; Stefán Karlsson 1993; Sverrir Tómasson 1993; Nordal 2012. See also AM 162 D2 fol

*Ljósvetninga saga*, which contributes to my study of the eye pain motif, was presumably written around 1260, but the surviving manuscripts are somewhat later. Nothing is known of the writer of *Ljósvetninga saga*, but the saga has been associated with the presumable descendants of the former *Ljósvetningar* family in eastern Iceland. An almost complete version of the saga is available in vellum AM 561 4to (ca. 1400), which contains other *Íslendingasögur* (*Þorskfirðinga saga*, *Reykdale saga*). A slightly more extensive version is found in a fifteenth-century vellum codex AM 162 c fol, written by a certain Óláfr Loptsson, which was later transmitted in over thirty paper copies. This codex also contains several *Íslendingasögur* (*Vopnfirðinga saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Þorsteins saga stangarhöggis*) and a *riddarasaga* (*Sálus saga ok Nikanórs*). The more extensive version contains several shorter tales that have been assessed as later additions, presumably from the end of the thirteenth century. Both versions have been followed in the *Íslenzk Fornrit* edition of the saga.<sup>241</sup>

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<<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM02-0162D-02>>; AM 162 D1 fol

<<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM02-0162D-01>>. Last accessed March 23, 2014.

<sup>241</sup> Magerøy 1993; Björn Sigfússon 1940, xlii–lx. See also AM 561 4to

<<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0561>>; AM 162 C fol

<<http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM02-0162C>>. Last accessed March 23, 2014.

## 6 Earlier Research

### 6.1 The Interdisciplinary Nature of Saga Studies

In this chapter, I will first introduce earlier research done on medieval saga emotions and then I will introduce earlier studies on the restless dead, on which I have chosen to concentrate to explore the possible alternative emotion discourses in saga literature. Additionally, I will indicate how my own study will augment the earlier research.

At this point it is important to note that saga studies is a broad field of research which includes different disciplines, such as Philology, Anthropology, Folklore studies, Literature studies and History, and involves interdisciplinary research. For this reason, I have taken into consideration research done in various disciplines, not merely in history. Moreover, in the history of saga studies the *Íslendingasögur* have been used as sources in various ways. In the early twentieth century *Íslendingasögur* were still often believed to reflect the time period they describe, around 870–1030. In modern saga research it is usually assumed that *Íslendingasögur* reflect the reality of the time when these sagas were written, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland. In addition, the texts are assumed to contain Braudelian long-term layers which may reveal pre-Christian attitudes that continued to exist at the time of saga writing.

### 6.2 The History of Saga Emotions

Earlier research on saga emotions has concentrated on the motivation of saga characters, following the example of William Ian Miller, as I have mentioned above. Miller has concentrated on emotion words in sagas, but also on somatic emotions. He has interpreted saga emotions by examining both the dialogue and the actions of the protagonists, mainly in the light of the blood feud mentality and heroic ethics which still prevailed in thirteenth-century Iceland.<sup>242</sup> Consequently, Miller has defined the culture portrayed in *Íslendingasögur* as a culture of honour, shame and envy, as a form of contrast to the so-called guilt culture, whose birth Miller ascribes to the internalization of the Christian conception of sin. Miller has questioned the existence of internalised guilt in the reality of the *Íslendingasögur*, thus leaving the possibility of emotions of moral responsibility in saga culture out of the discussion.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Miller 1992, 93. The blood feud tradition was banished after Iceland had submitted under the rule of the Norwegian king, after 1262.

<sup>243</sup> Miller 1992; Miller 1993.

Theodore M. Andersson has criticised the definition of saga culture as a culture of honour; while not denying the importance of honour, he rejects its dominant role. He has pointed out that there were various emotions which were culturally significant and which motivated people and steered their behaviour.<sup>244</sup> Thomas Bredsdorff has discussed emotions as executive forces in sagas, and has suggested that striving for power as well as erotic instincts constitute the dominant individual motives in most of the sagas.<sup>245</sup>

In my study I will challenge the view that emotions of moral responsibility did not exist in saga culture. The perspective in earlier studies has often been that of the researcher's own culture. Consequently, medieval Icelandic emotions which had no direct and unequivocal correspondence in the modern context have not been explored and culturally specific features of emotion concepts and concepts with emotional connotations have not been the main interest in these studies. This is a gap that I have intended to fill in my own study, as I have examined the concept of misfortune, *ógæfa*.

In earlier studies, *ógæfa* has usually been regarded as a state of affairs and not as a state of mind. *Ógæfa* has been connected to a person's fate, which could be affected by witchcraft or caused by the intervention of the pagan gods. *Ógæfa* has also been defined as part of the person's permanent nature. *Ógæfa* could imply lack of happiness, but it also referred to a destiny that the individual had freely chosen: either his goals had been wrong or he had failed to achieve the right ones. Those people who committed socially disapproved acts (*nidingsverk*) could also become *ógæfumenn*. *Ógæfa* has also been ascribed Christian connotations, suggesting that men of misfortune, *ógæfumenn*, were considered 'sinful men'.<sup>246</sup> In this study, I have not challenged these definitions of the concept, but I have broadened the definition by examining the motivation behind the words and actions of the *ógæfumenn* in *Íslendingasögur*, and the relationship of *ógæfa* with possible emotions of moral responsibility.

Earlier research has also highlighted the specific nature of medieval Icelandic emotion culture and the omission of emotion discourses. Alison Finlay has studied differences in medieval European and West Scandinavian representations of emotions in literature. She has compared the (originally Celtic) Anglo-Norman romance of Tristan and Isolde with its Old Norse-Icelandic translation *Tristams saga ok Ísöndar*, which was produced at the Norwegian court at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

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<sup>244</sup> Andersson 1989.

<sup>245</sup> Bredsdorff 2001.

<sup>246</sup> Hallberg 1973; Hermann Pálsson 1974; Hermann Pálsson 1975; Lönnroth 1965; Sejbjerg Sommer 2007.

Finlay has shown that there were certain differences between the two literary works in how emotions and the inner state were portrayed. The original poem is subtle in its portrayal of emotions and uses many expressions associated with sexual pleasure. The Old Norse-Icelandic prose translation, labelled a *riddarasaga* by modern scholars, follows the original poem faithfully, but falls silent as far as sexual pleasure is concerned. The translation also emphasises, unlike the original version, the negative aspects of love. Finlay has suggested that the translation shares features typical to native sagas, such as the *Íslendingasögur*. In *Íslendingasögur*, events associated with sexuality were not explicitly mentioned, but various euphemisms were used.<sup>247</sup>

Moreover, in his studies Daniel Sävborg has drawn attention to the differences between diverse saga genres. He has shown that ‘courtly love’ was genre-dependent: the first *riddarasögur* produced in Iceland, which had the translated *riddarasögur* as their models, represented love in a more positive way than other saga genres.<sup>248</sup> Both Finlay’s and Sävborg’s studies have thus shown that as far as love is concerned, there was a limited or restricted variety and availability of emotion discourses in the *Íslendingasögur*. In light of this, it is probable that other emotion discourses would be missing as well—or perhaps that they existed, but were not immediately visible to the modern eye. In my study, I will attempt to fill this gap in research by establishing whether there were alternative ways to represent emotions in saga literature.

In addition, folk theories of emotion have not been hypothesized on or discussed in earlier studies, and this too is something I have addressed in my study.

### 6.3 Studies on Saga Revenants

Earlier studies of reanimated dead in *Íslendingasögur* have concentrated especially on the examination of the restless dead as demonstrations of medieval and Viking Age beliefs.<sup>249</sup> Manifestations of beliefs according to which certain dead individuals were expected to return or harm the living have also been attested in archaeological evidence of burial practices and grave goods.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> E.g. *kvámur*, i.e. visits, or *tal*, i.e. conversations. Finlay 2004, 206 and 211–216. On emotions and sexuality in sagas, and the impossibility of expressing emotions related to love, see also e.g. Jochens 1992 (especially on the *mansöngur* tradition); Mazo Karras 1992, 290.

<sup>248</sup> Sävborg 2003; Sävborg 2007.

<sup>249</sup> Dupois 1999; Ellis 1977; Ellis Davidson 1981; Chadwick 1946a, 1946b. For the dead in Eddic poetry, see e.g. McKinnell 2007.

<sup>250</sup> See e.g. Gardela 2011, 2013a, 2013b.

The possible foreign (especially Christian) influences behind the restless dead motif in literature,<sup>251</sup> and links to insular (Celtic and Anglo-Saxon) tradition have also been explored.<sup>252</sup> The studies suggest that the corporeality of reanimated dead in sagas was not merely an Icelandic speciality, but can be found also in twelfth-century British sources and Germanic texts, such as those of Caesarius von Heisterbach (ca. 1180–ca. 1240) and William of Newburgh (ca. 1136–ca. 1198).<sup>253</sup> No direct influences from specific texts can be shown, but cultural contacts between Scandinavia, the British Isles and rest of Europe may have contributed to the distribution of story motifs.

In addition, Ármann Jakobsson has studied in some depth the words for reanimated dead in Old Norse-Icelandic, with special emphasis on the word *drangr*. He has outlined the most common characteristics of reanimated dead in the *Íslendingasögur*, showing that there are similarities between such categories of supernatural beings as reanimated dead and trolls (*tröll*). He has also emphasised the role of reanimated dead in *Íslendingasögur* as active agents, and accordingly has characterized them as selfish in nature. In addition, he has suggested that there is similarity between the medieval Icelandic restless dead and the vampires of eastern European tradition.<sup>254</sup>

Concerning the roles and functions of the restless dead in saga narratives, it has been shown that the dead could return and attempt to correct injustices that the living had failed to rectify, or the deceased could assist their descendants.<sup>255</sup> It has also been proposed that the role of the dead—as well as other monsters—in sagas was to serve as a counterpart for the monster-slaying hero and as part of an initiation process through which the saga hero increases his valour and fame.<sup>256</sup>

In past research, special emphasis has also been given to specific sagas, such as the *Eyrbyggja saga*, which has been one of the main sources in this study, although approached from a different perspective. It has been pointed out that the *Fróðárundur* ghost episode in *Eyrbyggja saga* shares similar motifs with later Hebridean folklore, and has influenced similar scenes in other sagas, such as *Flómannasaga*, *Grænlandingsaga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*.<sup>257</sup>

Torfi Tulinius and Russell Poole have analysed reanimated dead episodes in a similar way to what I have done here, but their emphasis is on the reanimated dead Glámr in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, which has not been investigated in this study. Tulinius has explored the subjective experience of the hero, Grettir, as he encounters

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<sup>251</sup> Kjørtan G. Ottósson 1983; Martin 2005; Schmitt 1998, 17–24; Tulinius 1999.

<sup>252</sup> Simpson 2003.

<sup>253</sup> Martin 2005; Simpson 2003.

<sup>254</sup> Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 2010, 2011.

<sup>255</sup> Byock 1982, 133; Lindow 1995; Vésteinn Ólason 2003; Martin 2005.

<sup>256</sup> Hume 1980.

<sup>257</sup> Ellis Davidson 1981; Kjørtan G. Ottósson 1983; Martin 2005.

the notorious restless corpse Glámr. He has interpreted the event as Grettir's symbolic encounter with his own father and as a fight between divine and diabolic forces over his soul. Poole, whose study does not concentrate merely on the reanimated dead episodes and the supernatural in this saga, but on the life of Grettir in general, also takes the mythical context into account. He has discussed Grettir's lack of homosocial bonds, and how his encounter with the reanimated dead Glámr is related to this experience.<sup>258</sup>

However, the analyses made by Tulinius and Poole have a psychoanalytical aspect—in fact, Tulinius explicitly names his “a Freudian and Lacanian interpretation”. Although Tulinius and Poole recognise the importance of historical contextualisation they have tacitly accepted that medieval Icelanders would have interpreted the reanimated dead as symbols of paternal authority that would be recognised by modern (western) people, and in terms that occasionally closely resemble modern psychoanalytical analysis. As I have emphasised above, I will take account of the cultural and historical presuppositions in this study.

The studies made by John Lindow and Daniel Sävborg have also been relevant for my study. They have both scrutinized the actual experience of encountering the reanimated dead, and their studies have not been taken into account in the ponderings of Tulinius and Poole. Lindow and Sävborg have shown that the reanimated dead in sagas are usually encountered in conditions where the vision of the observer is impaired, for instance in darkness or fog.<sup>259</sup> Moreover, Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir has suggested that seeing restless dead was categorised as a wonder, *undur*, in the context of the *Íslendingasögur*. Dreams, however, were considered real,<sup>260</sup> suggesting that reanimated dead could also reserve a space outside the ‘real’. This notion has been further explored in this research.

Important to my analysis is also the notion that ancestors only appear as corporeal restless dead in sources such as the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. The events in these saga genres are situated in the distant past, a time when it was seemingly natural to encounter reanimated dead. In the thirteenth-century reality, however, it was unlikely that people would encounter revenants in their physical environment. The *samtíðarsögur*, which tell of events closer to the time of writing, to which eyewitnesses could still be alive, did not include restless corpses harassing the living. Only a few ancestors or other remarkable dead people appeared to the living, and then only in dreams.

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<sup>258</sup> Tulinius 1999; Poole 2004.

<sup>259</sup> Lindow 1986; Sävborg 2009.

<sup>260</sup> Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir-Yershova 2006. See also Tulinius 1999.

Earlier studies suggest not only that the restless dead were ‘real’ to the thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Icelanders, but also sometimes more than that. In order to appear the reanimated dead required a setting in the distant past and in suitable light or weather conditions which impaired the vision of the perceiver. These observations have not been given proper attention in saga studies, something I attempt to rectify in this study.



## 7 Results and Discussion

### 7.1 Emotions of Moral Responsibility in Medieval Iceland

In this chapter I discuss words, concepts and motifs in medieval Icelandic literature which do not appear to refer to emotion-related states, but nevertheless had emotional connotations. As indicated by the aims of this study, I will concentrate on the representation of emotions of moral responsibility.

#### 7.1.1 Medieval Iceland as a Culture of Guilt and Gratitude

The precondition for guilt is a person's recognition of his or her deeds as 'bad'<sup>261</sup>; a realisation that he or she has transgressed norms and caused harm to others. Whether medieval Icelanders would have felt guilt is questionable, as their culture has been categorised as one of emotions of status rather than emotions of moral responsibility<sup>262</sup>—that is as one of 'shame culture' instead of 'guilt culture'.<sup>263</sup> Emotions of moral responsibility like guilt have often been associated with the Christian concept of sin. That earlier research has sometimes assessed the *Íslendingasögur* as sources that give reliable information about the era that they purport to describe rather than reflecting the reality of the time period when the texts were written naturally distorts this view. Still, it is probable that even in the early days of Christianity in Iceland, and conceivably before that, guilt-like emotions were part of

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<sup>261</sup> With 'bad' I imply acts that were considered harmful to the person's own community. The moral code, then, would be imposed by other people, not by a deity.

<sup>262</sup> 'Emotions of moral responsibility' is a concept used in this study to distinguish between shame and guilt, which are usually labelled as self-conscious emotions, i.e. they imply awareness of the self and of reactions of others towards us. Although shame can elicit a moral sense of social responsibility (and can produce conscience if one is being seen to do a bad deed), guilt is related to moral responsibility and awareness of moral authority and judgment. Presumably for this reason, guilt has also been strongly associated with Christian culture. Here the intention is not to use the concept to emphasize the dichotomy between Christian and pagan in medieval Icelandic society, but to accentuate the difference between such self-conscious emotions as shame and guilt.

<sup>263</sup> The definition 'shame culture' refers to the pivotal role of shame and honour in medieval Icelandic culture that has been discussed very thoroughly in earlier research. The tendency to categorise medieval Iceland as a culture of (shame and) honour has, however, also been criticized. See e.g. Andersson 1989; Miller 1990; Miller 1993; Meulengracht Sørensen 1993; Meulengracht Sørensen 2000, 23; Pakis 2005. For a discussion of shame and guilt as a basis for cultural distinction and a critique of this division, see Bedford & Hwang 2003, 134–138, 140–141; Benedict 1946; Bierbrauer 1992, 191–192; Dodds 1951; Eid & Diener 2001, 871 and 879; Gilbert 2003, 1206; Konstan 2003, 1033; Piers & Singer 1971; Tangney 1998, 2 and 4–8; Tangney & Dearing 2002; Tangney, et al. 1996, 1257, 1260, 1263–1265; Taylor 1985, 85–86.

the medieval Icelandic emotional repertoire, especially as the importance of family ties and relatives as well as social networks was recognised in Icelandic culture, and attested frequently in the social dramas of the *Íslendingasögur*.

Although legal and administrative power was eventually centralised in the hands of the Norwegian king and his men after 1262 the tendency to rely on one's kinsmen and allies and to sustain friendships in various ways that were based on the principles of reciprocity need not have changed dramatically, or at least not immediately. Even though allies among relatives were no longer a political necessity,<sup>264</sup> it seems likely that on a peripheral island with a northern climate the help of neighbours and kinsmen, that is social networks, retained an important role long after the period under discussion in my own work, despite changes in the governmental structure.

The functioning of these networks, as well as the political networks before 1262, was to a great extent based on the principles of gratitude that involved reciprocity. According to these principles, kinship as well as voluntarily made bonds such as blood-brotherhood and marriage were binding and obligated a certain kind of behaviour in order to meet the expectations of the collaborative party. Favours, services and gifts, both deeds and objects, necessitated reciprocity. It is precisely this kind of culture of gratitude that has been regarded as the predecessor of the culture of guilt—a notion that says more about our own wish to categorize different historical eras and cultures as Christian or non-Christian. The first-mentioned can always, with good reason, be associated with feelings of guilt. Accordingly, Christian cultures have often been categorised as cultures of guilt, even though Christianity has not been shown to be a prerequisite for the existence or development of guilt-related phenomena such as conscience.<sup>265</sup>

The departure point of my study is that the *Íslendingasögur* reflect the culture of the moment when the texts were written, rather than the culture that the texts depict. In this culture it was still typical to value the principles of gratitude and reciprocity, even though it had been nominally Christian for over two hundred years. I have argued in MISFORTUNE that transgressors of these cultural values could, as they recognised the wrongness of their deeds, experience emotions that corresponded to the modern feeling of guilt. The archaic rather than Christian concept of *óþáfa*, misfortune, had emotional connotations and thus suggested that an *óþáfumaðr*, man of misfortune, experienced emotions that were similar to modern guilt. In EYE PAIN I

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<sup>264</sup> See e.g. Bagerius 2013.

<sup>265</sup> Bierbrauer 1992, 191–192; Eid & Diener 2001, 871 and 879.

have argued that eye pain was a motif through which guilt-like feelings could be directly represented in sagas.<sup>266</sup>

### 7.1.2 *Ógæfa* Misfortune as a Social and Moral Concept

In both MISFORTUNE and EYE PAIN I studied the emotional aspects of *ógæfa* and eye pain by examining the motivation behind the actions of the saga protagonists. In MISFORTUNE I showed that the experience of *ógæfa* was a mixture of diverse emotional states and states of affairs. An *ógæfumaðr* would have conflicts with close relatives, especially the male kinsmen, and people that were significant to him. Such a man of misfortune would not receive approval or blessing for his actions and deeds from these people, but was excluded from his own social group as a transgressor of the community's norms. As a person who was marginalised he could not receive assistance from the groups that had otherwise been bound to him, and as a consequence of this social marginalization both his life and psychophysical wellbeing were threatened.

In the medieval Icelandic context *ógæfa* was naturally part of an individual's fate, and in that sense a condition that was caused by intrusions of the supernatural into his life. The experience of *ógæfa* did not refer only to a short-term emotional state. Instead *ógæfa* was a state or condition that consisted of diverse kinds of emotional and other experiences that continued for a long time (presumably until death if the exclusion lasted that long). Its long-term nature, however, does not indicate that an *ógæfumaðr* experienced continuous guilt and hopelessness. Instead, he could undoubtedly experience emotions of various kinds and occasionally be free of guilt, as I suggest in my discussion in MISFORTUNE. Moreover, *ógæfa* was a concept that not only revealed something of the inner state of an *ógæfumaðr* but also the perspective of others: how they interpreted the condition of a person who had transgressed norms and lost their social and material support—and who had recognised that what he had done was considered bad.

The question remains as to whether guilt-like feelings were associated with *ógæfa* by the time that the *Íslendingasögur* were written over two hundred years after the Conversion, as Christianity achieved an increasingly strong hold in medieval Iceland. The new religion required recognition of guilt as it vigorously emphasised the importance of penitence in the process of atonement for one's sins. As a consequence

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<sup>266</sup> According to Ásdís Egilsdóttir (forthcoming) the eye pain and the threat of losing one's eyes that I have discussed in EYE PAIN could be interpreted in the light of the works of (the probably French) Andreas Capellanus as a threat of losing one's ability to love. However, this may have been an interpretation shared only by a few of the medieval Icelandic elite who were familiar with Andreas Capellanus' texts.

of the decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, confession once a year had become obligatory for every Christian. According to some historians,<sup>267</sup> the individualisation of Christian salvation had its roots in this decision, which made everyone responsible for their own sins. The decree was adopted in Norwegian church law in 1268,<sup>268</sup> and since Icelanders had come under the rule of the Norwegian king in 1262 there is no reason to doubt that they too adopted it in the following years.<sup>269</sup>

It cannot be excluded that guilt in this sense merged with the concept of *ógæfa* during the early Christian period. In my opinion, however, *ógæfa* was not used in the sagas that I discussed in MISFORTUNE (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, *Gísla saga*) to depict a ‘sinful man’ as such. As I have shown, the committing of certain deeds of a sinful or socially disruptive nature did not in itself make a man an *ógæfumaðr*—this label was given because he had a certain character and a tendency towards certain actions, and also because those actions induced negative or disapproving reactions and attitudes from close relatives and other significant people. *Ógæfa* required conscience, as the *ógæfumaðr* cognized the mental states (and thus the disapproval) of others he respected, took them into consideration,<sup>270</sup> and recognized his own responsibility.

The association of *ógæfa* with sin is further diminished when the opposite concept, that of *gæfumaðr*, a lucky man, is examined. *Gæfumaðr* appears not merely to have indicated a person without sin, but a person who had made a pilgrimage (usually to Rome).<sup>271</sup> Apparently such people were considered ‘sinless’ by contemporaries, as a consequence of the absolution that they received in Rome, but I also consider it likely that such people were thought of as *blessed*, in the sense that they had managed to complete an especially physically demanding trip or other deed that brought him or her the *gæfa*. They retained their social networks and the approval and acceptance of society.

The enthusiasm at having seen Rome and numerous other things and met many people during his or her long journey, together with the probable joy and relief of the return to Iceland, was perhaps reflected in the person’s outward appearance. The experience of the pilgrimage may have made them observe people and life from a new perspective and perhaps helped them in their everyday tasks as they may have

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<sup>267</sup> See e.g. Le Goff 1980, 112–121.

<sup>268</sup> Nedkvitne 2004, 160–165.

<sup>269</sup> Studies in other saga genres such as the *fornaldarsögur* have also shown that personal change became a central theme in some later sagas, for instance in *Örvar-Odds saga*. This theme represents a contrast with the common mentality in sagas, in which the human personality was permanent and unchanging. Kleivane 2009.

<sup>270</sup> On social emotions see Bennett et al. 2009.

<sup>271</sup> See e.g. *Auðunnar þáttur vestfirzka*.

acquired special skills during their trip. Moreover, surviving the ordeals of their journey would almost certainly have increased their self-confidence. As now, in the medieval context we may not underestimate the value of life experience. Apparently such people were also, unlike the men on misfortune,<sup>272</sup> explicitly respected and shown consideration and admiration, which could only influence their self-image and show in their general demeanour. Given the combination of all these factors, it is not surprising that a concept indicating great luck was used to depict them.

The experience of *gæfa* has not been explored here, but the connection of this concept with the medieval Icelandic reality outlined above should discourage any attempt to view it as simply a ‘Christian’ or simply a ‘pagan’ ideological concept. This applies to *ógæfa* also, as, just as *gæfa* could imply blessing, so *ógæfa* indicated *lack of blessing*. I suggest in MISFORTUNE that *ógæfa* was not about the individual’s relationship with any deity (Christian or pagan), but about his or her relationship with others who had significance in his life and his place in the social environment. The authority that imposed guilt was thus worldly (i.e. social) and not celestial.<sup>273</sup> Kinsmen, rather than the heavenly God, would cause an upspring of guilt for the violator of the principles of reciprocity and gratitude.

The non-analogousness of *ógæfa* with the concept of sin is further suggested by other evidence. The main manuscript that is used for *Gísla saga* in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition that I have employed in my study, the late fifteenth-century Eggertsbók, also contains *Harðar saga Grímkelssonar*<sup>274</sup> and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*<sup>275</sup>. Both, like *Gísla saga*, are sagas of outlawed men and their protagonists are suggested to be *ógæfumenn*.<sup>276</sup> All three sagas employ *gæfa* and its derivatives frequently,<sup>277</sup> as if the

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<sup>272</sup> That sagas of these men of misfortune exist naturally implies that they were respected by their descendants who wished sagas to be written about them. However, this does not indicate that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelanders were not aware of the social and emotional consequences that committing deeds similar to those of *ógæfumenn* and losing relatives’ support caused.

<sup>273</sup> In this connection, ‘supernatural’ (e.g. ghosts) is not included in the same category as (Christian) God. Instead, ‘supernatural’ is here considered ‘otherworldly’ that was not clearly separated from the ‘worldly’ and the ‘social’.

<sup>274</sup> On *Harðar saga*, see Faulkes 1993.

<sup>275</sup> On *Grettis saga*, see Cook 1993. On the late (fifteenth-century) dating of *Grettis saga*, see also Heslop 2006.

<sup>276</sup> The Íslenzk Fornrit edition of *Harðar saga* draws on Eggertsbók. Although the edition of *Grettis saga* in ÍF draws mainly on AM 551 a 4to, the lacunae are supplemented with the text in Eggertsbók which, according to Guðni Jónsson (1936, lxxvi), is closest to AM 551 a 4 to. Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, lxxvii; Guðni Jónsson 1943, xlii; Guðni Jónsson 1936, lxxvi. On Eggertsbók, see also Lethbridge 2012a; Lethbridge 2012b; Ahola 2014, 114–118. Unfortunately I have not been able to study the possible differences between AM 551 a 4 to and the Eggertsbók texts of *Grettis saga*, if there are any.

<sup>277</sup> Compare, however, *Hallsfredar saga*, 157, 163, 166, where *gipta* is predominantly used.

concept had been of great importance to the late fifteenth-century scribe of Eggertsbók.<sup>278</sup> Nothing is known of the copyist, but apparently he or she had no compunction to emphasise the sins of the *ógæfumenn*, as some modern interpretations of *ógæfa* would lead us to expect: words for sinful used in several ecclesiastical texts—and therefore presumably known to the scribe—such as *syndigr*, *syndfullr* or *syndsamligr*, are not utilized.

These words appear to be of Christian import, and the lack of them in the above-mentioned sagas may be an indication that although a late manuscript, the texts in Eggertsbók had remained largely unchanged from the time when they were first compiled sometime in the thirteenth- or early fourteenth-centuries. However, it is also possible that the fifteenth-century scribe was unwilling to use ‘ecclesiastical’ concepts in such secular texts as the *Íslendingasögur*, or, as I would suggest, that ‘man of misfortune’ and ‘sinful man’ were not thought to be synonymous. Being sinful did not imply that a person had recognised his or her ill deeds, felt guilt and repented the sinful exploit, or that he or she had lost kinsmen’s support.

The concept of Christian repentance was apparently well-known in Iceland by the fifteenth century.<sup>279</sup> Since Eggerstbók was copied then, it cannot be excluded that what has been suggested above was a fifteenth-century Icelandic view. However, as *gæfa* was an archaic word that survived into the Christian era and remained unattached to the words for sin and its derivatives, it apparently had had and continued to have a significant role in the Old Norse-Icelandic vocabulary that was not easily substituted. Exclusion of the emotional connotations of *ógæfa* that I have suggested here until the days of Eggerstbók may not be necessary either. The derivatives of the word appear already in the early fourteenth-century Reykjabók text of *Brennu-Njáls saga*. As I have discussed in MISFORTUNE, by that time *ógæfa* already had similar connotations to those suggested here.

### 7.1.3 Eye Pain, Goal Conflicts and Emotional Suffering

As mentioned above, one of the aspects of *ógæfa*, guilt, could be communicated in literature through other means as well. In EYE PAIN I have discussed the relationship of eye pain to the inner state of the sufferer. I have argued that eye pain in sagas could be used to represent recognition of a wicked deed by the perpetrator, that

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<sup>278</sup> It also has to be noted, as Emily Lethbridge has shown, that as in *Gísla saga* the motif of conflicting loyalties is at the core of the narrative in some of the sagas (e.g. *Dorsteins saga Víkingssonar* and *Mágus saga jarls*) in the other part of the Eggertsbók, AM 566b 4to. Lethbridge 2012a, 385.

<sup>279</sup> See above (p. 84) on the individualisation of Christian salvation and requirements for confession every year after 1215.

is guilt, but also an emotional state that befell people when they found themselves in conflict (both inner and with others) as their own aims and desires did not coincide with the interests of those around them in the culture of gratitude and reciprocity. This occurred when the individual faced an induced goal conflict, which caused him or her emotional suffering.<sup>280</sup> This was represented in the saga as eye pain, which, even though strictly physical in nature, was associated with emotions because of the bodily nature of emotional experience that I have also discussed in DISTURBANCES.

In EYE PAIN I also discussed the impairment that followed from eye pain—which in my sources was manifested as the eyes bursting out of their sockets. In medieval Iceland the chance of this occurring was connected to people who had committed a *níðingsverk*, a socially reprehensible deed. There were differences, however, in how the period of eye pain might end. The saga protagonists Björn and Þormóðr in *Bjarnar saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga* respectively do not lose their eyes, but this does happen to Þorvarðr (*Ljósvetninga saga*) and Gestr (*Bárðar saga*): the latter two are not the main characters in the sagas where they appear, but they are nevertheless men of respectable origin. Both Þorvarðr and Gestr die because they wish to follow the will of the Christian God and do not fulfil the will of their kinsmen; despite the martyr-like nature of their deaths, the loss of their eyes and ensuing death may indicate that their acts were unacceptable to those around them. To medieval Icelanders (and all other medieval people of standing), social bonds implied obligation, and disregarding such obligations could not be tolerated without some reservation, even if the character in question was acting like a good Christian. Whatever the morality of acting in this way, it did not remove all social conflicts.

The sources also suggest that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century saga audiences still needed to balance what we might regard as Christian or non-Christian, new or old, and indigenous or foreign (and thus adopted) norms and views. The confrontation of old and new values is also visible in the concept of *ógæfa*: it formed the fundamental basis of the conflicts associated with an experience of misfortune. In *Gísla saga*, for instance, although Gísli as a saga character does not live in a Christian era, the values that the saga expresses (and which Gísli appears to transgress) are surprisingly Christian. As noted in EYE PAIN, the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century writers insinuate that revenge which leads to killing does not befit Christian men, who should instead attempt to reach a settlement by other means. The severity of the conflict between old and new is augmented by its initial setting, in which the ‘new’

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<sup>280</sup> On the concepts ‘induced goal conflict’ and ‘emotional suffering’, see Reddy 2001, 55–56 and 121–130.

Christian worldview is confronted by old cultural values that obligate the protagonist to act according to the interests of the family and blood-brothers, following the principles of gratitude and reciprocity; violators of these norms commit a *níðingsverk*—that is, they act ignobly.

Undoubtedly this old–new cultural conflict was considered a significant problem in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland—considering that choosing the Norwegian king as their ruler in 1262 was in large part motivated by the wish of ordinary Icelandic farmers to end a state of near civil war in Iceland, and that this choice was followed by an increase in the king’s legal and executive power and thereby the banishment of the bloodfeud tradition.<sup>281</sup> Against this frame questions regarding the didactic role of literature arise. Although a vendetta in *Íslendingasögur* occasionally appears to produce a catharsis of a certain kind, as I have suggested in AUTHORITY, it is also appraised negatively in many contexts—especially if it severely disrupts communal harmony. Seen in this light, the positions of Þorvarðr and Gestr remain somewhat ambiguous, however.

#### 7.1.4 The Internalized Guilt of the Wise

Descriptions of the men of misfortune, *ógæfsmenn*, in sagas as well as the moral aspects associated with eye pain may be linked to the medieval Icelanders’ gradual internalization of the Christian concept of sin and the idea of individual responsibility associated with it. If this is the case, in the strictly Christian sense the capability to recover from eye pain in *Fóstbræðra saga* may represent Þormóðr’s ability to gain ‘absolution’ and atone for his ‘sins’. In the context of the writer and his time, that is, after the decision of the Fourth Lateran council of 1215, this would have been expected of him.

The representation of emotions of moral responsibility that I have discussed in EYE PAIN and MISFORTUNE could thus indicate a shift from collectivism to individualism in Iceland. A similar shift appears to have occurred in the role of the living dead in sagas, which during the thirteenth- and fourteenth-centuries appears to have changed from that of indicator of social conflicts of more collective nature (in the classical sagas) to pointer to individual conflicts (in the post-classical sagas), in accordance with the individualisation of Christian salvation.<sup>282</sup>

In fact, the experience of *ógæfa* in *Gísli saga* that I have mentioned above shows traces of such individualisation, involving conscious awareness of responsibility

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<sup>281</sup> On the bloodfeud tradition in late medieval Iceland, see Helgi Þorláksson 1994; 1997; 2007a; 2007b; 2013; Matsumoto 2012.

<sup>282</sup> On this, see Kanerva 2013.



for the deeds the character has done: the experience of misfortune was associated with people whose own actions had led them to this state, *but*, who also possessed a certain kind of character and, for this reason, became aware of and recognised the injustice or norm violation that they had committed. Although in this connection the role of repentance has not been explored, it is of course possible that medieval saga writers and readers understood such self-conscious individuals as simultaneously repenting their deeds.

The guilt-like emotional experience of the norm violators that manifested itself as eye pain or an experience of misfortune was often associated with men who were considered wise and astute. Such men could, for instance, be talented poets (i.e. saga-worthy), such as Gísli Súrsson in *Gísla saga*, Björn Hítðælakappi in *Bjarnar saga* or Þormóður Kolbrúnarskáld in *Fóstbræðra saga*. Poetry, which in ancient Scandinavian mythology was associated with the god Óðinn, was regarded as wisdom. Skaldic poetry was rather complex in nature and its kennings were difficult to comprehend unless the audience was familiar with mythical lore: even among medieval Icelanders its listeners and readers, not to mention its composers, had to be both clever and knowledgeable.<sup>283</sup>

The heads of families were often regarded as wise, as is indicated of another victim of eye pain, Þorvarður in *Ljósvetninga saga*. All the four previously mentioned examples are from the classical sagas, whereas in *Bárðar saga*, which is a post-classical saga, Gestr does not necessarily achieve such a distinguished status as the other four saga characters, yet he is portrayed as a man who favours the Christian faith and who is baptised. Similar respect towards the Christian worldview is also indicated explicitly in the case of Björn and Þorvarður. Since the famous wise man in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Njáll Þorgeirsson, also relates positively towards Christianity,<sup>284</sup> it seems likely that ‘good Christians’ were valued for their wisdom in the manner that good poets and ‘noble heathens’ were.

The definitions of wise men may also reflect the ‘new’ worldview: namely that the writer of *Bárðar saga* considered Christianity a condition that automatically generated the ability to feel guilt in people who acted wrongly or transgressed the social norms. The four presumably older examples (*Bjarnar saga*, *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Gísla saga*, *Ljósvetninga saga*) suggest that guilt (and remorse) were thought to require wisdom and intelligence, that is, the capability to recognise the consequences of one’s actions and their own responsibility for them.

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<sup>283</sup> See e.g. Clunies Ross 2005, 91.

<sup>284</sup> See also on ‘noble heathens’ in Lönnroth 1969.

The results are, naturally, problematical given the difficulty of dating the sources and the lack of complete manuscripts from the thirteenth century referred to earlier (pp. 12, 58). Analysis of the texts, especially philology and the interconnections between them, indicates that *Ljósvetninga saga*, *Bjarnar saga*, *Gísla saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga* are thirteenth-century products, whereas *Bárðar saga* is said to have been written in the fourteenth century. However, it has to be borne in mind that none of the original manuscripts of the thirteenth-century *Íslendingasögur* survive. If the earliest copies date from the fourteenth century it is possible that a fourteenth-century scribe wished to emphasise or revise some details in the text according to the medieval principles of truth, that is, what sounded right and reasonable in the cultural context of the copyist and was regarded as correct at the moment of writing.

These amendments were not necessarily radical, and may have been, for instance, brief mentions of the characters' attitudes towards the Christian faith.<sup>285</sup> In this study I do not claim that anything of this kind happened. As I have shown in MISFORTUNE, guilt-like experiences did not exclusively belong to a Christian context and Christian penitence culture. These experiences were part of the culture of gratitude and reciprocity that existed among the Icelanders even before Christianity and thus can be regarded as an aspect of long-term cultural structures. However, I consider it possible that a guilt-like emotional experience adopted more Christian shades from the early fourteenth-century onwards.

### 7.1.5 The Shame of Eye Pain

Despite the Christian connotations, the experience of Þorvarðr (and Gestr) is not represented in a favourable light in the saga since losing one's eye as a consequence of eye pain was considered a punishment of socially unacceptable *níðingverk*. It also implied the inability of the victim to control his or her emotions, or in medieval terms, the movements of the mind that existed within the body, in the heart. In EYE PAIN I have suggested that loss of eyes in cases of eye pain, especially when use of the verb *springa* (to burst) indicates bursting out of the eyes, was also used to describe the extremely strong emotional states that resulted in this, in the sense that the body surface, that is the skin, or body openings (such as eyes) were thought to break up and as a consequence the substance within would burst out.

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<sup>285</sup> However, the role of authorship and copyists in any increasing 'Christianisation' of the sagas that may have occurred in the fourteenth century and whether this originated largely from ecclesiastical influence or the thirteenth-century saga compilers themselves has not been discussed in greater depth in this study.

In DISTURBANCES I have also argued that the discharge of bodily substances of various kinds was associated not only with emotions but also with some diseases. It seems that an emotion and illness were also thought to combine in the experience of eye pain. Such conditions were often met with disapproval, as I have shown in DISTURBANCES, since some illnesses were considered to infect only people of lower social status. In my earlier research I have also pointed out that as far as expression of emotions such as anger was concerned, some self-control, restraint and reticence was expected of people: eminent folk did not or should not have uncontrolled emotional outbursts, but ought to hold them in check.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, as suggested by the discussion of fear of the slaves in DISTURBANCES, they should do this as if their minds were not in the least affected. ‘No emotion, no illness’ was thus often considered a condition in which a person was considered capable of controlling the movements of his or her bodily mind.

I have also suggested in DISTURBANCES that illnesses and illness-like emotions that befell people who were considered respectable by the saga writers required explanation, presumably because such a condition may have been otherwise interpreted as degrading—a sign of lack of control. It cannot, therefore, be ruled out that medieval Icelanders thought Gestr and Þorvarðr weak, although they acted as good Christians. Alternatively, they were simply unable to bear the social pressure of their kinsmen on their embodied minds. In this they differed from such *ógaðfummenn* as Gísli and Grettir Ásmundarson in *Grettis saga*, who were too strong and mighty to be defeated by ordinary men alone, but needed to be overcome with the help of supernatural forces, namely by magic.<sup>287</sup>

### 7.1.6 Concluding Remarks

To summarize, medieval Iceland was, in addition to shame culture, also a culture of guilt and gratitude. In literature, eye pain as a motif was used to indicate emotional reactions similar to guilt. In addition, the concept *ógaða* encompassed connotations of guilt and moral responsibility. In both cases the experience of guilt was associated with conflicting goals and emotional suffering. Guilt was obviously related also to Christian guilt, conscience and repentance, and the emotion was strongly associated with wise and considerate men. Eye pain, however, included an aspect of weakness, especially if the illness ended with the loss of eyes.

The meanings given to *ógaða* may naturally have been context-specific. As mentioned above (pp. 85–86), the three sagas in Eggertsbók that depict *ógaðfummenn*—

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<sup>286</sup> Kanerva 2014.

<sup>287</sup> *Gísla saga*, 56–57; *Grettis saga*, 245–248.

*Gísla saga*, *Grettis saga* and *Harðar saga*—are all sagas of outlawed men who possess heroic qualities and who are portrayed as talented and intelligent individuals. It cannot therefore be excluded that *ógæfa* received the meaning outlined in this study in stories of such outstanding individuals who were labeled *ógæfumenn*, but that the concept *ógæfa* had other connotations in other contexts. The use of the word *ógæfr*, that is ‘luckless’, ‘unruly’, in another *Íslendingasaga*, *Laxdæla saga* in *Möðruvallabók* (ca. 1330–1370), suggests that as an adjective *ógæfr* was not associated with feelings of personal responsibility alone. Instead, in the context of *Laxdæla saga* being *ógæfr* would also have been understood as an outcome of social situations in which, in Douglasian terms, the actions were ‘out-of-place’, that is, they contradicted expectations pertaining to social order. In *Laxdæla saga*, such actions included having quarrels while on a fishing expedition, because behaviour of this kind was thought to cause bad luck in the catching of fish.<sup>288</sup> In another manuscript of *Grettis saga* (AM 551 a 4to dating from ca. 1500), *ógæfr* refers to a farmworker (*húskafl*) for whom no genealogy is given. He is portrayed as an unruly, lazy and quarrelsome man;<sup>289</sup> therefore he was a man whose actions did not comport well to the expectations of his master. In these two contexts, being *ógæfr* does not indicate that the farmworker or people quarreling while on fishing expeditions would experience guilt and personal responsibility. In both cases, however, it is implied that social equilibrium is threatened or challenged. This makes *ógæfa* in *Íslendingasögur* in general a condition of disequilibrium, which acquired further connotations in the narratives of *ógæfumenn* who possessed both heroic quality and wisdom.

What connects the examples of eye pain and *ógæfa* discussed in my study is that all involve a supernatural intrusion of some kind. Gísli and Grettir are both defeated in the end by magical means. Þormóðr and Gestr are confronted by agents of supernatural nature and, as discussed in EYE PAIN, *fylgjur* may be the cause of Þorvarðr’s illness. Only in Björn’s case is this link to the supernatural less clear, although his eye pain is preceded by dreaming, a state in which supernatural agents sometimes appear. All the examples discussed here suggest that experiences related to guilt were caused by intrusions of the supernatural, an issue that I will discuss further in the next chapter.

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<sup>288</sup> *Laxdæla saga*, 29.

<sup>289</sup> *Grettis saga*, 143.

## 7.2 The Folk Theory of Emotions, Part I: Passive and Porous Minds and Bodies

In this section I discuss the medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotions. I will consider the medieval Icelandic view of the origin of emotions: how and from what they were thought to originate and what the role of the supernatural ‘others’ in upspring of emotions was. Consequently, examining the supernatural agents also contributes to my investigation of the alternative motifs and means of representing emotions, emotion-like states, moods and other related phenomena in saga literature.

### 7.2.1 Porous Bodies, Porous Minds

In my study I have also demonstrated that for medieval Icelanders ‘emotion’ was something different from how it is conceptualised by modern people. As I have noted in *DISTURBANCES*, it was comprehended as a ‘movement of the mind’, which is precisely what the Old Norse-Icelandic word *hugarbræring* (emotion) implies. In other words, the mind (*hugr*) was something material, a physical organ: the heart.<sup>290</sup>

As becomes evident in *EYE PAIN*, emotions (or at least those studied here) were not considered merely visceral movements that happened within the body and which arose without external material/physical propellers. It is possible that some emotions were comprehended as forces within the body that could generate the primary impetus for motion, as shall be discussed later in the case of anger, in the chapter “Folk Theory of Emotions, Part II”. However, as I have suggested in *DISTURBANCES* and *EYE PAIN*, in cases of such self-conscious, submissive or depressive emotions as guilt, fear and grief the inner state and the movements within it were thought to be dependent, in a rather concrete manner, on the physical and social environment.

Although movements that took place within the body were understood as emotions by medieval people, similar conditions could also be categorised as illnesses, as I argued in *DISTURBANCES*. As such their upspring was thought to be induced by supernatural external agents and forces that invaded the body, a matter discussed in *EYE PAIN*. Having passed through the body boundaries by some means these agents caused a physical reaction that we might consider psycho-physical: an emotion. The failure or inability of someone’s body or physical mind organ to prevent these external powers from penetrating the body boundaries made the body porous. In the medieval conceptions this porousness was associated with moments of emotional weakness: when people were frightened or grieving they became susceptible to external

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<sup>290</sup> See CGV, 291, for *hugr*.

influences. Certain people might also be fragile as a consequence of their low social status—a categorization that need not indicate foreign influence.<sup>291</sup> Such emotions as grief or fear were more than simply movements—they were also bodily conditions that contributed to the opening of the body boundaries.

### 7.2.2 External Elicitors of Emotions

Because only a limited sample of emotions can be brought under scrutiny in a study such as this, the contours of a medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotions cannot yet be drawn in full—that is, if there ever existed a consistent implicit folk theory of emotions, which is doubtful. Nevertheless, the results of my study suggest that at least some emotions were thought to originate from outside the body and could be linked to various supernatural powers and punishments that were induced by magic. In both EYE PAIN and DISTURBANCES I have shown that emotion was not always considered a condition that originated within the body and expressed itself in visible changes, but also a condition that was connected to illnesses—even an illness-like state, pain or a condition in which emotion and illness could not be separated.

To reiterate some of the points made above, movements of the mind (emotions) were not necessarily understood metaphorically. Emotions could be considered actual movements; as suggested by the verb that was often used to depict powerful emotional states: *bregða*, to move.<sup>292</sup> The movements were induced by external stimuli, such as malevolent forces, shots<sup>293</sup>, winds and currents of air or breath, all of which could penetrate the individual through the various openings in the body. The porous body was likewise easily infected by a disease. Accordingly, the welling up of emotion was not automatically considered distinct from ‘contagion’—in other words, in medieval Iceland, the aetiology of emotions and illnesses (in the modern sense of the words) was thought to be similar or identical. This comes across particularly strongly in DISTURBANCES.

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<sup>291</sup> See also the discussion of illness in the Nepalese Himalayas in Desjarlais 1992, 45, where he shows how children, women and the aged are considered to become ill more easily because their ‘defensive boundaries’ are weaker, making it easier for various malignant supernatural powers to intrude into their bodies and cause illness. The process of illness thus appears similar to that in pre-industrial Finnic culture, as described by Stark 2006, and in this study of Icelandic saga culture.

<sup>292</sup> CGV, 77–78.

<sup>293</sup> See also e.g. envy that was caused by a ‘shot of envy’ (*qfundar skeyti*) in a late fourteenth-century manuscript of the Old Norse-Icelandic translation of the Old Testament, *Stjórn*, 234–235 (based on 1 Mos. 49:22–23 and Latin commentaries on this excerpt), and in a late fifteenth-century manuscript of *Mariu saga*, 426, a *vita* of Virgin Mary that was based on various Latin sources. *Stjórn* was compiled shortly after 1300, and *Mariu saga* dates from the thirteenth century. See also Heizmann 1993b, 407; Simek & Hermann Pálsson 2007, 262–263, 362.

In EYE PAIN I have also suggested that in the folk conception of emotion the boundary between external punishment and internal emotion was not clearcut: instead, the external elicitor (or: ‘punisher’) was an inseparable part of the mind’s movement that would not arise without an external propeller. This does not differ significantly from the modern expectations of the cognitive element in the upspring of emotion, a cognitive aspect of emotion that is clearly present in the sources examined in EYE PAIN. Thus eye pain in the sagas examined can be interpreted as a sign of recognition: the means by which the sufferer becomes aware that he has transgressed the norms and expectations of society. Often he also experiences induced goal conflict. This experience of the upsurge of emotions resembles Robert C. Solomon’s definition of emotion as “engagements in the world”,<sup>294</sup> which does not exclude simultaneous interaction with the physical environment. Moreover, the medieval Icelandic conception also appears to come close to classical thoughts of microcosm and macrocosm, and the origin of emotion in external influences which change a person’s “internal microclimate”.<sup>295</sup>

The relationship may, however, be more complex than appears at first sight, and should be interpreted in the medieval Icelandic context, where the power of the word was prominent,<sup>296</sup> an issue that I have briefly brought up also in AUTHORITY. The words through which the eye pain is inflicted in the sources used in EYE PAIN could be regarded as performative utterances or as *emotives*, a concept introduced by William M. Reddy and defined by him as “[a] type of speech act different from both performative and constative utterances, which both describes (like constative utterances) and changes (like performatives) the world.”<sup>297</sup> The words of the ‘punisher’ appear to make the victims feel guilty—a condition that expresses itself through pain in the eye. This is also reminiscent of a phenomenon frequently encountered in traditional cultures, where the infliction of witchcraft or magic on someone may produce behaviour that is held to be ‘normal’ for a bewitched person, because people start to treat them differently as a result of the curse.<sup>298</sup> Or, in modern terms, the curse becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Solomon 2004, 76–77 and *passim*.

<sup>295</sup> Kern Paster 2004, 1–24. See also Plato’s view in his *Πολιτεία* (Politics) in *Platon: Valtio*, 149–150.

<sup>296</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 120–129.

<sup>297</sup> Reddy 2001, 128.

<sup>298</sup> Helman 1994, 117–125 and 305.

<sup>299</sup> On the definition, see e.g. Merton 1968, 477.

### 7.2.3 Emotion Metaphors and Embodied Experiences

In sagas, eye pain is a somatic experience that involves a physical organ. In psychology, it has been shown how feelings related to depression, anxiety or anger, for instance, are not expressed in words in all cultures but through somatisation, that is by explaining the condition and depicting it as pain or a problem in certain visceral organs. Description of such states may then be linked to metaphors that are used to express emotional states; for example, in traditional Chinese medicine, liver problems have functioned as a metaphor for anger. Even nowadays physical complaints of the liver are interpreted by doctors/healers as emotional messages (e.g. the anger is understood as a pathogen which causes disturbance in the liver and its function).<sup>300</sup>

By the use of metaphor, an individual can thus express or represent an emotion for which there is either no word or no other appropriate mode of expression. Using such an expression does not, however, automatically indicate or necessitate that the individual in question has recognized and named the effect experienced. Yet the use of metaphoric expressions shows what may remain outside our vision if only words, which necessarily have a restricted signification, are used to express emotion and other potential modes of emotional expression are ignored. The eye pain depicted in sagas may be a metaphoric expression (similar to the liver metaphor in traditional Chinese medicine), which the contemporary audience understood as having the meanings that I have discussed in EYE PAIN.

The question remains as to the extent that metaphor is just figurative speaking or tells us something of the actual experience of medieval people. Zoltán Kövecses has explored the connection between emotion experiences and metaphors and has pointed out that many emotion metaphors have arisen from embodied experiences that are part of the construction of human emotions. They thus reflect psychophysical emotional experiences of people and reveal how the folk has conceptualised these experiences. Some metaphors may even be universal since many biophysical processes that are associated with emotion experiences are universal, but even in metaphorical language emotions show some culture-specific aspects. In addition to their reflective nature, however, emotion metaphors may also create and constitute, in the manner of emotion discourses, the emotional reality of people. Through the metaphors, the abstract experiences are made concrete.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> See Helman 1994, 267–271. The traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is not dualistic and, according to Helman (p. 270) “emotions and physical functions [...] are seen as part of the same phenomenon. [...] [A]lthough TCM emphasizes *physical* symptoms (and treatments) rather than psychological ones, the practitioners are able to ‘read’ these somatic symptoms as essentially an emotional message.”

<sup>301</sup> Kövecses 2000, 16–18. Kövecses does not discuss the possibility that the concreteness of emotion metaphors may reflect layers of culture that are long term and thus reflect



It is thus possible that such expressions as *springa*, to burst, and *bregða*, to move, which were used in sagas when emotional experiences were described, also reflected the embodied experiences of medieval Icelanders, and simultaneously shaped the way in which the emotional experiences were constituted. In fact, the physical movement intrinsic to the medieval Icelandic conception of emotions does seem to be a universal experience. According to Zoltán Kövecses, for instance, one of the common emotion metaphors is “[EMOTIONAL] CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS”.<sup>302</sup> In addition, the eye pain depicted in sagas may be a metaphoric expression that was founded on real embodied experiences (e.g. guilt produced eye pain, headache etc.).<sup>303</sup>

#### 7.2.4 Passiveness of Emotional Experience

Given the physical nature of emotion and the role of external agents or forces in their upspring in medieval Icelandic culture, emotion metaphors and the externalised causes of emotions (surprisingly similar to the effects of medieval demons) need nevertheless not be interpreted as concretisations of the abstract, as reflections of embodied experiences, or as real beings. Medieval Icelanders may have given more weight to their own physical experiences (believed to be material in nature) than modern people, whose body image is to some extent still affected by the strict mind/body distinction, which leads us to see emotions as intellectual and thus abstract and immaterial mental functions.<sup>304</sup> Moreover, externalisation of emotions onto exterior objects may also be related to alternative emotion discourses, an issue that I will discuss more thoroughly in the chapter “The Presence of the Absent” below. Ascribing causes of emotions and illnesses to diverse categories, the external agents included, helps us to discern the perception of individual responsibility for emotions in a given culture.

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conceptions that had already been held for several centuries and are an implicit part of (in Kövecses’s case) modern conceptions of emotion. This is suggested e.g. by the studies of Caroline Gaevart, who has shown that in Old English anger was often conceptualised as swelling rather than as heat, and that heat in the conceptualisation of anger appears to have grown more important later as a consequence of the popularity of humoral theory. Cf. Forceville 2009, 27.

<sup>302</sup> Kövecses 2000, 52–53.

<sup>303</sup> Compare also Arthur Kleinman’s suggestion that in modern USA, in cases of depression, non-psychological idioms, such as ‘I’ve got a pain’, are often used by people of poorer and less educated social classes, whereas better educated and more well-off classes psychologise unpleasant affects (i.e. the depression is seen as a ‘psychological problem’): as cited in Helman 1994, 268. Psychologisation may depend on the latter group’s greater awareness of the modern psy-discourse.

<sup>304</sup> It should be noted that this is not, however, the perspective of the medical-scientific community, which also focuses on the body in its study of emotions.

According to Cecil G. Helman, the origins of diseases known and recognised in many cultures are often similarly defined and categorised. These categories include: illnesses thought to originate either from within the individual; illnesses originating in the natural environment (e.g. the heat of the sun or chilly weather); those originating in the social environment (e.g. witchcraft); and those deriving from the supernatural world (e.g. demons). A disease may also, however, belong to a combination of any or all of these categories. If various conditions that are categorised as illnesses are ascribed to supernatural powers the individual's ability to help him or herself is diminished and he or she becomes a passive victim instead of being an active agent.<sup>305</sup>

Helman's model can be applied to saga emotions in general when defining the origins of emotions in medieval Icelandic culture. The role of external agents and forces in the upspring of some emotions suggests that people were not considered wholly responsible for their own emotions, that is, the way that their minds moved. Instead, the causes of unpleasant and inconvenient emotional reactions could be attributed to extra-bodily objects and agents or elements of nature. In the light of EYE PAIN, this may be an indigenous, long term conception of emotions.

My analyses of the meanings of *ógafa* and eye pain suggest that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century saga writers intended to emphasise the individual's responsibility for his or her own actions as they represented the self-conscious reactions of those who had transgressed norms and expectations. As they portrayed these emotion-like conditions as deriving from the influence of the external environment, they indicated that the experience was brought about by forces that the experiencer might perceive passively. Yet in *Fóstbraðra saga* it is implied that the experiencer was capable of influencing the circumstances he or she ended up in after the experience as a consequence of his or her actions, an implication I explore fully in EYE PAIN. However, to be able to do this a person had to be wise and strong enough.

Both EYE PAIN and DISTURBANCES suggest that there was a tradition of integrity of the body, its resistance toward the exterior world and the powers that inhabited it, be they natural or supernatural, and that illness was closely associated with emotion. In the medical information in Hauksbók the concept of *heill* indicated the opposite of illness, a healthy, sound, and whole (that is, intact and unbroken) body and mind.<sup>306</sup> With the negative prefix *ó* added, *óheill* was associated with misfortune, as explored in the MISFORTUNE article.

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<sup>305</sup> Helman 1994, 120–123.

<sup>306</sup> This meaning of *heill*, whole, was emphasized by Torfi Tulinius at the *Fifteenth International Saga Conference* in Århus in 2012, although 'Tulinius' approach was rather psychoanalytical and did not consider the health aspect or the concept's association with the medieval Icelandic body schema. Compare the Old English word *geþál* for 'entire', 'whole' and 'healthy'.

It is particularly intriguing that *heill* should mean both sound and whole—people who were both had intact body boundaries, not violated or penetrated in any way. Thus, after his son has begun to suffer eye pain in *Fóstbraðra saga*, Þormóðr's father says: “the one who has pain in his eyes is not sound (*heill*).”<sup>307</sup> Þormóðr is no longer whole, as his body has been penetrated by an external agent or force through his eyes at the moment the eye pain afflicted him. As a result he has become a passive agent penetrated by an external force, a condition considered unmanly and degrading.<sup>308</sup>

### 7.2.5 Concluding Remarks

In this section I have suggested that medieval Icelanders regarded the body as porous, in that its boundaries could be penetrated by supernatural agents. Since the mind was embodied, this made the mind porous as well. Consequently, emotions could be elicited by external, supernatural agents and objects that changed the internal ‘micro-climate’ within the human being (e.g. by means of winds, shots and breath). These changes were construed as movements. Some representations of emotions, such as eye pain inflicted by a supernatural agent, were metaphorical in that they could be founded on embodied experiences associated with certain emotional experiences. In the saga narrative, supernatural beings were motifs that could be used in representations of emotion and emotion-like states.

In the light of what has been said above concerning guilt elicited by supernatural agents, emotions in sagas were not considered *active* responses to outer stimuli, but *passive* movements that were propelled by outer forces or energies and could be understood as degrading. At this stage of my discussion it is not possible to argue that all emotions in sagas were categorized as passive responses to outer stimuli. To elaborate further the medieval Icelandic theory of emotions, I will next discuss conceptions of anger and the possible foreign elements in them.

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<sup>307</sup> Eigi er sá heill, er í augun verkir. *Fóstbraðra saga*, 176.

<sup>308</sup> See also Meulengracht Sørensen 1983.

## 7.3 Indigenous and Foreign Elements in Conceptions of Emotion—and Illness

In the following section, I will discuss further the essence of emotions and from what they were thought to originate. I will also consider the extent to which the Icelandic conceptions reflected medieval European learned discussion and whether it is possible to distinguish native and ‘foreign’ ideas.

### 7.3.1 The Heart-Mind of the Courageous and Angry

In my study I also consider the various cultural and historical layers that may have been present in the medieval Icelandic conceptions of emotion. Especially in *DISTURBANCES* I scrutinise the relationship between indigenous and foreign elements, that is the folk theories and ‘expert theories’ that spread through Latin learning. In examining the cultural conceptions of mind and body, I argue that the essence of the concept ‘mental’ was physical in medieval Iceland. Moreover, the words related to the mind and expressing, for instance, various emotional states suggest that the indigenous, traditional view coexisted with the view that was based on foreign influences, even if they differed in some ways.

This difference applies especially to the view of the size of the heart-mind in cases of fearful and courageous people that I have discussed in *DISTURBANCES*. Following ideas derived from foreign learning, some saga authors wrote that the brave had small hearts which contained little blood, if any at all. Conversely, they referred to the hearts of the fearful as containing lots of blood. The foreign origin of this view suggests that it represented the knowledge of the learned elite. A contrasting concept, probably of indigenous origin, held that heart-minds would be small (*buglítill*) if an individual was easily frightened. One could even be without mind (*buglauss*). According to this view, the heart-minds of the courageous ought to be full (*bugfullr*);<sup>309</sup> of what is not entirely clear, but some suggestions may be made.

One option would be blood. However, the saga sources imply that emotions could have a material essence and reside in the heart-mind. This is especially the case with anger, which was interpreted as a kind of a force or substance that resided in the breast. Its amount might increase, resulting in a bulging of the body and skin. This is implied, for instance, in the thirteenth-century *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*,<sup>310</sup> in which a man hears of the execution of his father and presumably experiences both grief and

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<sup>309</sup> See also *buglítill*, *buglauss* and *bugfullr* in CGV, 291.

<sup>310</sup> On the saga, see Rory McTurk 1993.

vengeful anger. His reaction is depicted as follows: “and he was so swollen, that his skin was all blown from all that savageness that was in his breast.”<sup>311</sup>

The example from *Ragnars saga* suggested that anger-related emotions resided in the breast. As the heart-mind existed in the breast, it cannot be excluded that the expression *hugfullr*, ‘mind full’, implied that courageous heart-minds were filled with a mixture of substances that resided in the chest, anger perhaps among them.<sup>312</sup> Whereas this idea reflected indigenous ideas of the heart-mind and its movements, notions that the heart of a timid person was filled with blood and the heart of a brave man had little blood are probably indicative of foreign influences. These ‘foreign’ concepts may have been written into the sagas as later additions to the text.

Anger conceptualized as swelling (like in *Ragnars saga* above) is not something specifically Icelandic. In Old English culture anger was also perceived as swelling rather than as heat, a later conceptualisation that appeared alongside humoral theory.<sup>313</sup> Swelling, it seems, formed part of a more archaic conception of anger that existed in both Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia.<sup>314</sup>

### 7.3.2 Anger as Substance

Swelling of a similar kind was also associated with boils or abscesses. I discuss the significance of these in DISTURBANCES. As we know, a boil is a swollen area on the skin around a hair follicle, caused by a bacterium and containing infected matter. Medieval Icelanders were aware of the accumulation of matter, but also thought that extreme emotions could cause both boils and abscesses.<sup>315</sup> In an episode in *Brennu-Njáls saga* Þórhallr suffers from a boil on his leg, which he pierces with a spear, causing the pus to run out. The description of this episode may draw on humoral theoretic

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<sup>311</sup> [...] ok hann var sva þrutinn, at hans hauraund var allt blasit af þeim grimleik, er i brioste hans var. *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 162.

<sup>312</sup> Since *önd* (breath or spirit, or in Christian contexts: soul) was considered responsible for the pulse and the palpitation of the heart it is, in my opinion, possible that *önd* too was associated with the *hugfullr* condition. See CGV, 764; for similar beliefs concerning breath (responsible for pulse) and life spirit in Sami culture, see also Harva 1948, 234–235.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. Forceville 2009, 27.

<sup>314</sup> Swelling was also characteristic of *megin*, i.e. ‘might’, that Clive Tolley regards as comparable in certain respects to the Finnish *luonto*. Tolley 2009, 473–474. This notion raises further questions about the essence of emotions in medieval Iceland and deserves a study of its own.

<sup>315</sup> Also, according to modern medical research, emotions (and stress) may cause skin disorders. Both emotions and skin disorders are connected to the autonomic nervous system (i.e. sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the ANS), the immune system and the hormonal system. See e.g. Keltner, Oatley & Jenkins 2014, 115–134; Urpe, Buggiani & Lotti 2005; Urpe, Pallanti & Lotti 2005.

ideas, as suggested earlier,<sup>316</sup> but it may simply be based on everyday folk observations of wounds and sores caused by external objects that turn into abscesses or boils. However, in this episode the boil in Þórhallr's leg was clearly linked to his emotions, and the bursting out of the matter from his boil is one representation of his anger—as well as his illness.

What I did not discuss in *DISTURBANCES* is an interesting parallel to Old Icelandic beliefs in pre-industrial Finnic culture. According to this belief, some illnesses were thought to be caused by an external force (known as *väike*<sup>317</sup>) that penetrated the body boundaries through wounds, cuts and bites. This illness was named 'anger', *viba*.<sup>318</sup> In a culture with a much lower level of hygiene than ours in an age before the invention of antibiotic drugs, it is easy to imagine that wounds, cuts and bites often induced inflammation. When the body boundary was broken infection produced a build-up of pus and dead tissue under the skin and caused swelling or a boil.

Moreover, as I have suggested in both *EYE PAIN* and *DISORDER*, nails, arrows and other sharp objects thrown or shot by supernatural agents or people skilled in magic were construed in medieval Icelandic culture as causing various pains and illnesses as well as emotions. Interestingly, in later Scandinavian folklore these missiles were thought to cause matter to build up under the skin.<sup>319</sup> Everyday experience would also have suggested to medieval Icelanders that sharp objects might cause wounds that subsequently created swellings in which some unusual substance began to accumulate soon after. The supernatural shots were apparently considered acts of malevolence in medieval Iceland; they were intended to harm and perhaps punish the victim. Such acts may have been associated with anger since punishment or vengeance, intentional harm and actual physical injury sometimes resulted from incidents that had made somebody angry, perhaps a deed that had caused shame, grief or offence. It is even possible that the magical shot was understood as metonymically connected to anger; the shot was comparable to a missile that could be part of the manifestation of anger. Following the laws of contagion through touch,<sup>320</sup> the anger was expected to end up in the wound.

In the light of what has been presented above concerning preindustrial Finnic folklore, it is possible that the boil in Þórhallr's leg was construed as being caused by

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<sup>316</sup> Lönnroth 1965, 49–50.

<sup>317</sup> The archaic connotations of this word include power, strength and force, whereas the modern word *väiki* usually denotes 'people' and 'crowd'. For *väiki* as an inborn internal quality in e.g. women in Finnic folklore, see Apo 1995, 11–49; Knuuttila 2007, 352.

<sup>318</sup> See e.g. Stark 2006, 275–277 and 283.

<sup>319</sup> Lid 1921, 41–42.

<sup>320</sup> See also p. 135 below and Stearns 2011, 41–45.

personal malevolence. In fact, the intense reaction that Þórhallr experiences when he hears about his foster father's (Njáll's) death suggest that this reaction and the boil on his leg were both seen as caused by a malevolent external agent. According to the saga:

Þórhalli Ásgrímssyni brá svá við, er honum var sagt, at Njáll, fóstri hans, var dauðr ok hann hafði inni brunnit, at hann þrútnaði allr ok blóðbogi stóð ór hvárritveggju hlustinni, ok varð eigi stöðvat, ok fell hann í óvít, ok þá stöðvaðisk. Eptir þat stóð hann upp ok kvað sér lítilmannliga verða—”ok þat munda ek vilja, at ek hefnda þessa á þeim, er hann brenndu inni, er nú hefir mik hent.”<sup>321</sup>

Þórhallr Ásgrímsson was so moved when he was told that his foster father Njáll was dead and that he had been burnt in [his house], that he swelled all over, and a gush of blood ran out of both of his ears, and it would not stop. And he fell unconscious, and then it stopped. After that he stood up and said that he had behaved in a paltry manner—”and I want to take vengeance for this that has now befallen me on those who burnt him.”

It is notable that Þórhallr blames the killers of his foster father *for his own unpleasant experience*, not for the killing.<sup>322</sup> In light of the discussion here and in EYE PAIN and DISTURBANCES, this experience suggests that an external object or agent has penetrated the boundaries of his body. This may have been a ‘wind’ of some sort, a manifestation of a thought of malevolent men or a witch.<sup>323</sup> It moves his mind and the effect is so intense that it makes his ears bleed and he loses consciousness, the bleeding hinting that his body has been pierced as blood gushes out. From my analysis of *Ljósvetninga saga* in EYE PAIN, the cause of the ailment that follows may be the *fylgjur*, that is, the fetches or protective spirits of Þórhallr's enemies<sup>324</sup>—bearing in mind that *fylgja* was also occasionally used as synonym for the human mind, which

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<sup>321</sup> *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 344–345.

<sup>322</sup> As a foster son, Þórhallr could be considered obliged to avenge Njáll, and in the light of the discussion on Gísli's *ógæfa* (in MISFORTUNE) the unpleasantness of the experience could also be interpreted as Þórhallr's reaction to his social obligation to take revenge and the possible conflicting norms and interests that would be associated with it.

<sup>323</sup> For thought as *vind tröllqvenna*, “the wind of the witch” see e.g. Prose Edda, 191; Heide 2006.

<sup>324</sup> For a conflicting view of *fylgjur*, see Sonne 2009, although Sonne does not, in my opinion, make a convincing argument.

contained thoughts, *hugr*.<sup>325</sup> In this case a supernatural projectile as the cause of an injury that made blood gush from his ears cannot be totally excluded. If Þórhallr's condition was thought to result from external malevolence it is possible that this consequence was construed in a similar manner to the illness of *viha* (i.e. anger) in pre-industrial Finland. This in turn may imply that the painful swelling on Þórhallr's leg<sup>326</sup> was considered to contain the material essence of 'anger' and 'malevolence'.

As usual with folk conceptions, it remains unclear whose anger builds up within the boil, and what becomes of it. In the saga, the boil is associated with Þórhallr's emotional outburst—with *his* anger—but the initial swelling may nevertheless originate from other people's malevolence towards Þórhallr.<sup>327</sup> The lack of clarity about these matters may even be necessary if anger was considered a substance that was an impersonal dynamistic power and did not require an owner.<sup>328</sup> Either way, the depiction of Þórhallr's boil and the emotional outburst that accompanies the eruption of matter suggests not only that the boil was part of Þórhallr's experience of anger but also that anger was construed as a material substance in medieval Iceland.

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<sup>325</sup> For the definition of *fylgja*, see e.g. Mundal 1974; Strömbäck 2000.

<sup>326</sup> The word used is *fótr*, which may mean the foot only or the foot and leg, but in this case means the leg, as it is also stated that Þórhallr's leg "above the ankle" (*fyrir ofan þekklela*) was swollen. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 359. It is thus not clear whether there was a wound in his *thigh*. In medieval Arthurian romances a wound in a thigh could be considered a castrating wound, thus causing impotence (see e.g. Francis 2001, 15, footnote 50), but whether the wound in *Brennu-Njáls saga* indicates symbolic castration remains unclear. The sore leg may have 'disabled' him at first, in that it prevented him from avenging Njáll's death and thus 'castrated' him temporally.

<sup>327</sup> In Finnic folklore, *viha* [i.e. anger] was "physical illness or pain seen to be caused by a [dynamistic] *väki*-force [that existed in various entities in the environment], which entered the human body *through wounds or breaks in the skin*" (Stark 2006, 257. Italics original.) Although the infected substance in the wound and the pain resulting from the inflammation (in the modern sense) was apparently considered *viha*-anger (see also *ibid.*, 275–277), it is not indicated that the victim's own anger would be involved in the illness. Considering the inflammation in Þórhallr's leg in the medieval Icelandic context and in the light of my suggestion that anger was a material substance, the anger in his body may not have been considered an emotion or an emotional force that belonged to someone or something *permanently*. Instead, we cannot exclude the possibility that the anger was an element which could be transferred from objects and subjects to another, and in its destination became mixed with the anger of the receiver. Compare also the ordination of a *tietäjä* apprentice in Finnish folklore (see also pp. 138–139), in which the ordinance ritual could involve contact between the *tietäjä* and the apprentice through material objects (e.g. a fabric). On this, see e.g. the picture on p. 219 in Siikala 1999. Such a practice might suggest that something in the *tietäjä* (e.g. his/her skills) was expected to transfer to the apprentice and mix within him (e.g. with his former knowledge). The essence of anger still requires further study, however.

<sup>328</sup> This notion becomes interesting if considered in the light of the phenomenon known as *emotion contagion* in modern science. See e.g. Levenson 2003, 357. See also on anger as energy below, p. 105.



### 7.3.3 Anger of the Reanimated Dead as Energy

The idea of anger as a material substance or a dynamistic power within the human body is also relevant to the anger of the two revenant candidates, Skalla-Grímr and Þórólfr bægifótr, discussed in *AUTHORITY*. Both are angry when they die. Posthumous restlessness seems to be expected in sagas when characters die in this state. When Þórólfr's dead body is reinterred later it is described as “big as an ox” (*digr sem naut*). This may indicate that the corpse was swollen, either actually or figuratively, because the author, who was used to depicting emotional states through somatic changes, wished to imply that the cadaver was full of anger. Such a description would imply that the deceased person still had the substance of anger in his breast, which had resided there since his death. In this light, bearing in mind that those who died angry were more inclined to return, anger appears as a form of energy that was thought to remain in the corpse and function as a catalyst for restlessness, that is, posthumous physical movements.<sup>329</sup> This is what appears to happen in Þórólfr's case, as he even injures his victims physically.

With reference to the discussion on the concept of emotion above, the apparently material essence of anger and its role as energy of some kind in restless corpses make the definition of emotion in medieval Icelandic context even more multifaceted. Anger may be categorized as a substance linked to inflammations, and that resided in the breast of some people<sup>330</sup> and occasionally functioned as a kind of life power. In addition, the amount of it in the body might vary, increasing either spontaneously or because of continuous external ‘attacks’. However, none of these characteristics indicates that anger was not regarded as an emotion in medieval Iceland. In many cultures emotions are indeed conceptualised as forces and substances in a container, that is, in the body.<sup>331</sup>

The question remains to what extent—if any—foreign models of the four bodily substances according to which anger could be associated, for instance, with

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<sup>329</sup> That an indigenous idea of some kind of life power and vitality that remained in the human body after death still existed as “a pagan relic” in medieval Iceland has already been suggested in Vésteinn Ólason 2003, 167. I will discuss this issue further in Kanerva (forthcoming a). On the life power in dead bodies in the medieval context, see Caciola 1996, 29–33; and in pre-industrial Finland, see Koski 2011, 95–96. On the exploitation of this life power in medieval and early modern medicine, Himmelman 1997, 185, 192, 196–197; Eilola & Einonen 2009, 193–194. Compare also modern conceptions of anger as a motivating force and thus, energy. See e.g. Aarts et al. 2010.

<sup>330</sup> The extent to which this phenomenon is linked to the medieval Icelandic conception of ‘personality’ or a person's nature (*náttúra*) is not under scrutiny here.

<sup>331</sup> This is shown, for instance, in such near-universal metaphors as *EMOTIONS ARE FORCES* and *ANGER IS A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER*. For these metaphors, see Kövecses 2000, 146, 192.

melancholic temperament and black bile could have influenced the conceptions of emotion argued above.

#### **7.3.4 Emotions and the Bodily Humours: Indigenous and Foreign Elements**

Here it should be mentioned that earlier studies have implied that medieval Icelanders were familiar with the theory of the four bodily humours at least as early as the early twelfth century.<sup>332</sup> Although no medical tracts survive from this period, only in later manuscripts,<sup>333</sup> the early fourteenth-century Hauksbók manuscript, which contains an excerpt that discusses the four bodily substances and symptoms linked to them, indicates that knowledge of the humoral theory existed then, at least among the aristocracy.

However, Peter Hallberg has criticised the emphasis given on foreign influence concerning medical lore, pointing out that the humoral theoretic ideas occasionally correspond to conceptions of wellbeing, mental and physical health and alleviation of various morbid states that have arisen through observation and experience. Hallberg has pointed out, for instance, that tears, which in humoral theory indicated the exit of melancholy that was in excess in the body, may not have been interpreted according to this theory. In the everyday experiences of the Scandinavians tears may have been regarded as a good way to relieve sorrow, and manifestations of similar ‘symptoms’ in sagas did not unavoidably indicate that they were adaptations and representations of humoral theory, as they might reflect pre-medieval Scandinavian conceptions.<sup>334</sup>

Moreover, today some traditions are recognized as ancient, of Indo-European origin, or even universal—and this may apply to theories of bodily humours. For instance, according to classical Indic and Tibetan medical doctrines the human body had three humours, and both mental and physical illnesses were considered to result from their imbalance. These disorders could be treated—or lost or maintained—with means similar to solutions in Western humoral theory, such as adjustments in diet, habitat, sleep, motion or secretions. Although the humours in Ayurvedic medicine (wind, bile and phlegm) were not identical to those known in ancient Western medicine, their role in human health and psychophysical balance appears to have been similar.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> See e.g. Reichborn-Kjennerud 1936; Lönnroth 1965; Høyersten 2004.

<sup>333</sup> Reichborn-Kjennerud 1936, 82–88.

<sup>334</sup> Hallberg 1965b, 170.

<sup>335</sup> For humoral theory, see Joutsivuo 2014a, 38–45; for the classical Indic and Tibetan medical theories, see e.g. Fenner 1996, 463; Desjarlais 1992, 75.

We should, therefore, treat earlier claims of influence on Iceland from medieval continental Europe cautiously, since some elements in humoral theory are anchored in observations and embodied experience (comparable to emotion metaphors).<sup>336</sup> Consequently, as Hallberg has also argued, the Scandinavians could have construed their own observations and experiences in a similar way to humoral theory, independently of Latin literary influences.<sup>337</sup> The humoral theoretic view was easy to reconcile with these indigenous views, which may have been of Indo-European origin, if the two did not conflict.

The rate of adoption and internalization of foreign medical doctrines such as humoral theory (especially when its connection to everyday observation and embodied experience is impossible to assess) is hard to estimate. There are few surviving *Íslendingasögur* manuscripts that manifest clearly and indisputably the use and application of humoral theoretic ideas, while the existence of scientific texts that named and explicated the theory is mere hypothesis based on pieces of text that may have been excerpts of them, but give us too little evidence to support the view that the theory had been socially established.

The question need not, of course, be one of ‘either or’—whether humoral theory was known or not. Instead, the question to be posed in this discussion should be: who knew the theory and who may have learned it well enough to detect the corresponding symptoms while reading, writing, copying or listening to the *Íslendingasögur*, in particular episodes such as the swollen leg of Þórhallr?

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<sup>336</sup> In the discussion in Mischler 2009, 269, it is implied that emotion metaphors based on the Four Humours model (in Mischler’s study, spleen metaphors) are not motivated by embodied experiences. I do not discuss his criticism here in greater depth, however, since I do not claim that all aspects in humoral theory were anchored in embodied experiences. In addition, in my opinion Mischler’s analysis ignores the historical context of his sources (19th century England). Although spleen is linked to humoral theory, the use of the verb ‘vent’ (to vent one’s spleen) in spleen metaphors suggests that the metaphors in question could be based not only on humoral theoretic ideas but also on visual observations of the nineteenth-century material reality and knowledge of technical apparatus, such as the operation of a steam engine, or on the idea of ‘nerve forces’ (originating in the 17th century, and used e.g. by Charles Darwin. See Rosenwein 2006, 13, footnote 52). Mischler also connects the spleen as metaphor of anger to the Four Humours model because the ‘fluid’ in spleen metaphors is ‘unheated’, not heat or steam. However, this view neglects the idea of inner heat (*calor*) and its movements and their role in passions, including anger, in humoral theory (Joutsivuo 2014b), and earlier findings referred to in footnote 301 on p. 97, according to which it was precisely the idea of ‘anger as heat’ that has been associated with humoral theory.

<sup>337</sup> Hallberg 1965b, 168–171 and passim.

### 7.3.5 Specialists in the Healing of Emotions and Illnesses in Medieval Iceland

As a microhistorical example, we do know that Haukr Erlendsson, the owner and contributory writer to the Hauksbók manuscript, was aware of humoral theory and had an interest in medieval scientific knowledge in general. This is indicated by the contents of Hauksbók, which consists of various historical and semi-historical works translated from Latin, as well as theological and philosophical dialogues, geographical texts and mathematical treatises.<sup>338</sup> However, we do not know whether Haukr fully assimilated as part of his worldview the information on humoral theory that he had written in his book, or if he merely wished to include it because he thought it important and worth consulting occasionally. Hauksbók does not tell us explicitly how its owner would have benefited from the knowledge of the four bodily substances and the ability to categorize people into four different groups according to their temperaments.

In all likelihood, information about the four temperaments would become essential for those who wished to tend sick people whose condition, as I have suggested in DISTURBANCES, could be considered both an illness and an emotion. We cannot be sure who these ‘doctors’ or healers were as there was no established profession in medieval Scandinavia. Nevertheless, it is probable that there were men and women who specialised in curing people long before the advent of Christianity in the North. In *Magnúss saga ins góða*, for instance, it is mentioned that the Norwegian king selected from his followers men whose hands appeared most suitable for the task to be healers. More often than not those mentioned as attending to wounds were women, although the sagas include few references to people who practised medical skills.<sup>339</sup>

The example above refers to treating physical injuries and illnesses. However, bearing in mind the moral aspects of (bodily) emotions and physical illness that I have highlighted in EYE PAIN, DISTURBANCES and ROLE OF THE DEAD, it is probable that the psycho-physical wellbeing of people also interested those who tended to their (Christian) souls. Diseases occasionally labelled as moral or excessive emotions that caused a variety of negative consequences could have been considered important for the salvation of the soul. In fact, although theology and medicine in the continental universities were already two divergent disciplines<sup>340</sup> this may not have indicated that in Iceland the shepherds of the soul were unaware of (ancient and modern) medical treatments.

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<sup>338</sup> On Hauksbók, see Gunnar Harðarson & Stefan Karlsson 1993, 271–272.

<sup>339</sup> Dubois 1999, 98–100.

<sup>340</sup> See e.g. Joutsivuo 1998a, 72–76; Joutsivuo 1998b, 143–144.

The rise of the medical profession on the continent began in the thirteenth century when the clergy began to lose their status as practitioners of healing and medical care (especially surgery). The most important single event that led medicine and theology to diverge was the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, which decreed that a patient should first receive absolution before his or her illness would be treated by a physician. Thereafter medicine could develop in its own right, especially when the translation of Greek and Arabic texts, notably the work of Galen, provided the practical and theoretical basis for its increasing professionalization.<sup>341</sup> However, this development was slower in some areas of Europe than in others, particularly in the north: in late medieval Iceland, for instance, the monasteries maintained their position as important healing centres and hospitals.<sup>342</sup>

In the rural areas healers were not necessarily acquainted with European medical learning, nor were they necessarily what we would refer to as physicians. Studies of later eras and regions that show traces of influence and interaction with Scandinavian culture, such as the Hebrides in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, suggest that medical specialists were not always physicians *per se*, but people who had other special skills. For instance, blacksmiths were often renowned not merely for their skills in working iron, but also as veterinarians and healers of people.<sup>343</sup>

This is an interesting detail considering that in Scandinavian mythology, as well as in Icelandic sagas, smiths were regarded as characters or beings that possessed magical skills,<sup>344</sup> which is suggestive of a link between healing and magic. Although there is no clear link between smithing and healing in the *Íslendingasögur*, Egill in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* is an interesting example of a man who is a skilful smith, skilled in magic arts and a healer: for instance, he cures a girl suffering from severe symptoms caused by runes which have been carved by a young man. The saga implies that Egill is the only one who knows the proper healing methods, or that only he possesses the power to perform these magical<sup>345</sup> techniques successfully: he burns the whale-bone

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<sup>341</sup> See e.g. Joutsivuo 1998a, 72–76; Joutsivuo 1998b, 143–144; Le Goff 1980, 63.

<sup>342</sup> Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir 2008, 2010a and 2010b. Moreover, although medicine and theology were distinguished in medieval universities, this may not have meant that medieval Icelandic churchmen made such distinctions. The separation of medicine and theology did not necessarily change the practices in the Western Europe either.

<sup>343</sup> Parman 1977, 107.

<sup>344</sup> The ability to work iron and other metals has been thought to involve magic in many cultures. Knowledge of this craft has often been hidden and restricted, but indispensable for the ruling elites for whom smiths could forge weapons that were superior in both appearance and capacity to inflict injury. Mythological weapons often had magical properties. See e.g. Barndon 2006.

<sup>345</sup> For a brief definition of magic, see e.g. Shanafelt 2004, 318.

on which the harmful runes had been carved and carves new runes, before placing them under her resting place. When the girl wakes up she is fully recovered.<sup>346</sup> Smithing and healing skills were therefore associated in medieval Iceland, and considered magical. Possessing special skills and knowledge may thus have implied that a person could use “supernatural techniques to accomplish specific aims.”<sup>347</sup>

The example of Egill also suggests that healing in general was not practised only for physical injuries and illnesses, but for mental disturbances as well, and might even involve ‘changing’ emotions. As emotions were often ‘symptoms’ in humoral theory, it cannot be excluded that this foreign model may also have been considered important in treating various psycho-physical problems.

In the light of the above, and since healing was a special skill, knowledge attained in European universities may have been regarded as special—and magical—in a similar way to the skills of a smith. That the first known Icelander to have studied abroad, presumably in Paris in the eleventh century, the above-mentioned (p. 48) priest Sæmundr Sigfússon (also known as Sæmundr the Wise, *inn froði*), was thought by his contemporaries and descendants to possess magical skills comes as no surprise.<sup>348</sup> In fact, this reputation may well have been acquired because of the knowledge he had acquired in foreign lands, which may have been awe-inspiring to Icelanders. Still, medical skills were regarded as an art that was mastered only by a select few. In sagas physicians are rarely mentioned, and when they are the information seems to have some special import, as in the thirteenth-century *Íslendinga saga*, which mentions a priest, “who was said to be a good physician, very successful in curing men’s illnesses.”<sup>349</sup>

Accordingly, the ability to heal was considered special and also magical, and was possessed only by few. After the Conversion and as Christian influence grew, this skill was associated also with learned men, for instance priests who had studied abroad. Healing skills were important and perhaps necessary for those who were expected to tend other people’s souls.

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<sup>346</sup> *Egils saga*, 229–230.

<sup>347</sup> Conrad Phillip Kottak’s definition, as cited in Shanafelt 2004, 318.

<sup>348</sup> Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1994.

<sup>349</sup> [H]ann kallaðisk vera lækniir góðr ok atgörða-maðr at meinum manna. *Íslendinga saga*, 301. Trans. by Julia McCrew in *Sturlunga saga I*, 245. Since a priest who has apparently studied abroad is involved, the word *lækniir* is likely to refer to a university-taught medical specialist. However, although physicians were trained in universities they often continued to utilize laymen’s knowledge when they practiced healing, even as late as in eighteenth-century Europe.

### 7.3.6 Knowledge of Humoral Theory among Saga Writers

However, it should strike us as significant that the words used of the four bodily humours that are depicted in Hauksbók are not habitually used in sagas; we cannot find explicit mentions of *melannkolea*,<sup>350</sup> even in episodes when this diagnosis would have been obvious to medieval European scholars learned in medicine. In the *Íslendinga saga* passage mentioned above, for instance, the symptoms of Snorri Sturluson's adult daughter, who eventually dies, could be understood as indicators of melancholia, since the priest and known skilled physician (i.e. *læknir*, as a priest possibly trained in a university) treats her with warm baths<sup>351</sup>— with qualities that are opposite to the coldness and dryness of the melancholic nature. The warm bath as a cure could be an aspect of medieval Icelandic folk healing in general.<sup>352</sup> However, since Dálkr was a priest and had possibly studied abroad *and*, according to the saga, possessed special healing skills, it cannot be excluded that his curing techniques were influenced by foreign learning, even humoral theory.

Although *Íslendinga saga* has been linked to Sturla Þórðarson, a man of wide knowledge who was at the Norwegian royal court and knew its literature, there is no mention of *melannkolea*. Nor is any other assessment of the nature of the daughter's illness given. It is as if diagnoses of this kind were not expected from lay people, although they would have been learned men, and that a *læknir* was considered a special post. This is not surprising, bearing in mind that even before medieval universities and formally trained physicians it was specific people, that is the traditional healers, who were consulted in cases of ailment and inconvenience.<sup>353</sup>

There are also other instances when humoral theoretical ideas are not presented explicitly even when suitable occasions arise. For instance, the colour of blood is rarely designated in sagas, even though the excerpt in Hauksbók suggests that all the bodily humours except phlegm were blood, but they could be distinguished by their colour as 'black blood' (i.e. black bile), 'red blood' (yellow bile) and 'real blood' (the sanguined blood).<sup>354</sup> Given the incidence of hacked off limbs, other dreadful wounds and general bloodshed in sagas, it is extraordinary that blood as such is rarely described. Had the saga authors wanted to describe it, one alternative to a language and a humoral theoretic context for the description could be found in Hauksbók.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> *Hauksbók*, 181.

<sup>351</sup> *Íslendinga saga*, 301.

<sup>352</sup> On hot/steam bath tradition in Scandinavia, see e.g. DuBois 1999, 100–101.

<sup>353</sup> See e.g. Maclennan 2002; Stark 2006, 286–291, 315–356.

<sup>354</sup> I.e. *rautt blóð*, *svart blóð* and *rétt blóð*. *Hauksbók*, 181.

<sup>355</sup> Of course, interpretations of the colour of blood may have lacked contextual relevance in narrations of violence. Moreover, the saga narration is laconic, and analyses of the colour of

Medieval Icelanders may not, of course, have found it necessary to diagnose the behaviour of the saga protagonists in such a precise manner as the four humours would have allowed. For texts that told of the ancestors it was perhaps thought unnecessary to depict the colour of the blood or the nature of the imbalance of bodily fluids—whether their forefathers had been melancholic, choleric or sanguine, and so on—even if their bodies had been pierced with weapons and their blood was shed by the bucket-load (and was thus made available for a diagnosis!). It is possible that such issues were of no interest to ordinary listeners to saga narrations, or that only a few could relate to them.<sup>356</sup>

There are nevertheless some examples in sagas that suggest that some saga authors did indeed wish to apply their knowledge of humoral theory in the texts they were writing. In the thirteenth-century *Bandamanna saga*, available today in the early fourteenth-century *Möðruvallabók* and in a fifteenth-century manuscript known as *Konungsbók*, a man called Óspakr kills another man who is married to Óspakr's former wife, who has remarried after Óspakr had disappeared after being made an outlaw. However, Óspakr himself is wounded, since the brother of the man he kills attacks him. Óspakr then disappears but is later discovered dead in a cave. Texts in both versions of the saga then state that a basin (*mundlang*) full of blood is found beside the corpse: “[...] and there was clotted blood in it” in *Konungsbók*,<sup>357</sup> or “[...] and it [i.e. the blood] was black as tar” in *Möðruvallabók*.<sup>358</sup>

Both versions of the text describe the blood in the basin as ‘black as tar’, that is, of an intense black colour, or by using the word for coagulated blood, *blóðlifr*, literally ‘blood-liver’. The latter, used in the *Konungsbók* version, indicates blood that is the same colour as liver and thus presumably dark in hue. There has been cautious and speculative discussion about whether the blood in the basin indicated that the dead Óspakr was melancholic or not.<sup>359</sup> In the light of the humoral theory this is plausible, but it is strange that the dying Óspakr should have gathered blood from his wound in a basin. Furthermore, since I have found no similar motif in any other

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blood would be inconsistent with this style. See, however, the discussion on the excerpt in *Bandamanna saga* below, pp. 112–113.

<sup>356</sup> Icelanders may not have made a conscious decision not to describe blood and its medical implications. Instead, this failure to describe blood may simply be a matter of oral/literary convention—in other words, the Icelanders did not ‘think’ or ‘find’ it unnecessary to describe blood, but did not do so because it was not in their (pre-humoral) literary vocabulary, just as descriptions of nature were not. I thank Philip Line for this insight.

<sup>357</sup> [...] ok var blóðlifr í. See the *Konungsbók* version (Gl. kgl. sml. 2845 4to, from the 15th cent.) in *Bandamanna saga*, 363.

<sup>358</sup> [...] ok var þat svá svart sem tjara. See the *Möðruvallabók* version (AM 132 fol, i.e. ca. 1330–1370) in *Bandamanna saga*, 363.

<sup>359</sup> Hallberg 1965b, 169, and the sources mentioned in it; Lönnroth 1965, 48.



*Íslendingasögur*, the basin seems a clumsy addition or clarification made by a writer or copyist of the saga who wished to emphasise the melancholic aspect. The ‘blood in a basin’, is reminiscent of an excerpt in Hauksbók:

Maðrinn hefir í sér líkindi .iiijra. hofuðskepna. ok má þat marka a æða bloði mannz ef þat stendr vm stund í keralldi. þa er þat með .iiij. litum. [...] Neðzt er melannkolea suarta bloð iqrðu líkt at lít.<sup>360</sup>

Man has in his body four main substances, and that can be noticed in the blood running in the veins of man if it is preserved in a vessel for a while. Then it is of four different colours. [...] Next is melancholia that is like earth in colour.

The colour of earth may not be identical with the colour of liver or coagulated blood, but both were dark. This minor difference need not exclude the influence of information available in Hauksbók, which tells us that the ‘temperament’ of a person could be defined by examining blood that had been preserved in a container for a while. The similarity between this Hauksbók excerpt and the tale from *Bandamanna saga* suggests that the writer or copyist of the latter intended to emphasise the melancholic nature of Óspakr.

I do not wish to explore the detail of the depiction of melancholics in sagas further or seek out other examples from the sagas:<sup>361</sup> here the emphasis is on why saga writers occasionally felt it necessary to introduce humoral theoretical ideas in their descriptions of people. As noted, by the beginning of the fourteenth century (if we follow the usual dating of Hauksbók) the elite responsible for book production must have been familiar with humoral theory. As *Bandamanna saga* implies, they wished to apply this knowledge in their texts—perhaps to demonstrate their sophistication and familiarity with Latin learning, and perhaps because they genuinely thought the information relevant for the understanding of the destiny of such saga characters as Óspakr. No explicit diagnoses are made, but the suggestive style may indicate that other saga depictions included such insinuations.

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<sup>360</sup> *Hauksbók*, 181–182.

<sup>361</sup> See, however, below, p. 129.

### 7.3.7 Concluding Remarks

The sagas show traces of both native conceptions and foreign influences in their portrayal of the heart-mind and emotions. Especially in native tradition, the anger in the mind was understood as a substance and a force (which did not necessarily have a permanent location within one body only), and as a kind of energy that enabled the dead to return. The influence of foreign models in the representations of anger studied here cannot be totally excluded, however. Humoral theory was apparently known among the learned clerics, and other individuals who practiced healing may have been interested in the theory too. As far as the saga writers are concerned, it is hard to say how well acquainted they were with foreign learning, since no explicit diagnoses were made in sagas. Nevertheless, some of the examples suggest that knowledge of foreign learning was available to them (it is of course possible that the writers or copyists in question belonged to the ecclesiastical elite).

Although motives behind the use of humoral theoretic ideas could vary, in Haukr's case his work as a lawman in Norway and interest in legal matters were probably the determining factors. Humoral theory may have offered him additional knowledge about people who transgressed the limits of socially acceptable behaviour. Perhaps it gave him tools for categorization or guidelines for norms. However, these are issues that are beyond the scope of this study.

Nonetheless, it seems probable that the traces of the indigenous tradition extracted from the layers of foreign influence that have been discussed in *DISTURBANCES* and *EYE PAIN* bring us closer to the socially established, even unconsciously held body schema and conceptions of emotions. Conceptions that were based on unconsciously held body schemas were more easily comprehended by a larger saga audience. Understanding and recognising specialised or 'new' knowledge, then, might have required more learning, which was possessed only by the learned elite.

Foreign scholarly concepts were probably not the only matter that required special cognitive effort (e.g. memorisation) in sagas that utilised stories of ancestors to comment on and give meaning to the present. This aspect of saga reception will be discussed next.

## 7.4 The Presence of the Absent in Sagas: Alternative Emotion Discourses

In this section I will discuss alternative emotion discourses that may have existed in medieval Iceland. I will concentrate on the motif of supernatural agents, restless dead in particular, and their role in the emotions of the saga characters. I will also explore reasons for their existence in *Íslendingasögur* and the possibility that they were understood in more than one way (i.e. as real beings).

### 7.4.1 The Emotional Community in Medieval Iceland

When I began my study, I was taken aback by the laconic style of sagas. At the same time, the lack of extreme emotional outbursts and depictions of inner state<sup>362</sup> in the tales where tenth- and eleventh-century Icelanders lived side by side with various supernatural beings made me think. This is why I became so interested in possible hidden and non-verbal expressions of emotion. I excluded gestures and other visible symbolic manifestations of emotional life and concentrated on other forms of expression that could be used to represent emotions in literature; expressions that were veiled and might necessitate some pondering and contemplation before they would reveal themselves to the reader.

In *ROLE OF THE DEAD* I have concentrated on this aspect of emotion culture: emotions, emotional states, moods and the like that may not have been verbalized or were not represented in what we would consider an ordinary manner. To put it another way, they might be movements of the mind such as thoughts, memories, wishes, desires and emotions that were not put into words or that could not be discussed for various reasons, which we therefore fail to recognise in medieval sources. Lack of emotional discourse hardly demonstrates that medieval Icelanders would not have experienced any emotional turmoil in connection with social and personal conflicts, such as love triangles and problematic father-son relationships. One of the main arguments of my study is that they may have had well-established indirect ways of representing such clashes: restless dead and other supernatural beings that appeared during such conflicts.

There could have been several reasons for these methods of representation. As I have noted earlier, the (clerical) translators of European romances omitted

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<sup>362</sup> Lack of emotion expression might, of course, also indicate that no emotion exists. Emotions could have been rejected or repressed, or perhaps they were simply not expressed because they were prohibited; it has been shown that if it is considered imperative to avoid certain emotions, the expression of these emotions may be reduced and even eliminated. On this, see e.g. Wikan 1990.

depictions of the inner state and sexuality. This may reflect the views of early thirteenth-century clerks, who might have found the descriptions improper for their elevated discourse. The translations were made from poetry to prose, suggesting that differences in the original and in the translated version could also be genre-dependent. Alternatively, it may have indicated a more general cultural difference, such as lack of appropriate Icelandic vocabulary or proper discourse for this kind of emotion talk or the representation of sexuality.<sup>363</sup> Moreover, discussing some emotions, for instance love, may have been strictly regulated by social norms as such discussions could cause conflicts.<sup>364</sup> This might restrain open and direct conversation on the matter in question. Correspondingly, expression of these thoughts and emotions could have serious consequences if the acts and utterances were regarded as punishable before the law. In addition, predictions and premonitions spoken aloud were expected to become true in medieval Icelandic culture. In other words, words had tremendous power in medieval saga culture and for this reason they had to be used wisely and well. Every word was a possible source of conflict and harm.

In addition, in my earlier research I concluded that emotional restraint and control were preferred in Icelandic culture.<sup>365</sup> For this reason writing openly about the emotional life and inner state of the ancestors may have been regarded as degrading and disrespectful to them. Restraint and control, then, did not indicate lack of emotion, but norms that regulated the expression of emotions. Nor do restraint and control imply that people would not have desires and expectations that they needed to handle in their social environment. Since it can be argued that the *Íslendingasögur* were social memory and were used to discuss important contemporary issues, while the saga audience consisted of people from diverse social layers, it is to be expected that more than political, legal and social issues were discussed in them. The listeners and readers of sagas may also have been interested in human relations, which were in themselves linked to the upspring of social and political conflicts, or legal matters. Since laws are regulators of social affairs, they too concerned conflicts which often involved emotions.

In DISTURBANCES I have shown that ‘mental’ in medieval Icelandic context meant something that we might consider physical. Moreover, although ailments could be physical in nature they might still have an emotional constituent. These psycho-physical conditions were, however, inconveniences that society thought

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<sup>363</sup> There is, however, evidence of knowledge of *fabliaux* in fourteenth-century Iceland. See e.g. Tulinius 1993, 212, who mentions e.g. *Möttuls saga* and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*.

<sup>364</sup> For instance ‘love poems’ (*mansöngur*) were thought to violate the honour of the closest male relatives of the woman. Jochens 1992.

<sup>365</sup> Kanerva 2014.

a person was better to live without, or to remove if they had been acquired. Because emotions could be sources of diverse kinds of physical disequilibrium that threatened the lives and wellbeing of people, we can safely conclude that emotional matters were of great concern to medieval Icelanders.

#### **7.4.2 Propelling the Tangible Movements of the Mind**

The concern over emotional matters becomes apparent in the depiction of bad luck and adversity in MISFORTUNE. Once again there is reason to ask what is emphasised: the emotional experience of the *ógaðfumaðr* or the demand to follow social norms; internal state or external punishment? If my earlier suggestions concerning the medieval Icelandic view of the nature of emotions and their upspring is correct, this distinction need not to be made.

The restless dead as I argue in ROLE OF THE DEAD, act as agents of order and appear to punish the living, even if it is not always those who have committed the ‘crime’ that suffer directly. However, as suggested above in chapter 7.2, movements of the mind (such as eye pain in cases of norm transgressions) were not necessarily elicited from within a person, that is, from within the body and mind, but needed a propeller, an external catalyst that triggered the motion.

From our modern perspective, the living dead and diseases, the loss of wit and the fear that they cause are separate things, yet medieval Icelanders may not have viewed them as wholly disconnected. Physical movement (of the mind) required an object or a force to cause it. These forces would penetrate the body boundaries and cause internal movement, rendering the human body and mind passive so that they became porous objects that struggled and moved at the mercy of external occurrences and forces. In the abstract sense, these forces might be social pressure, jurisdiction or religious norms that he or she could not control without the assistance of physical force, social networks and awareness and following of moral and religious norms.

Described from a slightly different perspective, emotions did not arise without events, things or other people to cause them. In cases such as those in the wonders of Fróðá in *Eyrbyggja saga* (discussed in ROLE OF THE DEAD), there may have been no other way of portraying the agony that could follow a triangle of passion that had produced offspring than to represent it in restless corpses. The role of Kjartan as a son of a man who was not his father and a descendant of a man who has injured or caused shame within Kjartan’s intimate social environment is somewhat complicated. The author of the saga may have needed past events—or tangible memories of them disguised as reanimated corpses—to make manifest the emotional

response of people on the farm to the conflicting thoughts, memories and emotions that would arise in such situations (or to represent the emotional *atmosphere* present there, as I will suggest in chapter “Folk Theory of Emotions, Part II”)—or the induced goal conflicts and emotional suffering thought to be present in such communities where people have lived through similar experiences.<sup>366</sup> The dead were the past (i.e. memory), which as tangible reanimated corpses were expected to propel the motion in the body-minds of the living.

### 7.4.3 The Context of the Supernatural in *Íslendingasögur*

Although lacking in emotion discourses similar to our own, there may still exist alternative ways to describe, discuss and represent emotions and emotional states even when means of expressing them were somehow restricted. In *ROLE OF THE DEAD* I argue that this is exactly what the writer of *Eyrbyggja saga*, and possibly writers of other reanimated dead episodes as well, may have intended to do: to represent through the imagery of a ghost story the emotional turmoil of the people at the Fróðá farm. The physical restless dead were a good option for this role<sup>367</sup> since as tangible things they could affect the mind-body of the living in a very concrete way.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Interestingly, it is very common that supernatural experiences in other cultures are experienced in psychologically liminal and stressful phases of life and during traumatic experiences, e.g. on the battlefield, after a natural disaster (e.g. the tsunami in Japan in 2011) and after great personal loss (so-called grief hallucinations). See e.g. Cook 2013; Grimby 1993; Baethge 2002.

<sup>367</sup> Compare ideas presented by Tony Walter (2014) regarding the phenomenon that in modern Britain the dead are increasingly imagined as angels. Typical for modern western culture is that the living wish to maintain continuing bonds with the dead, and angels are beings that enable this since they possess agency and—in a metaphorical sense—have wings that enable them to fly from the otherworld to this world (and angels have traditionally interacted with humans).

<sup>368</sup> It has to be noted that the story in *Eyrbyggja saga* may be based on the memory of a historical event or be an individual creation of the writer. Whatever the case, the story was read and heard in a cultural context where there existed various traditional legends about restless dead. (For ÜIo Valk’s definition of legend, see below p. 122, footnote 384). In these legends, the dead could “play a stabilizing role in upholding culture, its values, and religious traditions” (for this common function of the dead in many cultures, see Valk 2006, 33), that is “[t]he dead thus act[ed] as agents of order and moral judges” as I have suggested in *ROLE OF THE DEAD* (p. 44). Belief in this role of the dead was essential in understanding the social clashes that were discussed in the story. Consequently, an either/or situation in which the restless dead were reduced to either manipulated symbols/allegories *or* non-symbolic expressions of belief is an improbable scenario for medieval Iceland. The role of these ghost stories as belief legends does not require conscious interpretation (of allegories/symbols), as their conventional meaning (and other conventional meanings), e.g. their role as agents of order, was recognized. In general, belief legends can also be used to comment and consider current issues and problems related to social circumstances. See e.g. Siikala 1984, 194–195; Knuutila 2001, 34–37; Koski 2011, 162–163). On conventional meanings, see also Siikala 1984. In addition,

*Eyrbyggja saga*'s authorship has occasionally been associated with Sturla Þórðarson, whose own background makes the emotional turmoil and personal conflict in the wonders of Fróða especially interesting. The saga relates a story of an illegitimate son who proves his worth by conquering reanimated dead and banishing them. Assuming that Sturla *did* write the original *Eyrbyggja saga*, it is intriguing that Sturla himself was a concubine's son. In the context of medieval Icelandic society, this social situation would have made him, at least to some degree, a person of indeterminate status in spite of his education. Thus Sturla's social situation of having grown up and established himself through his political and legal career would parallel that of Kjartan in the saga.

It is not necessarily appropriate to interpret this setting and the characters in *Eyrbyggja saga* as Sturla's projection of his own inner state. If veiled meanings<sup>369</sup> were intentional or not is hard to clarify. Either way, veiled meanings—allegories, symbols and other euphemistic expressions—would have required specific skills from those who read and listened to the stories if they were to become unveiled. The analysis in *ROLE OF THE DEAD* also poses the question of whether the saga writers and the audience would have constructed meanings in this way. We should also consider earlier research that has supposedly shown how saga culture typically emphasised the tangible and concrete at the expense of the abstract,<sup>370</sup> which was portrayed in sagas only rarely. Is this merely a first impression?

#### 7.4.4 The Tangibility of the Abstract

It is questionable whether this 'tangibility' is a consequence of the oral origin of Icelandic culture, which started to become a literary culture from the twelfth century onwards. In earlier studies it has been suggested that people in oral cultures are inclined to conceptualise and categorise things within situational and operational frames of reference—thus concentrating on what happens and what is done—instead of an abstract one.<sup>371</sup> It is probable that after literacy arrived in the North it still continued to co-exist and interact with orality—consequently, medieval Iceland

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neither the saga writer nor the audience could reduce the stories to a single interpretation, and the writer as the sender of the message could never know for certain what interpretations the audience as receivers would make (on the different interpretants, see Johansen 2002, 46–48).

<sup>369</sup> On veiled meanings in saga literature and in *Sturlu þátr* in particular, see Ciklamini 1984.

<sup>370</sup> This has been suggested e.g. in Ellis 1977.

<sup>371</sup> Ong 1985, 49. Ong's strict distinction between oral and literate cultures and the views enhanced by it, that oral societies are less analytic, incapable of abstraction and (as a consequence) inferior in cognitive functions compared to literate ones have been (and should be) heavily criticized, however, e.g. in Coleman 1996, 1–33.

became an *aural* society<sup>372</sup>—although the literary culture had been strengthening ever since the Icelandic law had been put into written form. There is no dispute that literary culture had become important in medieval Iceland by the time the sagas were written down, since it seems clear that from the perspective of many people stories of the ancestors needed to be compiled in books.

Neglecting the abstract and focusing on the perceivable may be causally connected to the saga literature convention of not describing (at least not explicitly) the inner state that was visible to the eyes only from somatic signs. This manner of representation could be linked to oral conventions of story-telling. Naturally, it may be asked whether our wish to distinguish between the abstract and the concrete derive from our scientific worldview, which has created a tendency to segregate “entities in the world [...] [into] different ontological categories”<sup>373</sup>—matter, processes and mental states?

Although it has been shown that many modern scientific concepts, for instance in physics, belong to the category of processes, modern people initially conceptualise these concepts as belonging to the category of matter and may attribute to them the qualities of material substances.<sup>374</sup> It has been suggested that this phenomenon, known as *object bias*, that is, “the tendency to apply knowledge of physical objects to temporal processes”,<sup>375</sup> is intrinsic and depends on a core system of object knowledge that develops in early childhood, but can also be applied later in ‘commonsense’ reasoning.<sup>376</sup> Modern psychologists label this mixing (if viewed from the modern perspective) of ontological categories as category mistakes, yet the divergence of the defined system should, from a historian’s perspective, be viewed as a different system of categorizing.

Considering the object bias and the tendency to mix diverse ontological categories with preference to matter (what is done and perceived) instead of ‘processes’ common to people in general (changes that happen inside the body and mind but cannot be objectively observed), the concentration on somatic changes and tangible supernatural beings, and notions that in cultures with externalising belief systems the cause of mental disorders is thought to be outside the body of the ill person, instead of inside him/her,<sup>377</sup> become comprehensible. Consequently I suggest

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<sup>372</sup> I.e. stories were still recited orally as well and texts could be read aloud. See e.g. Coleman 1996, 20–24, 27–32.

<sup>373</sup> Chi, Slotta & de Leeuw 1994, 27.

<sup>374</sup> Chi, Slotta & de Leeuw 1994.

<sup>375</sup> Chen 2007, 479. It has to be noted, however, that object bias is not a phenomenon restricted to oral/aural cultures only.

<sup>376</sup> Chen 2007.

<sup>377</sup> Helman 1994, 128–129.



that in the thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century partly literate but oral-based Icelandic culture the restless dead were *not only* supernatural beings that the medieval Icelanders held as real. Although people may have had actual experiences of reanimated dead that they thought of as aspects of certain illnesses, and the *Íslendingasögur* were thought to recite true stories of ancestors, medieval Icelanders might have considered that there was also a ‘deeper’ meaning in the reanimated dead stories.<sup>378</sup> In light of AUTHORITY and ROLE OF THE DEAD I suggest that the restless dead in the *Íslendingasögur* could serve as expressions that made the abstract material in two different ways.

Firstly, the dead signified things that were not otherwise verbalized, but represented only through these objects. This was a handy tool to convey veiled meanings and write of taboos, such as mental functions linked with morally significant issues that were both abstract and invisible and could involve emotions that it was not appropriate to talk about. This argument is further supported by my own observations of the characters that interact with the restless dead in sagas and banish them so that they can no longer harass the living. They are, for instance, people whose opportunities to act have been restricted by conflicts with significant others, by indeterminate or low social status, or by gender. It may be expected that these characters were expected to experience certain kind of emotional stress, caused, for instance, because they were illegitimate children and thus persons of indeterminate status. Or, they were depicted as men who had a bad relationship with their fathers and because of this were not granted the support a father would usually give his sons.<sup>379</sup>

Secondly (as I will discuss further below in chapter “Folk Theory of Emotion, Part II”), the restless dead were concretizations of abstract minds and thoughts of men.<sup>380</sup> Yet these concretizations would not involve only the individual and his psychology (in modern terms), that is the ‘emotional experience’ of the hero that slays the reanimated dead, but also the collective and social, referring to the mixed individual/collective border of the medieval individual’s identity.

Consequently, the reanimated dead could have additional meanings. Next I will discuss by what kinds of processes these meanings could have been produced among the writers, readers and listeners of the *Íslendingasögur*.

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<sup>378</sup> On modern legends as alternative discourses see Valk 2012, 25.

<sup>379</sup> Kanerva 2013.

<sup>380</sup> Here I have not discussed the materiality of the restless dead and its connection with medieval memorisation techniques that also involved externalisation of internal memory in e.g. architecture, sculpture etc., as discussed e.g. in Carruthers 1990 and 2008. The connection with these memorisation techniques would require a study of its own.

#### 7.4.5 The Wondrous and Liminal Dead in *Íslendingasögur*

When the structure of the *Íslendingasögur* is analysed, it is notable that the restless dead episodes stand out as independent entities organized around a ‘reanimated dead story’, that is they act as dominants and stand out in contrast to the ‘background’ that receives little or less attention.<sup>381</sup> The appearance of the restless dead frames and confines the story and acts as a *header* which indicates that understanding the text in question requires application of a dividual ‘restless dead’ *script* and recognition of a corresponding ‘restless dead’ *scheme*.<sup>382</sup> In this script, the malignant reanimated dead harasses the living, as a consequence of which a young man, the imminent hero, combats it and defeats it, thus gaining honour and fame. The role of a revenant in a saga is significant: it is an object that attracts the attention of the audience, suggesting that the appearance of reanimated dead made the medieval readers and listeners aware of the manner in which the story should be understood.

Moreover, things outside the tangible and visible world were not a homogenous group, but motivated distinct categories. As earlier studies suggest, medieval Icelanders distinguished, for instance, between dreams that belonged to the sphere of reality, and restless dead that were part of the world of wonders. Consequently, the restless dead in *Íslendingasögur* could be referred to as wonder, *undr*, but were likewise discerned from the religious miracles, *jarteikenir*.<sup>383</sup> Therefore, the reanimated dead in the *Íslendingasögur* would not inhabit the world that was visible in all instances. Instead they were part of a world that contained an element of awe and strangeness and was situated on the borderlands of culture and society, similar to the abodes of medieval monsters in general.<sup>384</sup> Moreover, they needed to occur in times

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<sup>381</sup> On dominants and on the *figure/ground* distinction, see Stockwell 2002, 14–20.

<sup>382</sup> See Stockwell 2002, 76–78.

<sup>383</sup> Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir (Yershova) 2006. See also Sävborg 2009, 323–325. The restless dead could thus be labelled *mirabilia* instead of *miracula*. Tulinus 1999, 291–292. See also Bynum Walker 1997.

<sup>384</sup> For medieval monsters, see Williams 1996, 13. Ülo Valk (2012) writes about legends (i.e. “short narrative[s] about an individual encounter with the supernatural that breaks the ordinary flow of everyday life”, p. 23) as an alternative discourse “which challenges the official truth and questions [...] institutional authority” (i.e. in Valk’s article on the Lutheran Church). Valk 2012, 25. He points out that as the rational scientific worldview gained ground in nineteenth-century Estonia, fear of the Devil faded and its importance in Lutheran faith diminished, but paradoxically, the number of Devil legends grew dramatically. He interprets these legends as challengers to the (rational) theology of the Church. It can be questioned whether the restless dead in *Íslendingasögur* could be interpreted similarly. Reanimated corpses do not exist in *samtíðarsögur* but the dead appear only in dreams (see also above p. 79), while in the slightly later *fornaldarsögur* the revenants no longer cause awe (see also above p. 79). Bearing in mind that in thirteenth-century Iceland there was a boom of antiquarian interest in mythical poetry (see p. 55 above), it is possible that interest in legends that originated in the pre-Christian and early Christian era of Iceland likewise increased and was manifested in the revenant figures of

long gone, for instance, in *Íslendingasögur* that told of tenth- and eleventh-century events but were written within the frame of the thirteenth-century reality.

Following the definitions of Victor W. Turner, it is typical for the genre of *Íslendingasögur* that the physical and temporal spaces where the restless dead appeared and were encountered were ‘betwixt and between’.<sup>385</sup> The spaces were liminal either because of their geographical or topographical location outside the boundaries of human society and culture (e.g. in caves beyond human habitation or in geographically remote and ancient places), or because of unusual conditions that enabled only limited visibility (e.g. the restless dead appeared during the night or in weather conditions such as fog, which impaired vision), or because they were otherworldly or portals to the otherworld (e.g. graves and mounds).<sup>386</sup>

This has significance concerning the medieval reception of the stories. Peter Stockwell defines the *reading* of the text as an analytical process during which the reader attains an understanding of the meaning of the text, which he differentiates from *interpretation* that arises at the moment the text is read and even before this.<sup>387</sup> From the perspective of such a ‘reading’, the *Íslendingasögur* contain several layers, so-called *mental spaces* that associate them with the actual world—even as their role as history necessitated. But classifying the restless dead in *Íslendingasögur* as wonders would transfer these beings into the *fictional spaces* of text. Instead of the modern concept ‘fictional’ which is loaded with connotations, I would suggest that we speak of *wondrous spaces* in order to differentiate it from other, more ‘realistic’ mental spaces. *Wondrous space* in this case also encompasses the liminality of the physical and temporal

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the *Íslendingasögur* of the same age. Moreover, the restless dead in *Íslendingasögur* challenge to some extent the medieval theological view about the possibility of reanimating the dead. According to *Elucidarius*, which was translated into Old Norse-Icelandic around 1200, the dead would rise only “[b]ecause the devil goes inside the body of the dead and speaks on the dead’s behalf, and it seems then as if the dead were alive when he moves.” (Þui at diofull gengr inn í licam hins dauða oc melfr fyrir hann oc sýnist hann þa sem hann lífi er hann rōrist). *Elucidarius*, 128. This theological view would have been challenged by the view prevalent in *Íslendingasögur*, according to which the dead were often considered to possess a vitality of their own that made them capable of returning posthumously. On this, see Kanerva (forthcoming a). The suggestion that the clerical elite guided people towards the idea that the restless dead were merely tricks of the devil in the era when *Íslendingasögur* were written, as a consequence of which legends of revenants functioned as challengers of this Christian view, is not necessarily challenged by the fact that reanimated dead and ghosts are also common in later Icelandic folklore collected in the nineteenth century (in which era, following the ideas of Valk, as a consequence of scientific rationality interest in ghosts declined and could cause the legends to thrive, perhaps also in Iceland).

<sup>385</sup> Turner 1985.

<sup>386</sup> See also Sävborg 2009.

<sup>387</sup> Stockwell 2002, 8.

spaces in which the wonders are experienced, and does not label the revenants fictional but rather ‘out of the ordinary’ and liminal.

The ability to keep such separate mental spaces and their properties together, then, is a prerequisite for metaphorical and allegorical thought.<sup>388</sup> Although it cannot be taken for granted that all medieval Icelanders had this ability, there is some evidence of an ‘allegory-able’ group of people in the audience.

#### 7.4.6 Use of Symbols, Euphemisms and Allegories in Medieval Iceland

Use of symbols and allegories was common in medieval Europe, at least among learned churchmen. Symbolic or allegorical interpretation of virtually everything made tangible what could not be seen.<sup>389</sup> These ideas may well have spread to Iceland. For instance, St Gregory, whose popularity in Iceland has been emphasised in earlier research, presumed that a story held as historically true could still convey allegorical meanings.<sup>390</sup> St Gregory wrote in his *Homiliae*:

We must understand the miracles of our Lord and Saviour, dearly beloved, so as to believe that they have been truly done, and that their meaning still signifies something to us. His works show one thing by their power, and speak to us another by their mystery. We do not know the historical identity of the blind man, but we know whom he mystically denotes.<sup>391</sup>

We do know that medieval Icelanders were familiar with interpretation mechanisms that involved complex connections between different texts, in the broad sense. This is evident from traditional poetry of pre-Christian origin: to understand the kennings in medieval Icelandic skaldic verse required of the listener or reader a familiarity with mythical stories and the ability to interpret the euphemisms intertextually.<sup>392</sup> Such

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<sup>388</sup> Stockwell calls this mechanism *blending*. On mental spaces, see Stockwell 2002, 96–98. Yet fiction and allegory should not be treated similarly as allegories, where the “macrostructure” often “is a metonymy of the microstructure”. They differ as “the relationship between fiction and its meaning is more complex and less direct” than in allegory. Stockwell 2002, 124.

<sup>389</sup> Gurevich 1985: 59–60 and 82–84.

<sup>390</sup> See Steinhauser 1993, 103. On Pope Gregory’s popularity in Iceland, see Wolf 2001, 256–266.

<sup>391</sup> Sed miracula Domini et Saluatoris nostri sic accipienda sunt, fratres mei, ut et in ueritate credantur facta, et tamen per significationem nobis aliquid innuant. Opera quippe eius et per potentiam aliud ostendunt, et per mysterium aliud loquuntur. Ecce enim quis iuxta historiam caecus iste fuerit ignoramus, sed tamen quem per mysterium significet nouimus. *Homelies sur l’évangile*, 120. Trans. by Dom David Hurst in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 95.

<sup>392</sup> Tulinius 2001.

generation of meaning corresponds to the working mechanism of allegories and metaphors which is based on *blending* of diverse spaces, comparable to the mental spaces introduced above.<sup>393</sup> Torfi H. Tulinius has shown that similar semiotic mechanisms appeared also in prose. According to him, medieval Icelandic Christian literature demonstrates that the writers of these texts were familiar with the exegetical techniques known on the Continent.<sup>394</sup>

Christianity alone was not responsible for bringing to Iceland the capability to construe allegories, symbols and other euphemistic means of expression since in pre-Christian Iceland indigenous symbols were already used and interpreted,<sup>395</sup> and allegorical structures have been traced in the *Íslendingasögur*.<sup>396</sup> Moreover, in poetry and mythology, for instance, things described as tangible objects could be associated with abstract concepts, such as the two ravens of Óðinn known as *Huginn* and *Muninn* which medieval Icelanders may also have construed as the ‘mind’ and ‘memory’ of the pagan god (from *muna*, to think, remember, and *hugr*, a mind).<sup>397</sup> Such a conception would fall into the same category as that of witches’ thoughts as winds in EYE PAIN, an example of the implicit idea that thoughts could ‘fly’ or ‘move in the air’ (or escape) in the medieval Icelandic context.

Interpretation was linked with association techniques: the verb *þýða* was used to mean ‘interpret’ (also to explain, to associate, to attach) and suggested a link with construal that was based on association.<sup>398</sup> Interpreting the Psalter was regarded as work (*starf*) that required a spirit of understanding given by God. Thus when a person heard a “few words” (*fá orð*) he could put in some effort (*starf*) and go through a thinking process, and through this achieve knowledge of many words (*mörg orð* *bugrenningarinnar*). This system could also be used, according to contemporary medieval Icelandic texts, with other “talk” that needed to be explained.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Stockwell 2002, 106–107, 126–127. These spaces can also consist of various input spaces, such as “parts of a narrative text, the reader’s experience, sociocultural knowledge, or literary allusions.” Ibid. 126.

<sup>394</sup> See Tulinius 2001, 193–195, 199–212 and 214–215.

<sup>395</sup> See e.g. Mundal 1997, 56–69, for symbolism connected to clothes given as gifts.

<sup>396</sup> Einar Pálsson 1994.

<sup>397</sup> CGV, 290–291 and 437–438.

<sup>398</sup> CGV, 755. What might be of interest here is the word *jarteikna* that apart from referring to miracles of the saints could also mean ‘to symbolise’. The etymology of the word is obscure. de Vries 1962, 291. It would be interesting to investigate further whether the *jar-* could be related to the word *jarð*, ‘earth’, as *-teikna* indicates ‘to draw’ or ‘to make’ with the idea ‘making something concrete and tangible (like earth)’ that would suggestively refer to a tangible object that is made to stand for something else, as a symbol.

<sup>399</sup> Tulinius 2001, 194, 197–198. *Jartegn*, symbol, also refers to Christian miracles and denotes ‘evidence’ and ‘proof’. The *undr* mentioned above was rather considered a ‘scandal’. CGV, 324.

An excerpt from the Prologue of *Snorra Edda* that depicts the prehistory of the world suggests that Snorri Sturluson, as its presumed writer, wished to make a distinction between the thinking style of the people in his prehistory and the people of his own time. According to Snorri, people in prehistory had thought of everything as concrete and material, but he implicitly ascribed to his contemporaries the opposite, that is, ‘spiritual understanding’. The passage states that the men in prehistoric times had given names to all things so that they could remember and talk about them.

En til þess at heldr mætti frá segja eða í minni festa þá gáfu þeir nafn með sjálfum sér öllum hlutum [...] En alla hluti skildu þeir jarðligri skilningu þvíat þeim var eigi gefin andlig spekðin. Svá skildu þeir at allir hlutir væri smíðaðir af nokkuru efni.<sup>400</sup>

And in order to be able to talk about things or preserve them in memory, they themselves gave name to all things [...] And all things they understood through earthly understanding, because they were not given spiritual wisdom. They understood all things to be made of some matter.

The ability that Snorri here attributes to the people of his own era—or himself—after Christianisation, namely *andlig spekð*, ‘spiritual wisdom’, is not elucidated further in the Prologue. In the *Íslensk Hómiljubók*, and thus in a religious context the functions of *andi*, the spirit, are explicated as follows:

En þriþe hlutr heiter ande [...] Sa gefr hugqvæmi oc skilning. dómspekð oc mine mál oc scynseme. næmlect guþs truar. oc síalfræþe mannenom.<sup>401</sup>

The third thing [in addition to body and *önd*-soul] is called spirit (*andi*) [...] It gives ingenuity and understanding/intellect, wise discernment and memory, speech and reason, quickness to learn God’s faith and the self-will of men.

What Snorri would have labelled ‘spiritual wisdom’ in his Prologue may have followed the definitions enumerated above (although they should by no means be considered all-encompassing). It may thus have referred to intellect, reason, willpower and various cognitive capabilities of men. As the ‘spiritual’ implies, understanding might also concern things that were not material in nature. This has a resemblance to the third

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<sup>400</sup> *Snorra Edda*, 4.

<sup>401</sup> *Hómiljubók*, 116.

mode of vision labelled intellectual by St Augustine; the soul's capability to see things that had no physical appearance, such as abstract ideas.<sup>402</sup>

Although the excerpt is linked to distinction between pagan and Christian tendencies, that is worship of material idols in opposition to Christian spiritual perception, the ideas presented in the text are surprisingly similar to the ideas concerning object bias described above. The quote conveys the idea that in Snorri's view, his pagan ancestors in the oral society tended to comprehend things in material terms, whereas he and his contemporaries in the aural culture were capable of spiritual perception (of abstract ideas). Even so, Snorri may well have underrated the capabilities of his ancestors. It has been pointed out that abstract reasoning and analytical thinking, which have been associated with literacy, are not produced only in literate cultures. Although these capacities may be promoted in such a culture, they are not created by it.<sup>403</sup> It has also been suggested that "abstraction is an inherent ability of human cognition and does not imply people's need in philosophical concepts".<sup>404</sup> Although people in various cultural and historical contexts may not have talked about abstract ideas, their "languages [may still be][...] able to express abstract notions."<sup>405</sup> It is thus probable that, despite Snorri's account, his predecessors did not lack the ability of abstraction. Nor can it be suggested that Icelanders, or their ancestors before the era under scrutiny here, would not have understood veiled meanings or working mechanisms of the myth.

The excerpt from Snorri's text may tell us more about Snorri's own time than the time he writes of, and it suggests that medieval Icelandic culture was multi-layered. There may have been long-held conceptions that all things (including the restless dead—or visions and 'hallucinations' of the dead—and arrows shot by supernatural agents) were tangible. Moreover, the intermediate layer, *conjunction*, consisted of adoption and assimilation of Christian exegetical techniques which enabled the interpretation and reading of meanings veiled behind 'few words' (including allegories) but ready to be translated into more words through a process of abstract or 'spiritual' thinking or contemplation. In addition, we need not search any further than the mythic reality of medieval Icelanders to find an example of blending different mental spaces that existed before Christianity and literate culture arrived in the North.

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<sup>402</sup> Parman 1991, 49–50. Augustine's texts were known in medieval Iceland, although he was apparently not as popular as Gregory the Great. For instance, the Augustinian monastery of Viðey owned *De doctrina Christiana* and several other texts written by Augustine. See the inventory of 1397 in *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 4, 110–111.

<sup>403</sup> Coleman 1996, 8–11.

<sup>404</sup> This is a view presented by Luis S. Feuer, as cited in Khokhlova 2014, 9.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–9.

As noted in earlier studies, the working mechanism of allegories is similar to that of myths.<sup>406</sup> Gísli Sigurðsson and Margaret Clunies Ross, among others, have shown how mythical layers of meaning appear in the *Íslendingasögur*.<sup>407</sup> The stories would thus have a manifest layer apparent to all, and a mythic layer that required understanding of its working mechanism to be unveiled. Myth as well could make abstract and invisible things tangible, as Frederik Sontag has written: “Myth’s virtue is that it depicts non-visual events in a visual manner, so that, through its mediation, what is essentially intangible may be grasped and dealt with.”<sup>408</sup>

Bearing in mind the heterogenic nature of the readers and listeners of *Íslendingasögur*, it is probable that some of them could search for hidden meanings in texts, either while they read them or heard them read, or afterwards, when they had had time to ponder them, whereas some would enjoy the sagas literally. Seeing the concealed would not necessitate foreign learning, at least not to a great extent, since those capable of understanding the myths already had knowledge of the working mechanism. As suggested above, this did not exclude the possibility that all of the text consumers allowed the supernatural beings some degree of existence.

#### 7.4.7 Contesting Explanations

In view of the discussion above, it cannot be excluded that medieval Icelanders did occasionally experience the presence of reanimated dead; although we can only make retrospective and therefore speculative diagnoses, it is worth noting that ergot poisoning, for instance, could cause (among other symptoms) gangrene, which made the body parts turn black, or hallucinations—effects that resemble those in the ‘epidemic’ of *Eyrbyggja saga*, where the bodies of the dying turn black and several restless dead are seen in the district (if reanimated dead in sagas *are* hallucinations).<sup>409</sup> Naturally, medieval Icelanders themselves would not have made such diagnoses, and the prominence of the dead in legends suggests that their appearance cannot be attributed solely to food poisoning.

In medieval European medical writings, however, seeing the dead was regarded as a symptom of melancholia.<sup>410</sup> Bernard of Gordon (1260–ca.1318), for instance, wrote in his *Lilium medicinae* that melancholic symptoms included “diverse

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<sup>406</sup> Clifford 1986; Gaines 2001.

<sup>407</sup> Clunies Ross 1998; Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 321–328. On the allegories in sagas, see also Einar Pálsson 1994.

<sup>408</sup> Sontag 1961, 109.

<sup>409</sup> Alm & Elvevåg 2013, 17–19.

<sup>410</sup> See also Rider 2014.



and terrifying apparitions [...] demons or black monks or hanged men, or the dead.”<sup>411</sup> Although influences from the continent and the British Isles spread to Iceland over the centuries it is not evident that Icelanders would have been familiar with such conceptions.

Another illness depicted in sagas that could have been associated with melancholia in European medical writings, was eye pain, and a passage in Hauksbók suggests that excess of black bile was considered to exit from the eyes. This is an interesting detail if we bear in mind that the eye pain depicted in sagas could result in bursting out of the eyes. However, as noted earlier, such diagnoses are not made explicitly in sagas, so we cannot be certain whether medieval Icelanders other than people who had been trained in European medicine would have considered people with eye pain or seeing reanimated dead as suffering from melancholia, even if guilt and regret or awareness of one’s condition as a person of indeterminate social status might involve a condition similar to melancholia.<sup>412</sup>

#### 7.4.8 Concluding Remarks

The laconic nature of the *Íslendingasögur* and lack of certain emotion discourses raises questions of possible alternative discourses that may have existed in medieval Iceland. The nature of the sources, situations in which the supernatural beings appear that are connected to various personal and social conflicts, and knowledge of various systems of signification—euphemisms, allegories, myths and other circumlocutory expressions—that some medieval Icelanders undoubtedly possessed, suggest that such alternative means of representation could be known and understood. Using the reanimated dead in literature to bring forth the emotional turmoil connected to social and personal conflicts can be interpreted as a kind of textual emotional refuge, a motif that could be used to represent the turmoil associated with the incident. The restless dead were considered wondrous things, but because of the prevailing medieval Icelandic tendency to describe even abstract things as tangible objects and to place supernatural creatures in distant times and faraway places, they could also carry

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<sup>411</sup> Fantasmata diuersa et terribilia [...] demones aut monacos nigros aut suspensos aut mortuos. *Lilium Medicinae*, cap. 19: De Mania et melancholia. Available at <<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ucm.5316545825;view=1up;seq=230>>. Last accessed January 8, 2014.

<sup>412</sup> Bearing in mind the long history of humoral theoretic ideas, it cannot be excluded that hallucinations (in the modern sense) and pain and aches in the head (corresponding to seeing the deceased and eye pain) may have been regarded as symptoms of grief or corresponding emotions in diverse cultures around the world and in various historical contexts.

meanings that were not revealed to all,<sup>413</sup> but only to a select group who had the capability to interpret texts according to the working mechanism of allegories, myths and metaphors.

The restless dead could concretize the emotions of men in emotionally loaded situations, but the mixed individual/collective border of the medieval individual's identity needs further exploration.<sup>414</sup> It is to this that I turn now.

## **7.5 The Folk Theory of Emotions, Part II: Emotional Atmospheres and Strong Minds**

In this chapter I will discuss further the medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotions in the light of the concepts 'emotional atmosphere' and 'strong mind'. I will concentrate on the relationship between the individual and society and how medieval Icelanders thought the emotions worked in this interaction, which might also occur between the dead and the living. I also consider further the porous nature of medieval Icelandic body-minds and discuss what kinds of people, if any, were capable of controlling supernatural intrusions associated with emotions.

### **7.5.1 Emotions of the Living, Actions of the Dead**

In the light of AUTHORITY and ROLE OF THE DEAD, the restless dead were beings that brought the past into the present, that is, at the moment when the hauntings were experienced. The dead would return from the otherworld and make invisible and intangible thoughts, emotions, memories and conflicts visible in the scenes of saga literature. This was necessary if there was a state of disequilibrium in the (saga's) present. In this study I do not question the idea that the dead became restless of their own free will, but in the light of ROLE OF THE DEAD and AUTHORITY I do suggest that a key to the motives of the reanimated dead can be found in the past of the living.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> It is also worth noting that even in modern cultures, people may react to their supernatural experiences with questions such as "what does the experience mean", "what is its message", "why did I experience it": that is, explanations are sought for the unexplained.

<sup>414</sup> For the medieval man's 'personality', see e.g. Gurevich 1985, 298 and onwards.

<sup>415</sup> A similar interpretation of otherworldly beings has been suggested in Bourguignon 2003, where she has examined spirits that appear in dreams in a Cuban voodoo culture. According to her, the spirits give advice and instructions for the dreamer concerning his or her future actions, yet although psychoanalytical dream interpretation was not part of the culture in question the contents of the dreams can be explained by examining the past. See, however, Kanerva (forthcoming a).

In AUTHORITY, ROLE OF THE DEAD and DISTURBANCES I have argued that one origin of posthumous restlessness was believed to lie in the thoughts, wishes and actions of living people. The corpse of the respectable Arnkell in *Eyrbyggja saga* does not become restless as his remaining female relatives are too weak to search for a settlement that would return the psychosocial balance disturbed by his death. His posthumous peacefulness may also be related to his pleasant character. However, the equally popular Gunnarr in *Brennu-Njáls saga* does return after death, as his mother strongly expresses her will that somebody avenge his killing. Gunnarr's post-mortem appearance is a source of inspiration for his son, who is a good candidate to become his avenger. It is as if the reanimated corpse propels him into a proper 'killing-mood', enabling the vengeance to take place and social order to be (momentarily) restored.<sup>416</sup> Consequently, it can be suggested that emotions were thought to have an important role in the activation of the dead.

To return to Arnkell, in *Eyrbyggja saga* it is his dead father who restores the social equilibrium when no living person can accomplish this. The father does not need the thoughts and memories of the living to empower him, since there is already sufficient anger as life power stored in his corpse.<sup>417</sup> As I have argued in AUTHORITY, the revenge that the dead father accomplishes was presumably interpreted as bringing an emotional catharsis to the reader of the saga, since leaving an honourable man unavenged would not have served the medieval Icelandic audience's view of justice.

The role of the dead in *Íslendingasögur* therefore bears resemblance to the role of the reanimated dead and other beings that represent the powers of death, for instance, in preindustrial Finnic folklore, where the appearance of the dead was associated with, inter alia, the breaking of social norms.<sup>418</sup> As in that case, it appears that deeds done and the thoughts of the living activate the posthumous restlessness in *Íslendingasögur*.<sup>419</sup> We can also find a similar pattern in EYE PAIN when the impact mechanism concerning eye pain caused by supernatural agents is examined: those who have transgressed rules and norms and broken confidence are affected, or, to put it another way, 'shot with a sharp projectile by a supernatural agent'.

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<sup>416</sup> *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 185–195; Kanerva 2013, 124–126.

<sup>417</sup> Kanerva (forthcoming a).

<sup>418</sup> Koski 2011, 176–177.

<sup>419</sup> For similar 'motives' for posthumous restlessness in twentieth-century Estonia, see also Valk 2006. The notion of the possible power of the living to raise the dead also points to the need of further studies concerning the use of witchcraft in raising the dead, but also regarding the role of the dead themselves in their appearance, and whether they can be considered to take a passive or an active part in it.

This eye pain is likewise reminiscent of certain beliefs about magic in premodern Finnic culture, according to which only those who were guilty of what they were accused would be affected by supernatural means whereas no harm would fall on the innocent.<sup>420</sup> Based on the discussion in *ROLE OF THE DEAD*, the analogy in the *Íslendingasögur* is that the restless dead were supposed to appear only when the deeds of the living gave them reason to do so. The person to whom the restless corpse appeared did not have to be the transgressor, however, as shown in the example of Gunnarr, in which his dead form offers his son encouragement. Instead, the wishes and will of the living appear to suffice to make the deceased emerge in the world of the living, that is, within their field of vision. This also appears to apply to other cases of benevolent restless dead which have not been covered in this study.<sup>421</sup> Ascribing such agency to the living suggests that reciprocal communication with the dead had a place in medieval Icelandic culture.<sup>422</sup>

### 7.5.2 The Posthumous Breath in Emotional Atmosphere

One thing that may strike us as peculiar in *Íslendingasögur* is the emphasis given to the memories and the past and their power to shape the ‘present’ and ‘future’. As shown in *ROLE OF THE DEAD* and *DISTURBANCES*, past deeds in the guise of reanimated dead affect the mental wellbeing of the people in the saga ‘present’—to use a well-known phrase, the past really does return to haunt the living. The conception of emotion in medieval Iceland introduced above and discussed in *EYE PAIN* and *DISTURBANCES*, according to which mental functions could originate from the external environment or be transmitted through winds (of witches), raises some questions concerning the interaction between the dead and the living.

A concept that may offer some assistance in conceptualizing this interaction, especially when larger numbers of people are affected by the dead, is (emotional) *atmosphere*. Ben Anderson has discussed the concept, noting how it is used in everyday discourse as synonymous to collective emotions, feelings and moods. He has pointed out its essence as an experience or substance in between individuals, within them but escaping the borders of individual subjects. He defines atmosphere as an:

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<sup>420</sup> Stark 2006, 218.

<sup>421</sup> I have discussed some single cases in Kanerva 2013, 124–126.

<sup>422</sup> For such reciprocal communication in other cultural contexts (here Finno-Baltic) through e.g. laments, see Stepanova 2011, 136–137. I will discuss reciprocal communication in the Old Norse-Icelandic context in Kanerva (forthcoming a, b). For the possibility that there existed a tradition of female mourning songs in Scandinavia similar to (Finno-Baltic) laments, see also Mundal 2013. To speak of ancestor worship may be inadequate, however. Compare, however, Laidoner 2012.

affective experience as occurring beyond, around, and alongside the formation of subjectivity. [...] Affective atmospheres are a class of experience that occur before and alongside the formation of subjectivity, across human and non-human materialities, and in-between subject/object distinctions [...]. As such, atmospheres are the shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge. [...] [A]tmospheres are unfinished because of their constitutive openness to being taken up in experience. Atmospheres are indeterminate. They are resources that become elements within sense experience. [...] [A]tmospheres are singular affective qualities that emanate from but exceed the assembling of bodies. Which means that the term atmosphere presents itself to us as a response to a question; how to attend to collective affects that are not reducible to the individual bodies that they emerge from [...] [T]hey are impersonal in that they belong to collective situations and yet can be felt as intensely personal. On this account atmospheres are spatially discharged affective qualities that are autonomous from the bodies that they emerge from, enable and perish with.<sup>423</sup>

Anderson's thought is, naturally, modern, abstract and full of metaphors—and presumes that affects emerge from individuals' bodies—yet the definition he gives has similarities with what has been said above about the origin of emotions and illnesses. Through the concept 'atmosphere', the collective nature of the consequences in many of the restless dead episodes in *Íslendingasögur*, such as *Eyrbyggja saga* discussed in *ROLE OF THE DEAD, DISTURBANCES and AUTHORITY*, may be comprehended. The reanimated dead as the representation of emotional regime (that the people in the narrative context of the saga all share) do not infect, frighten or harass only one person, as their influence extends to far more people. For instance, all the residents at the Fróðá farm are poisoned by the ghostly effects except those whose high status and strength of character (or mind) protects them (as suggested in *DISTURBANCES*).

If the above atmosphere concept is combined with the implicit theory of emotions in medieval Iceland that I have discussed in *DISTURBANCES* and outlined above, it can be hypothesised that the restless dead were expected to induce their malign influence through air. This influence was not necessarily thought of as a miasma—that is, created by pollution of the air with poisonous vapour, in this case

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<sup>423</sup> Anderson 2009, 77–80.

from the dead corpses<sup>424</sup>—but by the motion of the air that was induced by the dead as active agents. This may have been thought to happen as breath (or wind or other substance) exited posthumously from their mouths and noses, for instance. The existence of such beliefs in medieval Iceland is possible, since we know that the service to the dead, *nábjargir*, consisted of closing the eyes, mouth and nostrils of the deceased. This suggests that the intention was to close all orifices in the corpse through which something might exit and enter the extra-bodily space.

Presumably it was believed that this exiting substance would be harmful to the living. To speculate further, the substance that exited from malevolent corpses was perhaps the breath, spirit or currents of air that people thought circulated in the veins, which then spread in the vicinity of the dead body in a wind-like manner. As the corpse was prepared for funeral it was not necessarily kept isolated but was at the centre of activities, and the smell may have been interpreted as the substance that was thought to emanate from the body (or as a sign of its presence). Because of its essence as wind or odour, this substance might have been thought to penetrate the body openings of living people easily (through nose and mouth). As I suggest in *DISTURBANCES*, such penetration of the ‘posthumous breath’<sup>425</sup> was expected to befall the timid especially, whereas the bodies of the socially more remarkable people remained intact.<sup>426</sup> Through this process the external force would produce the psychophysical problems depicted in *DISTURBANCES*, by causing the movements of the heart-mind.

### 7.5.3 The Contagious Emotions of the Powerful

The hypothesis outlined above does not conflict with earlier notions of *mana* as a power associated with the dead, which I have discussed in *AUTHORITY*. The existence of a kind of *mana*, or preservation of vitality or life-spirit of some sort in the deceased body, does not exclude the possibility that this residue or ‘remains’ could affect the atmosphere directly. This was so especially if the residue was regarded as a substance similar to air and its currents, that is winds, which, as I have argued in *EYE PAIN*, could indeed cause psychophysical reactions.

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<sup>424</sup> However, it cannot be excluded that “gaseous fumes emanating from the body of a recently deceased” could cause not only nausea, but also made people fall unconscious upon breathing them in, as is attested in Desjarlais 1995, 207.

<sup>425</sup> Compare also a notion presented in Simek 2011, 45, based on an incantation in a fourteenth-century manuscript written in Middle High German, that elves were thought to cause harm by *breathing*.

<sup>426</sup> See also Heide 2006; Stark 2006, 152, 257, 281–289, 292–299.

Concepts such as those discussed above were entirely compatible with medieval European views introduced to Iceland in the saga period. For instance, according to Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636), diseases could spread through touch but also through the air,<sup>427</sup> thus including the atmospheres of certain places. We do know that medieval Icelanders were familiar with some of Isidore’s writings, so his possible impact on the conceptions of the literary elite cannot be ignored.

Nevertheless, it may well be that a folk theory of emotions and illnesses such as that I have hypothesised above—that the human body was porous and could be penetrated by thoughts of others in the form of ‘winds (of witches)’—arose through inspection of the environment and its physical phenomena. Moreover, men’s own psychophysical experiences, acknowledged to result from physical phenomena, could influence the conceptions: the powerful winds that kept people from approaching places they aimed to get to or prevented (or facilitated) a sea voyage, sharp gusts of wind that almost knocked someone off their feet, breezes that barred one’s breath, illness that followed after being caught up in a storm, the piercing pain on one’s face or the ache in frostbitten toes and fingers caused by a cold wind. Hence air-like substances which clearly affected the wellbeing and prosperity of people were easily seen as dynamic forces that affected the world. Bearing in mind the ‘winds of witches’, they could be construed as being caused or moved by agents.<sup>428</sup>

In literature on the ‘latent’ level the restless dead could also represent a kind of collective mood experienced by a local community, in this case the group of people living on a farm where the dead were buried. The collective mood as an affective atmosphere could involve people’s individual emotional and mental experiences, that is, movements of the mind that would have ‘radiated’ from within the bodies (perhaps simply through the breath or through the eyes<sup>429</sup>).

The emotions (in *Eyrbyggja saga*) could consist of memories of the loss of an important person, the grief felt as its consequence, uncertainty when facing the future after the death of so many and realising the threat of new contagions, guilt and remorse felt after breaking social norms, distress caused by awareness of one’s socially indeterminate status, for instance. All these mental experiences would not necessarily create an atmospheric mixture and become part of the surrounding air, however. Instead, it seems that only individuals with a ‘strong mind’—whether they were dead

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<sup>427</sup> Stearns 2011, 41–45.

<sup>428</sup> Compare also the suggestion made by Steward E. Guthrie concerning a perceptual bias: namely that humans have a tendency to think that stimuli of uncertain origin are produced by agents. Guthrie 1993.

<sup>429</sup> Compare e.g. the mechanism of the evil eye in Dundes (ed.) 1992; Lindberg 1976. See also e.g. on facial expressions related to eyes and the size of the pupils in various emotional states and thus on eyes as ‘mirrors of the mind’ in Lee, Mirza, Flanagan & Anderson 2014.

or alive—possessed the ability to transfer their ‘inner air’ to currents of air that could simultaneously influence the conditions of others. It is this concept that I discuss in *AUTHORITY* and touch upon in *EYE PAIN*.

#### **7.5.4 Emotions and the Unbounded Self**

The hypotheses outlined above also bring to the fore the question of the relations between individual and community and the boundaries of an individual in medieval Icelandic culture. In the light of *ROLE OF THE DEAD*, *EYE PAIN* and *DISTURBANCES I* would argue that medieval Icelandic people cannot be regarded as individuals in the modern sense, nor can their ‘psychology’ or emotional experiences be detached from their social and physical environment. Following the ideas of Aron Gurevich, the boundaries of medieval ‘personality’ (or the ‘self’) were not clear cut, but somehow an intermingling of the individual and the collective.<sup>430</sup>

The conclusions I come to in *EYE PAIN* solidify this conception; the ‘individuality’ of a person was recognised as a whole that was confined within the human skin, but the human body—simultaneously the manifestation of the human mind as the intellectual functions were corporal in nature—was to a certain extent open and susceptible to external influences. Thus, the ‘self’ was porous as elements from the exterior environment could penetrate the individual’s body through various openings. ‘Self’ was not self-absorbed but in constant interaction with the external world and the various agents and forces in it, sometimes merging with them, sometimes extending its influence beyond the body boundaries.

People were not merely at the mercy of the powers of nature, but also of other people. Especially those who possessed magical skills—or those with a strong will—could induce harm to other men’s minds and bodies by harnessing, for instance, the elements of nature to their own use. Thus wind and storm could be considered phenomena raised by magic, and even the thought or will of a witch that by this means could penetrate the bodies through the mouth or nostrils,<sup>431</sup> as discussed in *EYE PAIN*.

The concept of emotional atmospheres and the indefinite boundaries between the individual and the collective allow the idea that the emotions within the body were not always expected to remain inside its corporal cage. Instead, the emotions could

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<sup>430</sup> Gurevich 1985, 298 and onwards. Compare, however, modern scientific perspectives: e.g. in the case of fetal alcohol syndrome (the effect on the fetus that follows in utero alcohol exposure) and in the light of attachment theory. In both cases the boundaries between individuals and the physical environment appear to be imprecise.

<sup>431</sup> See also Heide 2004; Heide 2006.



burst out, even literally and visibly. Such an occurrence is discussed in DISTURBANCES: the anger of Þórhallr is an abscess on his leg and bursts out as the boil erupts. As suggested above, the substance in the boil may have been interpreted literally as ‘anger’, a force that originated from some exterior being or power but became part of Þórhallr’s anger while in his infected wound.

Þórhallr’s anger is made of matter. The modern reader immediately concludes that the substance is probably pus, and it is difficult to consider it an element that could be mixed in an emotional atmosphere such as that hypothesised above—one we would rather define as ‘gaseous’—and one which could influence the emotions of others through the atmosphere, as apparently occurs when the angry dead Þórólfr bægifótr harasses the living in *Eyrbyggja saga*.<sup>432</sup> Or, the movements of the mind associated with the anger (or other emotions) of the strong-minded were expected to move the minds of the compliant as the emotional force spread outside the body and merged with the surrounding air.<sup>433</sup>

The hypothesis, according to which the living people could also have an impact on the mixture of atmosphere, has some basis in other known beliefs. The ‘nine openings’<sup>434</sup> of the one who would induce the influence could undoubtedly act as channels to the delivery of such effects. This is also suggested by the belief in the evil eye—it is likely that people holding such a belief thought that a power of some kind, or a substance that would be transmitted through air could emit from the eyes.<sup>435</sup> The implication is that the body-minds of people were heavily dependent on the physical and social environment.

### 7.5.5 The Untouchable Strong Minds

I have suggested in AUTHORITY that the power and authority of the dead depended on the strength of their minds. Following from such an asset—that was in a sense mental, but also physical—the deceased could return from the otherworld not only

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<sup>432</sup> Interestingly, modern science also considers emotions ‘contagious’, although there is no consensus on the mechanism by which this contagion occurs. Hatfield et. al 1993 and 1994; Sy et al. 2005; Schoenewolf 1990.

<sup>433</sup> See also footnote 312 on p. 101 on the role of air and breath (*önd*) in the palpitation of the heart and the possibility that this air-like substance resided in the heart of a brave and fearless (*bugfullr*) man. Although anger and bravery are not directly associated, huffing and puffing (i.e. breathing out abundantly) in anger is part of the modern caricature of anger expression.

<sup>434</sup> The ‘nine openings’ include ears, eyes, mouth, nostrils, anus and vagina. For the definition, see Stark 2006, 160.

<sup>435</sup> On the mechanism of the evil eye and theories of vision in various cultural and historical contexts, see e.g. Dundes (ed.) 1992; Lindberg 1976.

because of the wishes of the living but also of their own free will to harass the living and influence their psycho-physical wellbeing.

As shown in DISTURBANCES, the influence was transmitted to the human body as its boundaries opened up, for instance, at the moment of extreme fear or excessive grief. In many cultures, fear and grief are considered particularly dangerous and detrimental emotions because they affect the mental immunity of the person. These emotions could expose people to the influence of demons or evil spirits, or cause other mental and bodily disturbances, even disease and death.<sup>436</sup>

A degree of insensitivity—or at least avoidance of the emotions that made one passive, weak and unable to act<sup>437</sup>—was good and advisable since it assisted in keeping the body boundaries closed. A good heart, *gott hjarta*, was not to be found in the breast of the lenient and gentle, but indicated great courage, even the total lack of fear that was characteristic of famous heroic dragonslayers such as Sigurðr Fáfnisbani.<sup>438</sup> This organ was also associated with the mind, and further depiction of a fearless mind presented in DISTURBANCES suggests that it was less prone to move.

How was the movement in frightened hearts generated? The explanation may be similar to that proposed in the above discussion about the ability to influence others. That the source of this influence was the strong mind of a deceased person, or a living person appearing in dreams as described in EYE PAIN, may be suggested in the light of an example from pre-industrial Finnic culture. The characteristics of the sorcerers known as *tietäjät* (sg. *tietäjä*, literally ‘knower’) resemble those of the powerful figures in the sagas.

According to Laura Stark, a *tietäjä* needed to have a certain kind of personality and specific physical capacities in order to perform successfully the things he wished or was expected to accomplish. He should be courageous and have a ‘hard’ *luonto* (literally: ‘nature’), which was a form of dynamistic force within the individual.<sup>439</sup> In addition to this strong will, ‘strong blood’ and ‘hard’ body boundaries were required, so that the sorcerer’s mind and body could not be harmed by any exterior force that might try to penetrate the body.<sup>440</sup> The person who possessed the power to influence others (including bloodstopping and other healing practices) was thus characterized as

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<sup>436</sup> On similar ideas concerning fear and sorrow, e.g. in the medieval context, see Caciola 2000, 77–78 and 80; in the early modern context, see Macdonald 1981, 181; Kaartinen 2012; in anthropological studies, see Wikan 1990; Desjarlais 1992, 139–140.

<sup>437</sup> Such emotions often include fear and sorrow. See e.g. Lindemann 1994; Svendsen 2008.

<sup>438</sup> *Völsunga saga*, 45.

<sup>439</sup> According to Stark, the term *luonto* referred to “a dynamistic force present in the human body” that also indicated powerful agency in the sense “what [s]he wills, it happens” (2006, 262–266).

<sup>440</sup> Stark 2006, 257, 286–289, 292–299.

‘hard’, and was beyond any external influence whatsoever—in other words, untouchable.

I have argued in *AUTHORITY* that there were similar figures in Old Norse/Icelandic culture; certain people, whether alive or dead, could possess such a strong ‘personality’, or have such ‘charisma’ that they had an impact on others and continued to exert this authority even posthumously. Possibly they were thought to emit their power from their corpses (so that the surrounding atmosphere became ‘contagious’ in their presence). In *EYE PAIN, DISTURBANCES* and *AUTHORITY* I conclude that external forces, be it winds or other elements of nature, could not be directed by just anyone. This power to influence was allotted only to a select few.

As explained at more length in *DISTURBANCES* and *AUTHORITY*, this exceptional power is exemplified by people capable of controlling the influence of the dead—either so that they banished the restless dead or so that the illnesses spread by the deceased would not infect them. In many cases the strength of this counterforce was dependent on the social status of the person. In *DISTURBANCES* I suggest that expression and experience of some emotions, especially fear, was a question of status. This should not astound us since fear in itself, as a potential counterpart of anger and aggression, is universally, if to a varying extent, associated with subordinacy. People in the lower strata of the social hierarchy may be more prone to feel fear (also when confronted with their superiors), whereas the members of the higher strata more often express anger (also to their subjects) which is thus associated with dominance and aggression.<sup>441</sup>

For this reason slaves and landless or nameless people in sagas were often weak, vulnerable and easily frightened, whereas those with a reputable genealogy and respectable character could control and prevent external impact. This aristocratic attitude has been pointed out in earlier studies of medieval Iceland, and it has also been argued that the urge to stand out from inferior social strata became stronger or more common later in the fourteenth century, after the submission to the Norwegian king that greatly affected the evolution of the Icelandic aristocracy.<sup>442</sup> The close associations between concepts of emotion and illness and the bodily nature of each even suggest that medieval Icelanders expected people of lower status to be

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<sup>441</sup> On the experience of fear and expression of anger in different social groups, see Frost and Averill 1982, 284. On the connection between anger and aggression, see e.g. Izard et al. 2008; Izard et al. 2011, 45; Averill 1982, *passim*.

<sup>442</sup> Bagerius 2013. This attitude to social inferiors appears also e.g. in Saxo Grammaticus’s *Gesta Danorum* (c. 1200). Philip Line, personal communication. Similar resistance and immunity is visible also in European humoral theory as knights, i.e. members of the aristocracy were expected to be sanguine persons. Thus, their bodily humours were in balance and they suffered no bodily illnesses or (apparently) no emotional turmoil whatsoever.

more prone to catching ‘physical’ diseases. This is evident in the saga ghost episodes that involve epidemics, which are discussed in DISTURBANCES. In the light of continental European notions of the moral aspects of diseases such vulnerability may have been interpreted as a moral failure of the socially subordinate.<sup>443</sup> Illnesses could, naturally, attack the more noble as well: the idea that diseases had a moral aspect is also manifest in the saga episodes in which people who have transgressed some moral norms become the victims of disease sent by supernatural beings, as is attested in EYE PAIN.<sup>444</sup>

### 7.5.6 Strong Minds, Strong Bodies

The idea that the ‘strength’ of the restless dead (who became restless of their own free will) was precisely strength of mind is suggested by a semiotic analysis of the saga revenants that I have not included in my articles, but which may be mentioned briefly here. The corporeality of the restless dead in *Íslendingasögur* is interesting when examined from a semiotic perspective. The relationship between the corporeal reanimated dead as sign and its immediate object, the deceased, is iconic, since the sign resembles the object. The bodies of the restless dead are signs of the post-mortem presence of deceased human beings.<sup>445</sup> This is important to note, especially given the emphasis that I have placed on the important informative function of the human body in medieval saga culture which is supported by the sources: that the human body—including the skin—was the mirror of emotions and thoughts, and that mental functions were displayed on the basis of somatic changes.<sup>446</sup>

Since mental functions were thought to be physical in nature and they always involved the body, the body of the reanimated dead represents, iconically, the deceased individual and, metaphorically, their mind and the mental functions displayed in it. The relationship between sign and its object in this case can also be inferred since it is indexical: the reanimated dead and the deceased person are directly connected. They are two different conditions of the human being that occupy either the terrestrial or the otherworldly reality. The presence of the reanimated dead is, at the same time, the presence of the living but now deceased person and his body. The former resembles the latter in character and appearance.<sup>447</sup> The deceased causes the

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<sup>443</sup> See e.g. Metzler 2006, 13.

<sup>444</sup> See also Hall 2009.

<sup>445</sup> On iconic signs, see Chandler (electronic document); Johansen 2002, 29–35; Veivo & Huttunen 1999, 45.

<sup>446</sup> See also Larrington 2001; Miller 1992.

<sup>447</sup> On indexical signs, see Johansen 2002, 35–38; Veivo & Huttunen 1999, 45–46.

posthumous object, the reanimated dead, to appear; and without this state of affairs, the 'living dead' sign cannot exist. The revenant is a reagent, a trace left among the living by the deceased that is metonymically related to its object. Through the association of mind and body it is likewise a symptom, synecdoche, being present and part of the object itself<sup>448</sup>—the mind that stretches its influence beyond the grave.

Since reanimated dead often elicit some kind of submissive reaction or mental states that lead to passivity, such as fear, illness, insanity and death, at least in some members of society, it can be argued that the reanimated dead are the sign of the deceased person's posthumous power. Considering the informative functions of the body and the mental aspect of the effects, the corporeal revenant represents the mind of the deceased and its mental influence among the living.

This suggests that the mind of the deceased person was still an active agent capable of enacting its authority over the living, and raises questions about beliefs concerning the persistence of the mind (or possibly the soul) after death.<sup>449</sup> It is as if the (malevolent) thoughts and intentions (that is the minds) of the dead were thought still to be present in society as part of the emotional atmosphere, infecting the living with various consequences. The 'mind is an active agent' argument is further supported if the dead generally became restless of their own (and often malevolent) free will. Activity after death would not then be a punishment for the deceased, but an expression of their wish to continue participating in the society of the living.<sup>450</sup> It should be noted some reanimated dead clearly lack a will: those of *Flóamanna saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* appear to be involuntary dead people that constitute a group of restless dead.

However, it seems safe to say at this point that the power of the dead appears to have been based, at least to a certain extent, on the interaction between the minds of the living and mind of the dead. One of the preconditions for posthumous restlessness was that the dead person had possessed a 'strong mind', that is a powerful 'personality', in order to be able to influence the living. The authoritative 'personality' would have been manifested already in the living person. Such a personality was not merely a matter of status based on wealth and respectable genealogy, but could also be possessed by other, socially less noble yet well thought-of figures, or physically outstanding individuals.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Palin 1998, 130.

<sup>449</sup> See Kanerva (forthcoming a), on the medieval Icelandic idea that people's minds could continue to exist after death.

<sup>450</sup> On the dead as members of the society participating in its social conventions, see Byock 1982, 133; Martin 2005, 74–77; Nedkvitne 2004, 32–34 and 38–43.

<sup>451</sup> See also Bagge 2013, on the importance of personal characteristics instead of hereditary rights in acquisition of authority in medieval Norway.

A good example of the last category is the figure of Glámr in *Grettis saga*; an odd, troll-like man who is said to originate from the land of the Swedes and is unknown to everyone. As a shepherd, he is among those of lowest social status in the household, he is fairly unsociable, large in stature and becomes a vicious revenant after his death.<sup>452</sup> Although he is only a farm worker, he does not take ‘no’ for an answer from his superiors: when the mistress of the house has no wish to give him anything to eat during the Christmas fast, she nevertheless ends up doing so. Glámr does not want to have any Christian tricks, just his meal, and though the mistress suspects that such an ill deed during the fast will turn out badly for him, he demands to have his food, saying “it would turn out worse for her otherwise.”<sup>453</sup>

Glámr has a strong mind, but the excerpt also focuses attention on the threat of physical violence posed by his character and his large size. The episode raises the question of a possible link between physical strength and strength of mind. This association may have been strengthened by the common association of physical strength with courageous men, so that the quality of *bugfullr*, literally ‘full of mind’, would be expected to co-occur with physical strength in the same individual. In Glámr’s case, he may have had a broader and fuller chest, as he was certainly big and brawny (and thus the dwelling place of his heart-mind, the chest, was larger than usual).<sup>454</sup> Without doubt courage, that was related with the word mind, *bugr*, came far more easily to such men than to those who were small and scrawny.

The connection between physical strength and strong mind is also suggested by descriptions of large-sized women who indubitably possess magic powers. Among them may be listed Þórgunna in *Eyrbyggja saga*, who is heavily involved in the hauntings of Fróðá, and the figure reminiscent of an “angel of death” who presides over a ritualistic murder in Ibn Fadlân’s report of the ship burial among the Volga Rus.<sup>455</sup> As I have shown in *EYE PAIN*, large women may have been ascribed magical skills because they were considered abnormal, either because they were thought to transgress borders of gender or resembled the mythical giants who were well-known for their wisdom and knowledge of various vile arts. In order to be able to exercise their power they would have needed a strong ‘personality’, a mind that was strong enough not to quiver under the influence of external forces.

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<sup>452</sup> *Grettis saga*, 109–123.

<sup>453</sup> [...] kvað henni annat skyldu vera verra. *Grettis saga*, 111.

<sup>454</sup> In Galenic medicine, courage was expected to be in the stomach. See e.g. Hajar 2012. Interestingly, in modern studies it has been shown that threatening situations are often felt in the stomach and that this ‘gut feeling’ shapes fear. Klarer et al. 2014.

<sup>455</sup> Steinsland and Meulengracht Sørensen 1998, 88–89.

Those who suffered from the symptoms and consequences caused by the restless dead or other supernatural agents, including those depicted in EYE PAIN, were thus subordinate to the power that the otherworldly or otherwise supernatural agents signified. They had ‘weaker minds’, and in consequence, were not able to resist this authority.

### 7.5.7 Concluding Remarks

Emotions and interaction between the deceased and the living were sometimes involved in the return of the dead: the revenants could appear because they themselves wanted and possessed revitalising anger in their corpses, or because the wishes of the living were strong enough to cause them to return. The dead would return if the living needed them, or if the deceased wished to deal with their issues, which often involved norm transgressions. Especially the dead with strong minds—that is, those people with power, authority, physical strength and strength of character—were represented as being conscious of events occurring around them, since their body-minds had not yet decayed. They were able to transfer the emotional power or energy inherent in them to the living, possibly in such air-like substances as breath, smell or wind. The vapours could even be harmful, as they became part of the affective atmosphere (that contained e.g. emotions, thoughts and memories) in the vicinity of the corpses and could penetrate the boundaries of bodies of the living. Both fear and moral transgressions made people more vulnerable to such intrusions. However, strong-willed living people could keep their body boundaries intact and resist supernatural intrusions.

Above I have argued that anger was construed as a force with material essence. The restless dead Þórólfr bægifótr in *Eyrbyggja saga*, for instance, was apparently full of anger as he died, and became posthumously restless because of it. In this example in particular, anger appears as a kind of energy that propels the post-mortem activity.<sup>456</sup> Still, anger as a dynamic force that was connected to the reanimation of such strong-willed dead as Þórólfr bægifótr does not necessarily indicate that this reanimation was mechanical. The mind of the dead person was still functioning and consciously aware of its environment, and therefore capable of having emotions.

Since not all restless dead died angry, we may speculate that, in some cases, the activity-triggering power existent in reanimated dead and labelled here as strong mind could be associated with anger as well—anger as a kind of life power or energy

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<sup>456</sup> Kanerva (forthcoming a). See also Vésteinn Ólason 2003, 167.

that could move not only the person in question, but also others, as the anger of authoritative people could make things happen.

The strong mind was obviously not a prerequisite for posthumous restlessness in all deceased people, as is shown in the groups of reanimated dead mentioned above, those of *Flóamanna saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*, where the anonymous restless dead appear to lack a will of their own, and rather act as if possessed, as suggested by Vésteinn Ólason.<sup>457</sup> However, it seems that the 'passive' revenants are provided with the energy to become active by the strong-minded people present in every reanimated dead episode of the *Íslendingasögur*. It is possible that dead people with strong minds were thought to elicit the posthumous activity of other corpses as well.<sup>458</sup> In addition, just as the dead could influence the emotions of the living, so the thoughts and emotions of the living could affect the dead and cause the appearance of reanimated dead.

If there is a danger that too grim a picture is painted here, the results in AUTHORITY and EYE PAIN also imply that the world was not totally unsafe and unpredictable for medieval Icelanders, despite the external influences that could make them feel something they did not want to feel and placed them in circumstances that made them vulnerable. The power to influence was restricted to certain people, and various rituals as well as strength of mind, wit and intelligence assisted in controlling diverse unknown powers.

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<sup>457</sup> Vésteinn Ólason 2003, 164. Here I have not presented further suggestions regarding this possible 'possession' and its relationship with the Christian idea of demonic possession, but I have left these questions for a further study.

<sup>458</sup> See also Kanerva (forthcoming b).



## 8. Conclusion

What is Love? A God, a Celestial Spirit, a state of mind? Or is it, perhaps, sometimes to be thought of as a God or Spirit and sometimes merely as an experience? And what is it essentially in each of these respects? [...] Plato does not treat of it as simply a state observed in souls; he also makes it a Spirit-being; so that we read of the birth of Eros, under definite circumstances and by a certain parentage.<sup>459</sup>

Plotinus (204–270): *The Enneads*.

This study started as a study of emotions and their representation in saga literature. It was also clear that medieval Icelanders not only represented emotions differently from us, but they also had conceptions of emotions that were different from ours. As a consequence, I have also proposed new outlines for the medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotions.

Naturally, folk theories are not carefully thought-out doctrines, consistent and unambiguous. This has been apparent as I have considered the problem of the origin of emotions. I have argued that at least some emotions, here guilt and fear, were considered movements of the mind that could be elicited by external agents or forces, such as winds that could carry the malevolent intentions of witches. Anger appears to have been conceptualised as a substance that could penetrate the body from the outside, caused by the evil thoughts of others or by actual physical objects such as weapons. Some emotions, however, may have been thought to originate from within the body, making them in a sense ‘endocrinal’. Such was the case with anger, which also acted as a life power or force of some kind. This concept of emotion and anger in particular as a material essence is something that still requires further research, however.

The distinction between ‘emotion’ and ‘illness’ was not always clear in medieval Iceland. It is probable that all conditions comprehended as involving movement of internal organs or bodily substances (the latter referring not only to fluids in the humoral theoretic sense, but to substances of various kinds that resided within the body or could enter it from outside) were conceptualised similarly and categorised accordingly. The roots of this convention may go back to some universal experiences. For instance, although the early fourteenth-century writer of *Hauksbók* did not name the condition opposite to health, *heill*, in Hippocratic writings this

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<sup>459</sup> Transl. by Stephen MacKenna in *Plotinus: The Enneads*, 191.

counterpart is referred to as pain.<sup>460</sup> Since the medieval Icelanders believed the same—where there is pain (e.g. eye pain) there is illness (i.e. the person who suffers from eye pain is not *heil*)—the psycho-physicality of emotions and illnesses suggests that they shared a belief with the Ancient Greeks—and with modern scholars, who hold that it is not always evident to the observer nor to the one who experiences pain whether pain is physical or (in the modern sense) mental.<sup>461</sup>

In the light of the medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotions outlined above, it can be argued that medieval Icelanders did not ascribe all responsibility for a person's emotions to that individual, but recognised external influence as the propeller of (e)motion. When experiencing an emotion, the person was a passive recipient. Yet lesser responsibility also exposed people to suspicion of weakness, in that they could not resist the power of the exterior forces.

As noted at the beginning of this study, when exploring guilt-like emotions in sagas I began with the presupposition that emotions could be interpreted by examining the motivation behind the actions of the saga characters in question. This is, also in the light of medieval Icelandic conceptions of emotions, a useful, valid and justifiable tool, as it makes it easier for modern people to grasp the emotion culture of medieval Icelanders, who were 'goal-oriented' in the sense that they had their own desires and interests, which they either held individually or shared collectively with their fellow humans or kin. The passiveness referred to above does not invalidate this viewpoint, since the openness of the body boundaries could be controlled by people whose heart-mind was strong enough to do this.

Concerning the medieval Icelandic folk theory of emotions, however, there is still some work to be done on the extent to which foreign influence from translated romances and classical works, as well as medical doctrines such as humoral theory, was adopted and how it may have influenced the language and conceptions of the saga writers, which would in turn have affected the manner in which they portray emotions (and illnesses). The writer might, for instance, know humoral theory by heart, but this did not necessarily affect the body schema which s/he unconsciously held, only the body image that might include the latest cultural currents and learned elements. In Hauksbók, for instance, Haukr may have wanted to include information concerning humoral theory only for future use, if he was expected to be aware of behaviour associated with various temperaments in his office as a lawman. Alternatively, special knowledge was new and thus found intriguing, but this certainly does not indicate that it was consciously or unconsciously applied in sagas by all writers.

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<sup>460</sup> See "On the Nature of Man," in *Hippocrates IV*, 10–13.

<sup>461</sup> Wierzbicka 2012, 308–310; Marmaridou 2006; Kross 2011. Some studies suggest that social and physical pain also overlap on the neural level. See Eisenberger & Lieberman 2004.

That thirteenth- and fourteenth-century writers tried to apply humoral theoretic ideas is suggested by some sagas. However, it is by no means certain that the passages referring to this learning were not added to the original saga only in the later manuscripts that still survive. Moreover, it has to be borne in mind that many humoral theoretic ideas were not necessarily incompatible with native folk theories, and that similarity does not always imply influence.

Regarding the representation of emotions in sagas and the emphasis placed on somatic changes noted already in earlier studies, however, the possible influence of the early thirteenth-century translations of European romances on the description of somatic changes in *Íslendingasögur*, for instance, still needs to be studied in greater depth. In these translated *riddarasögur* portrayal of somatic changes is common, but their influence on the original *riddarasögur*, those written in Iceland during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, appears to have been the strongest. Yet the influence on earlier genres is apparent as well, although, for example, the theme of courtly love (and thus ‘happy endings’) does not seem to have made such a powerful impact on the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* as it made on the original *riddarasögur*, as has been shown by Daniel Sävborg.<sup>462</sup> Consequently, emotion discourses have been genre-dependent. Since I have concentrated on *Íslendingasögur* in this study, further study of various other genres still remains to be made.

Still, despite the laconic style of *Íslendingasögur*, externalisation of the responsibility—its ascription to various external agents—tells us how medieval Icelandic people conceptualised their mental functions as having an extra-bodily essence. This extra-corporality also offered a way to depict mental functions that, although some of them would reveal themselves in visible somatic changes, were often hidden from the vision of others. This may not be a question of pure symbolism, but of a manner of speaking, a discourse with which a wider audience may have been familiar. Understanding the role of external agents may have required awareness and internalization of the working mechanisms of such systems as allegories and myths. Reading the stories in a context that involved giving meaning according to such mechanisms was not necessarily a new, foreign or merely literary manner of interpretation for the medieval Icelanders. We tend to think that they believed in ghosts, but may ignore the possibility that as well as having supernatural experiences, people may have wanted to interpret these experiences.

The picture of the belief-world of the medieval Icelanders presented here is not one of superstitious folk living in a ‘Dark Age’, people without reason who feared everything and believed in anything, but one of people who emphasized tangibility of

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<sup>462</sup> Sävborg 2007, 201–271.

concepts, conceptualizing the phenomena that they observed with their own eyes as matter. In the context of their own worldview and even that of the medieval world in general, given what they believed about the body and the phenomena surrounding it, their concepts were logical and rational. The body boundaries could not always inhibit the various forces that inhabited the exterior (including physical) environment from getting through and influencing the human body/mind. These agents caused pain, illness or emotions. In the modern world we also speak of the influence of the social environment on an individual.<sup>463</sup> In sagas, this social influence appears (for instance) in the form of the tangible restless dead, as the already ‘deceased’ social environment, and in the form of people and beings that were strong enough to affect other people through dreams, thus representing the social environment that also consisted of things still alive. The social would not cease to exist after death or when isolated from strong-minded individuals, but remarkable people were expected to remain present in the minds of men, even when physically absent.

It is nevertheless also possible that the sources used here have been produced in a culture that was in the middle of a conceptual change, if we believe Snorri’s assumption that his ancestors thought everything was made of matter, whereas he and his contemporaries were aware that there were also spiritual things. The question remains, however, as to whether the assumed materialisation and externalisation (for instance, of guilt in that it was induced by external agents) were linked to old native conceptions, and referred to a situation where social order was upheld by society, whereas in Christianity the authority that defined the norms was God and the experience of repentance required internalization of guilt.

Finally, since this has been a cultural historical study it is worth considering what history has to teach us in this case, including how my own view of the world has changed during the research process. The discussion around new tools for diagnostic classification of mental disorders, the so-called DSM-5 (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) that may also affect the classification in Finland, engendered wide debate about whether long-term grief, for instance, should be pathologised or not. My study suggests that grief is not ‘becoming’ a disease for the first time in the history of humanity; but was earlier considered a form of pathogen. Additionally, some emotions, grief included, were not always distinguished from physical illness—perhaps because it was difficult to make the distinction or because this was simply not considered important. Grief and other stressful life situations could and did make people unable to operate in everyday contexts and increase their health problems,

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<sup>463</sup> On social environment as one of the elements of people’s wellbeing, see e.g. Minkkinen 2013.

since they affect the immune functions—and they still can and do.<sup>464</sup> This is not to say that grief should be pathologised, but that grief is a kind of ‘grey area’ that requires careful consideration before any diagnoses are made. Moreover, the historical perspective may offer us some thoughts on how to react to those who are grieving.

Moreover, the laconic attitude of medieval Icelanders and their appreciation of controlling emotions, something I have discussed elsewhere,<sup>465</sup> also point interestingly to modern psychological studies which suggest that diverse means to survive traumatic experiences do exist and that the same manner of coping does not suit everyone. Some people cope by expressing sorrow in outward signs, including speech, whereas others cope better if they conceal it and do not linger on their distress.<sup>466</sup> Consequently, expectations of open and explicit expression of emotions should not be regarded as a superior method of coping, but merely different. In other cultures and circumstances, being in control and ‘emotionless’ may be necessary for the health and wholeness of the human mind and body.<sup>467</sup> These are all important notions, bearing in mind that we interact with cultures foreign to our own to an ever-increasing degree nowadays.

Finally, to return to the quotation from Plotinus that appeared at the beginning of this final chapter and which will hopefully encourage further study of the issue, I conclude with a similar rhetorical question:

What is an emotion? An experience that involves extra-bodily objects, a material force, a movement of internal organs? Or is it, perhaps, sometimes to be thought of in the means of an externalized object or as a material force and sometimes merely as a movement of the heart?

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<sup>464</sup> See e.g. Jaremka et al. 2013; Segerstrom & Miller 2004; Buckley et al. 2012.

<sup>465</sup> Kanerva 2014.

<sup>466</sup> See e.g. Gagnepain et al. 2014.

<sup>467</sup> For such a culture, see also Desjarlais 1992.

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