

I BUMPED INTO THOR THE OTHER DAY.
HE TOLD ME TO SAY HI.
THE IDEA OF THE HOLY PRE- AND POST-CONVERSION

Maths Bertell

The fundamental change from the indigenous Old Norse religion and Saami religion to Christianity reached into the very heart and soul of everyday life for medieval Scandinavians. The new perspectives given, altered the contacts with the supernatural and where to meet the holy. What does supernatural mean, and what is sacred and holy? My paper will discuss ideology and distance, both geographically and chronologically, in a comparative perspective. Is it possible for us to get an idea on how the Viking age/medieval/ pre-Modern people perceived the supernatural? How does myth reflect ontology?

AT THE EDGE OF THE KNOWN WORLD: SUPERNATURALITY AND THE OLD NORSE GEOGRAPHICAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE WORLD

Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist

Considerable geographical knowledge, and perceptions about foreign regions near and far, is found in the Old Norse literature. Whereas regions close to Iceland and Norway in general are described in a relatively realistic way, regions seldom visited or only known through hearsay or continental literature are, not surprisingly, described more vaguely and often associated with supernaturality. Despite a big geographical knowledge, the creation and use of physical maps were virtually unknown in the Old Norse society in contrast to in continental Europe. However, there existed a kind of “mental map” of the world among the authors of the Old Norse literature that, at least in theory, can be transformed to physical maps.

A few, tentative, such attempts were actually performed more than a century ago by scholars like Axel Anthon Bjørnbo, but their usefulness is limited due to a lack of methodological rigour and partly erroneous perceptions. A theoretical and methodological framework has in more recent years been developed with regard to the “mental map” occurring in the oral tradition of illiterate native peoples of more recent centuries in North America and Africa. Moreover, a renewed interest in the geographical and cosmological world-view of the Old Norse society has been shown by scholars as Rudolf Simek, Tatjana N. Jackson, and Kirsten A. Seaver, although not much of this scholarship has explicitly been linked to the research on “mental maps”. So far, the only real attempt to investigate the “mental map” in the Old Norse literature has been conducted by Gísli Sigurðsson with regard to the Vinland voyages to North America.

The talk will concentrate on the possibilities, and some of the challenges, related to a planned project that will try to transform and project the “mental map” of the world-view found in the Old Norse literature to a physical map. Focus in this talk will be placed on the “mental map” regarding the edges of the known world in the Old Norse society and the blending of supernaturality and factual knowledge in these regions. It will be discussed to what extent the methods used by Gísli Sigurðsson for understanding the “mental map” of the Vinland voyages can be extended to other regions at the edge of the known Old Norse world. The usefulness of the research regarding “mental maps” in more recent oral tradition by illiterate native peoples for interpreting geographical knowledge in the Old Norse literature will also be touched upon.

THE LIVING DEAD IN FOLK RELIGION – A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Sara Duppils, Sandra Lantz

The 'spirits' of the dead in folk religion are often categorized and labelled according to folkloristic disciplines based on myths rather than experience. This paper seeks to elucidate these categories from a historic perspective, using myths as a metaphorical reality based on a theory that spirits of the dead were very much alive and part of an everyday life. This can also be understood from a psychological perspective, where physiological constrains such as hunger, tiredness and a harsh living, may have contributed to a change of consciousness, allowing experiences of an otherwise invisible realm. With this at hand, life and death are understood to be closely intertwined not only in myth but also as a reality based on experience.

(SUPER)NATURAL BODIES

Eva Þórdís Ebezersdóttir

“If you take your eyes of your baby, the fairies will take it and leave behind a changeling.”
“If you deny a young traveler shelter for the night, he will perish and come back and haunt your family for generations.” Statements like these appear in many folk legends and they refer to a supernatural world with supernatural beings in it. What does it take to believe so strongly in such statements and beings that one would accept them as truth and take great care to watch over your baby and always show hospitality to strangers? Is the legend itself strong enough to accomplish such belief, or does it every once in a while need something real and solid to give it merit? To what extent are such beliefs grounded in real life experiences that were explained by beliefs in the supernatural?

One is drawn to consider whether some beliefs in changelings might have been based on experiences with living children; and whether ideas of hauntings might sometimes have a root in particular behavior or psychological states. In this paper I will discuss the way in which people with different bodies or minds may have been viewed as offering evidence of a supernatural world. And in return how this resulting supernatural worldview and truth went on to have an influence on the understanding of bodies that were different than most, helping to position people with such bodies on the boundaries of worlds, some closer to the ordinary, others closer to the supernatural and therefore more extraordinary, while some find themselves pushed beyond the border, right into the otherworld.

The paper will be based on 19th-century Icelandic legend tradition with a theoretical framework from folkloristics and cultural disability studies.

APPROACHING REALITY AND FANTASY THROUGH BELIEF NARRATIVES

Pasi Enges

Folk belief tradition is typically ambiguous and belief narratives often balance between believable and impossible. From written records of orally performed folklore it is often difficult to get at the narrator's stance towards the topic and content of the narrative. Only seldom a text can be exact enough to relay even the main narrative devices the narrator may have used while revealing to or hiding from the audience his/her intentions and the true meaning of the performance. As a matter of fact, the true meaning of the performance can remain hidden from the original audience, as well.

In my presentation I will bring out some findings on the means that North Sámi narrators have used while communicating their own stance towards their narratives on supernatural topics. The analysis of the narrative structure and contentual details, as well as explicit metanarration and implicit metacommunication, can give valuable guidelines for understanding the messages encoded in the narratives. There are several means skillful narrators may use indicating the true nature of the narrative to the audience – or fooling the listeners. It turns out that by telling a belief legend or a personal experience story the narrator may place various supernatural phenomena in the realm of reality or the realm of fantasy. Each performance can shape the local understanding of the supernatural ontology. Conceptions about supernatural beings and their relationship to the human community are subject to a constant negotiation.

ONTOLOGIZING INTEGERS OF SUPERNATURAL ENCOUNTERS: APPROACHING MEANINGS IN MYTHIC DISCOURSE

Frog

This paper has a methodological emphasis. Rather than focusing on semantic or pragmatic groupings of supernatural encounters and phenomena in the sources, it turns to distinctions between formal (structural) types of the meaningful units through which such encounters are addressed and described. Focus is on symbolic elements like mythic images, motifs and plots that engage imagination and are expressed through language. Thus a word like *tröll* is distinguished from a symbolically meaningful image TROLL that can be communicated with or without the word *tröll*). A formal ontology is outlined for distinguishing types of integer following an analogy of language: an ‘image’ is a static unitary symbol or ‘integer’ of the tradition corresponding to the category of a noun (e.g. THUNDER, TROLL); a ‘motif’ as an integer which includes the equivalent of a verb, involving change or placing two or more images in a relation (e.g. THUNDER STRIKES TROLL); etc. The formal ontology is then illustrated as a tool for discussing descriptions of supernatural encounters as use and variation of these symbols in mythic discourse. When images are differentiated from motifs and more complex integers of tradition in this way, the meaningfulness of each integer can also be differentiated in specific examples. This allows an image of a supernatural being to appear in a non-supernatural motif, or for a motif’s slot customarily filled by a supernatural being to be completed by an outlaw or other character, or even for a story pattern of a mythological adventure of Þórr to be completed with humans and supernatural beings familiar to the human world. These recombinations of elements construct the meaningfulness of narrated events while also potentially blurring the line between natural and supernatural encounters.

VISIONARIES AND NATURE SPIRITS IN SCOTLAND

Julian Goodare

Numerous visionaries in early modern Scotland reported encountering nature spirits, usually fairies. These were not “stories”, but experiences that were felt as real. The encounter tended to be traumatic, but visionaries were often able to negotiate a working relationship with the spirit or spirits, and even to gain special knowledge from the relationship. This paper discusses the ways in which the visionaries themselves understood their relationship, and outlines phenomenological and psychological interpretations of their experience.

THE MAKING OF PARANORMAL WEAPONS: POINTED MESSAGES IN *QRVAR-ODDS SAGA*

Jonathan Hui

My proposed paper is based on a part of my Master's dissertation (completed in mid-2014). It would discuss the use of the two sets of arrows in *Qrvar-Odds saga*. Oddr's first set, the Gúsisnautar, would form the basis of the first part of the paper. They have the paranormal property of returning to the quiver after being shot, and are used against supernatural foes with a single exception, which I would examine as part of a discussion on the development of the fantastic mode (importantly, alongside a realistic mode) in the saga. The second part of the talk would focus on the second set of arrows, which are nameless and made of stone. In a very late episode in the saga, they are given to Oddr by a suspiciously Odinic character in case the Gúsisnautar fail Oddr. Curiously, in the younger redactions, this is preceded by another Odinic episode, and I would like to use this to discuss the combination of pre-existing, 'traditional' associations with the supernatural (i.e. Óðinn) and the saga-specific supernatural/paranormal elements with which they interact. The fact that the Gúsisnautar, so long a core part of Oddr's identity, do fail Oddr so late (and so anacoluthically, from a narrative perspective) in the saga is part of this discussion. Oddr's opponents, Álfr and his wife, are Freyr-worshippers with supernatural powers, and I would use the evidence raised in the discussion to theorise that the Odinic nature of the gift that Oddr must rely on to defeat these Gúsisnautar-resistant foes can be read in conjunction with, rather than in contrast to, the important subtext of Oddr's Christian faith. The discussion would hopefully shed some light on the literary processes, preoccupations and negotiations involved in the development of supernatural elements and motifs in a *fornaldarsaga* narrative that embraces – readily and at great length – its fantasy.

WONDERS, APPARITIONS, DELUSIONS? SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA IN SAGAS

Kirsi Kanerva

In my paper I will discuss how phenomena and beings considered by us as ‘supernatural’ were conceptualized and understood by medieval Icelanders. In earlier studies of supernatural in sagas it has been shown that – similar to Finnic folk conceptions – supernatural encounters often take place under special conditions: for instance, when the vision is somehow impaired, such as in a foggy condition or in darkness. Such spaces and conditions can be characterized as liminal. Accordingly, in my previous studies I have also suggested that people who e.g. encounter and destroy restless dead in *Íslendingasögur* are people of socially indeterminate status (e.g. widows, bastard sons etc.) and similar to Finnic folklore tradition, many of these hauntings are linked with norm transgressions that have taken place in the society. Therefore, people who encounter and destroy the dead, as well as the circumstances they are in (i.e. social disorder) can be characterized as socially liminal, they are ‘betwixt and between’. Inspired by this idea of liminality, the comparative Finnic folklore material and the notion that e.g. in *Íslendinga saga* many of the deceased only appear in dreams but not in the physical environment, I will discuss some categorizations of supernatural phenomena as they are represented by such concepts as *reimleikr*, *glámsýni*, *undr*, *sjónhverfing* or *fyrirburðr* and the ability of being *skygn* in saga literature.

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WEAK MAGIC? SOME NOTES ON THE ALLEGEDLY SUPERNATURAL NATURE OF GUNNARR'S HALBERD IN NJÁLS SAGA

Csete Katona

The *atgeirr*, frequently translated as halberd, is an extremely rare weapon in Old Icelandic literature. One notable exception is, however, the *atgeirr* of Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi, which plays a significant role in *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Despite the fact that *Njáls saga* belongs to the genre of the more realistic *Íslendingasögur*, Gunnarr's halberd possesses supernatural powers; protects its owner from being killed by any other weapons and rings loudly when someone is going to die. A close reading of the scenes where the *atgeirr* appears will reveal that neither of the halberd's supernatural powers work consistently, moreover even in cases of proper functioning it gives little advantage to its wielder compared to other magical artefacts from the Old Norse corpus. Similar examples like the failure of Örvar-Oddr's magical arrows or the non-functioning scene of the legendary sword Sköfnung in *Kormáks saga* will amend the argument to point out that magic can indeed be 'weak' in this literature. This case-study will hopefully shed light on bigger issues regarding the comprehension of the supernatural in Old Norse culture and will help us to decide: should we see such 'weak magic' as a supernatural occurrence or should we start somehow to measure the supernatural? Categorizing magic according to its 'strength', however will also be questioned and it will be illustrated to which extent this may be a projection of our modern perception.

THE MORAL GROUNDS OF REALITY IN FINNISH FOLKLORE AND VERNACULAR WORLD VIEW

Kaarina Koski

Both the epic poetry and prose genres in Finnic folklore show that persons, beings, and places outside one's own life-world easily get supernatural attributes. Even though this was also a means of emphasizing their otherness, such ideas were not only symbolic. Belief narratives which reflect the thinking of the 19th and probably also some preceding centuries show that reality was not assumed to be the same for the whole world and all the time. Instead, the human life-world was a result of constant maintenance and moral discipline. If something went wrong, the dead and other otherworldly beings which normally kept in their own side could penetrate the human world. Christianity strengthened the idea that the moral endeavors were a prerequisite of keeping up the world order as humans knew and controlled it. Various supernatural beings, in turn, ruled the night and the deep forests, as well as other times and places which were free from legitimate human activity. Also, in case of serious moral flaws, beings of the other world could appear even in a corporeal form to revenge, to warn, to make things right, or just because they were now able to. According to narrative tradition, otherworldly apparitions were always a sign of some kind of breach or imbalance. Popular belief narratives tell about hypothetical things which have been believable enough to raise fear and interest but still something which did not happen every day. The right social and Christian order kept the bogies at bay but the possibility of flaws and their consequences was taken seriously. What was taken as true depended on the context: dead men could walk if there was a good reason and the right time but otherwise no. In my paper, I analyze belief legends, which have been known in Finland and Scandinavia, to show that the ontology has been tightly connected to morals and that it involves a flexibility of the physical characteristics of the supernatural. To researchers, this flexibility is a challenge which requires knowledge about the ideals, norms and genre systems of the people whose texts and ontologies are studied.

BURIAL MOUND AS A PROJECTION SCREEN

Jan Kozák

The aim of this paper is to look at the supernatural encounters in mounds (*haugbrot*) known from the Old Norse sagas using certain concepts and observations from analytical psychology and phenomenology of religion.

The encounters with mound dwellers (sg. *haugbúi*) are of varied and colourful kind, but I propose a general polarity: There is a conflict on the one hand, as exemplified by the fight to the death (or second death) with the *draugr*. On the other hand there are encounters where the *haugbúi* and the visitor cooperate and the mound dweller helps the hero or bestows boons on the hero willingly.

I intend to interpret this polarity as a sign of basic ambivalent relationship, which is in accord both with the principal ambivalence of the relationship to the Otherworld (which is a place full of monsters and dangers and at the same time a place of wonders and magical treasures) and more generally with the ambivalence of the relationship to the Numinous. Numinous, according to the classics of phenomenology of religion, is powerfully ambivalent, being both *tremendum et fascinans*, and the same ambivalence counts for the contents of the unconscious according to the depth psychologists. Burial mounds, dark places of the dead, thus stand side by side with distant lands and distant times as projection screens for this basic ambivalence.

At the end of the paper I will propose a relationship between this basic background ambivalence of the culturally specific content of the burial-mound-encounters that we know from the Old Norse sagas.

THE DISTRESS OF BÁRÐR: COMMUNITY AND CHRISTIANITY IN *BÁRÐAR SAGA SNÆFELLSÁSS*

Mart Kuldkepp

This paper explores the question of probable contemporary societal and political relevance of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, a relatively late not-quite-*Íslendingasaga* known for its many supernatural elements (including the protagonist himself). I will view this text as an attempt to make sense and to reinterpret the category of supernatural in a late Medieval Icelandic context with the intention of reconciling the „local” folk belief with the ideological tenets of the Church. At the same time, parallels will be drawn with the depiction of supernatural occurrences in *biskupasögur* and the more hagiographical *konungasögur*, suggesting that the distress of Bárðr as depicted *Bárðar saga* should be seen as a kind of antithesis and commentary to the Icelandic cult of the two Ólafrs.

IS THE YEAR WALK (SW. ÅRSGÅNG) RITUAL REMNANT FROM PRE-CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS?

Tommy Kuusela

In his well-known survey, *Wärend och Wirdarne* (1863-68), Gunnar Olof Hyltén Cavallius argues that: “The ancient heathen folk practice, that in Wärend since olden days was known by the name to go year walk [...] can generally be considered, one of the most remarkable remnants from a heathen age and of a mythical outlook that hitherto managed to preserve itself among any of the newer European peoples”. This view is expressed by other folklorists as well, but no one tries to explain how it can be linked to a heathen age, or why it should be considered an ancient, or even a Medieval Scandinavian tradition. In this paper, I will give a description of the folk tradition and compare it with samples from Norse sources of rituals performed outdoors that are associated with prophecy. With this I hope to show if there is any basis for considering year walk an ancient tradition.

COMING FACE TO FACE WITH SIGURD FAFNESBANE IN MEDIEVAL NORWAY

Helen F. Leslie-Jacobsen

Sigurd, slayer of the dragon Fafne, decorates the portals of four Norwegian stave churches (Hylestad, Vegusdal, Lardal, and Mael). Sigurd is a figure in which the legendary and supernatural blur: although he is ostensibly human, he has many supernatural attributes and encounters (such as that with the dragon). Jesse Byock (1990) argues that the function of Sigurd on the stave church doors is a protective one, and that he replaces the Danish and German preference for the archangel Michael (also a dragon slayer and a figure of protection), in such a setting. This leads me to consider the fact that while the archangel Michael is biblical, and thus a legitimate object of belief for medieval churchgoers, this is less immediately obvious where it concerns Sigurd. With this in mind, my paper will consider how Sigurd was conceptualised and understood in medieval Norway, particularly with regards to his physicality, since we are presented with actual pictures of him on the portals. I will also consider whether he did indeed play a protective role and how those who viewed the pictures of Sigurd might have expected to 'experience' him. After all, if they truly expected Sigurd to protect them, they must have believed in him and his ability to continue to be active on the supernatural plane after his death, at least to some extent.

MEETING THE MONSTER: THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF BERSERK ENCOUNTERS IN THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

Rebecca Merkelbach

While the supernatural and the monstrous often overlap, they are still distinct categories in our taxonomy of the Other, and therefore, to comprehend the human experience of Otherness as a whole, one needs to look at both individually. Monsters, just like the supernatural, regularly appear in medieval Icelandic literature, most often taking the form of human or formerly human monsters such as revenants, outlaws and sorcerers. Among these different kinds of human monsters depicted by the Sagas of Icelanders, berserkers are one of the most frequently encountered character types. But not all berserkers are created equal, and the manner as well as the implications of encountering a berserker vary widely.

In this paper, I intend to address human encounters with different kinds of berserkers: the ubiquitous ‘berserk suitor’, the raiding berserkers of *Grettis saga*, ch. 19, and the more individualised berserkers we meet in *Eyrbyggja* and *Heiðarvíga* as well as in *Vatnsdæla saga*. These different encounters and the reactions they provoke in (members of) society tell us about society’s perception of the berserker as monster. However, the question remains whether there is a difference in the monstrousness between those who interact more with, even want to be integrated into, society, and those who ‘only’ want to abduct women. I also intend to consider the implications such a potential difference in perception (or even its absence) might have for our understanding of human monstrosity and its effects on the society the monster haunts.

RECOGNIZING A DWARF: MYTHS AND FACTS

Ugnius Mikučionis

After having watched *The Lord of the Rings* and especially *The Hobbit* movies, everyone knows what dwarfs looked like quite exactly. They were short, had beards, and there were very few female dwarfs – or, at least, female dwarfs were difficult to spot. How does such an image relate to descriptions of dwarfs in Old Norse or, more generally, Pre-Modern Nordic sources? Are the popular claims concerning the size, the beards, and the absence of females, “myths” or “facts” with respect to the Nordic dwarfs? In this talk I will focus on several texts providing more or less detailed descriptions of the physical appearance of the Nordic dwarfs, and occasionally compare the Nordic dwarfs with the *dwarves* in J. R. R. Tolkien’s writings (and the movies based on those).

Main attention will be paid to the following questions:

- Do all the Nordic dwarfs look the same?
- Are the Nordic dwarfs short?
- Are the Nordic dwarfs bearded?
- Are the Nordic dwarfs all male?
- Are the Nordic dwarfs different from humans?
- What are distinguishing features of the Nordic dwarfs, appearance-wise?

The following sources will be referred to: the runic inscription from Ribe, the Elder Edda, the Younger Edda, *fornaldarsögur*, *riddarasögur*, and folktales from North Norway.

THE *HAUGBROT* IN *HARÐAR SAGA*.

Arnild Mindrebø

Because *Harðar saga ok holmverja* is not among the most well-known Icelandic sagas, we will start with a general introduction before we concentrate on the *haugbrot* episode in chs. 14-15 and on the many supernatural incidents in this episode. We shall also look into the *haugbrot* from an archaeological point of view, and also what is said about grave mounds and their inhabitants in later folklore (especially Norwegian). Finally, we will try to find out what function this episode has for the saga as a whole.

SPÖKRYTTARE SOM MOTIV I HJÄLTEDIKT OCH BALLAD

Agneta Ney

Spökryttare som motiv förekommer i sagalitteraturen, men är inte frekvent i eddadiktningen. Ett möte med en sådan ryttare äger dock rum i den poetiska eddans hjältediktning. Det är emellertid inte som i sagalitteraturen fråga om ett dröm-motiv, utan om en kvinna som ute om kvällen och plötsligt ser en död man komma ridande. Gengångare till häst förekommer även i östnordisk balladdiktning, och jag har som syfte med min presentation att jämföra denna med hjältediktningen. Frågor som ska behandlas är tidpunkt, plats och frekvens för spökritten, ryttarens kön, sociala status och eventuella budskap, vem som ser, eventuell dialog och kommentar. En spökryttares eventuella budskap hänger samman med följderna. Vad händer sen? Med ryttaren, den som ser och övriga som berörs av dennes budskap, om ett sådant kommer till uttryck i motivet. Förhoppningsvis kan i sin tur ett jämförande perspektiv av det här slaget belysa skandinaviska föreställningar om detta specifika gengångarmotiv över tid och rum.

SPEAKERS, PATIENTS AND OTHER AGENTS IN SWEDISH HEALING CHARMS

Catharina Raudvere

The point of departure for this paper is the role of agency in a selection of Swedish and Swedish-Finnish charms used in healing practices. Or rather, *told of* as part of a distinct scheme for ritual behaviour. The paper will discuss the charms as indications of action as well as examples of fictive rituals, i.e. told of as performed as means to transmit insights about otherwise clandestine powers that affect the wellbeing of humans and cattle. This double perspective on healing incantations opens up for perspectives on the religious/existential meaning that the charm texts carry.

Charms, as folk-belief recordings in general, don't tell much about mythology or dogma in the conventional sense of the terms, but they transmit a certain cosmology. They tell of powers and characters clearly distinct from everyday logics (and partly from Lutheran dogma), but they still tell of believable entities that provide comprehensive explanations to cause and effect, illness and health, malevolent influence and means of resistance.

Recorded and filed in the archives after theme and genre, the several agents of a charm tend to fall in the background. By focusing on various forms of agency this paper intends to discuss the ontological status of the human experience expressed in the incantations and the characters appearing in the narratives surrounding the rituals.

THE CASE OF THE MISSING VALKYRJA: THE WOMEN OF *VÖLSUNGA SAGA*

Bethany Rogers

This work will examine the representation of women in *Völsunga saga*, including its literary structure and the social roles of women portrayed in the narrative in order to evaluate the extent to which the character of Guðrún transgresses against her gender and to determine if she is a valkyrja in disguise. The portrayal of valkyrjur in this story as a representation of gender roles in society has not been much explored by scholars, who consider the valkyrjur to be minor female spirits like *disir* and *fylgjur*, due to their psychopompic role in the Scandinavian mythos. One exception is Luke John Murphy's thesis "*Herjans dísir: Valkyrjur, Supernatural Femininities, and Elite Warrior Culture in the Late Pre-Christian Iron Age.*" This work examines valkyrjur as symbols used to propagate existing social structures in the warrior-elite society of the time, providing an excellent overview of the figure in myth. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir's book, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words and Power*, examines portrayals of human and supernatural females in the corpus to show various methods of gaining agency through speech or action within the otherwise patriarchal society. Susan Elizabeth Rivenbark's thesis "*Ek Skal Hér Ráða': Themes of Female Honor in the Icelandic Sagas*" focuses on the construction and protection of female honor, highlighting Guðrún, Borghild and Signy in *Völsunga saga*, and their devotion to their kinsman above their husbands. Other story elements such as marriage refusal, incestuous acts, and the use of shape shifting and harmful potions are discussed in terms of protecting one's honor.

These works have not explored the use of valkyrjur in *Völsunga saga* specifically, focusing instead on the women's motivations as wives and whetters. I will examine the characters of Sigrún, Brynhildur and Guðrún in context of their behavior. I argue Guðrún, like Sigrún and Brynhildur, transgresses against her gender; in fact, hers is the most monstrous transgression of all. By examining the portrayal of women and valkyrjur in *Völsunga saga* and related works, this project illuminates a neglected facet of this saga, the folkloric figure of the Valkyrjur and the Scandinavian culture of which they are a part.

GODDESS, *FYLGJA* OR FICTION? ÞORGERÐR HQRÐARBRÚÐR IN *FÆREYINGA SAGA*, THE VANIR, AND THE QUESTION OF MYTHIC STRUCTURES IN SAGA-LITERATURE

Andreas Schmidt

The figure of Þorgerðr Hqrðarbrúðr/Hqlgabrúðr, the private patroness of Hákon jarl inn ríki, has seen various attempts of interpretation, ranging from identifications as a type of goddess to addresses of being a *fylgja* of the Háleygjar-dynasty, probably their tribal foremother, venerated at mounds.

Þorgerðr is also featured in *Færeyinga saga*, in which Gro Steinsland has assessed a mythic substructure (Steinsland 2005). According to her, the chieftain Sigmundur Brestisson undergoes an initiation to become the ruler of the Faroe Islands, being initiated to Óðinn and Þorgerðr. Sign of this initiation is the ring of his patroness' statue that Hákon supplies him with. The scene in which Sigmundur receives the ring bears a strong mark of physical "reality" in its depiction, as do most events in Saga-Literature in which Þorgerðr is featured. The scene has been interpreted as an insertion inspired by miracle-tales in *Maríu saga* (Almqvist 2005, Ólafur Halldórsson 1990/1969). Þorgerðr's ring later accounts for Sigmundur's death through the hand of Þorgrímr illi after his conversion by Óláfr Tryggvason, when Sigmundur does not follow Óláfr's wish to part from his heathen jewellery. Rings also feature in other accounts about the figure of Þorgerðr in the Sagas of Icelanders.

In this paper, I will investigate the role of the ring in *Færeyinga saga* and expand to an examination of Þorgerðr and her nature as a whole. Turning against the findings of Steinsland, I argue that while the way in which the scene is presented in *Færeyinga saga* may be modelled on miracle-tales of the Virgin Mary, what may tentatively be assessed in the structure of the saga is a mythic substructure akin to what Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has called "Freyr-ideology" in some Family Sagas (Meulengracht Sørensen 1992). This might reinforce John McKinnell's opinion, who parallels Þorgerðr to the Vanir (McKinnell 2002). Indeed, although not necessarily presenting one consistent whole, interesting parallels between the literary depictions of the cult of Þorgerðr, the Vanir and other mythical beings such as the *dísir* can be stated. This paper will also be set to demonstrate some of them and ask what conclusions can be drawn from this evidence.

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HIDDEN CHILDREN AS REPRESENTED IN GERMANIC FOLKLORE

Scott T. Shell

A common motif in the origin of the Hidden Children is that they are descended from Adam and Eve (Kvideland & Sehmsdorf 2014; Simpson 2009; Grimm 1988). A usual approach to the incorporation of this church approved-dogma was to include them within the origin of humanity (c.f. Boucher 1981; Christiansen 1968; Grimm 1988; Simpson 2009; West 1980). In these stories, the Hidden Children are typically treated as a) parallel beings that bear no significance on the side of good vs. evil or 2) hidden creatures that will never be able to be “seen” by humans, respectively.

As depicted in these Germanic folktales, the Hidden Children are indirectly descended from the creations of the Christian god; they are born clean, pretty, unclean, hidden or dirty. The distinction between hidden and non-hidden resonates with hidden people vs. non-hidden people (e.g., humans) in modern Icelandic folk belief (Hafstein 2010).

However, an anomaly is presented in *Eve’s Various Children* (Grimm 1988)—the children are born either *schön* (‘pretty’) or *hässlich* (‘ugly’) to reflect their position within the social hierarchy. The relationship of being physically attractive plays no role in representing a farmer, tanner, king or blacksmith. In this talk, I will discuss the different motifs of the Hidden Children throughout the Scandinavian regions but also offer an explanation for the unique social class element present in *Eve’s Various Children*.

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MANAGING THE DEAD

Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir

In Old Norse-Icelandic literature, myth and legend there tends to be a certain uncertainty or ambivalence surrounding a person's death. The person, having been a relatively known entity – a live one – suddenly transforms into an unknown being – and, in some people's beliefs, has the potential of becoming a supernatural one. How does one deal with such circumstances? What do we do with this transformed being that once belonged to our world but does not belong there anymore? How would – could – people make sure that the new being goes where it is supposed to go and does not linger on in our world to cause us harm? In my presentation I mean to explore the idea that the performances and rituals people are shown as carrying out in narratives relating to death from earlier times can be seen, at least partly, as attempts to manage this precarious situation, ensuring that the deceased crosses safely from this world to whatever otherworld s(he) is supposed to now belong to, a place that is *somewhere else* than here. In my lecture I will take several examples ranging from the death of Þórólfr bægifótr in *Eyrbyggja* to that of Skalla-Grímur in *Egils* saga, making one or two pit stops in contemporary narratives of funerals such as that by Ibn Fadlan noting the lengths people of the Nordic world of the past seem to have gone to in order to safeguard themselves and their world from the perceived threat of these recently transformed supernatural beings – the dead. By looking at this material from the perspective of the real performances that lay behind these narratives, I hope to be able to suggest some possible answers to the questions above.

THE DEVIL AND NATURE SPIRITS BETWEEN CHRISTIANIZATION AND NATION BUILDING

Ülo Valk

Vernacular narratives about supernatural encounters have been systematically documented in Estonia since the late-19th century, when the extensive project of folklore collecting started. Protestant Christianity had gained the dominant position in the society but it was challenged by the romantic ideology of nation building with its endeavours to study and revive the pre-Christian mythology. Thirdly, Enlightenment and scientific materialism gained ground and undermined the validity of folk beliefs that were re-interpreted as worthless and harmful superstitions. Folk narratives about the supernatural reveal conflicts between co-existent belief systems and ideologies, contradictions between frames of interpretations, and ambiguities of vernacular religion as a creative realm of variations and alternative beliefs. The paper discusses folk beliefs and narratives about the Devil and nature spirits and their changing status within the context of these hardly compatible world views.

PARANORMAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE SAGAS

Arngrímur Vídalín

In order to deduce what a supernatural encounter is one must first venture a definition of the supernatural. This is highly problematic as I have recently argued, as the term is both highly loaded and cannot consistently be applied to medieval mentalities and to what modern scholars expect from it.¹ Regarding ontology, whether supernatural beings can be said to exist or whether encounters with them or other paranormal forces can be said to have occurred in reality, is contingent upon the meaning which we each individually attach to the term 'supernatural'. Ontology as a philosophical field of inquiry begs the familiar question which scholars still grapple to find an answer to: whether medieval audiences could *believe* in narratives of monsters and strange creatures, whether they would have thought those accounts to be *believable*.

This paper will focus on 14th century saga narratives, based on highly learned geographical treatises from the same period, which tell of travels of Norsemen to the East and to the West, and their encounters with what I choose to label as 'paranormal', rather than supernatural, entities. The main sources of the present study are AM 736 I 4to, Hauksbók, Stjórn and AM 194 8vo to provide the basis of an analysis of *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Grænlandinga saga*, *Eiríks saga víðförla* and *Yngvarrs saga víðförla*. The analysis presented will show that various kinds of monsters were not only to be expected on travels such as these, but that they are encountered in travel narratives as a rule rather than as an exception. By way of establishing these narratives as *believable* according to the most learned authorities of the period, it will be shown that no big leap is required to establish an ontology of quasi-supernatural figures such as *tröll* and related entities. It is the conclusion of this paper that such an undertaking should be encouraged.

¹ Arngrímur Vídalín forthcoming, "Some Thoughts on the Supernatural, the Fantastic and the Paranormal in Medieval and Modern Literature."