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Sensing and Storying the Urban Landscape

People-Place Relations in Central Reykjavík

Ólafur Rastrick

Abstract

The study explores the intertwined roles of sensory engagement and narrative practices in shaping place attachment in inner-city and central Reykjavík. Through a qualitative mixed-methods approach – including walk-alongs, audio-visually recorded in-situ group sessions and solitary self-led walks with audio-visual recording glasses – this study examines how individuals connect to the urban landscape and form place attachment through embodied experiences and the telling of personal and shared stories. Building on an understanding of the city space as relational, multiple and becoming, this study illustrates how sensorial experiences, reminiscences and stories shape and reshape the relationship between people and places. Special consideration is given to the notion of breccia to illuminate the dynamic relationship between past experiences, sensorial engagement and the materiality of place, thus underscoring how the participants' understanding of and attachment to the built heritage of the city is in flux, always open to new stories and contexts.

Keywords: Storytelling, emplacement, place attachment, urban landscape, relationality, brecciation, sensory ethnography

The urban landscape is not merely a backdrop to everyday life that is independent of city-dwellers' engagements with it. Following Massey (2005), places are not fixed but are always emerging and continually shaped by interactions, movements and narratives. In this process, people and the physical environment engage in an interactive relationship, perhaps most clearly manifested in the recontextualization and fate of

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the effigies of certain notables over recent decades. Public monuments, meticulously designed and carefully placed to induce a clear message to those who pass them by, can instantaneously fail to do so – the message being transposed or rendered either inappropriate or insignificant. By engaging with the (slowly or swiftly changing) material features of the city through experience, recollection and narration, people actively contribute to its production. A place is a dynamic relationship between people and materiality; a place can thus hold multiple and diverse meanings and ambiences depending on who experiences it, how they move through it and what memories or emotions it induces. As narratives and experiences accumulate, are remembered, forgotten and recontextualized, the significance of the urban landscape is, to some extent, maintained and in other senses transformed.

Not only monuments or designated heritage sites, Sumartojo (2020) reminds us, but "all places can carry echoes of the past" (249). Indeed, as Österlund-Pötzsch (2011) observes, the city – where people live their everyday lives – serves as a "stage for subjective memories and storytelling", in which seemingly insignificant features of the environment become "inscribed with multiple stories" (117). In engaging with a place, individuals draw on their sensory faculties, experience and knowledge to make sense of the location. For those revisiting a stumping ground from their youth, the encounter with the materiality of place may trigger memories of people, events and bittersweet sensations, among other things, that fashion the understanding and engagement with the locale. Complete strangers will, on the other hand, rely more solely on their knowledge and experience of other places in perceiving and evaluating an unknown territory. The material qualities of place that signal its pastness will certainly contribute to the feel of the place and interact with sensory and cognitive processes that constitute its significance for the individual.

Drawing on examples from a mixed-method ethnographic study of people–place relations in inner-city and central Reykjavík, conducted from 2022 to 2024 (Jóhannesdóttir & Rastrick 2024; Rastrick 2025), this article explores the intertwined roles of sensory engagement and narrative practices in shaping place attachment in central Reykjavík. This study examines how individuals connect to urban spaces through embodied experiences and the telling of personal and shared stories. The findings reveal how sensorial encounters with Reykjavík's urban fabric evoke memories and emotions, while arguing that subjective sensorial experience and the stories people recount and develop about features of the urban landscape are central to understanding how the past and its endless reconfigurations can figure in the present to dynamically dictate people's understanding of place, place attachment and a sense of belonging.

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From a folklorist perspective, this study resonates with work on the relationship between storytelling and landscape (Cashman 2020; Gunnell 2009). This article argues that, in their sensorial and narrative encounters with place, the participants in our study engaged in vernacular place-making, activating the landscape through memory, significance and personal biography as well as through wider communal narratives, thus storying place as a way of knowing and belonging. Cashman's (2008, 2016) exploration of how people weave together memory, emotion and the physical environment though storytelling as a central way of making sense of the environment thus offers an important avenue for understanding people–place relations. From a different perspective, working with Icelandic legends, Gunnell's (2009, 2018) attentive appreciation of the situational and performative contexts of storytelling underpins this study's ethnographical emphasis on the significance of exploring our participants' interactions with the environment in situ.

Building on this premise – namely, that places are not merely static backdrops, but are dynamically constructed through social interactions and shared memories – the current article borrows on the one hand from writings associated with the relational turn in urban studies to facilitate an understanding of space as relational, multiple and always under construction (Massey 2005; Löw 2016; Amin & Thrift 2017). On the other hand, this study also draws on phenomenological propositions to emphasize how experience is both embodied and emplaced (Casey 2000; Seamon 2018), as well as studies on people–place relations and place attachment (Madgin & Lesh 2021; Manzo & Devine-Wright 2021). In linking these distinct theorizations, use is made of the metaphor of *breccia*, which has been experimented with in both critical heritage studies and architectural studies to illustrate how material and experiential fragments from the past are brought together in the present in a rearranged context (Bartolini 2014; Öztürk Aksoy & Dursun Çebi 2024). Building on the case study, this article examines how place-based everyday anecdotal storytelling and both past and present sensorial experiences of place are expressed and shared, embedding affective perceptions, personal memories and cultural meanings into the physical landscape in a provisional and volatile way. By foregrounding the affective and experiential dimensions of urban life, this article demonstrates how sensing and storying the city create emplaced attachments that resonate at both the individual and communal levels. From this perspective, it is argued that the urban built heritage in Reykjavík is not just about listed physical sites – it encompasses how people's everyday emotional engagements, memories, anecdotes and sensory experiences continually shape and reshape the meaning of urban spaces, ultimately fostering attachment (or conversely, effecting detachment) to places.

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Methods

Seeking to access the different kinds of perceptions, different modes and contexts of storytelling that emerge as people engage with places calls for a certain variety in terms of methodological approaches. Indeed, advancing sensory ethnography, Pink (2015:160), advocates methodological plurality when seeking to access the diversity of people's experiences and understandings of multisensory environments. In striving for methodological variety, the methods used in this study have certain aspects in common. They are founded on the premises that people's engagement with places is best studied in situ and while people are experiencing, perceiving and responding to a particular physical environment – rather than reflecting from afar on the significance of place (Pink 2015; Waterton & Watson 2015). Furthermore, the study has been guided by the understanding that people engage with the urban environment as they move through it and that walking is both commonplace and the most sensorially absorbing form of people–place interaction in a city centre environment (Middleton 2010; Österlund-Pötzsch 2011).

This project employed three complementary qualitative methods designed to provide a multi-faceted perspective on people's affective, sensory and emotional place-relations in an urban landscape. The aim here was to gain richer insights into how individuals experience, remember and ascribe meaning to places that transpose the past into the present, as well as to highlight dynamics that would remain hidden if only a single method were applied. Each method both compensates for the limitations of the others and generates openings that they might otherwise foreclose, thereby producing a layered methodological approach.

The first method involved walk-alongs, where a researcher accompanies a participant through an area of the city while engaging them in conversation. This approach allows for an immediate exploration of how participants perceive and make sense of the material and sensory environment as they encounter it. As has been demonstrated in earlier studies of urban experience (e.g. Kusenbach 2003), the walk-along method elicits reflections on embodied engagements with place, while foregrounding how memories and associations emerge in situ. At the same time, the results are necessarily shaped by the presence and interventions of the researcher, who guides the dialogue and frames the encounter.

The second method consisted of focus group sessions with two to four participants – family, friends, neighbours or colleagues – who met up at a prearranged site. Conducted in a minimally intrusive manner and supported by the use of historical photographs, these sessions were designed to encourage participants to share and compare their experiences of the

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changing urban landscape. The focus groups underlined the collaborative dimension of people–place interactions, showing how memory, meaning and attachment are socially negotiated. They also bring into play questions of group dynamics and power, because the trajectory of discussion and the co-production of knowledge may be influenced by differences in status, personality or narrative authority (Krueger & Casey 2015).

The third method adapted sensory research methodology as developed by Cooke, Buckley and associates (2020, 2021), involving the use of audio-visual recording glasses. Participants undertook solitary walks through familiar areas, recording what they saw, said and heard with minimal researcher influence. These recordings captured micro-interactions with the urban environment that may be overlooked in more conventional interviews. Within a week, participants revisited selected sections of the recordings with a researcher in a narrative-style interview that encouraged reflection and elaboration. This two-stage process afforded both immediate, emplaced documentation and subsequent interpretive commentary, thus creating opportunities for participants to articulate affective and sensory dimensions of their encounters.

The study was conducted in Reykjavík's city centre and adjacent inner-city neighbourhoods between 2022 and 2024. In total, 80 individuals participated, having been recruited through a combination of snowball sampling and social media advertisements. Eligibility was determined solely by participants' self-reported connection to the city centre, established through long-term or repeated engagement with the area. The group was balanced in terms of gender, ranging in age from their late twenties to their mid-eighties.

The Relationality of the Built Urban Heritage

Urban scholars have increasingly worked from the perspective of understanding space as relational, which refers to a *spatial turn* in the social sciences in general and a *relational turn* in urban studies (Löw 2016; Amin & Thrift 2017). Amongst the most influential protagonists of this area of study, Massey (1991, 1995, 2005) challenged the idea of space as a static container or a fixed backdrop to everyday life, while arguing for an understanding of space as relational, multiple and always under construction. The construction of space is thus not only a question of physical structures and layout, but is shaped by social relations, histories and movements. In this sense, space can simultaneously hold a multitude of meanings as an amalgamation of diverse and sometimes conflicting experiences and interpretations. The volatility of space derives from this, and

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its meaning evolves through encounters, narratives and changing power dynamics. In this view, places are never finished but are ongoing processes of becoming shaped by both past trajectories and future possibilities. In this vein, Massey (2005) introduced a temporal component of spatial constructions (what she refers to as *space-time*), thus emphasizing that space and time are co-constitutive – that is, made through interactions that unfold over time.

A relational understanding of space implies an acknowledgement that places have different meanings for people and that those meanings may change over time. Thus, we can say that a variety of stories can co-exist within the same place, each carrying its own temporal depth encompassing memories, past uses and future potentials. By integrating time into spatial analysis, Massey highlights that places are constantly being reworked through historical processes, lived experiences and future possibilities. This perspective allows us to see historic urban landscapes as dynamic, immersed with past experiences, present encounters and imagined futures rather than as frozen historical sites. Personal and collective narratives can thus be conceived as continuously shaping and reshaping the meanings of urban spaces. When individuals recall memories or share anecdotes about their surroundings, they are engaging in a process that actively constructs space through interrelations.

In bringing a relational perspective to the study of the tangible heritage, different metaphors and conceptualizations have been used to apprehend how the temporal and spatial intersect (Mawson 2024). The notion of *heritage assemblages* has, for instance, been introduced in heritage studies to theorize the dynamic and relational nature of heritage, emphasizing how it is constituted not by fixed objects or narratives, but through the coming together of diverse elements – material, spatial, social, sensorial, affective, mnemonic and temporal (Hamilakis 2017; Edensor 2023). Heritage assemblages can be seen as formed through the "dynamic folding, intersections, and entanglements of time" (Edensor 2023:2), where pasts are not merely preserved but are actively negotiated in the present. Rather than seeing heritage as a stable or singular entity, heritage assemblages foreground the heterogeneity and instability of heritage. Elements within an assemblage may include buildings, regulations, emotions, stories, performances and technologies, all of which are entangled in complex and often shifting relationships. These assemblages are context-dependent and open-ended, thus allowing for tensions, contradictions and multiple meanings to coexist.

Over a decade ago, Bartolini (2013, 2014) introduced the term *brecciation* to heritage studies based on Freud's metaphorical use of geological breccia to describe the temporal qualities of dreams and how they are

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not formed of ordered or linear narratives but can draw together fragments of dissimilar origins. In contrast to the metaphor of the palimpsest, which is commonly used to describe the multiplicity of meaning that is or might be attributed to aspects of the historic urban landscape, Bartolini's (2013) adoption of brecciation highlights how "fragments from different moments are brought together and reordered" (1045). Drawing on Bartolini's concept, Houssay-Holzschuch (2021) notes how the term encompasses the clutter and complexity of space-time configuration and highlights the temporal dynamics: "Past elements from a specific bygone period can therefore be brought back to the surface, here or there, or sink and disappear for a while" (465). While Bartolini's interest in the term focuses primarily on how different physical elements from different times and contexts coexist and interact in the materiality of the city environment, she suggests that the concept has possibilities for understanding the more intangible aspects of urbanity. "Indeed", she suggests, by "enabling juxtapositions to coexist … there may be subtler ways for affect and emotions, forms of tensions, as well as issues of power to be exposed." While the notion of palimpsest may have drawn attention to hidden traumas or hauntings evoked by place, "brecciation may reveal other forms of accommodation and seduction present at a site" (Bartolini 2014:531).

Recently, the architectural scholars Öztürk Aksoy and Dursun Çebi (2022, 2024) have adopted breccia in linking a space syntax approach to a phenomenological perspective, thus placing memory and lived experience at the core of their analysis. Rather than focusing solely on the spatial arrangement of the built environment, their concept of *urban breccia* draws attention to how individuals perceive, remember and emotionally engage with urban space. They use the term to describe how cities are not experienced as coherent or continuous, but rather as fragmented and layered formations composed of multiple temporal and experiential strata. These fragments – material, affective and mnemonic – are not passively received but actively composed through bodily movement, memory and imagination. In this sense, their approach foregrounds how individuals produce subjective images of place that are sedimented over time and shaped by both sensory and emotional engagements.

Building on this, the metaphor of brecciation can thus be extended to describe how people make sense of places they have encountered across different times, contexts and emotional states. It allows us to conceptualize place not as a fixed or stable identity, but as a dynamic, composite formation shaped by overlapping memories, affects and associations. First, the metaphor reflects the fractured yet cohesive nature of personal experience. People's sense of place is often built through fragments – sensory impressions, emotional residues or stories – accrued over time and held

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together not by rational continuity, but through subjective meaning-making. Second, it foregrounds the idea that the urban landscape is not perceived uniformly, but as a patchwork of moments. The same location might carry multiple, even contradictory, associations depending on one's position in time or social context. Third, the metaphor evokes how individuals layer and compress these experiences into a meaningful narrative, however provisional or unstable. The act of narrating place becomes a form of sedimentation. Fourth, it acknowledges dissonance: competing or unresolved experiences are not erased but remain embedded in the composition, ultimately contributing to its textured complexity. Finally, the metaphor opens up space for those more elusive or buried fragments of experience – the smells, atmospheres, absences – that still inform one's affective response to place, even if they remain outside conscious recall.

Conceptualizations of heritage assemblages and brecciation thus offer a way to accommodate an understanding of the city space as relational, multiple and emerging. In contrast, traditional views on urban built heritage, fostered by an *Authorized Heritage Discourse* (Smith 2006), tend to work from the premise that segments of the urban space, demarcated as heritage sites through expert value judgements, offer a stable repository of heritage value. Although this position has been heavily critiqued (e.g. Smith 2006; Harrison 2013; Whitehead, Schofield & Bozoğlu 2021; Edensor 2023), prevailing heritage management structures generally position urban built heritage as something to be conserved on grounds of a fixed valorization and a coherent historical narrative. As an institutionalized and dominating way of *past presencing* (Macdonald 2013), this linear and top-down understanding of historical significance cannot accommodate the different ways people give meaning to the urban environment. Adopting a relational approach to space in this context thus reframes the urban built heritage as something inherently dynamic, contested and socially produced. Thus, it can be claimed that the urban built heritage cannot be understood solely in terms of its architectural form or historical origin. Instead, it is constituted through the relationships people build with it over time – through daily use, emotional attachment, memory, protest or even neglect. A singular, authoritative narrative about a building's "significance" is insufficient; its meaning emerges through plural, lived interactions. A relational perspective also challenges the dominant tendency to privilege one interpretation of a place. The focus is thus moved towards perceiving urban heritage as a site of coexisting and sometimes conflicting narratives – from official commemorations to personal memories and marginalized voices. Finally, the focus is moved from assuming that the value of heritage is rooted in its preservation of the past, which implies a desire for stasis or authenticity-as-unchangeability, towards

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recognizing heritage as an unfinished cultural process that is constantly being remade through everyday interactions, contemporary events and shifts in social context. This opens up space for more inclusive, participatory and future-oriented approaches to heritage – where new stories, uses and experiences are seen as part of the evolving significance of the built environment.

Revisiting an Old Stomping Ground and the Tale of the Cobbler's Ghost

In one of her suggestive movements in theorizing space as relational, multiple and always under construction, Massey (2005) proposes conceiving space "as a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (9), and that "places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space" (130). For the individual, a place at any given moment can thus be seen as a collection of personal anecdotes and learned stories linked to that same place, available for recollection. Evidently, these stories are not all the same, as Howard (2019) reminds us: "the same landscape can mean different things to different people" (51), and one should add, those meanings are prone to alter with new encounters and experiences – as new stories emerge. De Certeau (1984) also compared places to stories, including stories that do not necessarily make it to the surface of consciousness or discourse: "Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body" (108).

In our study on the perceptions of Reykjavík's inner-city neighbourhoods and city centre, we were particularly interested in people's engagement that they themselves found to be significant (Jóhannesdóttir & Rastrick 2024). For our participants, walking through the city, being present at a place they either stumbled upon or had consciously chosen to visit, would prompt memories, calling forth fragments of past experiences associated with the place in question: events and persons of the past, as well as observations about the physicality of place and how it has changed (Rastrick 2025). These mnemonic episodes manifested in various form of sensorial or emotional expressions, sometimes, but not always, expressed in anecdotes or cohesive narratives. While these stories might at times convey general (historic) knowledge about the place or reflect the cultural memory of the area, more often than not the anecdotes were fraught with personal observations that provided glimpses, however fragmentary, into the significance the place held for the participant.

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Anna was one of our participants who had been recruited though snowball sampling. She is a professional folklorist in her early thirties and had moved from the countryside to the city when she started university. After completing her studies, she and her boyfriend rented a basement apartment in an inner-city neighbourhood but have since moved to the suburbs, apparently with some remorse. We provided Anna with audio-visual recording glasses for her city walk. With minimal instructions, mainly designed to encourage her to express herself during the walk about what she was perceiving and how she felt, we sent her off on the solo tour, starting from a well-known public square in the city centre, with the audio-visual recording from the glasses creating what Sumartojo and Pink (2017) call a *video trace*.

About ten minutes into her walk, she found her way to her old home address as she "sometimes do[es] when in the vicinity … just to check," she explains, "if the house is still yellow" (H-119). Years ago, while Anna lived in the house, she had learned that the owners planned to repaint the house a different colour, a choice to which she did not subscribe. Once she heard that the owner's girlfriend had suggested painting the house black, and Anna "simply couldn't imagine anything worse". On another occasion, just before they moved, she overheard a couple of workers doing renovations at the house discussing plans to paint the house brown, "which I also think is appalling" (H-119). In Anna's eyes, the yellow colour had gained specific importance. Not only was the exterior of the house painted yellow but so too was the apartment, "at least the kitchen and living room" (H-119). Repeated "threats" to paint the house black or brown intensified how she referred to the brightness of the yellow colour as symbolizing the couple's time in the apartment, as if a darker colour would impede the pleasant memories that she associated with the place. Standing in front of the house, Anna associated the yellow colour with "summer", contending that "this house is very much summer in my mind, it is very dear to me" (H-119). She then extended her confession of emotional attraction to other timber houses clad in corrugated iron in the inner-city dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: "I love all these tiny, brightly coloured, old houses – I think they are kind of great – I think they are really great" (H-119).

Anna's visit to the house prompted a few other anecdotes that she recounted for the benefit of the recording, while lingering by the house explaining various features of the building and making observations about its quality and ambiance. As the video trace captures her movements – with her looking at the house, back yard and neighbouring houses from different angles – she is quite casually reminded of a personal ghost story involving her boyfriend:

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> He was absolutely certain that the house was haunted because every time I went away, which happened regularly, to [her hometown] or somewhere else, then when [soft snicker, barely detectable] Palli woke up in the morning, *his shoes had been moved* [italics designate slightly dramatized emphasis]. He was often telling me such things, and he is just quite sensitive to the supernatural, which I'm not. And he was saying that his shoes had been displaced and something. And I just go, ahh okay, should I Google the house like we are in some old horror movie, and I just Googled the house. As it turns out, a shoemaker had lived in the house for a long time, and this completely convinced us that it was the shoemaker's ghost that was moving the shoes around (H-119).

The anecdote ends here, in a matter-of-fact kind of way, excusing the "folkloric digression", as her perception shifted to other aspects of the landscape and she heads away from the house. There is an air of casualness with an understated humorous twist to the anecdote, giving the impression that the absent presence of the cobbler was a welcomed added value to the place. The story was called forth by being in situ, Anna having been instructed to articulate her feelings and thoughts as she walked through the urban landscape. The anecdote is thus illustrative of the brecciated nature of her encounter with her former home. As she moves through the familiar landscape, her memory is activated not through deliberate reflection, but through spatial engagement: looking into the backyard, scanning neighbouring houses and narrating sensory and architectural details. This unstructured, fragmentary form of recollection aligns with the metaphor of breccia, where the experience of place is not linear or cohesive, but composed of layered, disjointed elements that are sedimented through repeated encounters over time.

In this instance, the ghost story surfaced as one such fragment – partially humorous and perhaps uncanny (for the boyfriend) – that was firmly situated in Anna's personal narrative. The anecdote was shaped by multiple temporalities and contexts: her own repeated departures from the house; her boyfriend's sensitivity to the supernatural; a folkloric motif familiar from broader cultural narratives; and the retrospective confirmation offered by Google, tying the story to a former resident. These elements – personal, cultural, affective and digital – coalesced into a moment that was only loosely held together by narrative cohesion but was rich in meaning.

Such a moment exemplifies how brecciation allows fragments from different moments and sources to co-exist without necessarily resolving into a single interpretation. The presence of the cobbler-ghost is not offered as proof or belief, but as a narrative layer enriching Anna's sense of the place. The absent presence is both literal (a ghost story) and metaphorical: it suggests how past lives and associations can hover at the edg-

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es of perception, subtly influencing how a place is perceived and valued.

Furthermore, the anecdote was possibly shaped by an awareness of the research context. Herself a folklorist, Anna was conscious of the fact that she was taking part in a research project (that incidentally bears the acronym *haunted*) and speaking to folklorists and ethnologists, and this may have influenced the selection and tone of the story. This adds yet another aspect to the breccia: the performative and situational context of narration. Her casual delivery, mixed with understated humour, reflects not only her personal memory but also an intuitive engagement with genre and audience expectation. The anecdote thus becomes a composite of lived experience, cultural form and research context – all compressed into a brief, textured moment in the urban landscape.

Sharing and Co-creating Emplaced Anecdotes

Anna's video trace offers insight into her solitary encounter with place through a method that focuses on the subjective interior and thus misses somewhat sight of the co-creative aspect of storytelling. In the sessions that included a participant and researcher (walk-alongs) or multiple participants and a researcher (group sessions), the communal aspect of place-based anecdotes can be appreciated. In the group sessions, where the participants knew each other beforehand, interactive reminiscing often fostered co-created narratives of everyday past events and circumstances associated with particular locations. An example can be drawn from a video-recorded session with three childhood friends (a woman and two men) in their mid-eighties at the time of the recording (H-203). The session took place by Lake Tjörnin in the city centre, with clear view of the lake and its surroundings, including the old primary school two of them had attended in the late 1940s. Throughout the session, the participants could complement each other's stories with small comments and information that the other had not realized, had forgotten about or remembered differently.

Shortly into the session, for instance, they started reminiscing about ice-skating as children on the lake during winter. Pitching in with personal anecdotes, sentiments and pieces of information about "how things were back then", the group session quickly took the form of a normal conversation between peers, with the researcher gradually retreating with his queries and comments, instead giving the childhood friends a chance to interact freely about the immediate surroundings: "At one stage," Andrés asserted, "the municipality started to pipe warm water into the lake for the benefit of the ducks, and that…" – Sigfinnur broke in: "then the kids started falling in the thaw holes [turning his gaze to the lake and point-

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ing]". Andrés muttered in agreement but was blocked from making a further point by Sigfinnur, who continued: "I was once in woodwork class in school [indicating the school building] and then I saw someone falling in and I just jumped out of the window and rescued…" – Andrés interrupted cheerfully: "Yeah, you rescued him, I remember this very well" – and Sigfinnur said: "Ahh, you remember, I was maybe around eleven," paused for a moment, looking intently at his friends: "That wasn't too bad." The others started to giggle amiably as they visualized the heroic deed of the "modest" child saviour. With a mischievous expression on his face, Sigfinnur carried on: "He probably wouldn't have drowned, people have drowned there, no I don't think so, …" – Andrés indicated that he disagreed, but Sigfinnur continued, "there was sludge in the bottom – he was scared, the poor bugger." After a moment's hesitation, Andrés chipped in: "You threw him a jumper…," which put Sigfinnur back on track: "Yeah, I had read it in *Æskan* [local children's periodical] that you should crawl on the ice and take off your jacket or jumper and then toss [imitates the movement] one end of it to the chap that was in the thaw hole, you know, so you wouldn't break the ice…" (H-203).

This exchange illustrates how the reminiscences could unfold in a dialogic manner, with overlapping turns, interruptions, embodied gestures and expressions of sentiment, thus making the encounter a collectively animated act of remembering. As the woman joined in, the conversation went on to other ice-skating incidents, of themselves and others falling in the lake, of the guys with scrapers who cleared the snow off the ice, of crowds skating on the lit-up rink on winter evenings to the sound of music from a gramophone, among other memories – thus creating a narrative tapestry echoing both embodied sensory memories and descriptions of the physicality of the skating rink on the lake. They reconstructed chains of events among themselves, individual and shared impressions of the environment forming a negotiated narrative of the past and present of the place. Often they remembered things differently or not at all – "his shop was on the other corner" or "no, I don't remember that"– but through the conversation, they seemed, sometimes hesitantly, to be negotiating an agreement about how things had been and what they signified. The group session thus became a platform for mutually developing their stories and anecdotes. In this case, the brecciated configuration was not confined to a single subjectivity but emerged through a dynamic interplay of recollections, corrections and elaborations. Each participant brought their own fragments – partial memories, embodied sensory impressions, emotional tones – and in the act of sharing and responding, these fragments began to gather as sediment in a collectively composed narrative. Being in situ contributed to the mutual remembering. The visual and spatial cues

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provided by the surroundings functioned as prompts, not only triggering individual memories but anchoring them in shared spatial references. Sitting beside the lake, the site became a kind of mnemonic field that supported the coalescence of disparate recollections into a collectively intelligible narrative, thus showing that the process of narrating the environment is not only internal or psychological but is also performed and reshaped through embodied interaction.

This form of co-creative storytelling highlights the temporally unstable and fluid nature of memory, where stories are not merely retrieved but reconstituted through interaction. The anecdotal fragments may shift in emphasis or meaning depending on the other's input, which demonstrates how even seemingly stable memories of place are contingent and relational. The breccia metaphor accommodates this porous and dynamic process: rather than a static layering of personal recollections, a composite assemblage is formed in which memory is shaped through social negotiation and spatial context.

A group session with the siblings Markús and Málfríður (H-209) is another case in point, giving further insight into the embodied and performative aspect of in situ storytelling. Málfríður had just turned seventy-two at the time of the recording, and her brother was five years her senior. The session took place in what used to be the back yard of their childhood home, where their family had lived for ten years in the 1950s and early 1960s. A recent concrete house had replaced the timber house that had been their home, the old house having been relocated elsewhere within the city centre. Although their house, along with some of the neighbouring ones, was no longer there, they could orient themselves quite easily with reference to the street and remaining older buildings on adjacent lots. Málfríður observed: "This feels a bit like home, even though the house isn't here – because the environment is" (H-209), thus underscoring that, for her, the place persists even though quite a bit, but not all, of its physical features have changed. She continued: "All the buildings across the street – this is so important – they are still there, and they played such a role, because everything was there – everything, shops and everything" (H-209). None of the shops that were there in the 1950s are there any longer, but she identified the buildings as being the same.

Having sat down in their old back yard, side by side on the folding chairs provided by the researchers and facing the video-recorder, the siblings immediately launched into a discussion about the physical transformation of the site. They quickly went on to reminisce about the people and events they associated with the back yard and the surrounding neighbourhood. With four other siblings, all close in age, the back yard had been a playground for them and for a herd of children from the neigh-

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bouring houses. Although the site had transformed, being in situ, Markús and Málfríður cheerfully talked, often with nuanced references to various remaining material features of the place, about the buildings and layout of the place as it was during their youth, the games they played and the mischief that they and their friends had got up to.

> Málfríður: But it was so much fun, here, where this building is [pointing], there was this really high A-roof [steeply pitched roof – uses both arms to indicate location, size and shape] and another house in front with a long drop to the ground [uses hands to emphasize the long drop]. We'd spend every evening there, for hours, sliding down the A-roof. And if anyone was still inside [the hardware store that was in the building], of course they would shout [in a different pitch of voice]: "Hey, get down from there." But we made sure to be there after the shop had closed [looks at her brother, pinching his arm].
> Markús: Yeah, they more-or-less left us alone, those chaps.
> Málfríður: Yeah, usually. There were 10–12 kids sliding down here [makes a sliding movement with hand].
> Markús: We climbed up on, up on –
> Málfríður: the bins –
> Markús: the bins, yes, there and onto the roof [makes expression with hand] –
> Málfríður: onto the roof [lifts her arm above her head to express height] –
> Markús: and from there on to the other roof and then we were there [indicates towards where the rooftop had been].
> Málfríður: This was of course quite dangerous – and then onto the A-roof that was terribly high. Just imagine if we had fallen down on the other side or [chuckles, lifts both arms above head to indicate height].
> Markús: Then we sat straddling the ridge.
> Málfríður: Yes, straddling and chatting. That was the main entertainment – you know – the whole evenings (H-209).

The siblings' conversational exchange illustrates how they collaboratively and affectively reconstructed their childhood memory through both language and embodied gesture. Completing and affirming each other's sentences while animating their recollections with pointing, mimed movements and playful interaction, they re-enacted the embodied experiences of climbing, sliding and sitting on the rooftop. Their account frames the site as simultaneously thrilling and dangerous, while underscoring how children appropriate and reconfigure the built environment as spaces of play and transgression, often in defiance of adult authority. Crucially, the memories are explicitly anchored in the present setting ("here, where this building is"), producing a brecciation of past and present elements that reinscribes the contemporary landscape with affective and mnemonic significance, and thus exemplifying how place-making is performed through narrative, gesture and shared reminiscence.

Through their reflections and embodied reaction to the place, the back yard becomes more than a physical site – it is a node in a web of lived ex-

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periences, shared histories and emotional attachments. Through their storytelling – with fleeting impressions of past games, remembered neighbours, missing structures and surviving details – the siblings reassemble the site as a landscape of meaning, rich with playful mischief, social bonds and childhood imagination. This indicates that their perception of the value of the place is not solely derived from architectural preservation but from the interplay of people, stories, material traces and affective memory. The fact that the siblings could orient themselves and begin storytelling so readily suggests how these elements are entangled in their sense of place and contribute to their attachment to the place.

Place Attachment through Sensing and Storying

Addressing the emotional bonds between people and place, scholarship on place attachment (cf. Manzo & Devine-Wright 2021) often refers to the phenomenological tradition that draws on the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (and their insistence on the central role of bodily presence and action in human existence), sometimes referred to as the phenomenology of place (Trigg 2012; Seamon 2018). The phenomenology of place theorizes the existential significance of place, ultimately connecting the very possibility of our being-in-the-world to being at a place (cf. Casey 1996:44). This suggests that subjectivity and place are directly associated with both experience and agency and can only "take place" by being emplaced (Malpas 2018). David Seamon (2018) talks about this existential condition, that at any given moment we find ourselves located in a place as "perpetual, unavoidable emplacement", defining place as "any environmental locus that gathers human experiences and meanings spatially and temporally" (1). Summing up phenomenology's treatment of place and distinguishing it from a realist approach to place, Dylan Trigg (2012) maintains "that lived spatiality is not a container that can be measured in objective terms, but an expression of our being-in-the-world" (4). He further explains that at every moment "we find ourselves located in a particular place, specific to the bodily subject experiencing that place. We are forever in the here, and it is from that here that our experiences take place" (4). This understanding is at odds with the commonplace approach that sees the subject as inserted into a spatiality that is independent of the perceiving human being. In terms of the built environment, this approach has been developed in architecture, for instance, by theorists such as Norberg-Schulz (1979), who coined the term *existential space* in rejecting a functional approach to the built environment and highlighting how all architecture is intrinsically connected to human existence and perception.

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This phenomenological orientation towards place is helpful for understanding how individuals articulate a sense of belonging through memory, embodiment and everyday encounters with the urban landscape. It highlights how meaning emerges not simply from spatial form, but through lived and emplaced experiences – through walking, seeing, remembering and narrating. In this view, personal and collective histories are not external to place but are folded into its textures, atmospheres and material forms. The built environment thus becomes meaningful not only as a backdrop for life but as an active participant in shaping subjectivity. This perspective is especially illuminating when considering the reflections of participants in our study who, while moving through familiar neighbourhoods, described the city not in terms of publicly defined urban environment but as something animated by lived experience and memory.

Indeed, all participants expressed, to varying degrees, a particular attachment to places that elicited anecdotes or narratives of personal significance. Such attachments were especially pronounced in relation to sites imbued with personal memories or associated with familiar individuals, both living and deceased, as well as with events of personal relevance. Tóta's walk-along offers a poignant illustration. A long-time resident of an inner-city neighbourhood in Reykjavík, her narrative offers an illustration of how the city becomes meaningful through its entanglement with personal history and emplaced storytelling. During her walk-along, she chose a path that took her to different places associated with family and friends: residential housing, workplaces and the cemetery, visiting the gravesites of her relatives. Her walk and talk revealed extensive knowledge of the area's historical development, cemented in personal recollections and stories about people and places, some passed on to her from others. Towards the end of the walk, after many places had prompted little anecdotes from earlier times, the researcher asked her what, for her, generated a sense of belonging to the city. Without hesitation she proclaimed: "Roots, people, stories!" After a pause she acknowledged: "I was of course much more with granny and grandpa … they were good at telling stories about where they had lived and what they had been doing here in town". After another pause, Tóta professed: "For me, it's like the city comes alive – it becomes something more than just streets and houses. It becomes like stories you look at, and then you get these memories through the stories" (H-007).

Tóta's reflection on her sense of belonging reveals the relational character of the urban space. She does not communicate a view of the city as a static container of buildings and streets, but as an affective and narrative fabric where relationships – between people, memories and material forms – intersect and take shape. Her account shows that the urban landscape is

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constituted through ongoing interactions: between her own biography, her grandparents' stories, the historical lives of buildings and the embodied act of walking through the city. Characterizing the city as becoming "like stories you look at" suggests that urban space is a polyvocal terrain in which different narratives and temporalities overlap. Through her grandparents' memories, Tóta accesses not only her own past but a broader cultural memory, which suggests that the meaning of place is never singular or uniform. Instead, it is shaped through a tangle of voices, affects and material cues, some intimate, others inherited. This also seems to speak to the becoming of the neighbourhood – how its meanings are not pre-given, but emerge through experience, memory and narration. The city "comes alive" for Tóta not through monumental heritage or formal history, but through the activation of place by stories and emotional resonance. This suggests that place is in a constant state of transformation, made meaningful through the situated practices of remembering and storytelling. The city becomes, in this sense, an evolving entity – alive with affective and mnemonic charge.

With reference to the conceptual framework of brecciation, it can be seen that her perception of the historic urban landscape is not structured by coherence or chronology that form neat layers, but by disparate fragments – memories passed down, fleeting impressions, partial narratives – that accrue and interact over time. Like breccia, her relationship to place is made up of pieces of different origins: personal memories, her grandparents' accounts, cultural references and sensory associations. These fragments are bound together not through historical continuity but through affective resonance and personal meaning-making. Thus, Tóta's understanding seems to suggest that the built heritage of the city is not only something preserved or displayed, but something continually assembled through everyday practices. The historic urban landscape holds value for her because it is not simply there – it is storied, felt and re-lived, ultimately forming a brecciated assemblage of past and present, material and emotional, individual and collective.

Conclusion: Attachment to Urban Landscape through Narrative and Affect

As people move through the urban landscape, their engagement with place becomes palpable. Writing about her home city of Melbourne, Australia, the author Sophie Cunningham captures how public events and personal, emplaced experiences interweave to produce the city as it is known and felt by individuals: "The cityscape has become embroidered over the years with impressions of these larger public dramas, moments that nestle along-

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side more private and fleeting experiences" (2011:4). As this article has illustrated, seemingly insignificant material features, even absent ones, may evoke a feeling or memory that contributes to the subject's relationship with place. Such affective encounters are shaped by the materiality of the environment as well as other atmospheric dimensions of the moment – lighting, smell, weather. They are also informed by the subject's mood, mindset and, importantly, by past experiences and personal or cultural knowledge of the place in question, as well as of other places that may be similar or serve as a point of contrast.

This article has demonstrated how the historic urban landscape of Reykjavík is not only experienced through architectural forms or official narratives but is continually produced through the sensorial, affective and narrative engagements of those who move through it. Drawing on the relational turn in urban studies and the metaphor of *brecciation*, the study has shown how individual and collective encounters with the city's built fabric contribute to a dynamic sense of place. As stories are told, memories are evoked and sensory experiences are felt on the move and in situ, the city is reanimated – not as a coherent whole, but as a constellation of emotionally charged fragments. These fragments, like geological breccia, are drawn from different times, sources and affective registers, sedimented into the present through the interplay of materiality, memory, emotion, narration and performance.

By approaching the urban landscape as relational and always under construction, this study aligns with Massey's (2005) call to view place as a "simultaneity of stories-so-far". The stories shared by participants – whether solitary and introspective, like Anna's account of colour and spectral presence, or dialogic and co-created, like the reminiscences of the siblings and the old friends – show that heritage is not merely inherited but actively made through lived, sensory and emplaced practices. The metaphor of brecciation offers a means to account for this textured, fragmentary and affect-laden composition of place. It underscores the relational, multiple and temporally dispersed nature of place-making, especially in everyday urban environments where heritage is not always monumental or visible, but felt, remembered and continuously reassembled through the embodied presence of the individual. Taken together, this study illustrates that the emotional significance of urban built heritage lies not solely in the conservation of physical structures, but in the experiential processes by which people sense, interpret and narrate the city. In this light, urban heritage emerges not as a fixed legacy, but as an unfinished and plural process – dynamic, relational and always becoming.

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Emerging Supranormal Wilderness

Encountering Sites of Folk Belief in Finnish Belief Narratives and in the Field

John Björkman

Abstract
Finnish belief narratives from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contain a wealth of descriptions of supernatural or rather supranormal encounters and interactions taking place at specified, often identifiable places. Such encounters are typically set in areas regarded by contemporaries as wilderness, an environment which in folk belief is typically viewed as unpredictable and unruly. The belief narratives can be seen to express the agency of such unruly environments. The narratives express a worldview in which the wilderness is seen as an agent, which can emerge into different types of interaction with people at specific wilderness sites. This study looks at eighty sites mentioned as places of supranormal wilderness encounters in belief narratives. Ways in which the agency of a place is described in the narratives are compared with first-hand experiences from visiting the sites in person. Field visits to the same sites today show that a person's cultural conditioning clearly affects how the place is experienced, but also that places known for supranormal interaction can give rise to experiences similar to the ones expressed in the narratives.

Keywords: Belief narratives, folkloristics, wilderness, folk belief, autoethnography, legends, field research

This article is about places in the wilderness of southern Finland which are known to act upon or interact with people in supranormal ways. It is part of the broader research project *The Sacred Forests Around Us*, studying the ritualized forest relation of the Finns through prehistory and history. It also builds on my previous studies on sacred natural sites of

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Finnish folk belief and methods of studying them, presented in my dissertation *Healing Springs and Haunted Woods: Sacred Sites of Folk Belief and Spatial Order in Southwest Finnish Village Societies* (2024). In the dissertation, I was unable to focus sufficiently on comparing my own experiences with those expressed in belief narratives. The focus of this article will therefore be on how specific wilderness sites, known in Finnish folk belief recorded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have power or agency over people who have interacted with them in accordance with such belief, and whether it is possible to experience some aspects of such interactions by visiting the same sites today. I will observe how such interactions are expressed in belief narratives about specific places in the wilderness and also compare this with observations from my own field visits to such places.

The study is based on two kinds of material, archival and autoethnographic. My primary source is 160 historic belief narratives about supranormal encounters at forest sites in western, southwestern and southern Finland. In these narratives particular and named places are described as having some kind of agency either in themselves or via a supernatural being. The materials come from different folklore archives such as the Finnish Literature Society, The Society for Swedish Literature in Finland and the place-name archive of the Institute for the Languages of Finland, as well as heritage-themed journals from the early twentieth century, primarily *Kotiseutu, Hembygden* and *Finskt museum*. The material was collected mostly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from the Finnish-speaking majority population, as well as the Swedish-speaking minorities living in the coastal areas. In this article I also use observations from field visits to 80 of the sites mentioned in the belief narratives and compare my own experiences to the descriptions in the archival material. Does the experience of visiting a site match what has been narrated about it or provide insights about the narratives? Do the places affect me or interact with me in similar or different ways compared to that which is expressed in the narratives? Does visiting the actual site reveal new or surprising aspects about the described interactions or why these places were considered special? I will present an overview analysis of the whole material, as well as an in-depth case example describing my experiences from a field visit in detail.

My study reflects a growing research interest in the agency or social interaction of terrain and landscape, aspects that tend to be lost or under-communicated in studies of written sources. A source of inspiration for my fieldwork/autoethnographic method from Finland is a new school of studying prehistoric sacred sites through sensory engagement (for example Ahola, Lassila & Mannermaa 2024; Rainio & Shpinitskaya 2024;

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Rainio & Vikman 2023; Valovesi & Fredriksen 2023). The study of prehistoric sites lacks access to recorded texts about beliefs connected to them. The physical places and any evidence found in them are all there is to work with, which is why new methods of gaining information about such sites are essential. Studying sites of folk belief from more recent history, associated with recorded belief narratives, brings the benefit of being able to compare those narratives with experiences in the actual place. Recorded belief narratives provide accounts of the usage and meaning of such sites, although the accounts themselves follow certain narrative schemes and patterns. What I do is to combine the sensory engagement approach employed by archaeologists with information from recorded belief narratives to uncover new aspects of how a specific place could have been experienced to engage with people in supranormal ways.

Describing, finding words for my own experience, is to be seen as a form of autoethnography. The historian of religion Jaana Kouri, who has made extensive use of the method, characterizes it as a way of verbalizing situated and embodied knowledge and experiences, and she herself uses the method to describe interactions with water and rowing. As autoethnographic descriptions stem from the experience of the writer, it is extremely important to be reflexive and open about the writer's own position (Kouri 2023:197–208; Adams et al. 2015).

Emic and Theoretical Perspectives

What is meant by *wilderness* in the scope of this paper? Today, strict, objective divisions between nature and culture are considered highly problematic. Already in 1981, the folklorist Lauri Honko pointed out that just naming and sustaining oral traditions about an environment should be seen as a form of cultivation (Honko 1981a:30–31). The anthropologist Tim Ingold, for his part, has suggested that human involvement in natural surroundings turns them into something beyond nature or culture. Ingold sees landscapes as formed by human activity and co-activity with the environment and calls them *taskscapes* (Ingold 1993:157–161).

On this point it is important to take note that our ways of connecting to the environment have departed significantly from that of nineteenth- or early twentieth-century agrarian societies whose members spent most of their time working with land in various stages of cultivation. A bourgeois, or middle-class, idealization of wilderness stands for a completely different relation, which has been described as more distanced by the ethnologists Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren, or, in the words of the Scandinavist Matthias Egeler, a "looked-at" environment in contrast to a

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"lived-in" one (Frykman & Löfgren 1979:46–69; Egeler 2024:279–302).

Other folklorists have, however, identified that systems of folk belief maintain *emic* differentiations between "wilderness" and "inhabited land". Boundaries between the two are often emphasized, the two zones are inhabited by different types of supernatural beings and are also often seen as the domains of different genders (Tarkka 1998:92–94; Granberg 1935:229–242; Stark-Arola 1998:36).

Even clearer indications that some parts of the terrain, on an emic level, were seen as a separate category of environment can be found in the way land was organized and governed. In the Swedish system of land division dating back to the medieval period, village lands were divided into "inner property" or "heartlands," encompassing unitary grain fields and meadows, and "forests and outlands" which were utilized for finding construction materials, fuel, gathering of berries and mushrooms, coal-burning, tar-making, as well as grazing, hunting and fishing (Talvitie 2013:52). From Ingold's point of view, we could see this as a division of taskscapes according to different types of tasks. This *emic* division of land into heartlands and forests and outlands is also clearly visible in village and partition maps, where the latter is always marked in a different colour and, especially in partition maps, is sometimes even drawn on a separate map from heartlands (see Figure 1).

In this paper, I proceed from the emic differentiation of the societies I study. I have thus classified as "wilderness" areas which on historic village maps have been defined and marked as forest, or sometimes as lakes or hills. The belief narratives used as material typically refer to the place by a place name, or refer to a specific lake, rock, hill or fork in the road. Occasionally they make general descriptive references such as "places far away from habitation" or "crevices on rocky hills". As the terms used in the source material are quite varied, I have opted to talk about "wilderness" rather than "forest", although the land definitions used on village maps would also justify the latter.

At the same time, I must remain aware that I can never fully experience the places as part of the taskscapes they were to villagers of the past. I have grown up viewing the wilderness as a taskscape for mainly recreational open-air activities which are generally considered healthy. I have enjoyed spending time in the wilderness since my childhood and have in my adult years taken up orienteering and trail running as hobbies, through which I have developed a relation to the wilderness mainly as a stimulating environment for physical exercise. Further, my research on sites of folk belief, which has been going on since 2017, has made the wilderness into a new type of taskscape for me; it is an environment in which I look for places which have been considered supranormal and observe them with my senses.

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Figure 1. Old village maps make a clear distinction between what was considered cultivated land (green and yellow fields) and wilderness (other areas). Maanmittaushallituksen uudistusarkisto. MHA U Uudistuskartat ja -asiakirjat. B UUDENMAAN LÄÄNI. Espoo. B8a:26/1–6 Velskola / Vällskog; Karta öfver egorne med delningsbeskrifning (1775–1783). Kansallisarkisto (Accessed 12 August 2025).

The thought of things having agency and existing in relationships of interaction has also been central among post-humanists. Some central names that have developed theories for the interaction between humans and non-humans include the sociologist Bruno Latour, the feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad and the philosopher Jane Bennett. All three start by criticizing the idea of separable individual beings, usually humans, possessing agency and acting upon things and each other. All three also emphasize that non-human things, "material" or "nature" should be seen as social or interactive agents which, according to Bennett, have the power to "aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us" (Bennett 2010:ix). Especially Barad thinks along much the same lines as Tim Ingold, emphasizing that things only emerge into existence through inter-action (or "intra-action") and that changing the interaction causes different phenomena to emerge (Barad 2008:128, 175, 178). In other words, post-humanists not only see and acknowledge the interaction of people and things but also acknowledge the power of things over people. In many respects, this school of thought might provide better perspectives to understanding folk belief than more anthropocentric humanism.

Rather than individual entities, we should focus on the connections that bind both people and things together. According to Latour, "attachments

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are first, actors are second" (2005:217), whereas Barad claims that "there are no bounded entities behind phenomena. Phenomena come to exist through intra-actions" (2007:128).

Several folkloristic scholars have focused on cultural patterns of engaging with nature, especially among Fenno-Ugric peoples, including ritual modes of communicating with the wilderness and understandings of wilderness agencies (e.g. Arukask 2017; Stark 2006; Tarkka 1998). However, folklorists for their part tend to focus on the intangible cultural elements, rarely paying much attention to possible material counterparts.

The concept of emergence through interaction with things can also prove useful in studies related to heritage and understanding the past. Harald Bentz Høgseth, professor of arts and crafts education, has proposed, based on Latour and Barad, that material remnants of the past are not to be seen as separate from the past, but things that join the past with the present, and further, that engagement with such remnants can provide insights into past ways of understanding, albeit from the premises of the present (Høgseth 2024:68–69). This builds upon Ingold's idea of landscape as "an enduring record" of "the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it" (1993:152). Although Høgseth talks primarily about buildings and engaging with them using traditional tools and techniques, I propose that the same philosophy can be applied to interaction with wilderness sites. Although their surroundings and even the sites themselves may have changed, they are the same sites, and they "contain" the totality of their past. It is possible to engage with them bodily and materially by walking in them and observing their surroundings, and to gain insight into how people have experienced these places in the past. Preserved folklore about these places provides a central tool for such interactions.

I view belief narratives about supranormal agencies at wilderness sites as expressions of meaningful interaction between a person and wilderness (or intra-action in Barad's terminology). According to current research, belief narratives are not only viewed as expressions of actual belief but also acts which actively maintain and create belief (see e.g. Valk 2021:176–181; Koski 2011:348). Recurrent narratives about encounters at certain places exceeding the ordinary emphasize those places and encounters as especially meaningful. From a Baradian, or even Latourian point of view, the meaningful or supranormal place only emerges through the encounter. It exists only through the encounter. According to folklorist Lauri Honko, existing belief traditions played a key role in how such encounters were experienced (Honko 1981b:92–105). This approach, however, leaves the role of the actual environment out of the picture.

My own approach, based partially on my own experience of having

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moved in the wilderness a lot ever since childhood, is that the environment definitely has an agency and co-acts with humans who, to use Ingold's (Ingold 1992:52) term, *dwell* in it. The terrain can direct a human's choices of routes. Trees, rocks or streams can block one's way. One tends to not want to walk into wetlands or boulder fields. The possibility of falling and getting hurt is often present. If the ground is treacherous, steep or slippery, the environment becomes dangerous. Impressive views can unexpectedly present themselves, or even landscapes and bad weather and mosquitoes can make a forest dull and uninviting. Moving around in wilderness is, in fact, a highly social and interactive activity.

Belief narratives about supranormal, possibly sacred places in the wilderness often contain mentions of supernatural beings connected to those places and tend be vague about whether agency experienced at the place is ascribed to the supernatural being or to the place itself. Such supernatural beings can be seen as a way for the local tradition to "give a shape" to the agency of the wilderness, or in Bennett's words, to ascribe a "governing central head" to it (Bennett 2010:24).

We must also bear in mind that belief narratives are not necessarily very direct expressions of an individual's experience but are formulated according to certain schemes identified within the local tradition, regarding both form and content. A belief narrative about, say, encountering a lake spirit at a specific lake, is to be seen as an adaptation of an individual's experience, fitted into a local belief tradition. It must also be acknowledged that even my own accounts of my own experiences cannot possibly capture the totality of the experience itself. Considerable information is already lost in the process of translation into text, even more so as the text is formulated into a field report or academic text. But, although both belief narratives and academic field reports are to be seen as separate accounts, they both stem from experiences of interacting with the same physical environment, which has a potential to "join" the past with the present.

Supranormal Wilderness Encounters in Belief Narratives

In this section, I will provide an overview analysis of how supranormal encounters at wilderness sites are described in the belief narratives, and through what kind of agencies these sites are said to interact with people. As mentioned previously, I have used 160 belief narratives about 80 identifiable sites. I have combined all narratives about the same place into one entry. The numbers in parentheses in the following descriptions should be

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seen in relation to the total number of 80 sites.

> In Torbacka river in Degerby, there is a deep place where the water spirit reigns. Should you see a blue and purple mist spreading over the place, it is time to take flight, because it is a sign that the water spirit is about to rise" (SLS 72.1:37).

The most commonly mentioned agency or effect connected with the encounters is fear. That a place itself causes fear is mentioned outright in 22 cases, often by describing how someone fled the place in fear. In most cases, however, a supernatural being at the place is the cause of fear (14). In addition to the belief narratives directly mentioning fear, many more can be interpreted as insinuating fear. Examples of these include mentions of strange noises (17). These are often described as booming or thundering sounds, but also often disembodied voices talking or weeping. Strange visual effects that can be interpreted as frightening include will o' the wisps (1), unexplained flames (1) and strange, coloured mists (1).

Another very commonly mentioned supranormal agency is that of healing, which is always connected to water (20). Most of these cases are sacred healing springs, which are usually located in forests near human settlements (see Björkman 2020). An additional effect sometimes connected to the same types of places as healing, i.e. springs, is being able to see or predict the future at the place (3).

Descriptions of the place being dangerous, even potentially deadly, can also be seen as causing fear. This hazard is especially often connected with the healing springs already mentioned. The theft of money or other items offered to the spring is said to bring illnesses of varying kinds to the thief (7). In some cases, the places are described as actively taking lives by causing people to drown in water or sink into the earth (4). In one case a place known to be inhabited by the Devil is described as potentially fatal: "Many dead people are said to have been found there." The same place is also said to lead people into the forest's cover or leave them supranormally lost (Kotiseutu 1910:352–353). In another case, a supernatural being is said to deal out physical punishments to those passing by (SLS 20:41).

> On Simpsiönvuori hill [in Lapua parish], there is a large cairn. In old times, the only road to reach the community went across that hill. It is told that the hill had such a hard spirit that nobody could get across without tossing some object by the road. Even stones sufficed as offerings and the large cairn is said to have been formed by such offered stones. It is said that Bishop Hemming once passed by here, and that he sat down on a rock to preach a sermon to the spirit of the hill. Demoralized by the sermon, the spirit withdrew into the hill and since then, every traveller has been able to pass without offering a stone (Kotiseutu 1912:148).

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Hindrance of passage or approach is another form of agency often mentioned. The descriptions vary between what would today be considered rational and supernatural causes. Some places are simply described as hard to reach, for example because they are so steep or narrow (5). Hindering passage often happens by having an effect on the traveller's horse: the horse becomes mysteriously unharnessed, or simply stops in its tracks, refusing to move (4). Some islands can also be described as unapproachable: it is impossible to reach shore with a boat and should you succeed, your boat will be mysteriously unfastened, leaving you stranded on the island (2).

In the example of Simpsiönvuori hill, above, we see another example of Christianity providing power to people over nature. In this example, the power of the bishop's sermon was enough to permanently banish the spirit of the hill and its power to stop travellers, altering the interaction between people and Simpsiönvuori hill. Sites of supranormal encounters are also described as having a connection to human activities in the forest. Primarily, it can either predict or affect one's fishing or hunting luck (5). This is often said to happen through interaction with a wilderness spirit such as a lake maiden.

> In the Little Lake of Gästerby, Snejdåback [a farmer] used to see the lake maiden between two and four in the morning, when she used to wash herself in the lake. She had long hair, a beautiful face and long breasts that she would throw over her shoulders when bathing. If you stood in the lake maiden's favour, you could catch any amount of fish, but if you did not, it was pointless to even try to fish there. Snejdåback knew how to win her favour and he always caught plenty of fish. Forty years ago (from 1928) he used to go fishing there often and saw the lake maiden (FSF II.3.2: 340).

This belief narrative show how fishing at the same lake can emerge in different constellations of interaction, depending on your relationship to the water spirit. The Snejdåback farmer knew to interact with the lake and lake maiden in a way that was beneficial.

But forest sites could also affect people's activities in negative ways. Certain trees, for example, could not be felled (3). The well-known effect of being caught in the forest's cover (see the case example below) is mentioned in only two instances. But they are good examples of interaction where nature claims power over people.

It is worth noting that in comparison to supranormal effects, actual physical characteristics of the places or their effects on human activities are rarely described. Probably the most commonly occurring physical description is of some place being steep or containing large boulders. Occasionally a place can be described as "cruel-looking and horrifying"

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(Kotiseutu 1910:285). One possible explanation for the belief narratives often lack physical descriptions could be that locals were so accustomed to everybody in their local surroundings being familiar with the terrain that describing it would have been seen as redundant. It is rather the specifics of the supranormal encounter which are meaningful enough to be narrated, and they tend to be narrated following certain traditional and recurring motifs.

In order to understand why the encounters occurred or shed some light on their meaning in their contemporary culture, it might also be in place to observe what the people in the legends were doing at the places. These activities can possibly be seen as the basis for the connection between person and place and are retold either as planned interactions, such as healing at a healing spring or interacting with a lake spirit to gain fishing luck, or disruptions of the planned activities, such as a traveller being hindered from proceeding. Economic activities connected to the forest and wilderness are mentioned, but perhaps less frequently than might be expected. Such activities include herding sheep or cattle (7), hunting or gathering (4) or fishing (3). More common reasons for going to places known for supernatural power include healing illnesses at sacred springs, which has already been mentioned (20). Other activities of a magical or supernatural quality are also mentioned (5), from predicting the future to purposefully seeking out supernatural beings in order to gain wealth or magical knowledge. In some cases, festive gatherings have been held at such places, especially on Midsummer's Eve (4). The most common context for supranormal encounters at wilderness sites, however, is simply when passing by (27). In these cases, passage is usually interrupted or prevented, but there are also descriptions of people stopping at specific places to perform ritual actions that will ensure safe passage.

Supranormal Wilderness Encounters in the Field

I have made field visits to all the 80 wilderness sites used as material for this study. The original purpose was to see if the places have some kind of agency upon me. But perhaps a more appropriate approach would be to describe the interaction or engagement between me and the places. According to Høgseth's philosophy, the places and their terrain connect their entire past with the present. Even though a haunted rock or sacred spring is not an artefact physically shaped by humans, they have emerged in meaningful interaction with humans in the past (of which there are archived belief narratives as evidence). By engaging with the same places today, just by respectfully walking in them and observing them, I am able

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to have access to at least partly the same experience of interaction which has given rise to belief narratives.

It must, however, be noted that:

1. These are observations based only on my own visits and interactions with the sites. Another person might experience them differently. I have also been researching sacred natural sites for many years and have observed that my previous experience has an effect on my way of perceiving them, as pointed out in my dissertation (Björkman 2024:75–77).
2. I am a product of a different time and different social context than the informants who narrated the legends used as materials and who were members of highly place-bound agricultural village communities. My perception is not culturally conditioned by the same factors as the places are not tied to my everyday living environments. In other additional respects, my tools for engaging the places, both physical and immaterial, are not the same as people had more than a century ago.
3. The environments of wilderness sites are likely to have changed in the course of 100–150 years. In some cases more, in some cases less. Even places which have seemingly remained in a "natural" state have undoubtedly changed in some ways, for example changes in the vegetation. As an example, a hill described in 1938 as covered by a beautiful birch forest is today an almost impenetrable spruce thicket. I have left out places whose surroundings have certainly changed radically, for example if they have been rebuilt into roads or parks.

Is it possible to separate aspects of the holistic bodily, physical, sensory and even emotional experience of visiting a natural site and interacting with it into "themes"? We can begin by looking at central themes in the belief narratives. As outlined above, the most prominently repeated theme is that of fear and a sense of danger. I cannot say I have often been *afraid* during field visits, nor have I felt urges to escape the sites or run away from them. I have also not encountered perceivable supernatural beings, frightful or otherwise. However, many of the sites have features which have instilled in me a sense of awe, a fascination mixed with respect, which even has hints of fear involved. This reaction is likely to be partially affected by the knowledge that I am looking for a site of supranormal encounters and knowledge of the lore surrounding the site. I can believe that archaeologists discovering previously unknown prehistoric sites experience similar emotions.

But is there real or perceived danger? I have experienced both accidents and physical harm. Slipping and falling have occurred numerous

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times. In 2019 I fell and fractured my wrist while visiting a sacred spring. The terrain at supranormal or sacred wilderness sites is often difficult, more difficult than in their surroundings. This is most typically due to sheer slopes and steep cliffs (21 cases, see Figure 2) or, more rarely, soggy and wet ground (five cases). I have not experienced the risk of getting unexplainably lost or taken into the forest's cover particularly often. Over more than one hundred field visits, I have felt seriously lost only two cases, one of which is described in the case example later. The risk of getting lost in the woods is of course significantly smaller in a time when we have access to compasses as well as both digital and printed maps to rely on. But on both occasions when I have got lost, the environment in that particular place has been somehow inexplicably confusing. A further reason for a sense of danger could be wild animals. On one occasion, I have heard wolves howling in the forest and once I have encountered a female elk standing in my way. Both cases did give cause for a more respectful approach to the site.

Figure 2. Sheer hillsides that make a place difficult to approach are characteristic of places of supranormal activity, such as Kasberget in Pojo, known to be an abode of trolls. Photo: Author.

I have taken care surrounding places which in folk belief have been associated with deadly danger. I have for example not risked swimming in waters that are known to drown people. I was told by a local that one such body of water, the Svartå river in Karis, is known for frequent drownings even today. The knowledge of these deaths causes the waters of the river to appear both ominous and powerful.

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There are, as mentioned, many cultural elements which obviously hinder me from experiencing the places or their agencies in the same way as described in the belief narratives. Some of them are purely practical: I do not own a horse and carriage, and modern roads are not intended for horses. Travelling by horse could probably create wholly different potential interactions with the environment. I do not have a hunting licence or rifle. Neither am I very skilled at fishing and it would be hard for me to judge a place's effect on my fishing luck. Others are immaterial: I have been raised and educated to believe that illnesses are cured by modern medicine, not spring water. It would be mentally hard for me to risk my health in order to test whether water from a sacred spring could cure me when I am sick. I thus cannot experience the exact same *taskscapes* as the people in the belief narratives. For me, the taskscape is a different one – one of searching for supranormal sites from historic folk belief, which, without doubt, affects my experience of the interaction. Yet the landscape is in many significant ways the same and I argue that I can share many aspects of the experience with people from the nineteenth century, or even from earlier times. I might even be able to discover aspects of the environment's agency which have been omitted from the belief narratives.

Many prominent and recurring aspects in the environments of supranormal wilderness sites have not been described in the narratives. These are particularly connected to perceiving the sites and how the sites cause themselves to be perceived. One aspect is that of visibility from close range or far off, or from a specific direction. This aspect has previously been emphasized by archaeologist Tiina Äikäs in her study of Sámi sacred sites in the landscape (Äikäs 2011:78–80). Many supranormal sites in southern Finland as well have "hidden" identifying features which can only be detected close-up or from a certain direction, or the whole site can be detected from close range (20). For example, the so-called Eyespring (Finnish *Silmälähde*) of Rasvala village in Kiikala lies in a deep recess with a stream running from west to east. When looking for the spring, I approached the site from the south, climbed down into the recess, crossed the stream and climbed up again on the opposite side without having found the spring. I had, in fact, walked right past the spring, which is next to a north-facing rock, without noticing it. Only when I came back the opposite way, facing south, did I see the spring right in front of me (Figure 3). It very much felt like it had emerged or materialized out of the environment.

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Figure 3. The Silmälähde, or "Eye spring" in Kiikala is located in a crevice and surrounded by vegetation. It can only be detected from very close range and from the right direction. Photo: Author.

Interestingly, some of the sites whose identifying features can be detected close-up have other features which are visible from afar and even dominate the landscape. These are hills or islands which are visible from a long distance away but hold within them a smaller feature such as a spring or noteworthy rocky feature which can only be seen from close range or from the right direction.

In some cases, especially if the terrain is treacherous, rocky or steep, it can constrain or even direct me to move in a certain way or follow a certain route, which occasionally has led me to find a hidden view as detailed above. For example, on the hill of Kuuvanvuori in Nousiainen, known as a "playground of spirits", there is a distinct rock formation with a very impressive "face" that can only be seen from the southwest. When approaching the hill from the south (the direction of most habitation in the nineteenth century), the terrain forms a natural path toward the rock, from its most impressive side. In other cases, the terrain can form natural constraints, in some cases narrow openings that have to be crawled through in order to reach the most sacred part of a place (Figure 4).

Figure 4. In many cases, sites of supranormal activity can direct a person's movement such as by rocks forming narrow passages, as at the Devil's Gate in Nousiainen, South-West Finland. Photo: Author.

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An even more frequently recurring environmental effect is a sense of isolation. Either through changes in elevation, being surrounded by trees and vegetation or other obstacles, the places feel "sheltered" or isolated from their surroundings (50). This sense of being in a separate place can further be enhanced by a terrain feature such as a rock or spring that acts as a focus or seemingly dominates the place (40). It is also not uncommon for a sacred site to feature several such foci, seeming to have a certain internal interaction (28). Typically, only one of the features is mentioned in the lore. I have also noted that identifying features in the terrain which remind me of other sacred sites can quite suddenly make me see the place in a wholly different way; the layout or "sense" of a meaningful sacred site emerges from what I previously saw as just terrain.

The Cases of Offerberget and Lilltjärnen

Next, I will present an in-depth example to illuminate the possibilities of attempting to understand the agency of a place. One of the best-known ways in which nature or the landscape is said to have had an effect on people in Nordic folk belief is the effect that is often called "being under the forest's cover" or "spirited away", which means getting disoriented or lost in a supranormal manner, walking in circles unable to find one's way out of the forest, or, in a sense, becoming a "prisoner" of the wilderness. This phenomenon has been the object of numerous studies in folkloristics and the history of religion (Enges & Koski 2021; Kuusela 2020; Stark 2006:357–380; Granberg 1935:140–152; Holmberg (Harva) 1925). To my knowledge, none of the previous scholars on the subject has attempted to go into a forest associated with this effect to see what happens. One such place, described in the following belief narrative, is to be found in the South Finnish community of Pojo.

> A troll was believed to dwell on a rocky hill next to Lilltjenan [local Swedish dialect for 'Little Lake'] in the same parish [Pojo]. A woman from the neighbourhood once ventured onto this hill. She was hexed, so that she could not find her way home, despite the fact that she was familiar with the area since her childhood. She kept walking, but always ended up in the same place. Then she asked God to help her. The hex was broken, and she found a path leading her back home (SLS 72:36).

It is possible to localize the place mentioned in the belief narrative above. There is only one lake with an appropriate place name in the community of Pojo: *Lilltjärnen* (Swedish 'the small woodland lake'). It lies next to a rocky hill with a Bronze Age cairn on top (NHA # 606010007). The rocky hill is named *Offerberget* (Swedish 'offering hill'), which gives addition-

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al hints to the ritualized or sacred nature of the place, although the belief narrative does not directly mention any offerings.

I visited Offerberget and Lilltjärnen in September 2024. I will next provide a description of my experience of interacting with the place during my field visit. The hill named Offerberget is quite vast, measuring approximately 20 hectares. A small road circles it on the eastern side, which is from where I approached it. The only historic map I could find was a rather imprecise village map from 1728, which does not show whether the road was there in earlier centuries.

The lake Lilltjärnen lay on the opposite side of the hill, only about 500 metres away, with the cairn a little bit closer. Equipped with my mobile phone with the National Land Survey's cartographic app and a pair of sturdy boots, I approached the hill from the east. Viewing the terrain map and the hill from that direction it looked like relatively easy terrain to cross, meaning a quick field visit. After a short ascent, I realized the terrain contained more elevation changes than I had expected and was forced to go downhill again (see Figure 5). I thought I would be just a short distance from the lake at that point, but another glance at the map made me realize that I had only advanced a quarter of the way and swerved too far to the south. As the hillsides were quite steep, I decided to try to follow the elevation curve (a common practice in orienteering) and circle the highest parts of the hill around the southwest side instead of climbing over it. However, dense vegetation in the way made this approach difficult too. I soon reached a promontory with a stony cliff face reminiscent of many other sacred natural sites I had encountered, but which was not discernible on the map. Beyond the next corner, I expected to catch a glimpse of the lake or at least the hill with the cairn on top. But instead, I entered into even steeper ground. The terrain kept hindering and confusing me, never looking quite as I had expected it to. Without the map application, I would have been hopelessly lost at this point, and I was constantly forced to ascend and descend in quite steep places. There were no paths anywhere. When I finally caught a glimpse of the hill with the cairn, my legs were very tired. And the hill seemed both steeper and higher than I had expected. The whole layout of the terrain was like a maze of hillsides that was very difficult to traverse and to navigate – even with a cartographic app. The hilly terrain had made me fatigued and light-headed, which made it even harder to get a grip on my surroundings. I forced myself up the hillside to reach the cairn, finally saw the little lake from the hilltop but before I could reach it, I was faced with a tricky descent down a steep hillside filled with mossy rocks. The difficult slope drained my strength even more, but the sight of the serene forest lake turned my feeling of fatigue into a sense of joy and wonder over the sense of the

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Figure 5. The elevation differences on Offerberget made it tough for me to move and find my way. Photo: Author.

Figure 6. Reaching the lake of Lilltjärnen made my feeling of bewilderment and exhaustion give way to a sense of wonder. Photo: Author.

place (see Figure 6). I noticed a boulder by the water on the opposite side of the lake in a formation that once again reminded me of other sacred natural sites. It made the whole place stand out to me as something special. After admiring the lake for a while, I found a path, which led me on

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a relatively easy route out of the forest.

I could very well see myself having ended up like the woman in the belief narrative – walking and walking but always ending up in the same place. Where she asked for help from God, I trusted my smartphone with a GPS and map application. In fact, I would say that my smartphone affected my interaction with the environment in quite a significant way and my orienteering experience helped me apply the information in the map to ways of traversing the terrain. We both received the help we needed and were finally able to find our way at Offerberget. But most interestingly, my experience from visiting Offerberget had parallels to that of the woman in the legend. I could relate in new ways to the narrative, having repeatedly experienced the environment in that same forest confusing and disorienting me.

As mentioned earlier, previous research about the so-called *forest's cover* has not really focused on the effect of the practical engagement with a specific place associated with the phenomenon. The folklorist Laura Stark saw the sensation of being in the forest's cover as dependent on the early modern person's identity being so strongly tied to the community and its socially ordered spaces of villages and farms, that being outside that space for too long risked a kind of identity crisis, or sense of one's identity "dissolving" (Stark 2006:357–380).

The historian of religion Tommy Kuusela considers belief narratives about being supranormally lost and possibly encountering forest spirits as a set of cultural interpretations of the sensation of being lost, distressed and fatigued in a bewildering territory, as well as an expression of the wilderness outside the cultivated lands being dangerous and unpredictable (Kuusela 2020:173–175). Folklorists Pasi Enges and Kaarina Koski have delved even deeper into the "experience" aspect, comparing "natural", i.e. psychological and neurophysiological explanations of the phenomenon with the "supernatural" explanations of belief narratives. They emphasize the sense of strangeness and unfamiliarity often expressed in records about being in the forest's cover, which fits in well with the psychological phenomenon of dissociation. However, they also state that studying the psychological or neurophysiological causes of strange experiences of getting lost and the cultural meanings and frameworks ascribed to the phenomenon are two different things, and one does not cancel out the other (Enges & Koski 2021). In other words, the belief narratives are, in a way, separate from the individual experience, and formulated according to a traditional set of forms and motifs. Yet the tradition is also anchored to the local environment, and certain features in the terrain (see e.g. Siikala 2008:45–46; Honko 1981a:35).

Although the attachment and adaptation of tradition to the terrain has

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been mentioned before, none of the earlier scholars have considered the impact of the specific, individual sites. Belief narratives about supranormal events and unexplained agencies in the forest are nevertheless accounts of interaction between a person and a place. Trying to explain or analyse belief narratives about interaction between people and places without engaging and taking into account the non-human part risks giving us a one-sided view of the whole interaction (Høgseth 2024:73). Occasionally, belief narratives about the forest's cover and other supranormal agencies interacting with people in the wilderness mention specific places where it can happen.

Supranormal Encounters as Interaction with Wilderness

The way supranormal encounters at wilderness sites are described in belief narratives seems to a large extent be to dictated by local belief traditions. Retellings of supranormal encounters at one place borrow elements from narratives about other, similar places. According to traditional motifs, places can be known to be frightening or inhabited by frightening supernatural beings, they can be known to be able to heal illnesses or have other desirable supernatural effects. The places, or spirits residing therein, can also pester or hinder people in their activities, or help them if they know how to engage with the place and its spirit in a respectful manner. In all these cases, interaction with these places is clearly described as particularly meaningful. They are places which *emerge* from more ordinary surroundings and interact with people in ways that ordinary surroundings do not. A place can be transformed from ordinary to supranormal through a meaningful interaction. A lake in the woods can be just any lake, but if you, like the Snejdåback farmer, know how to engage with the lake spirit in the right way, it can emerge as an enchanted lake, providing plentiful catches of fish. But if you are careless or disrespectful, a place can emerge to interact with you in a harmful way, for example by preventing your passage, or even drowning you in a river.

The belief narratives can be seen to reflect how the wilderness outside the cultivated village lands were experienced as unpredictable, even unstable. In the cultivated lands, a field is a field and the people in the village interact with it in very clearly defined ways. But in the wilderness almost any kind of interaction can emerge, harmful or helpful. The encounters of belief narratives also express a worldview where the wilderness can have power over people. This can be affected by positive interaction with the wilderness or a supernatural wilderness being, such as via ritual actions or

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offerings, or via the power of the Christian God, which seems to invoke a worldview where man is the master of nature.

Let us return to the case example of the woman being caught in the forest's cover in the woods of Offerberget. Perhaps the place name contains a hint about how the place should be engaged? The woman abstained from making an offering, causing her interaction with the place to take a harmful form, with the place gaining power over her. Calling upon the power of God, however, changed the interaction, with the powerful, bewildering forest changing into a forest that was under control and connected to her home in the village.

Interaction with the same sites today is obviously different. Also, as described above, belief narratives cannot be seen as very direct accounts of encounters with the wilderness but are formulated and adapted to local traditions. Likewise, any written account I try to write about my experiences will inevitably be detached from the actual experience and formulated by current conventions of academic writing. Even the experience itself to some degree can be seen to be affected by cultural factors: the interaction theoretically understood as a *taskscape* would be different if I was herding cattle, fishing, practising orienteering or conducting field research in order to understand past belief traditions. Still, I argue that at the centre of the layers of interaction formed by (a) the retelling of the experience and (b) the perspective of the experience formulated by tasks, there is a "core" of a human interacting with a place, which can provide insight into the experiences of others who have interacted with the same place, irrespective of whether they were herding cattle in the nineteenth century or on a weekend hike in the twentieth. This indicates that tradition, or cultural conditioning, plays a more important role in how such experiences are interpreted and retold to others, than the individual forming of the experience itself, as suggested by Honko (1981b:92–105).

To sum up, emergence and interaction with the sites does occur in ways somewhat similar to what is described in the belief narratives but interpreted through different cultural tools. My education and background make me understand and relate to places in different ways from nineteenth century villagers. At the same time my knowledge of belief traditions surrounding places has a role in how these places are emerging as meaningful to me. It changes my way of interaction with the sites.

Although occasionally the belief narratives also contain individual descriptions of the qualities of a particular place, there is much in the interaction with the physical terrain that is left out of the narratives. Commonly recurring aspects which are never mentioned in the narratives include the terrain guiding one's movement, or that of impressive features "revealing themselves" (emerging) only from a close distance or the right

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angle. Having to undertake special measures such as crawling or stooping to reach a place are occasionally mentioned. In some instances, the sense of danger expressed in the narratives can be associated with treacherous or challenging terrain.

Another aspect that connects the narratives and my own experience is that the places can have power over a human. They have the power to subtly direct me in a certain direction, to prevent my movement in another, to make me lose my way, to spend much more time in them than I had intended, to make me fatigued, to make me slip and fall, even to break my bones. In the most unfortunate circumstances, they could kill me, for example by drowning. When encountering the wilderness, the actual concrete place plays a significant and noticeable role, and furthermore, places described as sites of supranormal encounters often have remarkable features.

In the view of this study, post-humanistic theory and terminology regarding the interaction of humans and things can help us understand belief systems of past societies – in this case how agricultural societies in the north possessed a culture of viewing the wilderness as having agency, even potential power over people and that it was seen as possible to interact and have meaningful relations with it through particular places. Thus, perhaps post-humanist thought is not that new? Whether the agency is seen to exist in dispersed networks or singular actors is somewhat unclear. In more than half the cases, a supernatural being is said to reside at the place and is attributed with the place's agency. Even in the remaining cases, a singular topographic feature, such as a rock or spring, is often pointed out as the "locus" of interaction. However, their actions toward people are often said to happen in a dispersed manner, such as getting fish from a lake or getting lost in the woods.

In many of the belief narratives, the protagonists are already engaging the environment in some kind of more normal or mundane interaction; herding cattle, fishing, hunting, or just passing through. The supranormal intervention, whether sought by the protagonist or not, changes the nature of the interaction from ordinary to meaningful and thus worth retelling. But what comes first? Having heard belief narratives about a particular place is also likely to make it emerge as meaningful to more people. Based on my personal experience, archived belief narratives from a hundred years ago can have that effect as well. Does this mean that supranormal places emerge as *real* only through these interactions, as Barad's theory would suggest? I would rather say that they emerge as *meaningful*, although I interpret the encounter with wilderness in different ways than the archived narrators.

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[1] Funded by the Kone Foundation's "For the Woods" initiative.
[2] Often we can also find various motifs such as tales of local spirits, hidden treasures or bandits' hideouts connected to the same place, suggesting that different tales can have been attached to a place which felt significant (Björkman 2024:54–55).
[3] "Vid Torbacka ån (Degerby) finnes ett mycket djupt ställe som kallas 'Gölarna'. Där härskar sjörådet. Om man ser en blå och gredelin dimma utbreda sig över stället, är det hög tid att taga sig till flykten, ty det är ett tecken på att rådet stiger upp." All translations are by the author unless otherwise stated.
[4] "Simsiönvuorella on laaja kiviraunio. Muinoin on ollut ainoa tie paikkakunnalle tämän vuoren ylitse. Tarina kertoo, että vuorella on ollut niin kova haltija, ettei yksikään päässyt vuoren yli ellei heittänyt jotakin esinettä tien viereen. Uhriksi kelpasi kyllä kivikin ja kerrotaan koko suuren raunion syntyneenkin näistä uhrikivistä. Kerrotaan, että kerran oli piispa Hemming matkustanut tästä ohi ja hän oli istunut mainitulle kivelle ja saarnannut siellä vuoren haltijalle. Piispan saarnasta lannistui haltija ja pakeni vuoren sisään ja sen jälkeen jokainen matkustaja voi kulkea tiensä uhrikiveä heittämättä."
[5] "I Gästerby Lillträsk såg 'Snejdåbackin' (Byman) mellan två och fyra på mor-gonarna sjöjungfrun, när hon satt och tvättade sig i träsket. Hon hade långt hår och vackert ansikte och så långa bröst, att hon kastade dem över axeln när hon tvättade sig. Stod man i gunst hos henne, fick man fisk hur mycket som helst, men annars lönade det sig inte att fiska där. Snejdåbackin visste, hur man skulle komma i gunst hos henne och fick därför alltid fisk. Ännu för fyrtio år sedan (från 1928) brukade han vara och fiska där och fick se sjöjungfrun."
[6] The last reported drowning was in September 2024 (ÅU 24.9.2024).
[7] "Likaså torde troll ha huserat på ett berg invid sjön Lilltjänan i samma socken. En qvinna från grannskapet gick en gång upp på detta berg. Hon förtrollades så, att hon icke hittade hem, oaktat dessa trakter voro henne bekanta sedan barndomen. Hon gick oavbrutet, men kom alltid tillbaka till samma plats. Då anropade hon Gud om hjälp. Förtrollningen bröts, och hon hittade hemstigen."
[8] Maanmittaushallituksen uudistusarkisto. MHA U Uudistuskartat ja -asiakirjat. B UUDENMAAN LÄÄNI. Pohja. B41a:23/1. Thomasböle; Karta öfver egorne med åker- och ängsbeskrifning (1728–1728). Kansallisarkisto. Viitattu 23.1.2025.
[9] "Forest's cover" is a direct translation of the Finnish term metsänpeitto, whereas the closest equivalent Swedish term would be bergtagning, meaning 'taken into the mountain'.

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Changing Perceptions of Estonian Sacred Natural Sites

Ott Heinapuu

Abstract
This article considers the changes and variation in perceiving sacred natural sites and landscapes in Estonia that have been brought about by the processes of modernization and the shift from a mainly oral vernacular culture to a national culture with a written core. Sacred sites of the vernacular religion as well as narratives and customs associated with them have been documented in collections of folklore and some of the archived folklore texts have been given second lives in print; concurrently, Romantic literary notions about pre-Christian Estonian history and culture have become rooted in the collective cultural memory. The article presents an overview of the diversity of ways of conceptualizing sacred natural sites that are current in Estonian culture and how sacred natural sites are used at different levels of collective memory.

Keywords: Sacred natural sites, collective memory, placelore, oral tradition, Estonia

Estonian landscapes form a varied patchwork where some areas show conservative, almost premodern patterns, and are intermingled with spots that serve as examples of modern industrial and Soviet extensive farming landscapes as well as postmodern landscapes (Palang et al. 2004). To this day, the more conservative parts of this patchwork include remains of a previously wider network of sacred natural sites, most usually sacred trees, springs and sacrificial stones, with some spectacular sacred groves covering wider areas (Valk 2009; Viires 2000:57–72). Premodern oral tradition – recorded and archived since the nineteenth century and in some cases known even today by mostly older local people or enthusiasts willing to give it a second life – associates sacred natural sites with ta-

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boos restricting land use, healing or other magic as well as folktales with supernatural motifs. Since the rapid modernization of Estonian society in the nineteenth century, many traditional sacred natural sites in Estonia have likely been abandoned, forgotten or destroyed.

In discussing such sites, I prefer the inclusive concept of *sacred natural site*, or a "natural feature or an area of land or water having special spiritual significance to a community" (Wild & McLeod 2008:xi), as this broad definition, endorsed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and UNESCO, can encompass a number of diverse vernacular and scholarly concepts as well as a variety of natural features.

Since 2019, Estonia's Heritage Conservation Act specifies that a historical sacred natural site is a "thing or an area without significant human impact and characterized by folk tradition, which is associated with sacrifice, worship, healing or religious and ritual activity" while emphasizing that these sites "are the significant bearers of folk tradition and local identity" (MuKS 2019:§11 lg 6). In practice, what constitutes "significant human impact" or the absence thereof so that a site may merit protection as a "cultural monument" remains a matter of interpretation and discussion among experts advising the National Heritage Board (a spring of water once considered sacred that has well kerbs made of concrete installed on it will probably not qualify). In the end, the decisions are at the discretion of the Minister of Culture.

The Estonian legal definition of a historical sacred natural site has been narrowed down from the international IUCN definition, as it is intended to cover phenomena originating from the vernacular premodern tradition and to reflect the heritage of national academic research. This is also broadly the starting point of this study: I will proceed from the assumptions that Estonian vernacular sacred natural sites have traditionally been locations outside the built environment or on its edges; that there has been an association with supernatural creatures or forces there; and that this in turn has motivated a customary limitations of land use and other human activities at the site. I will also discuss modern notions, sites and practices that are in some way derived from the vernacular tradition just outlined or that are intrinsically connected to this tradition in order to understand changes in the perception of sacred natural sites.

The Estonian national identity is a modern phenomenon that originated in an emancipatory awakening led by nineteenth century literati whose works borrowed heavily from dominant German-language examples of Romantic literature (Jansen 2004; cf. Anderson 2006). The rhetorical foundations of Estonian nationhood in that era strongly emphasized history, including constructing a patriotic narrative of a golden pre-Christian era before the thirteenth-century Baltic crusades that led to the subjuga-

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tion and Christianization of the territory of today's Estonia. In this narrative, supposed ancient sacred natural sites such as sacred oak groves – mostly as imagined landscapes – were used as signifiers of national identity (Jonuks 2009:28–31; Heinapuu 2010, 2016:178–180).

In referring to modernity, I am in general agreement with Bruno Latour (1993) that the strict separation of human culture or society from the spheres of nature and the supernatural became possible only after the development of Western European modern and scientific schools of thought from the seventeenth century. For the purposes of this article, this separation of culture from nature as well as the compartmentalization and marginalization of the supernatural will be considered key features of modernity. In addition, the distinction between premodern and modern in this article will roughly correspond to the different subsystems of culture distinguished as orality *vs.* literacy or non-written *vs.* written culture (as conceptualized by Ong 2002 and Lotman 2019b).

The most crucial features of a modern worldview as opposed to a premodern one (besides its being literate) are the emergence of the concepts of *culture*, *nature* and the *supernatural* that implies that both the division of culture and nature and the division of the natural and the supernatural are to be viewed as distinctively different opposing domains or qualitatively contrasting worlds that follow different sets of laws and that have hard borders between them rather than being poles on continuous scales. Another modern innovation of note is the prominence of the division of the world into nations: being Estonian, German or Russian becomes a dominant layer of identity.

Modernization has always been an uneven process, with the first shoots of modernity appearing and then spreading in a premodern world at first and, subsequently, islands of premodernity surviving in a sea of modernity. This is in line with Juri Lotman's model of a semiosphere: any larger community has numerous internal boundaries and heterogeneous constituent parts that communicate with one another in makeshift pidgins and creoles if necessary (Lotman 1990:123–150). Points of communication between different subsystems of culture should be of particular interest due to the varied semiotic activity and innovation generated there. One such point in Estonian cultural history was the subculture of folklore collectors in the late nineteenth century who were "living in an environment where orality prevailed but aspired towards literary culture" and stood "quite consciously on the borderline between oral and literate, local and national" (Kikas 2021:196).

Against this background, premodern sacred natural sites as physical landscapes have also acquired new meanings in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In addition, new sacred natural sites have been created

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or chosen since the twentieth century, to give tangible form to conceptions of perceived "ancient Estonian" sacred sites. Concurrently, some memory of premodern meanings and functions of sacred natural sites has persisted in many localities, changing and intertwining with more modern notions.

In the following, I will try to make sense of the diversity of ways of conceptualizing sacred natural sites that are current in Estonian culture and what uses are made of different notions of sacred natural sites at different levels of collective memory. This could provide a possible framework for understanding how elements of different ideologies, religious and other schools of thought intermingle in the ways people represent and interact with symbolic landscapes. The analysis that formed the basis of this article is informed by the ecosemiotic notion that cultural symbolic representations of natural phenomena that stray too far from their point of origin and proliferate may ultimately cause unexpected and adverse consequences for the natural phenomena they originally represented (Maran 2020). This is coupled with the understanding, rooted in the premises of the Tartu–Moscow school of cultural semiotics, that cultural theory or any self-description of culture is a part of the more general processes of culture and contributes to these processes (see Lotman 2019a). As an attempt at a more general synthesis, this article will mainly draw on previous written and published sources, both scholarship and texts current in the cultural memory. Occasionally, the author's fieldwork experience and unpublished archive material will be directly and specifically utilized pertaining to specific case studies. The examples considered represent sacred and symbolic sites prominent nationally or locally, as "telling cases" that illustrate wider cultural processes.

The article will typologize different ways of conceptualizing sacred natural sites current in Estonian culture, with brief case studies accompanying each type. The analysis concentrates on whether and how current Estonian discourses and practices (stories and customs) pertaining to sacred natural sites are connected to actual tangible landscapes while considering the nature of these landscapes. As in the dominant discourses of the self-description of Estonian culture, sacred natural sites are generally considered ancient and pre-Christian, the concept of modernity was central: the discourses and practices were classified as (a) premodern, (b) modern or (c) hybrids of modern and premodern. Connections of the discourses and practices with landscapes were classified into three categories: (1) absent (landscapes referred to in texts are unknown to the reader; representations and discourses that do not refer to tangible landscapes; discourses on imagined landscapes); (2) discourses and practices involving premodern sacred natural sites; (3) discourses and practices pertaining to new sacred natural sites or symbolic landscapes emulating sacred

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natural sites (including patriotic landscaping). This analysis yielded eleven types of conceptualizing sacred natural sites in Estonia, discussed and illustrated with examples below.

I will use the concepts developed by Aleida Assmann (2016) to distinguish between different levels of *collective memory* in order to determine the groups to whom a certain site or landscape is relevant and to model the dynamic processes of change and continuity in remembering, forgetting and resurrecting old memories about sacred sites.

The simplest and most brittle form of collective memory is *social memory*, which extends the individual memory into the communication of a small social group; entities of social memory live in interaction between people and rely on immediate personal contact. In the material I will refer to oral heritage such as legends and other placelore as well as non-verbal practices and ways of knowing, such as the skill of navigating landscapes and taskscapes (cf. Ingold 2000).

In turn, the transmission of *cultural memory* relies on writing and other ways of recording heritage for retrieval across a distance in time or space. This comprises (1) *functional memory* that defines a current canon of heritage for a larger group, including the seminal texts and other entities of cultural importance, such as imagined landscapes that give substance to the imagined community of Estonians (cf. Anderson 2006) and (2) *storage memory* to allow for the recording of dormant heritage not current in functional memory. Entities of storage memory considered below include folklore recorded in archives that may come back into current use, as there is always some dynamic exchange between functional and storage memory (Assmann 2016:38).

Finally, *political memory* forges the identity of a political collective, including rituals that symbolically unite it. In the material considered, this includes patriotic landscaping, or the creation of new landscapes fit for national or local rituals of political significance, and the sustained performance of such rituals themselves. Relationships between these notional layers of collective memory are fluid and dynamic and the borders between the layers are porous: texts or motifs may pass from social memory into cultural memory and from there may be incorporated into political memory and vice versa: the oral social memory of a group may adopt features from cultural memory or political memory and use them in new, unexpected ways. In the Estonian context, significant overlap may be seen between what belongs to the cultural memory of the Estonian nation and the political memory of the nation-state, the Republic of Estonia whose main aim is often perceived to be protecting the Estonian culture. In the following, only phenomena co-opted into or originating from the practices or communication of official institutions or their representatives

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will be considered as instances of political memory.

Representations of Sacred Sites Divorced from Physical Landscapes

Perceptions of sacred natural sites that have become abstract by being divorced from physical landscapes include narratives, representations and discourses that serve as virtual sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*). The concept of the *lieu de mémoire* as defined by Pierre Nora may stand for "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" (Nora 1996:xvii). French *lieux de mémoire* listed by Nora include, in addition to physical sites, memory institutions (archives, museums, libraries), such mainly semiotic phenomena as commemorations and celebrations, the Dictionnaire Larousse and the tricolour flag (Nora 1989:12). For the latter examples, no single topographical location can be discerned. Similarly, Jaan Undusk (2011:2) has, among examples of Estonian sites of memory, enumerated real sites, as well as chronotopes like the ancient golden era, objects and works of prose.

According to Nora, "the moment of *lieux de mémoire*" occurs when an "immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history". This period marks both "a heritage consolidated" and "the decisive deepening of historical study" (Nora 1989:10–11). I believe that the passing of Estonian traditions connected with sacred natural sites from the local social memory of small groups and communities to the collective cultural memory of the nascent modern Estonian nation was just such a moment as a new heritage was being created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Premodern perceptions of sacred natural sites, known from direct experience in landscapes and associated with beliefs and customs, became the basis of abstract ideas as symbols of a glorious past (as parts of the ancient era of freedom) and thus pillars of the new national identity (Jonuks 2009:28–31) and were concurrently decontextualized into phantom landscapes (Heinapuu 2010; cf. Lindström 2008). In Aleida Assmann's terms, such sites of memory clearly belong to the layer of cultural memory but knowledge of these may become important in the orally transmitted social memory of smaller groups and may come to influence tangible landscapes.

In order to understand the nature of this decontextualization, I will distinguish between three ways of perceiving disembodied sacred natural

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sites: informed ethnographic nostalgia, Romantic nostalgia and, finally, a hybrid of these two.

Informed Ethnographic Nostalgia

Premodern oral tradition that concerns sacred natural sites may be displaced and estranged from its contexts and become mere narrative texts recorded in an archive where they are usually read by scholars and occasionally published in print if considered notable enough or having artistic value. This is an example of living oral social memory becoming cultural memory as dormant archive records that may or may not resurface in actual usage, and if such lore re-enters circulation it may be approached in the same way as narrative prose or fiction rather than knowledge about concrete landscapes.

The initiative, led by the National Heritage Board, to use recorded information from archives of folklore, archaeology and other possible sources to locate Estonian historic sacred natural sites to determine which of them merit protection as national monuments (see Kama 2022) has shown that determining what landscapes and sites are referred to in written records of legends, descriptions of places and customs and other oral placelore can be difficult or outright impossible, especially if the site was known – in the premodern vernacular tradition – to a narrow circle of people. However, the more fortunate pieces of placelore may receive a rich second life within the currents of cultural memory by being conveyed to a wider audience of readers through the pages of books or periodicals and, in more recent decades, via the internet.

As an oral legend is written down in a fixed form that eliminates the context-dependent variability and flexibility characteristic of orality, a text of placelore becomes a text of the written culture. Unlike a living narrator, the fixed form of a text cannot, when encountering new audiences with different collective memories, explicate the hidden assumptions behind the text or provide contextual knowledge tailored to a new audience. At the same time, the text migrates by stealth from a genre that provides information about the lived environment of a community into a semi-literary fictional genre: a map becomes a work of art, so to say. There is also a bias for printing legends that are more artistic in expression, as opposed to legends that flow seamlessly in everyday, unmarked speech (see Valk 2015). References to landscape features that are assumed to be known to the original intended audience who share the social memory of the narrator can too easily be read as timeless and placeless fairytale expositions in the vein of "once upon a time in a faraway place".

An example of a piece of placelore that has successfully transitioned from the social memory to the cultural memory is a cluster of narratives

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about the Kassari sacred grove on the island of Hiiumaa: "In Tagaküla, there was a sacred grove [*hiiemets*]. It was so dense that it was impossible to pass through it. Maidens of the grove and dogs of the grove [*hiieneitsid ja hiiekoerad*] lived there. People who did not know the song of the grove [*hiielaul*], they were attacked by the dogs and killed; those who knew it, could pass easily" (Loorits 1941:165–166). The oak grove in question was cut down by the end of the nineteenth century. But the colourful stories about it (another, narrated by Leena Elmi (b. 1864) and Mare Niitim (b. 1870) in 1939, mentions the maidens dancing at night in red dresses), first published by the prominent Estonian folklorist Oskar Loorits in a closely curated selection of texts from the Estonian Folklore Archives, are occasionally printed in the local newspapers of the island of Hiiumaa and otherwise contribute to how the informed and interested public perceives historical Estonian sacred natural sites. As Ülo Valk has remarked: "When legends became ancient heritage and also fiction, they gained national significance" (Valk 2015:546). Descriptions of small communities' tangible home landscapes can thus become parts of the nation's sacred history or be absorbed in a corpus of "literature of identity" (cf. Kivari 2023) that affirms the readers' perception of the peculiarity of being Estonian, a phenomenon that could be viewed as a form of post-colonial self-exoticization.

Edited texts of oral provenance describing sacred natural sites have been printed in books since the time of Matthias Johann Eisen (1857–1934), who was both the initiator of one of the two largest Estonian folklore collections of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century and a prolific author of popular books on folk tradition and heritage. A number of narratives concerning or touching on sacred natural sites are represented in Eisen's *Esivanemate varandus* ("Treasury of Our Ancestors"), a popular selection of local legends that has been published in several editions since 1882 (for the latest edition, see Eisen 2000). The Estonian Folklore Archives as well as commercial publishing houses have kept publishing books that reproduce legends and folktales recorded in the folklore archives, making snippets of the dormant cultural memory available to larger audiences and thus giving them a chance to re-enter the active cultural memory. Many publications are also digital and available online free of charge. As a result, there is an Estonian-language corpus of published placelore largely shorn of its original context accessible to the interested reader. This also enables one to infer an "average Estonian" heritage and to read the corpus in a way that might be called *informed ethnographic nostalgia* with the goal of understanding the premodern mentality from which these texts originate. Such a tendency was characteristic of the philological method of twentieth-century Estonian

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folkloristics that aimed to filter out from the archival record anything that was of literary provenance in order to access the supposed original, pure heritage.

Romantic Nostalgia

In the opinion of twentieth-century professional folklorists, the layer of influence of Romantic-era nationalist discourse needed to be peeled off from the texts recorded by amateur correspondents. This Romantic discourse included some preconceptions about what the most important pre-Christian Estonian sacred sites had been. These preconceptions had been shaped by models from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western European literary sources whose tradition can, *in extremis*, be traced to the ancient Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus's remarks in Chapter 9 of *Germania*:

> The Germans, however, do not consider it consistent with the grandeur of celestial beings to confine the gods within walls, or to liken them to the form of any human countenance. They consecrate woods and groves, and they apply the names of deities to the abstraction which they see only in spiritual worship (Tacitus 1942:713; see also Schama 1996:75–134).

Written records of pre-Christian and vernacular Estonian mythology were woefully lacking in the first half of the nineteenth century, but a native mythology and a glorious prehistory were perceived to be essential attributes for the existence of a full-fledged nation by the nascent Estonian intelligentsia. Therefore, a whole pantheon and canon of myths – nowadays usually called "pseudomythological" – was constructed by creatively combining the still relatively small collections of folklore, the scant available historical written resources, foreign (German, Finnish) models with assumptions and outright Ossianist inventions (see Viires 1991).

A key element of this pseudomythology has been the motif of the oak as the sacred tree of the ancient Estonians and of the existence of oak groves sacred to Taara, the god of thunder and war (Heinapuu 2010, 2019). Such a representation of ancient oak groves has more in common with the nineteenth century scholarly view of oak as the tree sacred to the Indo-European thunder gods Zeus, Jupiter, Donar, Perkunas and Perun than with vernacular Estonian mythology: the Estonian language belongs to the Uralic language family and despite a long period of contact with Baltic, Germanic and Slavic peoples, oral tradition has not adopted the central myths of these peoples (cf. Siikala 2002). Among the hundreds woodland areas documented as sacred natural sites in the vernacular tradition, one may find only a few oak groves, such as those in the villages of Sõõrike and Mihkli in Pärnu county (Kaasik 2017:28–34), Koumardi

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oak grove in Pärna village in Lääne-Viru county (Estonian cultural monument no. 10681) and Lehmja oak grove in the borough of Jüri near Tallinn (Ramst 2007; Kaasik 2017:316–318).

In the single most influential text of the pseudomythology, the epic poem *Kalevipoeg* by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (first published from 1857–1861), most of the references to the oak groves sacred to Taara are vague references to an ancient golden age with no concrete spatial references, sometimes appearing in the lyrical expositions by the narrator, the nameless old bard, e.g.: "Heavenly candle, star of dusk, / […] Softly gazed your silent eye / Changes brought throughout the ages, / Gazed on Taara's oak tree groves, / On the sacred trees so handsome / In their verdant leaves arrayed" (Kreutzwald 2011:183, VIII:1, 7–11; see also Heinapuu 2019:269–270). The implication, widely accepted in the Estonian cultural memory, is that such ancient oak groves were destroyed and replaced by churches after the imposition or adoption of Christianity in the Middle Ages.

Due to the influence of *Kalevipoeg* and other Romantic-era texts, the oak grove of Taara – despite its lack of a physical presence – has become an important Estonian site of memory as a prototypical image of an ancient sacred natural site. Kreutzwald's view of the future of the Estonian people was pessimistic, envisaging an extinction of the vernacular language and the assimilation of the ethnic group into Germans, and thus his nostalgia for ancient oak groves stood for a longing for a glorious age that was never to return. But later generations have produced more hopeful dispositions and thus a longing to bring back the golden age in a new guise and the possibility to return to the oak groves of yore. This has resulted in initiatives for planting new oak groves in the spirit of patriotic landscaping (see below).

Hybrid Notions Based on Both Folklore and National Myth

In practice, the disembodied notions described in the two previous sections tend to hybridize in the collective memory, as most people considering such matters do not constantly practise rigorous source criticism and accept authoritative segments of cultural memory at face value. Therefore, it is common to assume that sacred oak groves have existed or may still exist and simultaneously to know that it is customary to offer coins to sacred stones or sacred springs of water. Such abstract knowledge may exist and be passed on within the active cultural memory even in the absence of personal experiences of any concrete sacred sites.

Hybrid notions that combine the prestigious literary tradition that emphasized the role of oak groves and more vernacular motifs appear in the Estonian written cultural memory. Correspondents sending their material

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to central folklore collections represented a vernacular literacy and, while recording oral tradition, often blended it with pseudomythological ideas derived from the nascent literary sphere that included texts like *Kalevipoeg* and derived works (cf. Kikas 2024). This development can be understood as an attempt to translate the oral social memory into the written cultural memory. Even Matthias Johann Eisen, while writing about general concepts, tends to honour the literary tradition to supplement the empirical data sent to him by correspondents while formulating a consensus opinion in his treatise on Estonian mythology: "Our ancestors' sacrificial customs and their veneration of deity were mainly concentrated in sacred sites [*hiis*]. The sacred site was an oak grove or some other coppice. More rarely, a woodland was venerated as a sacred forest" (Eisen 1919:239).

Premodern Sacred Natural Sites

The network of Estonian historical sacred natural sites has been assumed to include a very archaic layer, as it can be assumed that sacred sites near villages that existed in Late Iron Age have been in use since before the thirteenth century (Valk 2017:139–143). Similarly, a group of common mythological legend motifs that are associated with such sites – such as tales of giants hurling stones or the supernatural punishment befalling the one who fells a sacred tree or fouls a sacred site – are quite archaic so that their age can be measured "not in centuries, but in millennia", as Mari-Ann Remmel and Heiki Valk note (2014:311). As is usual in the spread of folklore, motifs that have prominent local (or even national) significance tend to be known internationally, narrative pillars of a local identity may, *mutatis mutandis*, be of global spread if viewed as typological units. As the patterns of settlement change, new sacred sites can be assumed to be associated with narratives similar to those current in conjunction with earlier ones.

From a semiotic point of view, sacred natural sites and supernatural creatures have allowed for a premodern possibility to model the semiotically active and mutually intertwined complex comprising humans and their environment and to interpret the environment to make practical choices (cf. Maran 2020). Such premodern concepts facilitate attributing agency to non-human entities and communities or clusters of them as well as to symbolically form relationships and to make commitments to non-humans. In this way, it is possible to translate orally transmitted ways of making sense of landscapes into the language of more modern ecology, such as considering sacred natural sites as the oldest protected areas of the planet (see Wild & McLeod 2008).

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Abandoned and Forgotten Premodern Sacred Natural Sites

The number of Estonian sacred natural sites known in archive records has been estimated to be approximately 3,000 (Eesti looduslikud pühapaigad 2015:8). Before the process of modernization intensified in Estonia in the nineteenth century, the number of sacred natural sites in active use must have exceeded this number, as information about a great number of more transient sites known in the social memory of some small group, such as a single family or a group of families, is unlikely to have been recorded.

It is possible to distinguish sites that are *abandoned,* i.e. where the local community has retained some (peripheral) social memory without the active use of the site in ritual or custom, and those that are *forgotten* so that no knowledge about them remains, even if a site (e.g., a stone, a body of water) may still be physically at the same spot. Information about some of the sites that have fallen into oblivion on the level of living social memory may lie dormant in some repository of cultural memory, such as the folklore archives or on an early modern map of a manorial holding. Such dormant cultural memory (or some interpretation of it) can theoretically re-enter local social memory if it happens to reach a community concerned.

However, as Lauri Honko (2013) has argued, giving a "second life" to folklore by resurrecting recorded traditions into active cultural usage from archives very seldom results in its return to its roots or the collective it originated from; and when it does happen, it is often through media that are new to the folklore process in the traditional sense and in genres that follow other norms than that of the oral tradition: such as the written word, sound recordings, or film. In comparison, resurrecting entertainment genres such as folktales, songs, folk tunes played on an instrument or even folk games is easier than that of the placelore surrounding sacred natural sites, as placelore is connected to its environment more intricately.

Conservative Premodern Vernacular Tradition

If a premodern sacred natural site is mainly known within the social memory of a local community or some other small group and it is used in a traditional way, it is a case of premodern practices persisting in a traditional site. In a traditional society, sacred natural sites form a part of a pattern of relationships that people of the community have with other people (including the dead remembered in the community) but also with creatures or entities other than human: animals, plants and supernatural entities. Eduardo Kohn (2013) has shown that this network of relationships can be modelled by following semiotic activity in the communication between representatives of official authority, influential figures within the commu-

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nity and other human communities, domestic and wild animals as well as supernatural creatures who all form an interconnected network.

A persistent premodern tradition is represented by the use of the so-called cross-signed trees (*ristipuu* 'cross tree') in funerary rites in the traditional counties of Võromaa and Tartumaa in the southeast of Estonia (Kõivupuu 2007; Torp-Kõivupuu 2004; Valk 2009:54–55). The focus of this tradition is formed by trees whose bark is marked with a cross to commemorate a deceased person. The mark is cut into the bark of a tree, often a pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), during the procession of the relatives and community of the deceased accompanying the coffin to the cemetery. The locations and identities of the trees used in such a way are traditional and have been passed on in families. In addition to single trees that are marked with crosses, there are groups, coppices or "woods" (*ristimõts* "cross-wood") with numerous cross-signed trees. The vernacular interdictions concerning cross-signed trees are similar to those applied to other premodern sacred trees: it is perceived to be forbidden to fell them or to break the branches of these trees; the violators of these interdictions have traditionally been known to be struck by accident, disease or death (Torp-Kõivupuu 2004:117). In the Baltic region, similar traditions have been known in neighbouring Setomaa (*lautsipuu*), the islands of western Estonia and northern Estonia (Valk 2009:55) and in Finland (*karsikko*) (Vilkuna 1992) but the southeastern Estonian tradition seems to be the only one persisting in vernacular use.

The tradition of cross-signed trees is knit tightly to the oral social memory of the families that practise the customs, funeral rites being usually among the most conservative part of family traditions (Kõivupuu 1997:58). Therefore, such customs are slow to change or to adopt new features from the newer layers of collective memory. The highly localized and context-dependent nature of the tradition and its connection with one's own family members would make it difficult to elevate cross-signed trees into a cultural or national symbol of an imagined community. Thus, it is natural that the tradition has not played a prominent role in the wider Estonian cultural memory. However, the known cross-signed trees have been mapped in the twenty-first century in order to protect them from felling by unknowing representatives of the forest industry; the Võro regional movement has also emphasized this complex of traditions as a characteristic trait of the regional culture (Torp-Kõivupuu 2004:114). The customs related to cross-signed trees persist in a geographically bounded area and adoption by outsiders has been limited to people settling into the area where these customs are practised (Kõivupuu 1997:59).

A similar conservative but continuing tradition within the social memory of a local community is the knowledge of stones called *moaljakiv-*

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id on the western Estonian island of Muhu, as attested by the results of fieldwork in 2005 and 2006 (see Kaasik 2007:45–46). Etymologically and mythologically, the appellation is a reference to underground supernatural creatures (*moaljad*) who have been known to cause skin and other diseases; accordingly, the practices associated with the stones have been those of magical healing. Often, the stones are not remarkably large and they may be located near houses; such a stone is typically known to a few families. In the largely conservative settlement pattern of the island, the stones may function as significant markers in the known landscape and remain to be known by name due to their role in delineating the space that people inhabit; this may also be a factor for preserving at least a part of the repertoire of supernatural legends associated with the stones. Before the twenty-first century, knowledge about such stones had not spread beyond the bounds of oral social memory.

Former Sacred Natural Sites Redefined as Profane Landmarks

As the premodern conceptions of the functioning of the world recede, a traditional sacred natural site may retain the significance of a landmark or an important landscape but lose the association with the sacred or supernatural sphere so that it is no longer seen as a sacred site. In such a case, the new meaning of the site in the active cultural memory has overshadowed its earlier meaning in the local social memory. The landscape as the signifier may be the same (although inevitably more or less changed in time) but the signified or the meaning of the symbolic landscape may have shifted beyond recognition.

A process approximately like this can be discerned at the site of a small hill called Kalmemägi ("Burial Site Hill") close to the major Tallinn–Tartu road near the borough of Adavere in central Estonia. The hill was mentioned as a sacred site (*hiiease*) already by the pioneer of Estonian archaeology Jaan Jung (1898:205, no. 36) and, deemed to be a burial site, it has been protected as an archaeological monument since 1964 (national monument no. 9343, see Kaasik 2017:142–144). In addition to that, a sacrificial stone on the hill is protected separately (as national monument no. 9345). However, for most people who pass the site in a car or a bus on the busy road next to it, the site has been better known as the "centre point of continental Estonia" (*Mandri-Eesti keskpunkt*) since the Soviet age. This appellation can be read on a dark-red road sign informing of a site of cultural interest; it has also been carved into a stone on the hill that can be seen from a car or bus window.

As an additional layer of explicit signmaking, the spot – as the supposed centre of continental Estonia – was chosen with the support of the local authority of Põltsamaa to be one of the 21 attractions of southern

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Estonia that merited the installation of a physical yellow rectangle sponsored by National Geographic aimed at the place so that the framed view resembles the cover of the magazine. (Kohler 2014; Reinpõld 2015) The rectangle, or "window", as it is commonly known, is focused on the inscribed stone. In contrast, the sacrificial stone is shrouded by the trees and is not as accessible.

Contemporary Living and Transforming Traditions in Premodern Sites

There is a subset of Estonian premodern sacred natural sites where premodern practices persist to a degree while adopting new features or being supplemented by new practices grounded in more modern ideas. This usually also means that the site's traditional significance in the social memory is supplemented by some connection with elements from the cultural memory of a larger group. The site may attract significance in the eyes of people as something of a national importance and/or new meanings for new small groups that are not as territorial or descent-based in nature as the premodern communities for whom vernacular sacred natural sites have been significant.

This group of sites includes the most visible and best known Estonian sacred natural sites that are local tourist attractions in their own right, such as the Tamme-Lauri oak (*Tamme-Lauri tamm*) in Urvaste in the south of Estonia that both has a role in the common celebrations of the community of the local school and is also known for being displayed on the reverse side of the Estonian 10-kroon banknote from 1992 to 2010. In such places, one can observe a living and changing tradition that perpetuates some premodern narratives and customs in some fashion while adding new ones.

Already when the late nineteenth-century collection of folklore was in full swing, correspondents attached literary motifs originating from Romantic or historical writings to narratives about sacred natural sites (e.g. Metssalu 2008), thus creating a hybrid heritage incorporating both premodern and modern material. Such a sedimentation of new layers into placelore has been noted by Mall Hiiemäe and Mari-Ann Remmel (2020:390) who observe that sacred natural sites that have remained intact in the landscape but have been rediscovered since the late 1980s have in several cases become ritual sites for followers of the Estonian ethnic religion *maausk* (see Servan-Schreiber 2022, 2024; Ringvee 2024), whereas the interpretation of vernacular customs was partly guided by the way the pre-Christian era is depicted in nationalist imaginings of an ancient golden age (cf. below). An example of how notions from the stock of motifs I have dubbed as Romantic nostalgia above have come to influence premodern sacred natural sites was the planting of oaks in the

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sacred grove of the Samma village in Virumaa in 1988 (see Heinapuu 2010:127–129). In the past few decades, oaks have also been planted on the sacred hill in the village of Purtse in the same area. According to Hiiemäe and Remmel, sacred natural sites have become "an embodiment of the old worldview, a litmus test of community identity, the calling card of Estonians as an indigenous people and a carrier of the idea of protecting nature" (2020:390).

A telling example of a case where a clearly premodern vernacular tradition has merged with modern layers of heritage is the hill called Jumalamägi ('God's Hill') in the village of Kolossova in Setomaa. The hill has been a focus of essentially premodern oral tradition (according to a legend, it is the site where God takes the souls of people destined for heaven on to his carriage and each tree on the hill stands for such a soul) and practice (people visiting the site on the Friday before 2 August, the feast of St Paraskeva celebrated in the nearby Saatse Orthodox church). The hill, however, has no official protection either as a natural object or as cultural heritage and has started to accrue new functions only after the local community, led by the village elder Silver Hüdsi, decided to take the hill into more active use in 2007 (Kaasik 2017:50–52). A significant addition to the hill has been the statue of the Seto fertility god Peko by the local artist and antiquarian Renaldo Veeber (on Peko, see Valk 2019). The statue has become a new focus of practices at the site, as knowledge of the hill's significance as a sacred site has spread from the local social memory to the nascent common cultural memory of the Seto people, an ethnic group whose belonging to the Estonian people has been ambiguous, as the Seto remained a part of the Eastern Orthodox religious sphere and were governed by the Russian Empire when the bulk of Estonians became Lutherans and were governed by a German-speaking aristocracy. In the modern Seto cultural memory, the agrarian fertility god Peko whose statues were kept in secret, has been reimagined as the sleeping king of the Seto Kingdom, a celebration of the local identity held on the first Saturday of each year in various places of Setomaa. Thus, we can see an intertwinement between the social memory and the cultural memory of the wider Seto group whose collective identity has been supported by this innovation; and in turn the Seto cultural memory has supported the practices on the hill. In addition to this, according to Silver Hüdsi, Jumalamägi has attracted the attention of adherents to new religious movements who have conducted rituals there.

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Sacred Natural Sites of the Modern Era

When compared to premodern sacred natural sites, the meanings of similar sites taken into use or founded during the reign of modernity are more connected to cultural symbols from the national canon and thus their associations with the supernatural are more indirect and rarer (if such a site is associated with the supernatural at all). The modern distinction between the natural and the supernatural encourages one to doubt the existence of all supernatural creatures and forces and this doubt has become more and more mainstream during the twentieth century. Therefore, it is conceptually more difficult to justify the inclusion of a symbolic landscape in the cultural or political memory due to its association with the supernatural. However, this may be done in a more roundabout way: one may refer to "ancient Estonians" for whom the oak was supposed to be a sacred tree (see Heinapuu 2010, 2016). Thus, the symbolic landscape becomes rooted in the common history of the nation and the share of literary or (pseudo)historical motifs stored in the collective cultural and political memory becomes more predominant in the placelore of modern-era symbolic sites. This tendency does not apply to the same extent to sacred sites that have been recognized or founded by followers of new religious or spiritual movements that are based on modern precepts (cf. Kivari 2018; Hiiemäe 2017).

Abandoned Modern Sacred Natural Sites

The twentieth century allowed for new opportunities for the spread of new ways of discerning the sacred in nature or in landscapes by means of teachings relying on modern-era preconceptions. Thus, new sacred natural sites were found or founded by small groups. In this section, I want to highlight the transience of the social memory of such small groups: many of such sites sacred to some group or another have fallen into disuse, been forgotten or abandoned for various reasons, thus yielding modern-era sacred sites with no associated active tradition or practice.

During the period of the Russian Empire, it was compulsory for each citizen to belong to an established church and participate in its upkeep. This principle was abandoned by the First Church Congress of the Estonian Lutheran church in 1917 and, as proposed by Johan Kõpp who was later to become both the rector of the University of Tartu and the bishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the new church was defined as "a free people's church" so that people in the congregations gained the right to cease to be a member of the church at will (Rohtmets 2012:38–39, 477). Previously, the only formally accepted means of exiting the church and exercising a modicum of religious freedom was to be-

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come a member of the Russian Orthodox Church. In Estonian nationalist terms, leaving the Lutheran church could be motivated by a perception that it was an instrument of Baltic German domination over the Estonian peasantry, as the majority of the clergy hailed from the German-speaking upper classes.

Although the majority of Estonians remained within the fold of the Lutheran church throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, the possibility to quit the church was promoted by the movement of *taarausk* (Taaraism), an initiative to create a religion fit for the Estonian nation from the 1920s onward. Most of the writings by leaders of the movement show an approach that seems top-down and deductive in nature, proceeding from the general to the particular: religion as the highest form of the culture of a nation; as the political independence of Estonia has been established, it is necessary to continue the struggle for independence of the Estonian mind or spirit (*vaim*) and culture from overbearing German and Russian cultural domination, including religious domination, thus a vehement rejection of Christianity as a foreign phenomenon. The ideology drew heavily on the canon of established Estonian cultural memory (rather than vernacular oral tradition) and was saturated with Romantic nostalgia as described above. Practices and customs were usually spoken of as if these needed to be created rather than perpetuated from living memory. Therefore, it is safe to say that *taarausk* was a predominantly modern school of thought dependent on written cultural memory.

Before the suppression of the movement by the Soviet authorities in the 1940s, the number of true adherents to *taarausk* remained in the low thousands (Vakker 2012:188–189). However, the circle of sympathizers and people influenced by its ideas seems to have been larger, even if it is impossible to measure, as the *damnatio memoriae* by the Soviet authorities hit this group particularly severely.

One practice adopted and promoted by adherents of *taarausk* was the founding of private sacred groves (*koduhiis* "home sacred grove") to be used by a single family. The author has heard a few references to the existence such sites in conversations with some descendants of the adherents of *taarausk*, but a more complete contemporary perception of a *koduhiis* is made explicit in a column-wide appeal in the daily newspaper *Postimees* in May 1944:

> There are few home groves in Estonia. […] Every farmstead and the surroundings of every home has a free piece of land where one may plant trees and bushes, place benches between these and walk or sit there in one's hours of leisure. […] when a baby brother or sister is born, we will plant an ash, a maple tree or a bird cherry for their luck. When someone of the family dies, we will plant a fir tree. […] Let us, young friends, surely take up establishing home groves this spring. Let us give every tree its own name and

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> meaning. And afterwards we shall plant ever new trees. Thus we will get a beautiful home grove to be an example for the neighbourhood (Saar 1944).

The suppression of the *taarausk* movement that included the imprisonment, deportation and/or execution of many of its leaders by the Soviet authorities, made the ordinary members or sympathizers of the movement wary even of speaking about it for decades. This has led to a diminishing trace of the 1930s *taarausk* within Estonian cultural memory and has cut off many possible avenues for transmitting information about it in living social memory.

The latter half of the 1980s saw a brief but intensive blossoming of interest and media coverage in all things religious, alternative and spiritual in Estonia (see Hiiemäe 2019; Kõiva 2007a:86–94, 2007b; Kivari 2018). This enthusiasm, at its height before and after the implosion of the Soviet power, generally petered out in the 1990s as new and increasingly sober institutions took hold. When one considers the numerous twentieth-century teachings founded on modern precepts that have found sanctity in nature but have not been inclined to do in-depth archival research into premodern traditions, one has but to conclude that there are bound to have been modern sacred natural sites – or landscapes of special spiritual importance – identified or taken into use during that period and abandoned later (cf. Kõiva et al. 2020). This is an area that would merit further research but will remain outside the bounds of this article.

Premodern Practices Localized in New Sacred Natural Sites

Offering coins to stones or springs of water and tying ribbons of cloth to the branches of trees are premodern customs widely known even today (Kõiva et al. 2020). In addition to premodern sacred natural sites, these practices can nowadays be observed at sites that have been taken into use following more modern considerations.

In Estonia, about 1,800 so-called cup-marked stones have been found, each with a number of artificial round depressions with circumferences of 4 to 7 centimetres and depths of 0.5 to 2 centimetres. The earlier archaeological research tradition has deemed these to be sacrificial or cult stones (Tvauri 1999a:113) although in the nineteenth century only a few of these have been known to be used as sacrificial stones (Tvauri 1999a:140–141; Tvauri 1999b) and there is no recorded consistent pattern of known oral tradition connected to these stones. This is to be expected, as the Bronze Age and Iron Age custom of making cup-marks on stones seems to have fallen into oblivion by the end of the Early Roman Iron Age (50–200 AD) at the latest (Tvauri 1999a:156).

However, a large number of cup-marked stones were given the protec-

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tion and status of archaeological monuments during the Soviet era (and these remain protected under the Estonian Heritage Protection Act). Due to this, such heritagized stones were marked with adjacent signposts proclaiming them to be "cult stones" (*kultusekivid*) for decades, although later scholarship has taken a step back and the consensus of researchers does not consider this group of prehistoric monuments to have been unambiguously religious in character.

Although the mechanism of recognizing these monuments as religious was modern by its nature (a scholar identifies a stone as a member of a predefined set associated with a hypothesis), the signposts have at least in some cases attracted people to make offerings of coins to these stones. This has certainly been the case with the so-called Nõiakivi ("Witch Stone") in Assaku near Tallinn, a stone that was unearthed during the construction of a road in the 1960s (Lõugas 1971) and with Rehe cup-marked stone in the village of Hõreda in the northern Estonian parish of Juuru (Heinapuu 2018:93).

Additionally, the practice of offering coins and ribbons has been observed in the holy grove of Kassinurme near Jõgeva that was taken into use as such a few decades ago (Hiiemäe 2017:230). This site is dominated by what I referred to as the Romantic nostalgia for the ancient golden age above due to its being a site of a prehistoric wooden stronghold.

These can be considered cases of authorized heritage discourse (see Smith 2006) and its associated notions of cultural memory meshing with lingering vernacular notions of sacred sites. In a living vernacular tradition, it is not uncommon to have a traditional method of identifying previously unknown sacred natural sites that could receive a treatment similar to those known previously (cf. Valk 2007; Haavio 1951:252; Goody 1977:29–30) but in the examples cited above, the decisive features that have led to the recognition of a sacred site have been derived from the collective cultural memory of a predominantly written modern tradition and relate to its views about the ancient (pre)history of the nation.

Modern Sites, Modern Traditions: Civil Religion and New Religious Movements

On the basis of modern ideas or ideologies, new sites or landscapes with natural features are being created or taken into use, and some of these resemble sacred natural sites or are explicitly inspired by notions of earlier sacred sites. In addition to sites of power or sanctity chosen or founded by new religious or spiritual movements (see Kõiva et al. 2020; Kivari 2018), this category should include sanctuaries of Estonian civil religion, such as parks of oaks planted in imitation of imagined ancient sacred oak groves and other similar forms of patriotic landscaping.

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One of the most ambitious pioneering projects of this kind was the "sacred grove" at the hill of Sõjamäe near Tallinn (*Sõjamäe hiis*), developed on the initiative of adherents of *taarausk* (see the section "Abandoned Modern Sacred Natural Sites" above) from 1927. The objective of the project was to create "a powerful copse (sacred grove) of remembrance that would correspond to the nation's current and future religious-festive gatherings, such as the commemoration of the heroes of the St George's Night Uprising, celebrating the opening of the national day etc.", as stated in the founding documents of the committee dedicated to the development of the five-hectare site in 1933. In addition to planting oaks, a large area for 12,000 people with a sacrificial stone was planned at the centre of the hill. The plan included building a structure around the sacrificial stone (*urila*, a neologism signifying "a place for making offerings") as well as a beacon tower (*tulila*, a neologism for "place for a fire") (Vakker 2012: 190–191; Sõjamäe hiis 1933).

The site, left unfinished before World War II and heavily damaged in the war but restored in stages first as a public park since the 1950s and as a site for official ceremonies after the restoration of Estonia's independence in 1991, is now named Jüriöö park ('Park of St. George's Night') to commemorate the Estonian uprising of 1343 against the feudal lords who included the King of Denmark and the Livonian branch of the chivalric Teutonic Order. As the city has grown to embrace the park with industrial, residential and other urban landscapes, the venue now serves as the site where elected officials of the City of Tallinn – the mayor, a vice mayor or the chairman of the city council – light a ceremonial bonfire on Victory Day (23 June) and attend the city's official celebration of Independence Day (24 February). Conscripts of the Guard Battalion of the Estonian Defence Forces give their military oath of allegiance at the site upon the completion of their basic training.

In the cases of new sacred sites of civil religion, symbolic representations from the current active level of cultural memory can be seen to induce changes in landscapes: the concept of the sacred oak grove, bereft of any concrete topographical references, has become symbolic of the history and identity of the Estonian nation and has inspired the creation of new landscapes modelled on the symbolic notional oak grove. These new landscapes, as venues for different celebrations, support rituals belonging to the sphere of political memory that provide symbolic support for the cohesion of the nation. In an example of the intertwining between different levels of collective memory, this in turn creates new islands of social memory for people participating in rituals and celebrations.

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Intermingled Premodern and Modern Traditions at Modern Sacred Natural Sites

Finally, both premodern and modern practices may become attached to sites that have been recognized as sacred within the modern worldview. Whereas this could be simply interpreted as continuity within the vernacular tradition, I will consider a prominent example that exemplifies how disembodied notions of sacred sites (as discussed above) have found new focus and have become attached to a purportedly ancient sacrificial stone on Toomemägi in Tartu (see Heinapuu 2024). This case is interesting due to the dynamic relationships between different layers of cultural memory and social memory that become apparent in the analysis.

Although the stone in question is universally known and often used as the "sacrificial stone" and is protected as a national monument, it was most probably unearthed in the latter half of the nineteenth century when sand and gravel were mined from a pit in an area called Kassitoome near the eastern portion of early the modern fortification zone of the city of Tartu. The stone was subsequently hypothesized to be a sacrificial stone by the scholars at the University of Tartu, as it had characteristic depressions in its otherwise smooth texture (Tvauri 2001:74–75). This way of recognizing a sacred site was by its nature a modern procedure that contrasts with traditional means of choosing or finding sacred sites in vernacular religion (cf. Valk 2007), as the purpose of identifying the sacred stone was not to communicate with supernatural powers but rather to understand and describe an ancient and different culture (an Other) that was separated from the present by a temporal and ethnic distance, as historical and archaeological scholarship was the province of the German-speaking elite.

The stone, now placed in a prominent spot next to the ruins of the city's medieval cathedral on the hill of Toomemägi (German *Domberg* "cathedral hill") has blended into the landscape and transformed from an antiquarian curio into something that has seemingly always been there. The stone has attracted, in addition to offerings of coins and ribbons, new kinds of traditions such as the ritual burning of lecture notes by students at the end of the term or playing a role in wedding ceremonies, thus being involved in the social memory of various groups (Kõivupuu 2011:174–175). In general, stones that have offerings to divine or otherworldly forces placed on them are a staple of Estonian landscapes. There are 400 sacred stones recognized as national monuments and many are both logistically and culturally accessible (Tvauri 1999b), retaining a role in the collective memory: it is common to see recent coin offerings on known sacrificial stones. This can be seen as the persistence of a premodern practice that has been also localized on Toomemägi.

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Due to its accessible location close to the university grounds where most Estonian archaeologists and historians were taught in the twentieth century, the stone on Toomemägi became a yardstick against which all other sacrificial stones in Estonia were measured (Tvauri 2001:74). The sacrificial stone is generally perceived within the framework of the myth of the Estonians' golden age of pre-Christian freedom before the thirteenth-century Baltic Crusade. This is partly due to fact that the hill of Toomemägi, a central location of the university city of Tartu, has been inscribed into the Estonian cultural memory as a supposedly central sacred site of the ancient Estonians. This assertion originates from Romantic-era Estonian nationalist writings, amplified after its first appearance in the fictional legend *Wannemunne's Sang* by Friedrich Robert Faehlmann: "Da kam nun Alles zusammen, was Leben und Odem hatte, um unsern Domberg herum, auf dem ein heiliger Hain stand" (Faehlmann 1840:43). Due to the prominence of Romantic-era fiction in the Estonian cultural memory, this assertion has often been uncritically accepted as a fact even by historians and archaeologists.

In this case, the different levels of collective memory support each other, and as both the sole tangible monument of the pre-Christian era in central Tartu and as a landmark in the lives of the people who live or study in city, the sacrificial stone remains relevant in both cultural and social memory while acquiring new functions and meanings for different people.

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of the diversity of ways in which sacred natural sites are conceptualized in Estonian culture and how this is relevant at different levels of collective memory. This may help provide a framework for understanding how elements of different ideologies, religious and other schools of thought intermingle in the ways people make sense of such symbolic sites and landscapes. One can observe that notions about both physical and imagined sacred natural sites and practices connected to them are current and relevant at all the three levels of collective memory: for small social groups, the predominantly written culture as well as the Estonian political collective. There has also been lively traffic of ideas and perceptions about sacred natural sites between the social memory of small groups and the cultural memory, and to a lesser extent, between these two levels of collective memory and political memory.

Abstract national myths of an ancient golden age as expressed in the image of supposed pre-Christian sacred oak groves tend to support

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community members' interest in their local premodern tradition so that narratives from the modern national canon may come to be associated with premodern sacred sites. This is reflected in literary motifs surfacing in local placelore and displacing earlier narratives of more mythological content that have been previously associated with traditional sacred landscapes. These two layers of tradition may also intertwine. Contrarily, some recorded oral legends about sacred sites have been divorced from their landscapes of origin and, given circulation as written texts, have become parts of the cultural memory about the nature of premodern sanctuaries – even if the sites described have been destroyed or transformed beyond recognition. Oral narratives about premodern sacred natural sites and archaic practices originating in (mainly agrarian) folk religion that have been recorded in writing and made accessible either in print or online sometimes gain a "second life". But the restoration of placelore to its point of origin is more problematic and is prone to more distortions than recycling entertainment genres like folksongs or folktales that do not require a detailed knowledge of physical landscapes. A traditional sacred natural site may also retain the significance of a landmark or an important landscape but lose the association with the sacred or supernatural sphere so that it is no longer regarded as a sacred site.

Official rituals that have a political dimension tend to select new sites as their venues, such as newly planted oak groves, rather than historic sacred natural sites. These usually draw on nineteenth-century Romantic literary notions from the canon of cultural memory about what pre-Christian Estonian sacred sites were like, thus the emphasis on oaks and the association with military themes. Therefore, a site may become a narrative – a lost site living on as a text – and, conversely, a narrative can become a site when an image from a literary work inspires patriotic landscaping and, thereby, is given physical form.

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[1] For a more general discussion of how "natural" should be considered with regard to "sacred natural sites", see Heinapuu 2016:166–169.
[2] Placelore (Estonian kohapärimus) is a concept that has developed in Estonian folkloristics since the 1990s. It is usually seen as encompassing mainly narrative lore bound to a toponym, site or other landscape object and including local legends, place-bound beliefs, descriptions of practices, historical lore as well as personal memories (Remmel 2014:67). In a wider sense, placelore refers to a symbiotic relationship between tradition communities and their environment, the tangible reality and the world of narrative; it can be considered as a set of traditions that focus on a community's natural and cultural surroundings, such as hills, trees and forests, bodies of water, fields, pieces of built environment, roads, and terrain (Hiiemäe 2007:364, 370; Valk, Sävborg 2018:9; see also Hiiemäe & Remmel 2020).
[3] Narrated by 80-year-old Villem Vahe from the neighbouring village of Esiküla in 1924.
[4] For the provenance of Taara as a deity, see Sutrop 2004, Viires 1991:138.
[5] The religious organization Hiis was formally registered in 1932, see Ringvee 2024:43–48; Vakker 2012.
[6] All translations by the author unless otherwise stated.

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Pilgrimage Place-lore

Restorying Landscapes of St Olav and St Sunniva

Hannah Kristine Lunde

Abstract
This article details ways in which the development of the Sunniva Route to Selja and the St Olav Ways to Nidaros contribute to the place-lore of landscapes associated with St Sunniva and St Olav. The narratives about the martyrdoms of these saints and the subsequent veneration at their shrines from the eleventh century onwards story these places. As symbols of contemporary pilgrimage routes, the saints are evoked as flexible figures connecting pilgrimages in the past and the present. Sources span from hagiographical legends, Saga literature and Medieval church art to pilgrimage logos, websites and stories told by accommodators and pilgrims at and in reference to the geographical pilgrimage routes and destinations. The aim of the article is to explore how the combination of certain places, stories and figures, that is, historical shrines and routes leading there, legends and saints, contributes to highlighting and adding to pilgrimage place-lore in Norway, and to connect these routes to international pilgrimage developments. Special attention is paid to how St Sunniva and St Olav form a comparative pair both historically and in their rebranding in the context of contemporary pilgrimage.

Keywords: Pilgrimage, place-lore, restoried landscapes, St Sunniva, Selja, St Olav, Nidaros, Caminoization

While visiting the West Coast island of Kinn in 2020, I became aware of a way-marker displaying two logos: one with a cross surrounded by a bowknot, the other with a cross flanked by waves underneath (see Figure 1). Having done fieldwork along pilgrimage routes in Norway for a couple of years by then, I recognized these as the logos of the St Olav Ways to Nidaros and the Sunniva Route to the island of Selja respectively. The logo of the former route can be found in extensive parts of eastern and

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central Norway, along the roughly 2,000 kilometres of routes accommodated for walking to Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, as well as in parts of Sweden and Finland. The logo of the latter is not as widely dispersed. It can be found between the islands of Kinn and Selja on the Norwegian West Coast, marking stretches of the approximately 100-kilometre-long route to the shrine of St Sunniva at Selja, accommodated for walking and sailing. I expected to find this logo at Kinn, since it is the starting point of the Sunniva Route. I was more surprised by this visual reference to the St Olav Ways, and particularly to see these symbols adjacent on the same sign. This is one example of how the figures of St Sunniva and St Olav are highlighted as symbols for the contemporary pilgrimage routes bearing their names as well as being placed together in these landscapes. This case also points to landscapes as processual and relational, as discussed by Christopher Tilley:

> Places are both spatial and temporal. They are intimately connected to history, the past, and hold out the promise of a desired future. As such they are in flux rather than static nodes or points in a landscape, and their qualities and character can only be understood relationally, with reference to other places, and on different scales (2006:21-22).

Figure 1. Detail of a way-marker at Kinn, displaying the logo of the St Olav Ways (left) and the Sunniva Route (right). Photo: Author, 2020.

To understand that these visual symbols are references to St Olav and St Sunniva, and that the paths around Kinn are part of these two pilgrimage routes, requires prior knowledge (or, of course, seeing them can trigger interest in learning about what they signify). The accommodators of these routes, the Confraternity of St Sunniva and the National Pilgrimage Centre in Trondheim respectively, also present the routes in textual references to the saints, such as in printed brochures and books and online:

> In the year 996, Olav Tryggvasson proclaimed Selja the first sacred place in Norway. Sunniva was sanctified. St. Sunniva is Norway's only female saint, and her legend was very important for the Christianization of Norway. The legend tells that Holy Olav went ashore at Selja to kneel in the chapel in

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> Sunniva's cave when he returned to Norway from England in 1015 to gain royal power. Both Kinn and Selja were pilgrimage destinations (Sunnivaleia.no).

> The pilgrimages to St. Olav's shrine in Nidaros, which was the old name for the city of Trondheim, started right after his [Olav Haraldsson's] death at Stiklestad in 1030. It quickly became known that he was a holy man and in 1031 he was declared a saint. […] Within a few years the pilgrimage to St. Olav's shrine was so strongly consolidated that it became known far out in Europe (Pilegrimsleden historie).

Both of these websites quoted above (sunnivaleia.no and pilegrimsleden.no) provide practical information to pilgrims, including maps of the routes, how to sign up for organized walks and advice about what to pack for the journey. As such they are similar – but also distinct. What makes the routes distinctive are the historical and legendary origins of how and why Selja and Nidaros became pilgrimage destinations around the eleventh century, as referenced in the quotations. The sources for these events stem from different genres, including hagiographical legends and saga literature, medieval church art and folklore. The quotations exemplify how the development of geographical pilgrimage landscapes in Norway, that is, marked routes accommodated for walking and sailing (see Figure 3) also highlights and adds to narrative landscapes associated with these saints. In other words, contemporary pilgrimage agents contribute to *restorying* (Bowman 2012) or *narratively re-loading* (Valk & Sävborg 2018:9) Selja and Nidaros and the pilgrimage routes leading there.

This article explores ways in which pilgrimage agents interact with and add to the place-lore of the landscapes associated with St Sunniva and St Olav in the context of contemporary pilgrimage. What I refer to as *place* or *landscape* includes visual and virtual media (cf. Coleman 2024:191), such as the logos and websites referenced above. Following Simon Coleman and John Elsner (1995), I view *pilgrimage landscapes* as consisting "not only of a physical terrain and architecture, but also of all the myths, traditions and narratives associated with natural and manmade features" (Coleman & Elsner 1995:212). This encompasses both hagiographical legends (ecclesiastical traditions) and folklore (vernacular traditions) about these saints. The focus is not on the development of contemporary pilgrimage routes in Norway per se (see e.g. Amundsen 2002; Vistad 2012; Mikaelsson 2017; Selberg 2011; Øian 2019; Grau 2021; Lunde 2022, 2023, 2024) nor the motivations of pilgrims travelling along these (see e.g. Jørgensen et al. 2020). It is neither an attempt to map the plethora of contemporary references to and interpretations of St Sunniva and St Olav in general. Rather, the aim is to look at how pilgrimage place-lore in Norway is developed through restorying in specific assemblies of these

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saints, their historical shrines and contemporary pilgrimage routes leading there.

The cases that are analysed contribute to the existing literature through a comparative perspective on St Sunniva and St Olav. I find this interesting because, both historically and in ongoing realizations, they form what can be termed a saintly pair. Comparing these saints in this context sheds light on similarities as well as differences in how the contemporary pilgrimage phenomenon is interpreted and realized in Norway, and on how initiatives on different scales (of geographical extent and level of administration) intersect. I focus on the empirical material from fieldwork along the Sunniva Route and Selja. Compared to the St Olav Ways, this route has received little research attention. A comparative perspective with special attention to the former therefore adds to existing literature and opens for future comparisons. The relational aspect of pilgrimage landscapes (cf. Tilley 2006) encourages comparative perspectives, both on local to national scales and, to quote Simon Coleman (writing about multi-sited ethnography), to follow chains of "material, and narrative association that reach across shrines and national borders" (Coleman 2024:185). In addition to comparing the two routes in question and the stories connected to these landscapes, I therefore also address international pilgrimage developments, more specifically the notion of Caminoization. First, I present the empirical material and theoretical concepts. Then, I give a brief overview of the historical background to the storying of Selja and Nidaros before moving to contemporary restoryings.

Empirical Material

The empirical basis for this analysis is fieldwork in the landscapes in question (interviews and participant observation) and close reading of promotional websites and other textual material published by pilgrimage agents online and in print. Participatory observation was conducted between 2019 and 2021 during an organized pilgrimage along the Sunniva Route (in 2019), along stretches of the Gudbrandsdal Route (in 2020 and 2021), at the regional pilgrimage centres in Oslo and Trondheim and during events at Selja and Nidaros Cathedral. These events include the annual services for the historical holy days of St Sunniva and her followers, the Seljumen (Seljumannamesse, 8 July) and St Olav (Olsok, 29 July). I also worked as a volunteer at the pilgrimage centre in Selje for three weeks in the summer of 2020. I combine ethnographic fieldwork with document analysis to shed light on how narratives and places are merged in visual and textual utterances in different media (websites, pil-

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grimage credentials, signpost along the routes).

I apply two categories of *pilgrimage agents*: accommodators and pilgrims. The main difference, and the practical reason for applying these as analytical categories, is how a person (at a given time) is involved in pilgrimage from either a *practice perspective* (identifying as a pilgrim, participating in pilgrimage) or from an *administrative perspective* (as an accommodator, e.g., through organizing pilgrimages and developing, managing and promoting routes) (Lunde 2022). Importantly, there are frequent overlaps between these categories. As recently emphasized by Simon Coleman (2021) and Ian Reader (2024), to understand pilgrimage one ought to include accommodators of pilgrimage and pay attention to the infrastructure that shapes and upholds the phenomenon in various ways, in addition to focusing on the most common theme of pilgrimage studies, namely pilgrims and their motivations. What I refer to as *accommodators* includes volunteers in pilgrimage confraternities, project managers of pilgrimage projects in Selje municipality and the diocese of Bjørgvin and employees of the St Olav Ways. A total of sixteen interviews with pilgrimage agents were conducted between 2019 and 2021. The interviews focus on how pilgrimage in Norway is developed as administrative projects on different scales (from grassroots initiatives to government-funded projects), including how the phenomenon has been translated from the historical, religious practice to be framed as outdoor recreation and part of the cultural heritage for the regions where the shrines are located (primarily the West Coast area and the region of Trøndelag) as well as of the Church of Norway. Personal motivations and reflections about participating in pilgrimage through practice and as "pilgrim bureaucrats" (Interview Trondheim 16.06.19 no. 1) were also touched upon (see Lunde 2022; 2023). Interviews are referred to by the location and time they took place (e.g. Interview Bergen 20.05.19).

Place-lore: Geographical and Narrative Landscapes

Following Ülo Valk and Daniel Sävborg (2018), *place-lore* is defined as narratives associated with specific places, traditions that focus on natural and cultural surroundings, and to relations between tangible reality and storyworlds. These relations thus describe what I refer to as *geographical* and *narrative landscapes* constituting contemporary *pilgrimage landscapes*. The core of place-lore is relations between stories, places and people:

> place-lore is not an analytical label that pinpoints a certain genre but a syn-

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> thetic concept that highlights a variety of expressive forms that manifest close bonds between humans, places and the environment. Characteristically, place-lore contains elements from different time periods, but place-lore is also in constant formation as new memory places are being created (Valk & Sävborg 2018:9–10).

Valk and Sävborg (2018:19) draw attention to how legends *take place*, they are not detached from the environment. They also emphasize how place-lore contains elements from different times that can be added to and how it is in constant formation. The temporal dimension of the concept makes it apt to analyse how contemporary pilgrimage landscapes are storied through references to historical and legendary sources from different times that are revived in the present. This concords with Coleman and Elsner's (1995) definition of pilgrimage landscapes referred to in the introduction and Marion Bowman's (2012) notion of restored and *restoried* landscapes (in her case the landscapes associated with Arthur and Bridget in Glastonbury). I focus on how restorying of place is done in reference to and at geographical places. As the examples will show, although pilgrimage accommodators frame the routes through the stories of saints, these stories are not always pronounced or seemingly in focus during a pilgrimage (cf. Jørgensen et al. 2020). However, they can surface at given points along the journey for individual pilgrims and provide the direction of the physical journeys in both a spatial and metaphorical sense.

The constant formation of place-lore (Valk & Sävborg 2018) implies that storied places are dialogical (cf. Bakhtin 1986). Restorying of place is contextually dependent, in that places are attributed political significance and hold different kinds of meaning (and accessibility) at any given time (cf. Tuan 1977; Massey 2005; Tilley 2006; Selberg 2007; Isnart & Cerecalez 2020). What Doreen Massey (2005) refers to as spatio-temporal processes entail viewing places as open and internally multiple, not intrinsically coherent. Therefore, what she refers to as "the throwntogetherness of place" demands negotiation rather than an assumption of pre-given coherence (Massey 2005:141):

> "Here" is where spatial narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctures of trajectories which have their own temporalities […] Thus something which might be called there and then is implicated in the here and now. "Here" is an intertwining of histories in which the spatiality of those histories (their then as well as their here) is inescapably entangled (Massey 2005:139).

In similar terms, Torunn Selberg (2007) addresses how places are made into something more than the here-and-now through stories about the past, which becomes part of the experience of the place in the present, de-

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pending on time and interpreter. In the cases discussed here, this provides flexibility in how to frame pilgrimage as cultural heritage and outdoor recreation as well as religious practice. In the following, I address the historical grounds for the current restoryings of the shrines at Selja and Nidaros and sources for how these saints have been paired historically.

St Sunniva and St Olav: the Roots of Restorying Selja and Nidaros

The island of Selja, facing the Stad peninsula, is located along what historically was an important fairway along the Norwegian West Coast. It held the status of a religious centre in large part because of the legend of St Sunniva. The religious centre consisted of the Sunniva Church and cave and the Benedictine monastery dedicated to the English proto-martyr St Alban (Hommedal 1993, 1997, 2018). The shrine is now traceable as a large stone terrace, the ruins of a Romanesque stone church, and a rock shelter with a cave. St Sunniva was probably not a part of the veneration of saints at Selja from the start, and it is likely that her legend was developed in stages, St Sunniva becoming a personification of the more anonymous group of holy persons at Selja (Rekdal 2003; Ommundsen 2010; O'Hara 2009). Still, she has a long history as the patron saint of Bergen (*Bergensium patrona*) following the translation of her reliquary to that city in 1170. She is also named *Patrona Norvegiae*, the patron saint of Norway (Bjelland 2000; Ommundsen 2010). The source material about pilgrims to Selja is scarce, but textual and archaeological sources indicate that there most likely were pilgrimages to Selja from the mid-eleventh century (Bjelland 2000; Hommedal 2018). There are also some indications that Kinn was visited by pilgrims, likely in the context of travels to Selja and/or Nidaros. Both the Latin legend and the Norse saga literature mention miracles and signs at Selja and at Kinn (Bjelland 2000:164, 174–176).

The Latin hagiographical account of the legend of Sunniva (transmitted in four fragments) is called *Acta Sanctorum in Selio*. It was probably written for the translation of St Sunniva around 1170, possibly based on oral traditions from the eleventh century (O'Hara 2009; Ommundsen 2010). According to this narrative, Sunniva was a Christian Irish queen who fled a heathen suitor by setting out in boats without sails or oars with her followers the Seljumen, drifting to Selja. When mainlanders suspected them of stealing sheep they had grazing on the island, they asked their chieftain to kill them. Sunniva and her followers retrieved into a cave and prayed to God for deliverance. This came in the form of the cave collapsing,

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and they were saved from their persecutors by being martyred. The legend tells that the remains of the Seljumen were discovered by King Olav Tryggvasson and his bishop in 996 along with the body of St Sunniva, lying in the cave as if sleeping. The legend adds that there was a pleasant smell in the cave when the holy people were discovered. St Sunniva was sanctified, and a church was built on the island in her honour with her reliquary on the altar (see Rindal 1997; Ommundsen 2010). The motifs in the legend are known from many other hagiographical legends, particularly the subgenre of Christian martyr-virgins that goes back to the fifth century (Antonsson 2021; O'Hara 2021). A version of the Sunniva legend is also found in the Norse sagas, in *The Saga of Olav Trygvasson by Oddr Snorrasjon Munk* (*c*. 1190) and an elaboration of this version in *Flateyjarbók*, written between 1385 and 1395 (Rindal 1997:268; Tordsson & Torhallsson 2014:417). The hagiographical legend and saga literature thus connect St Sunniva and Selja to King Olav Tryggvasson as well as King Olav Haraldsson, the latter known as St Olav in his saintly afterlife.

The historical king Olav Haraldsson was in power for periods between 1015 and 1028. According to hagiographical legends and saga literature, he died in the battle of Stiklestad in 1030, was canonized in 1031 and translated to the location of what became Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim (historically named Nidaros). St Olav is Norway's national saint; *rex perpetuus Norvegiae* (the eternal king of Norway) (Steinsland 2010; Skeie 2018). Nidaros held the status of the ecclesiastical capital of the country due to the sepulchral church of St Olav and as an archdiocese from 1152/53 until 1537. This was an important shrine on the Northern European scale. Churches were also dedicated to St Olav in the other Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe (Steinsland 2010). There are rich ecclesiastical and folkloristic traditions about St Olav/Olav the Holy (Sankt Olav, Olav den Hellige) that this article will only scratch the surface of. Medieval sources include the twelfth- and thirteenth-century saga literature, Snorri Sturluson's *Saint Olav's Saga* (part of his *Heimskringla*, *c*. 1230), being among the most well-known, ecclesiastical and folkloristic legends (with *Passio Olavi* prominent among these texts) and official documents such as law texts (Bjelland 2000; see also e.g. Bø 1955; Henriksen 1985; Langslet 1995; Skeie 2018; Hodne 2021). What is implied by St Sunniva and St Olav being a saintly pair in historical sources?

Historical depictions of St Sunniva and St Olav as a saintly pair are mainly from (or narratives are placed in) the West Coast, that is, the area that St Sunniva is most strongly associated with. Most of the 27 sculptures and paintings from medieval church art depicting St Sunniva stem from coastal areas. She is a patron of mercantile seafarers, who often could need a protector in the perilous waters around Stad. Combined por-

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traits of St Sunniva and St Olav are found at seven of these (see Kroesen 2021). One of the earliest textual sources to mention the shrine of St Olav is *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (*The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*) written by the German monk Adam of Bremen around 1070. This text includes a reference that has been interpreted as the first mention of the people holy at Selja: a cavern of the ocean in the north where miracles take place and that Olav (unspecified which one) built a church. Moreover, a reference is made to a similar martyr-virgin legend to that of St Sunniva, namely the story of St Ursula of Cologne and the 11,000 virgins (see Bjelland 2000; Hommedal 2018; Antonsson 2021). Another narrative connecting Selja and Olav Haraldsson is found in Snorri Sturluson's *Saint Olav's Saga*. According to Snorri, Selja (the island of *Sæla*) was the place where Olav Haraldsson landed when he came back to the country to reclaim power in 1015:

> It is related here that King Olaf came from the sea to the very middle of Norway; and the isle is called Saela where they landed, and is outside of Stad. King Olaf said he thought it must be a lucky day for them, since they had landed at Saela in Norway; and observed it was a good omen that it so happened. As they were going up in the isle, the king slipped with one foot in a place where there was clay, but supported himself with the other foot. Then said he "The king falls." "Nay," replies Hrane, "thou didst not fall, king, but set fast foot in the soil." The king laughed thereat, and said, "It may be so if God will" (Project Gutenberg 2013).

The event symbolically and quite literarily makes Olav take root in the country. This took place around twenty years after King Olav Tryggvasson discovered Sunniva and the Seljumen in the cave at Selja according to legend (in 996). *Sæla* means *luck* (Hommedal 2018). The text does not elaborate on why it was deemed lucky to land on this island. Commenting on the significance of this story, Alf Tore Hommedal (2018:63) remarks: "for the historians writing the king's history in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, it must also have been important to connect the future holy king to Norway's first Christian sanctuary." St Sunniva is not mentioned in this story, nor elsewhere in Snorri's sagas of the Norwegian kings (Rindal 1997). However, St Sunniva and St Olav are mentioned together several times in other saga literature, such as in *Sverrir's Saga* and *Håkon Håkonsson's Saga* (Bjelland 2000). Ragnhild Bjelland (2000:161) remarks that the utterances in these sagas are located in Bergen, the main area of the Sunniva cult. This exemplifies connections between Selja and Olav Haraldsson as well as between St Sunniva and St Olav in historical sources, visual as well as textual. In the following, I move from the "there" of these stories to the "here" of the contemporary uses of these sources that demonstrate the "throwntogetherness" of place (Massey 2005).

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Restoried Routes to Historical Shrines

The ecclesiastical and vernacular traditions of the lives, martyrdoms and translations of St Sunniva and St Olav and the veneration that followed in their saintly afterlives in the Catholic period of Norwegian history (*c*. 1000 to 1537) is the foundation for the current restorying of their shrines and the development of routes leading there. The shrine of a saint localizes the holy through the presence of an invisible person and her or his earthly remains (Brown 2015). However, St Sunniva and St Olav are no longer present at their historical shrines. As in other European countries, the upheavals of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation radically changed the religious landscape theologically – and largely also geographically and materially (Walsham 2011; Anderson 2019). With the Reformation of Denmark-Norway in 1537, the veneration of saints was banned, and in effect pilgrimage as a pious practice was discontinued (at least as part of official religion, Laugerud 2018). The reliquaries of St Sunniva and St Olav were removed from their shrines, and it is not known what happened to them (see e.g. Steinsland 2010; Hodne 2021; Ommundsen, Hommedal & O'Hara 2021).

The time span of a millennium from the storying to the restorying of the landscapes of St Sunniva and St Olav includes the Catholic era, the Reformation and the, so to speak, translations, of religious history and shrines into cultural memories from the late nineteenth century. The shifting interpretations of St Olav and Nidaros Cathedral from (quite literarily) Catholic relics to central national symbols and cultural memories in the context of national romanticism from the late nineteenth century are important to consider for an understanding of the contemporary pilgrimage developments (see e.g. Amundsen 2002; Mikaelsson 2008).

The historical changes in political, religious and cultural contexts between the tenth century and the present-day pilgrimages entail an ambivalence regarding the role of the saints in the Lutheran and secular context of today's Norway for the development of pilgrimage routes to "saintless" shrines (cf. Selberg 2006:141). It is not mainly the Catholic pilgrimage tradition that is being revived through the pilgrimage projects in question, although Catholic (and Orthodox) pilgrimages are organized to the same locations. Arne Bugge Amundsen (2002) points out how the movement of pilgrimage from historical references to geographical landscapes entail connections between well-known stories and practices that have not been linked in this way since before the Reformation. This requires using historical raw material with both historical and symbolical weight, namely the medieval St Olav tradition and Nidaros Cathedral as the cultural, symbolical and physical core (Amundsen 2002:149, 168). This is also true for

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Selja and St Sunniva (see Mikaelsson 2005; Selberg 2005, 2006, 2019). With the reliquaries of the saints absent, and the shifting context from a Catholic to Lutheran, and increasingly to a secular and multireligious society, the absent saints and locations of their (former) shrines are transformed into *roots* for current revivals of pilgrimage through the notions of tradition and heritage as well as religious history. To understand the current reframing of pilgrimage in Norway it is also important to consider the significant degree of inspiration from international pilgrimage developments.

Dialogical Relations: Caminoization

What I address here is not pilgrimage as an all-encompassing phenomenon, but the contemporary pilgrimage phenomenon spearheaded by the Camino de Santiago to the shrine of St James in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Pilgrimage routes rooted in historical shrines emphasize walking across large parts of Europe and other parts of the world as networks of marked routes (cf. Margry 2008; Reader 2014; Bowman & Sepp 2019). It is not a given that saints, or religious motivations, are the primary focus of this kind of pilgrimage to (historical or active) shrines. Pilgrimage of this kind is not only "destination-oriented travel" but has developed into a cultural field where "the process of the journey" is an integral part (Sánchez & Hesp 2016:4). Different geographical locations and histories of shrines are likened and draw inspiration from each other but can also be places of contestation, such as between secular and religious discourses (Eade & Sallnow 1991). The development of pilgrimage landscapes accommodated for walking in Norway (and the Nordic countries) is part of what Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch (2013:41) describes as "a global trend but also retains some regional characteristics". The development of pilgrimage routes and framing of shrines as contemporary pilgrimage destinations are grounded in motivations such as, but not limited to, developing cultural heritage and local economies and practised as religious ritual as well as outdoor recreation (cf. Frey 1998; Österlund-Pötzsch 2013; Reader 2014; Coleman & Eade 2018; Bowman, Johannsen & Ohrvik 2020; Murray 2021).

The Sunniva Route and the St Olav Ways shed light on the extent of what Marion Bowman and Tiina Sepp (2019) call the *Caminoization* of pilgrimage. Indeed, the St Olav Ways is one of their examples (see also Mikaelsson 2019). The notion of Caminoization is useful to shed light on how the local shrines and place-lore of the Norwegian cases are dialogical and processual (cf. Tilley 2006; Coleman 2024). It concerns the

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framing and administration of routes rooted in religious history and cultural heritage (religion as resource more than as authority – see Kraft 2007), not only on local or national scales but also established by transnational agents such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe (see e.g. Schrire 2008; Murray 2021). Inspiration from the Camino is visible along the routes, accommodated for long-distance hikes and signposted with branded way-markers. The logos of the Sunniva Route and St Olav Ways addressed in the introduction (see Figure 1) are inspired by the way-markers along the Camino; the scallop associated with St James and a cross. Another example of Caminoization is pilgrimage credentials.

When I attended the annual organized walk along the Sunniva Route in 2019, the pilgrims were provided with a pilgrimage credential (see Figure 2), designed in collaboration between the tourist information in Selje and the Confraternity of St James Norway (based in Oslo). The image on the front page depicts St Olav and St Sunniva with halos and crowns, with their attributes (an axe and orb and a stone respectively). The two saints share the attribute of being royal saints – and are distinct by being female and male, a saintly queen and king. The motif derives from the tabernacle shrine of Granvin Church (see Kroesen 2021).

Figure 2. Pilgrimage credential designed by the Confraternity of St James Norway and Selje tourist information. Handed out to pilgrims attending the annual pilgrim-age along the Sunniva Route in 2019. Photo: Author.

This type of document is produced for use along pilgrimage routes including the St Olav Ways and the Camino, signifying that this is a pilgrimage rather than another form of hike. It also has the practical function of being stamped along the way to document the journey, a requirement for receiving the diploma *La Compostela* in Santiago de Compostela, and to receive *the Olav Letter* upon arrival at Nidaros. The location of the arrival point where the credential will serve as documentation is not specified in the credential provided for the Sunniva Route pilgrims, nor is there a diploma designed for pilgrims arriving at Selja. The credentials were only

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stamped at the tourist information in Selje. It had no practical function as part of the infrastructure and administration of the pilgrimage like the more explicitly Caminoized credential for the St Olav Ways. Rather, the credential provides a visual expression of and addition to the pilgrimage place-lore of the Sunniva Route through the image of the medieval depictions of the patron saints carried along the way, as well as textual reminders of their stories and places. Both the similarities in and the distinctiveness of the historical significance of the saints for their landscapes are addressed in the passport: "In this passport we have emphasized Selja (the coast/district) and Trondheim (city). The one is symbolized by a female saint, St Sunniva, the other by St Olav. Both places have their own history, but they are also connected."

In the following, I outline the development of the Sunniva Route and St Olav Ways (see Figure 3) with emphasis on examples of how geographical and narratives features relate to the pilgrimage landscapes of the past as well as other pilgrimage places in the present.

The Sunniva Route

The Sunniva Route (*Sunnivaleia*) began as a local initiative by agents living close to Selje and Kinn around 2007. At that time pilgrimages to Selja had been organized for several years but not as a marked and accommodated pilgrimage route. An important event for connecting pilgrimage stories and practices (cf. Amundsen 2002) was the anniversary for Selja as "sacred for 1000 years" in 1996 – dated after the year when the Sunniva legend says that she was discovered and canonized (see Rindal 1997). The motivation to connect Kinn and Selja through a pilgrimage route was the legend of St Sunniva (Balog 2015). Other motivations and inspirations included the pilgrimages of one of the initiators in Lier around St Hallvard's day, 15 May, in the 1990s and along the Camino de Santiago in the early 2000s. These experiences of pilgrimage from a practice perspective informed her idea of establishing a pilgrimage route in her local area from an administrative perspective when she became the vicar of Selje (the mainland community and municipality close to Selja). The vicar detailed how she relates to the legend about and figure of St Sunniva during our interview:

> What fascinates me [about the Sunniva legend] is her combination of defiance and courage and devotion. […] to commit to God and see what happens, that fascinates me. And then it fascinates me that she did not have a clue. Well, she journeyed to Selja and was hit by a rock in the head and that was it […] but that her life, well, yes, if we take the legend for what it is, has

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> produced so much fruit that she could not have any idea about, right, that one does not need to know oneself what one is doing, because God knows (Interview Bergen 20.05.19).

This resonates with the text on the website for the Sunniva Route: the legend about her was important for the Christianization of Norway. Personally, St Sunniva becomes relatable for her in that she committed herself to God, concordant with her view of pilgrimage as a metaphor for her life as a journey where God has set a goal (Interview Bergen 20.05.19).

Other initiators in this project include the vicar of Florø (the mainland community close to Kinn) and a local tourist guide from the same area (Interview Bergen, 20.05.19). In 2013, this group established the Confraternity of St Sunniva. The main activity of the confraternity is to organize group pilgrimages each summer along the Sunniva Route, via stretches on foot and by boat.

The website sunnivaleia.no, quoted in the introduction, is the digital information channel of the confraternity about the Sunniva Route. The page about organized pilgrimage tours explains that a nature guide and a priest (from the Church of Norway, Dnk) accompanies the pilgrims (sunnivaleia.no). This exemplifies what Österlund-Pötzsch (2013) refers to as Nordic pilgrimage as both part of a global trend and having regional characteristics, in this case through framing pilgrimages both as spiritual journeys and as part of outdoor recreation. It is emphasized in the information provided to pilgrims that the devotional aspects of the journey (prayers, psalms, readings from the Bible) are voluntary (Field notes 2019). When I attended the organized pilgrimage along the Sunniva Route in 2019, three volunteers accompanied the pilgrims: a priest from Dnk, a local woman who have walked the Camino and a German pilgrim who has lived in Norway for many years and who is associated with the pilgrim confraternity in Hamburg. Around ten people attend each year, the majority aged 50 and over. Several of the pilgrims attending the Sunniva pilgrimage in 2019 had also walked some of the St Olav Ways, including the Gudbrandsal Route and organized sailings along the Coastal Pilgrimage Route. Through a collaboration between the Confraternity of St Sunniva and the pilgrimage confraternity in Hamburg, many German pilgrims attend the annual walks (Interview Bergen 20.05.19, Field notes June 2019).

It is emphasized on sunnivaleia.no that the coastal landscapes offer pilgrims different experiences than the inland routes. Although not explicitly stated, this is a reference to the St Olav Ways and the pilgrimage routes (only) accommodated for walking (Interview Bergen 20.05.19). This comparison between the geographical landscapes, inland and coastal, and stretches by boat in addition to on foot implies some of the con-

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testations that have been part of the development of contemporary pilgrimage routes. A core source of contestation has been the framing of the St Olav Ways as a national pilgrimage venture funded by governmental ministries in Norway. The project group for the Sunniva Route make the comparison to the St Olav Ways explicit in interviews with local newspapers, emphasizing seafaring pilgrimages as historical and traditional (*Fjordenes Tidende* 29.10.08). For the occasion named "the first coastal pilgrimage conference" in Selje in 2010 (Myren 2010), a representative of Selja municipality summarizes what appears to be a common sentiment at the time: "We do not instigate a competition between saints or a pilgrimage championship, but it is not for nothing that Sunniva and Olav stand side by side on the western frontal of Nidaros Cathedral" (Myren 2010). A similar notion was expressed during a conference about St Sunniva in Bergen in 2019. One of the speakers emphasized the importance of St Sunniva in the context of contemporary pilgrimage by stating: "We need a saintly balance" – in reference to St Olav as the counterpart (Field notes Bergen 2019).

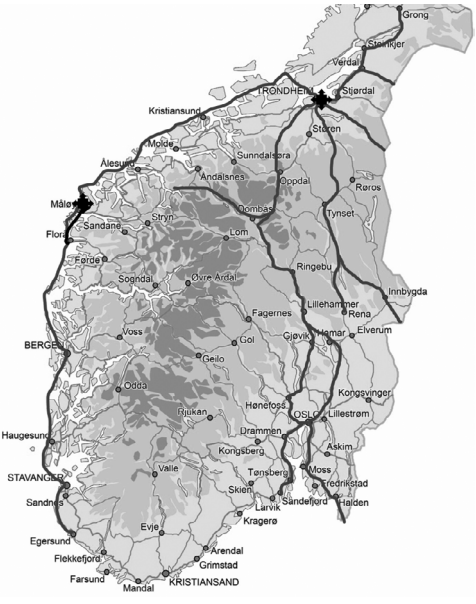

Figure 3 Map of the Sunniva Route (in black) and the nine St Olav Ways (in grey). Map © Kartverket. Lines indicating the pilgrimage routes and the icons marking Selja and Nidaros added by the author.

The St Olav Ways

The St Olav Ways (*St Olavsvegene*) is the major pilgrimage route project in Norway, in the sense of being the best funded project, the largest geographical network of routes and the most frequented by pilgrims. It was initiated in the 1990s and developed through several projects by a range of agents on local, regional and national levels. Ideas and motivations from pilgrimage agents in the 1990s included, among other things, individual journeys to Santiago de Compostela from the 1970s (Interview Tønsberg 08.05.21), interest in cultural history along the old roads across Dovre Mountain and other historical routes to Nidaros (Interview Oslo 24.08.20) and the opportunity of combining

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cultural heritage management with furthering and accommodating for outdoor recreation (Hage 1996; DN-note 1998-2; Interview Trondheim 16.06.19). How agents relate and highlight the historical and religious traditions varies. Some emphasize the pilgrimage routes as accommodated paths for outdoor recreation along routes with historical depth (see e.g. Luthen 1992; DN-note 1998-2), while others reinterpret the religious significance of pilgrimages and the figure of St Olav as constitutive elements of pilgrimage renewals (Interview Trondheim 31.07.19; see e.g. Bakken 1997; Jensen 2015; Vegge 2014). The notion of *the heritage of St Olav* (*Olavsarven*) is a constitutive element for framing the St Olav Ways. In the national strategy for pilgrimage, it is stated that all the St Olav Ways must be "anchored in the heritage of St Olav" (the Ministry of Church and Culture 2012). This is also addressed in the presentation of the routes online:

> St. Olav Ways – the pilgrim paths to Trondheim, is a network of authentic, historical routes leading through beautiful nature, agricultural landscapes and historical places. […] All approved St. Olav Ways must have the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim as the final goal and a connection to the legacy of St. Olav. The Nidaros Cathedral is St. Olav's burial church and Europe's northernmost pilgrim goal from the Middle Ages (pilegrimsleden.no.en).

What the heritage of St Olav entails and how to relate to this is debated in pilgrimage milieus as well as in other contexts, such as for the annual Olavfest in Trondheim and *Spelet om heilage Olav*, the historical play about the martyrdom of Olav Haraldsson performed at Stiklestad (the place of this event in 1030). This is not the place to go into these debates. For the context of pilgrimage place-lore, it is sufficient to underline that there is a plethora of ways to restory places through the notion of "the heritage of St Olav" by various agents that stretch beyond the locations of his death and canonization (see e.g. Kjølsvik 2014; Mikaelsson 2019). As formulated by a project manager of the St Olav Ways: "There is some sort of story of Olav around everything" (Interview Trondheim 18.06.19, no. 1). For the framing of the contemporary pilgrimage routes to Nidaros, the heritage of St Olav encompasses place-lore associated with King Olav Haraldsson, his afterlife as St Olav and pilgrims who travelled to Nidaros to venerate him. The Valldal Route (Valldalsleden) and the St Olav Route (St Olavsleden) are based on the journeys of Olav Haraldsson as described in the saga literature. The majority of routes are based on historical paths where pilgrims (might have) journeyed, that is, places to "follow in the footsteps" of historical pilgrims to St Olav's shrine in Nidaros Cathedral (the routes through Gudbrandsdalen, Østerdalen, Tunsberg, Borg, Nordleden from Grong via Stiklestad, Romboleden from Köping in

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Sweden via Tydalen in Norway, and the Coastal Pilgrimage Route). Several interviewees underline that there were of course unmarked, undesignated pilgrimage routes in the Middle Ages; pilgrims walked from their homes and followed the accessible common roads (Interview Trondheim 18.06.19, no. 2; Interview Oslo 24.08.20).

Stories of the travels of King Olav Haraldsson and journeys of pilgrims to the shrine of St Olav are merged in the formation of contemporary pilgrimage landscapes through both narratives and physical features. Searches for St Olav and historical pilgrims in written sources, place names and literarily in the ground through archaeological finds were part of the development of the first St Olav Ways in the 1990s. One of the project members in the municipality of Dovre, employed at Dovre pilgrimage centre at the time of the interview, explains how they approached the task given by the project managed by the Directorate of Cultural Heritage and the Directorate of Nature Management:

> when it is written that Holy Olav visited Dovre Mountain, well, where did he walk? […] we had some things, we had the first point at Hjerkinn, for instance, written in the Saga of Sverrir […] we had the physical at Vesle-Hjerkinn with the excavations in the [19]80s […] a name tradition connected to wayfaring, for instance far into the mountain there is a mountain named Halvfarhø, that is, half-way between, and that is about halfway between Hjerkinn and Dovre (Interview Oslo 24.08.20).

For the pilgrimage accommodators in the local area of Dovre, the aim was to merge geographical and narrative landscapes associated with St Olav and pilgrims to his shrine to frame the landscapes as part of the pilgrimage route to Nidaros. The excavations at Vesle-Hjerkinn refer to traces of a place of accommodation for pilgrims to Nidaros, which is also mentioned in saga literature (Lunde et al. 1997:38–39). During the pilgrimage project in the 1990s, a part of a pilgrim staff was found in the area (Interview Oslo 24.08.20) – adding a material source to pilgrims in the area to the place-lore of what is today part of the Gudbrandsdal Route (of the St Olav Ways). In the following I address the Valldal Route (Valldalsleden) as an example how local vernacular traditions of St Olav and geographical features are brought to life in the context of the St Olav Ways.

Valldal, Skjåk and St Olav: Sea Monsters, Anniversaries and Dialogical Landscapes

A volunteer in one of the pilgrimage confraternities associated with the

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St Olav Ways explains how the storyworlds of Olav Haraldsson and the historical veneration of St Olav intersect and are differentiated:

> Valldalsleden, there have never been pilgrims walking there, but the point is that it is a pilgrimage route because Olav himself walked there. Because there was a great battle, that he escaped by taking his boat into that area, burnt it on the beach, walked over Lesja and down to Hamar, and went to Novgorod. […] In fact, the pilgrimage route between Dombås and Hamar should have been marked both ways [to and from Nidaros], because, if you walk along Valldalsleden in his footsteps, then you ought to continue down to Hamar […] that is the right way if you are going to follow in his footsteps, but north is the right way if you are going to be a pilgrim and walk to his grave to get healing, right, so there are different matters (Interview Oslo 30.01.20).

An employee at Nidaros Pilgrimage Centre explains this differentiation of the routes in similar terms to the quotation above, of the double movement (in time and geographically) of "walking in the footsteps" of both Olav Haraldsson and pilgrims seeking him in his saintly afterlife as St Olav:

> Gudbrandsdalsleden, which many refer to as the pilgrimage route, is a route that people have walked along to get to Trondheim, simply a common road. But then you've got these other routes, some of them are pilgrimage routes, but some are St Olav routes that tell stories about St Olav being there, right. At Valldalsleden, for instance, you've got a lot of memories of Olav. And the same with the St Olav Road from Sweden, from Sundsvall where you almost walk in the footsteps of St Olav to Stiklestad. And then you follow the road, in a way, after his death, of course, how he was transferred to Trondheim and so on. So, that is two completely different perspectives, the one being a story of Olav, or some of them are, and some simply being transport routes towards Nidaros. […] everything is called Olav Ways, but some routes tell more cultural history, in a way, or legends, than others (Interview Trondheim 30.07.19).

The route from Valldal is also part of the heritage of St Olav because of a feature in the landscape associated with the folklore about him: *Syltеormen*, a mountain formation in the shape of a serpent that St Olav is to have fought and thrown into the mountainside (see Aukrust 2011). On the website of the St Olav Ways, this is presented under the title "Sea monsters and steep gorges":

> It was at Valldal that the Viking king Olav Haraldsson, later St. Olav, and his men went ashore in the winter of 1028 - 1029 according to Snorri Sturlason's royal sagas. The legend says he encountered a seamonster on his way into the fjord, which he threw up into the steep mountain wall in Syltefjellet, and the mark still stands there (Pilegrimsleden.Valldalsleden.en).

The "steep gorges" refer to the challenging trail, which the accommoda-

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tors recommend only for experienced mountain hikers. Another example of how geographical and narrative landscapes of St Olav intersect is through the many St Olav wells found across the country, associated with stops along his travels (see Ohrvik 2020; Hodne 2021; Den digitale Olavskilden).

The ways in which the heritage of St Olav is in constant formation as part of the place-lore of several places across Norway is currently developing within the framework of the National Anniversary 2030 (*Nasjonaljubileet 2030*), commemorating 1,000 years since Olav Haraldsson's death at Stiklestad (see nasjonaljubileet2030.no). Pilgrimage is one of several topics and practices through which places are connected to the past as well as the prospects of a desired future (cf. Tilley 2006:22). Interestingly, 1030 is highlighted as the significant year, more than 1031 – the year of St Olav's canonization and translation to the location of the present-day Nidaros Cathedral. One of the places included in the "anniversary relay" between 2021 and 2030 is Valldal, discussed earlier in this article, with the topic "Folk tradition" ("Folketradisjon"):

> Folk tradition is a central part of the legacy of Olav. In 1029, Olav Haraldsson visited Valldal, a visit that has left behind a myriad of legends and traces in nature. Based on history, this year's [2029] theme in the anniversary relay is Folk Tradition. It opens for many questions with relevance to the past, present and future. How do people use stories to understand and organize the world? What role do traditions play in society? What lies in the gap between folk beliefs and organized religion (https://nasjonaljubileet2030.no/2029)?

These questions are relevant for what it entails to organize the National Anniversary in 2030 as well as for this and coming analyses of spatio-temporal landscapes. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the revival and development of place-lore of patron saints in the context of contemporary pilgrimage routes merge with other places, events and agents on different scales. I address this in the following exemplified through one of the interviewees who demonstrate dialogical relations between storied pilgrimage landscapes as well as intersections between the identities of pilgrim and accommodator.

To have place-lore connected to St Olav does not mean that he is admired. A member of a pilgrimage confraternity explained that St Olav is not popular in her home village of Skjåk in Gudbrandsdalen. According to saga literature, Olav Haraldsson burned the village because they did not want to convert to Christianity:

> all saints and vernacular belief and everything were mixed into one story and told to us kids. […] I carry that with me quite strongly into the pilgrimage milieu. […] I am from Skjåk, there are quite a lot of memories of Olav

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> in my home village. And he came over a mountain in Skjåk, and he stood on top of the mountain and said that this village is too fair to be burnt, so, he is not that popular in my village […]. He wanted to burn the whole village because they did not want to receive Christianity. […] There are a lot of memories of Olav in, the whole village, but he is not that sort of person that is told much about (Interview Oslo 21.06.19).

Her interest in pilgrimage derives, among other things, from the stories about saints told by her parents, part of the place-lore of where she grew up and other figures and narratives "mixed into one story". More than the place-lore of St Olav associated with her home place, Selja exerts a strong fascination on her. The significance of Selja as a special place (see also Mikaelsson 2005; Selberg 2005) preceded her pilgrimage along the Camino and other pilgrimage routes, including in Italy and along several of the St Olav Ways (Interview Oslo 21.06.19). This interviewee furthermore exemplifies how the categories of pilgrimage accommodator and pilgrim intersect, through her both being a practising pilgrim and administering journeys for others through pilgrimage confraternities as well as on her own initiative. Moreover, although there have been contestations between pilgrimage initiatives focused on St Sunniva and St Olav there are also collaborations and interest from accommodators and pilgrims encompassing both saints and routes – as well as a great many other pilgrimage landscapes (Field notes Oslo 2019, 2020, Trondheim 2019, 2021). At the end of this article I return to Selja and Kinn to exemplify how this takes place on a local scale in connection with the Sunniva Route.

Local and Regional Storying: St Sunniva, Borgny and Olav × 4 at Selja

The landscape storying the Sunniva Route is primarily St Sunniva's shrine at Selja, as well as the legendary connection to Kinn and the historical footsteps (or in this case surges) of (seafaring) pilgrims in the Nordfjord area (see Mikaelsson 2005; Selberg 2005; Mikaelsson & Selberg 2020). As mentioned earlier, there are few traces in written sources or archaeological finds left by historical pilgrims in the area between these islands (Bjelland 2000). Rather than being viewed as a disadvantage, the project group of the Sunniva Route saw it as providing flexibility to outline the geographical pilgrimage route as they wished: "we envisaged walking. Since there are no tracks [left by historical seafaring pilgrims], they are erased, we had leeway to lay it where it was convenient" (Interview Bergen 20.05.19). The place-lore of the two islands is thus connected both as geographical and narrative pilgrimage landscapes. The project group did

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not only want to connect the islands geographically but also through annual events taking place there: *The Kinna Play* (*Kinnaspelet*), performed at Kinn on the third weekend of June, and *Seljumannamesse*, the holy day for St Sunniva and the Seljumen, celebrated with religious services at/around the 8th of July by the (Lutheran) Church of Norway and by the Catholic and Orthodox congregations on the West Coast. The local geography played a part in that the pilgrimage initiators had to choose between one of these events being part of the organized tour: it is not a long enough stretch to walk and sail between the islands to begin with the play in June and end the pilgrimage a week later by attending Seljumannamesse at the beginning of July. They chose Kinnaspelet as the starting point (Interview Bergen 20.05.19). This play is set in the context of the Protestant Reformation, with the Sunniva legend being performed as a "play within the play" (Isene 2014). In this way, the pilgrims are introduced to a staged performance of the Sunniva legend before their journey leading to the site of her martyrdom.

The organized pilgrimages end with a service in the Sunniva cave at Selja, where part of the story about St Sunniva and the Seljumen is told by the priest attending (Field notes June 2019, see also Lunde forthcoming). In one version of the Sunniva legend, some of the followers of Sunniva end up at Kinn when the three boats with the group for Ireland became separated in a storm. A local tradition adds another female protagonist to the story, Borgny, the sister of Sunniva. There are both narrative and material similarities between the pilgrimage landscapes of Kinn and Selja, including caves and a medieval church. A fellow pilgrim along the Sunniva Route in 2019 told a local legend about how the church at Kinn was built: It was Borgny who wanted to build a church with the aid of a Hulder man ("tusse"). In return, he wanted to marry her. The Hulder man had not revealed his name to her, but Borgny had found out what it was. Just as he was about to set the last stone on the building, she shouted his name (Vindfløy) and he fell from the roof, relieving her of her promise of marriage (Field notes June 2019). This story is a version of what is more commonly known in Scandinavia as *Finn legends* (Aukrust 2011). Often it is St Olav who is the protagonist, building a church with the aid of a troll (named Finn). This migratory legend (legend 7065 in Christiansen 1958, referenced in Aukrust 2011:165) was primarily connected to the construction of Nidaros Cathedral and then later to several other churches. In this context, it can be read as a dialogical relation between the place-lore of Kinn and Selja through these saintly sisters. It is a vernacular story with similar elements to the hagiographical Sunniva legend: a Christian woman facing an unwanted heathen suitor, her escape from the marriage, and the legendary origins of a church that can still be visited. To

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tell stories of Sunniva and Borgny while visiting Selja or Kinn, or along the route between the island, restories (Bowman 2012) these places. The "then" in the narratives becomes part of the "here" of visiting in the present (Massey 2005). The pilgrimage can also entail light-hearted ways of relating to the legends: On board the boat from mainland Selje to Selja in 2019, before arriving at the destination for the pilgrimage, the accompanying priest handed out liquorice candy shaped like boats (*lakrisbåter*) to the pilgrims – describing them as "boats without sails and oars" in reference to the Sunniva legend (Field notes 2019).

There are no textual references to St Sunniva, pilgrimage or the history of the monastery at the part of Selja where the ruins are located. This is a conscious choice on the part of the accommodators, wanting to give visitors the opportunity to "listen to the silence" ("Lytt til stilla") of the historical place (see Lunde forthcoming). One the way from where the boat with pilgrims docked in 2019, we walked past "the Olav stone" "(Olavssteinen) in the landscape, unveiled by the director of the Norwegian Directorate of Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren) in 2018. An information sign in front of the stone explains that it commemorates the four kings named Olav associated with the island (Olav Tryggvasson – sanctifying St Sunniva in 996, Olav Haraldsson – landing there in 1015, Olav Kyrre – who established Selja as a diocese around 1068 and Olav V, king of Norway 1957–1991, who visited Selja in 1968 for the 900th anniversary of the Diocese of Bjørgvin, information sign at Selja, Field notes 2020). The story from Snorri about Olav Haraldsson landing on the island in 1015 is retold. Indeed, the sign in front of the Olav stone is the only place where a textual narrative with reference to St Olav or St Sunniva is found on the island. After the reference to Snorri, the text continues: "Olav was later the Norwegian patron saint as Olav the Holy, and together with St Sunniva of Selja these are the two most important saints, both royal, a man and a woman, and representatives of a central part of the country, Trøndelag and the West Coast" (information sign, Selja, 2018). The Olav stone thus merges royal namesakes in a spatio-temporal expression of place-lore at Selja and connects the four Olavs to Selja and Selja to historical and national significance. There is another visual reference to St Olav at Selja: a logo of the St Olav Ways at the quay close to the ruin complex. It has additional information to the logos referred to at the beginning of this article: stating that this is a key place (*nøkkelsted*) along the Coastal Pilgrimage Route (Field observations 2019). From 2018, the Sunniva Route has been connected through the St Olav Ways through the status of the islands of Kinn and Selja as key places, and through the regional pilgrimage centre that opened in Selje in 2020. The inclusion of this regional pilgrimage route in the network of St Olav Ways is the rea-

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son that the logos of both routes are found at Kinn. In a comparable way to the historical significance, Selja (and Kinn) are today both pilgrimage destinations and stops along the way for pilgrims travelling along the coast towards Nidaros Cathedral and St Olav.

Concluding Remarks

This article has explored the development of pilgrimage place-lore in Norway through examples of how geographical and narrative landscapes of St Sunniva and St Olav are brought to the fore and added to in the context of the development of routes to their historical shrines. For this purpose, stories reviving St Sunniva and St Olav in textual, oral and visual expressions at and in reference to these pilgrimage landscapes in the past and contemporary restoryings have been discussed. These processes have been contextualized in light of international pilgrimage inspirations, emphasizing the dialogical relations between pilgrimage landscapes in Norway and internationally, demonstrating processual aspects of place-lore. The combination of local religious history and Caminoization opens for creativity and flexibility among various agents involved in the contemporary pilgrimage phenomenon. As the examples show, St Sunniva and St Olav are depicted as a saintly pair in visual and textual historical sources as well as being referred to as competitive, adjacent – and complementary patron saints in reference to and in the geographical landscapes they are associated with.

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[1] "I år 996 utropte Olav Tryggvasson Selja til den fyrste heilagstaden i Noreg. Sunniva vart helgenkåra. St. Sunniva er Noregs einaste kvinnelege helgen, og segna om ho var svært viktig i kristninga av Noreg. Soga fortel at Olav den Heilage gjekk i land på Selja for å knele i kapellet i Sunnivahola då han vende tilbake til Noreg frå England i 1015 for å vinna kongsmakt. Både Kinn og Selja var pilegrimsmål." All translations by the author unless otherwise stated.

[2] The empirical material is largely based on fieldwork conducted for my Ph.D. project in Cultural History at the University of Oslo (Lunde 2022). The Ph.D. project was part of the research projects Stories of Heritage (UiO) and Re-Storied Sites and Routes as Inclusive Spaces and Places: Shared Imaginations and Multi-layered Heritage (EMP340).

[3] On place-lore (Estonian: kohapärimus), see Hiiemäe 2007 [2004]; Valk 2009; Remmel & Valk 2014 (referenced in Valk & Sävborg 2018). Given my inspiration in using this term from these scholars, I also follow them in spelling place-lore with a hyphen.

[4] These perspectives on landscapes and stories can be seen in light of the spatial turn and the mobilities turn in the humanities and social sciences (see Sheller 2017). These turns entail a growing awareness that places are not static; they are filled with significance through cultural practices and ideas associated with them. Attention to place and narratives is of course not a new concern in ethnology and folkloristic research. Still, these turns have contributed to a greater emphasis on identifying active processes of how humans create place through meaning making and agency, more than humans passively being shaped by the places they live in (cf. Klein 2002; Selberg 2007). Inspiration from human geography and related fields provides perspectives on landscape as relative, with emphasis on how it is felt, experienced and negotiated, rather than approaching geographical locations as absolute, as objective backgrounds or containers. This can for instance entail processes of de- and re-enchantment/

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sacralization and heritagization.

[5] The church ruin has been dated to the twelfth century (Hommedal 1993). In 2024, archaeologists from NIKU made new discoveries in the foundation of the ruins, indicating the possibility of a small stone church from the early eleventh or late tenth century or a chapel with traces of Anglo-Saxon craftsmanship. This is most likely connected to the Seljumen, the oldest saints associated with Selja (Meyer 2024).

[6] Nidaros is the historical name of the city of Trondheim. Nidaros Cathedral (known as Nidarosdomen, officially called Nidaros domkirke) was developed from a wooden chapel to a stone church (built from the second part of the eleventh century) in Norman and Romanesque styles, then expanded to a Gothic cathedral completed around 1300. The present-day cathedral is the result of a large-scale reconstruction project initiated in the late nineteenth century (Ekroll 2019).

[7] La Compostela is the diploma presented to pilgrims at the pilgrimage office in Santiago de Compostela. The criterion for receiving it is to have walked at least 100 kilometres (or cycled the last 200 kilometres) of the Camino with a religious motivation. Stamps on the pilgrimage credential are the necessary documentation. A different diploma is given to pilgrims who do not express religious motivations. The criterion for receiving the Olav Letter (Olavsbrevet) at Nidaros Pilgrimage Centre in Trondheim is the same regarding kilometres (of the St Olav Ways) but the pilgrims are not asked about the motivation for their journeys. At present, there is no diploma for pilgrims arriving at Selja. For coastal pilgrims travelling to Nidaros, a version of the credential for the St Olav Way pilgrims travelling on foot renders pilgrims who have visited at least six of the key places on the Costal Pilgrimage Route eligible to receive the Olav Letter (see Mikaelsson & Selberg 2020).

[8] St Hallvard is the third of the Norwegian patron saints, alongside St Sunniva and St Olav. Lier is restoried by his legendary martyrdom, as is Oslo through the translation of his reliquary there, making him the patron saint of the city.

[9] This debate was running high around the initiative by the Ministry of Church and Culture Project Pilgrimage Motif (Prosjekt pilegrimsmotivet) (Interview Trondheim 30.07.19). The critique came from a variety of pilgrimage agents from the West Coast, including representatives of municipalities and counties, dioceses and voluntary organizations interested in pilgrimage and local history (Adresseavisen 22.07.09; the report On the Path of Life. The Pilgrimage Motif – a National Development Project (På livets vei: Pilegrimsmotivet – et nasjonalt utvikling-sprosjekt, Uddu 2008) laid the grounds for the (second) governmental pilgrimage venture focused on the St Olav Ways and Nidaros (Strategi for pilegrimssatsning 2012, see Lunde 2024). The first governmentally funded pilgrimage project was the Pilgrim Way Project (1992-1998), managed by the Ministry of Environment. Agents around other historical shrines, such as Selja, Røldal and the St Thomas Church at Filefjell, have at times felt sidelined or overlooked. The report from 2008 generated around 100 consultation responses, many who commented on the one-sided focus on St Olav and Nidaros when framing the venture as national (Ministry of Church and Culture 2009).

[10] Through the involvement of the Ministry of Environment (in the 1990s) and the Ministry of Church and Culture (from 2008), the development of the St Olav Ways has gained the status of "the National Pilgrimage Project", managed by the National Pilgrimage Centre in Trondheim (Ministry of Culture et al. 2012; Nasjonalt Pilegrimssenter 2019; see also Lunde 2024). There are also initiatives to develop a route from Northern Norway (from Trondesnes). As part of the infrastructure of the routes, several regional pilgrimage centres have been established that are responsible for maintaining stretches of the route in their vicinity, providing information to pilgrims and serving as social nodes for pilgrims and meeting places for pilgrimage confraternities. The networks of routes in Norway are connected to routes through parts of Sweden, and to the St Olav Waterways from Turku in Finland

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across Åland and Sweden to Trondheim. The St Olav Ways also hold the status of a Cultural Route of Europe (from 2010) and are thus valued as (and part of the production of) cultural heritage on the European level. Pilgrimages are also highlighted around places associated with further sacred figures and objects in Norway, including St Hallvard, the St Thomas Church at Filefjell and Røldal stave church (with a crucifix to which healing properties are attributed) – to mention the best-known.

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The Lake and Its Monster

Communicating Connections with Landscape, Belonging and Sense of Place with Great Lake Monster Narratives

Sanna Händén-Svensson

Abstract

This article explores the longstanding connection between a local version of a widespread cultural phenomenon – sea and lake serpents – and the community that cares for it. Legends and observation narratives, memorates, from the seventeenth century onwards concerning this lake serpent are analysed. The study further discusses how these narratives constitute the best-known Swedish version of lake serpents, the Great Lake Monster in the province of Jämtland, as an intermediary in connecting humans, history, landscape, and societal transformations, and how these narratives convey a sense of place. These intimate links position the Great Lake Monster as a protective spirit of the locality, a *genius loci*.

Centred around one key question – "In what ways do Great Lake Monster narratives express connections between people, history, landscape, and place?" – the article shows how early interpretations of this phenomenon were shaped by life embedded in the everyday interaction with nature and the landscape. With the older legends functioning as a formative foundation for the later shaping of the idea as a cryptid, or "hidden animal", I argue that they can be viewed as bridging the shared idea of the lake serpent on the Frösö runestone, Jämtland, Sweden, and the cryptozoological tradition of an observed animal in the lake.

Keywords: Monster, lake serpents, storytelling, narratives, landscape, human ecology, monster observations, cryptozoology

Cryptozoology is the (pseudo-)scientific field of studying "hidden animals", or animals seen by people but not yet scientifically proven to exist

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in the physical realm (Swahn 1990; Welinder 1998, 2004; cf. Regal 2009, 2011; Rossi 2016; Hurn 2017; Bubandt 2019). A crypto-creature, or cryptid, is therefore not a "real animal" but a liminal monster, awaiting discovery or oblivion – whichever comes first (Händén-Svensson 2024a).

This was not always the case with Storsjöodjuret, or "the Great Lake Monster" in translation. Once upon a time it lived with the people inhabiting the shores of the lake Storsjön in Northern Sweden, shaped their relationship with the water, and served as explanations for elements in the landscape – and it was as real to these people as were all the other fauna of the lake.

To understand the Great Lake Monster and its stories today, one must understand it as an ambiguous phenomenon: simultaneously a folkloric being, a cryptid, a symbol, and a monster.

Communicating belonging

What does it mean to belong to a certain place? In this text I will explore what I understand to be a particular way of communicating belonging, namely by stories of observations of cryptids. I focus here on narratives about *Storsjöodjuret*, or "The Great Lake Monster", in the province of Jämtland, Sweden. The work is based on my doctoral thesis in Human Ecology (Händén-Svensson 2024a), and I have not explored whether narratives of observing other cryptids function the same way.

Figure 1. Storsjön is situated in the province of Jämtland in Sweden. Lantmäteriet 2023©. Map layout: Linda Stihl & Sanna Händen-Svensson.

In this article I analyse older published narratives of the Great Lake Monster and interviews conducted with observers of it. The analysis and discussion are formed around one central question: In what ways do Great Lake Monster narratives express connections between people, history, landscape and place? In order to understand how this particular cryptid is used as a way of communicating belonging, I start by placing the Great Lake Monster in the Jamtlandic landscape as a *ge-*

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nius loci. I then turn to other stories and conversations, which all differ in genre as well as in content, to explore local relationships between the lake Storsjön (Figures 1 and 2), the people living there, and the surrounding landscape, making the argument that the observation narratives discussed here are not merely told to communicate the encounter with the cryptid, but also as a way to make use of the landscape as part of the process of world-making.

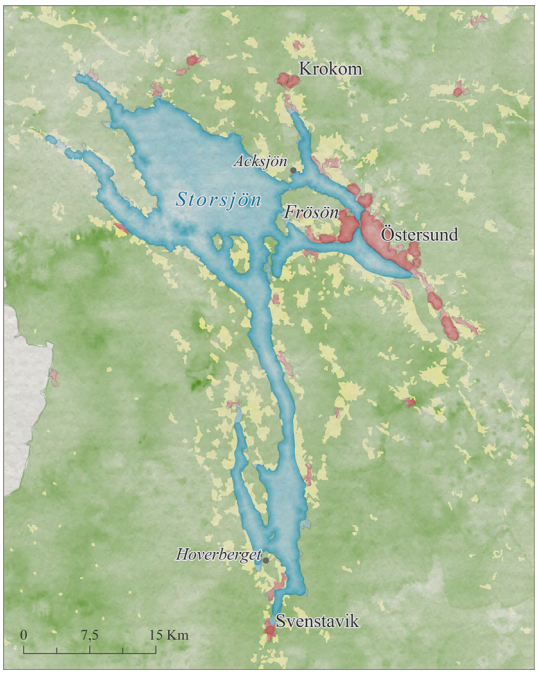

Figure 2. Local map of Storsjön. Lantmäteriet 2023©. Map layout: Linda Stihl & Sanna Händen-Svensson.

Written records of conceptualizations of this lake monster exist from 1643 and into our days, and it has been continually reimagined and recontextualized, while still keeping its core narrative form recognizable. The meanings ascribed to the creature are not fixed; rather, they are shaped by the people who engage with it across different social, cultural, and spatial contexts. Drawing on a range of narrative materials, I have elsewhere discussed the history of the figure, identifying four dominant conceptualizations: (1) as a *väsen*, a folkloric being embedded in a cosmological order and tied to pre-industrial vernacular ontologies of nature; (2) as a *cryptid*, positioned within a scientific discourse and treated as an object of empirical inquiry; (3) as a *symbol* for the region, mobilized for tourism purposes, regional branding, and economic development; and (4) as a figure of popular culture, often rendered in monstrous or fantastical form (cf. Händén-Svensson 2024a). These shifting representations reflect broader transformations in how landscapes are experienced, narrated, and commodified. While focusing on the relationship between the first two identities, this article discusses how folklore operates as a living, adaptive system – one that mediates relationships between people, place, and the more-than-human world (cf. Cruikshank 1994; 1997; 2000[1998]). In doing so, it contributes to ongo-

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ing conversations in both folklore and landscape studies about the role of narrative in shaping spatial imaginaries and cultural memory (cf. Schama 1995).

First mentioned in writing by the Danish physician and rune historian Ole Worm (1643:522–523), it was at this time called a "lake serpent", a folkloric being inhabiting and ruling the lake. In early narratives of this lake serpent, which by and large explain an eleventh-century runestone's placement by the eastern shore of the island of Frösö in the lake (Plantin 1685), their interconnected relationship is made obvious. In later narratives, the focus is instead shifted to the witnessing of a "hidden animal", as the understandings of the lake serpent were transformed to adapt to scientific and societal changes. In making room for zoological interpretations of the old narratives, scholars in zoology (as well as archaeology), tried to identify the species of the creature described by witnesses (Lönnberg 1898, 1899a, 1899b; Olsson 1899; Wibling 1903). In this process, the repertoire of stories told about *Storsjöodjuret* also shifted, from shared legends to individual memorates (for discussions about memorates and individual narratives of experience, see e.g. Dégh & Vászony 1979; Honko 1964; Klintberg 1973; Meurling 2016; Rooth 1979), which also share patterns and motifs (Händén-Svensson 2024a, 2024b).

However, no animal was found that matched or explained what was witnessed, and the once commonly shared folklore, traditions, and beliefs about the lake serpent vanished and gave room for the cryptozoological interpretation present today (Malm 2017; Heuvelmans 1958[1955], 1968, 1983, 1990, 1997, 2007, cf. Händén-Svensson 2024a; 2024b). Contemporary images and uses of *Storsjöodjuret*, besides its lure for cryptozoologists and *believers*, can best be described as that of a symbol of the province of Jämtland, Sweden, often used for tourism purposes.

In the following I will focus on the communicative meaning of the stories as expressions of a sense of place and belonging, and I will show how the Great Lake Monster functions as a mediating link between humans, history, the landscape, and societal change. I argue that *Storsjöodjuret* and the people who care for it belong together, share history in this landscape, and that through this connection a sense of place is constructed.

Theoretical Perspectives

This article draws on two main theoretical categories: folklore studies and geography. Working together they contribute nuanced understandings of the relationship between people, the phenomenon, and the place.

Theoretically I base the analysis in phenomenological geography, and

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core concepts such as sense of, and belonging to, place, and that of *genius loci* (Norberg-Schultz 1980; Relph 1976; Seamon 2018). From this perspective, "one can define place as *any environment that gathers human experiences, actions, and meanings spatially and temporally*" (Seamon 2018:2, italics in original). They are assigned meaning by individuals but can simultaneously be a shared experienced (Relph 1976; Raymond et al. 2021; Tuan 1977). Place can also play a central role in the formation and communication of identity on both individual and collective levels (Riley 2010:652; cf. Glassie 1995[1982]; Hornborg 2001; Laime 2014).

The older legends about *Storsjöodjuret* not only established, but also continuously maintain, a tradition of the lake serpent as a *genius loci*. The concept, used to describe a deeply felt meaningfulness attached to a certain place, entered geography with the phenomenological landscape research in the latter half of the twentieth century. The idea sprang from a Roman tradition around the beginning of our era, where certain sacred locales of significance for a family or cult were said to be protected by place-bound spirits, often depicted as serpents (Flowers 2017; Malm 2017). The architect Christian Norberg-Schultz, in a central study in 1980, used the concept to describe the feeling of or for a place in architectural analysis. *Genius loci* thus describes a kind of "spirituality" significant for meaningful places (Norberg-Schulz 1980; Relph 1976; Tuan 1977; Vecco 2020), and places can be attributed anything from a long and deep to a weak such sense of "spirituality" (Lewicka et al. 2019; Raymond et al. 2021).

"Some landscapes", writes Ulrich Magin in 2016 (p. 211–212), citing Charles Fort (1994:12), "contain the necessity of a creature or phenomenon, and because these fit that landscape or the desires and/or fears of their inhabitants, they are not only 'necessary monsters', but can also be regarded as an expression of the genius loci." Fort attributes cryptids the role of handling various feelings people in a particular time or social group experience towards place and argues that feelings of homeliness and belonging to a place or landscape can be embodied in the cryptid as a *genius loci*.

In the following I will use the early legends of the Great Lake Monster as a way of placing the lake serpent in the landscape, showing how the *idea* of a serpent body in this water is constructed historically as a shared folk belief and narrative. This idea is then given new meanings in a later interpretation as a cryptid, connecting observers, landscape, lake and monster in historical processes of meaning-making and belonging.

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Materials and Empirical Data

Folklore legends from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are analysed, as well as interviews with witnesses alive today. The interviews, conducted between 2018 and 2023, focused on the informant's observation as well as other aspects that they brought up in relation to telling me about the time (or times) the lake monster revealed itself to them. Four interviews are cited in this article: Gustav, a man in his seventies, saw *Storsjöodjuret* in the 1980s; Emma, a woman in her forties, witnessed the lake serpent in the early 2000s; Imbar, a woman also in her seventies, saw it in 2013; and Orvar, a man in his eighties had a very close encounter with the cryptid when it was caught in his fishing gear in the 1990s.

The origins of the older narratives about the lake serpent (here discussed as a background to the idea that later reveals itself in physical shape to the interviewed observers), their age or socio-cultural contexts, are unknown. I stumbled across them in daily newspapers. magazines, books, and archives during the work with my doctoral dissertation (Händén-Svensson 2024a). They are published, with all the scholarly frustrations this evokes; information on provenance, the narrative's position in the teller's repertoire, personal and creative addenda, etc., are all missing in the "frozen" written form of each particular narrative. Oral traditions, in contrast, are fluid, in constant adaptation to situation, contexts, inter-personal relations, and motifs of the storyteller (cf. Cruikshank 1994; 1997; 2000[1998]), and we can imagine that these stories once also were "alive". What follows are thus my interpretations of a very small sample, and I make no claims to have exhausted the possibility that several more narratives – and interpretations – exist.

The older stories are legends, and as such part of a larger set of cosmological beliefs about the world, including the relationship with nature, animals, and magical beings (Klintberg 1972:14). From the late nineteenth century another kind of narrative entered the stage of Great Lake Monster stories: *memorates*. A memorate about an observation, or of the witnessing of a "hidden animal", is individual in reference, but analysed in relation to each other reveal that they share common structural and almost formulaic elements (Händén-Svensson 2004a). The observation can within a cryptozoological context be held as proof of the animal's existence, making the memorate a kind of "eyewitness statement" (cf. Loxton & Prothero 2013:13–16).

The earliest narrative in the material analysed here was published in 1836 in a newspaper article about a trip to the mountain Åreskutan, located in Jämtland, Sweden. Other stories are still in use today, primarily in the contexts of (cultural heritage) tourism. Below I give brief summaries

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of them. Previously, the archaeologist Stig Welinder (1998; 2004) has discussed the relationships between the monster, local (cultural) history, and the landscape. Of the legends discussed here, the one about the two trolls Jata and Kata is referenced in Welinder's writings.

Great Lake Monster Legends

There are several origin legends that tell the story of how the creature came into existence. The first one published, as far as I have found, appeared in *Jämtlands-Tidning*'s supplement *Jämten* on 29 January 1897. In this narrative the lake serpent appears in the human world as a punishment, motivated by disobedience to the rules set in dealings between trolls and humans. I retell it here in part:

> A long time ago, somewhere near the lake Storsjön, lived a wealthy, but unusually stingy, farmer. He only provided barely enough food for his people. One day he consulted a forest troll […] about how to feed the people of his farm in the least expensive way. He got good advice: for an entire day he should cook only lake water and was strictly forbidden to peek into the pot until the evening when it got dark. […] He immediately informed his wife of the new cooking method, and she started on the task right away, after having been thoroughly warned to obey the troll. […] However, when the evening came, she peeked in the pot thinking, "It can't hurt." To her great horror, a small creature rolled out of the vessel, across the floor, and straight into the lake. The woman fell dead on the spot. With her curiosity, she had incurred the troll's wrath upon herself and her husband, who was killed by a bear at the same moment.

The story continues with a sequence which I believe to have been the most important part in early narrations of this legend, letting us know that the serpent grew until it could coil around the islands in the lake. The locals hurried to contract the well-known Kettil Runske, who bound the unknown animal. The method used to bind the monster differs in the origin legends analysed, but most of them connect to the serpentine motif on the Frösö runestone, thus explaining the presence of this strange stone in the landscape.

Building on shared beliefs, fears, and hopes, folklore serves to shape, communicate, and uphold norms (Arvidsson 1999; Frykman 1977; Skjelbred 1998; Stattin 1984). In this story, a fear of unknown fauna presents itself as a small, unrecognizable animal that rolls from the pot into the lake. Such species were not known in the human world, and therefore a man with magical powers, Kettil Runske, was sent for to keep the otherwise uncontrollable in check, marking the animal as *unusual*.

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Traces in the Landscape

In another origin story, the trolls themselves take on the task of cooking something. This marks a shift in the communication of *why* Storsjön has a lake monster. Today this is the most frequently retold variant of the stories here discussed, and it comes in many versions, e.g. in *Jämten* 1917 (below, Westin 1917), and a shortened version recorded in 1955 (read from "The Map of Nordic Folklore"). They show a strong resemblance but exhibit one important difference from a placelore perspective.

> A long time ago two trolls, Jata and Kata, stood on the eastern shore of Storsjön, each of them cooking something in their cauldrons. They stirred and cooked, and cooked and stirred for days, weeks, and months, wondering and waiting to see what would eventually become of it. Then one evening, after a long time of cooking, a strange sound was heard from one of the pots. It sounded like a sick child, groaning and screaming, and suddenly a loud bang sounded, as from a violent thunderclap, and a strange black animal with a snake's body and a cat's head jumped out of the cauldron and disappeared into the lake. At the same time, both the kettles and the trolls disappeared; only white smoke was seen after them, and a gaping chasm appeared in the ground. […]

The animal that sprang from the cauldrons thrived in Storsjön and grew immensely, spreading fear and terror, and finally grew so large that it encompassed all Frösön and could bite its own tail. Kettil Runske then bound the monster with a powerful spell, which was inscribed on a stone erected on the eastern shore of the island.

We also see a clear references to the old Norse serpent Jörmungandr/Miðgarðsormr, hinting that the local serpent belongs to pre-Christian mythology and cosmology.

In the version found on "The Nordic Map of Folklore", another relationship between nature and monstrous being is uncovered when the explosion from the cauldrons not only presents the world with the Great Lake Monster, but also create a large, gruesome chasm that fills with water: the lake itself is created at the same time. The unknown animal again grew so large that it eventually encircled the island in the middle of the lake, so it could bite its own tail, and the rune magician was contracted to bind the monster.

In this case, the monster is connected to the place not only as folklore about water and trolls but as an embodied part of the landscape, as the entire lake is created in the great explosion in which the lake serpent with a cat's head and snake's body is formed. In this version the "birth" of *Storsjöodjuret* made an impression not only in people's minds but also in the physical landscape, being shaped by its birth.

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The Frösö Runestone and Kettil Runske

So, what is the story of the stone with magic runes on the eastern shore of Frösön, recurrently included in the older narratives about this local lake serpent? The Frösö runestone is dated to 1050/1080, and was erected by Östman Gudfast's son who, according to the inscription, "had Jämtland christened". The earliest mention of a lake serpent in connection with the runestone appears in Ole Worm's work from 1643, and later records from the Swedish Antiquarian Inquiries during the 1680s suggest that the people ascribed the runes magical power to control the lake serpent, which served as a representative of frightening aspects of life lived by the lake (Plantin 1685). Already in the mid-seventeenth century the lake serpent and landscape elements were tied together, forming the foundation upon which later legends and observation stories were formed. The stone, with its central placement on the shore, became what Eskeröd (1947:65–87) called a "milieu dominant" – that is, something in the environment that is so dominantly present that it shapes, and reshapes, folklore in the area – in the adaptation of the local lake serpent narratives.

The man who, according to the legends, inscribes the runes and binds the lake monster is most often called Kettil Runske, or some version of that name, and the next source linking the stone to Kettil Runske appears in *Norrlands Tidningar* in 1836. During a trip to the mountain Åreskutan the author and his travel companions stayed a few nights on Frösön and later wrote about the lake serpent tradition as a model of explanation of the often harsh weather conditions on the lake. According to the author, a serpent is said to lie chained to the bottom of the lake by a church bell that, during a transport over the strait in winter, went through the ice and landed on the serpent's tail. The narrative thus also functions as an image of Christianity's victory over older religious and belief systems.

Belonging to Place

An observation of a cryptid can, in its own way, reinforce an individual's sense of belonging to place. It becomes a memorable event – an "anchor" in their personal narrative – but also a piece in a larger, shared process of relational place-making, and in this next section the article will focus on contemporary expressions and narratives of the relationship between the Great Lake Monster, the people, and the landscape. By examining how these relationships are articulated through legends and other forms of vernacular storytelling, I aim to connect the older narratives with the experience of observing the cryptid, and the narration of this experience. These do more than recount encounters with a cryptid; they embed the

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creature within a dense web of place-based meanings, positioning it as a protective spirit of place –a *genius loci*. In this way, the Great Lake Monster becomes a symbolic and affective anchor for both individual and shared senses of place.

"Belonging to a particular locality evokes the notion of loyalty to a place, a loyalty that may be expressed through oral or written history narratives of origin as belonging, the focality of certain objects, myths," writes the anthropologist Nadia Lovell (1998:1). I argue that the cryptid functions as a "focusing object" of shared history and as a symbol of such connections. The storytelling surrounding this local cryptid acts as a form of cultural inscription, shaping how the landscape is perceived, remembered, and inhabited, and the legends can be viewed as contributing to a shared *sense of place* that is emotionally charged and socially transmitted. As the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) has argued, *topophilia* – the affective bond between people and place – is often cultivated through narrative, memory, and embodied experience.

In an interview in 2021, the tourism developer Anne Adsten describes it thus: "The *Storsjöodjuret* is a part of us, a part of who we are [as Jämtlanders]." An observation of the Great Lake Monster is of course not the only way in which local belonging is communicated in Jämtland. But it is, I would say, a very special way, which is expressed repeatedly in interviews and narratives. In the following I will explore a few of these, using them as entry points to understand how belonging to place is narrated, expressed, and given shape by the observers. The monster observation is rendered meaningful in more than one way, as both confirmation of belonging and as the powerful experiencing of witnessing something extraordinary from the legends.

In my earlier work, which centred on how the intricate web of the social, the cultural, the historical, and the local influenced the shaping of this Swedish cryptid, I interviewed eleven observers about their experiences. The purpose of the study was to demonstrate how this scientifically still unvalidated animal serves as an interesting representative of a borderland between the real and the imagined, and how views of nature, landscape, place, society, history, and culture are woven together with storytelling and scientific exploration to illuminate socio-ecological relationships. Earlier research on cryptids and the regionally grounded history of them have mainly focused on their meaning in local folklore (ethnology/anthropology), investigations of what is observed (zoology/crypto-zoology and environmental history), or the people searching for them (sociology, sociology of religion, and tourism).

When inquiring about an interview, I asked the informants to show me places they thought I need to have visited to understand their observa-

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tions. This is what happened.

Gustav lives in a small town in Jämtland. This place has been his home for over forty years, and he has witnessed the Great Lake Monster twice. He begins by going back much earlier than the day he "met" *Storsjöodjuret* and points our driver to the home he built for his family in 1977–78. On our way there he tells me about the municipality's history and his life here. Only several hours into our drive does he bring me to the shore where he saw the Great Lake Monster. I understand this as a way of connecting his observation narrative to the place, grounding it in the landscape (cf. Glassie 1995[1982]). To understand his observation, I must understand him belonging here. By introducing me to the landscape before giving me his story, he is narrating not just the experience, but also his relationship to this place.

Emma, whom I interviewed online during the COVID-19 pandemic, also uses her observation as reinforcement of her belonging to this place. In her family a chronicle is told that very tangibly connects her and her family to the area and to the runestone, and thereby also to the lake serpent:

> Me: What has fascinated you about the myths and stories?
> Emma: Maybe the fact that *Storsjöodjuret* can be connected to the Frösö runestone in some way, because on my father's side we are directly descended from the one who raised the stone. The serpent on the stone is bound with something, and it is said that when the curse is broken, the serpent will come loose, grow larger, and encircle Frösön. According to the legend, the whole island will then sink.
> [Later in the interview:]
> Me: Would you say that your observation has affected your everyday life in any way?
> Emma: Hard to say, I have always respected those who have seen it. I feel humbled. I am extremely grateful that I might have seen it. Humbled and grateful.

The water surface splitting and the hidden animal revealing itself is highlighted in the observers' life narratives as a humbling event to cherish with gratitude. Emma's observation becomes a kind of double confirmation of this being her place: she witnesses the monster that, through the legends, relates to the runestone with an inscription significant to her family's history.

Imbar, with whom I drove though the Jamtlandic landscape in 2019, talking about history, family, her life in the area, and her Great Lake Monster observation, also described the event as a positive and confirming experience. The event took place in 2013, when she was sitting on a warm bus on her way home from work. Years later – this time in cold and windy weather – we walk out on the same bridge so that I may come as close as possible to the site of the original observation.

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> Imbar: What happened was so strange. I was startled and almost jumped out of my seat and thought "What was that?" It was such warm and sunny day, and I had placed myself on the wrong side of the bus. But it was so beautiful, so I stayed and looked out over the water. Just as the bus drove over the bridge, something arched from the surface in a cascade of water […] and then it came up once more!
> Me: What does it mean to you that you got to see it?
> Imbar: Well, I thought it was fun and fascinating. I usually say that "I never get to see anything, I never experience anything, I am so sceptical." So that was fun!

Standing there beside her, gazing out over the water, allowed me to gain a personal and emotional understanding of the event and its spatial context. The embodied act of returning to the site, even under different conditions, becomes a form of situated knowledge-making, where landscape, memory, and narrative converge. Imbar, who says she never experience anything extraordinary, was on that day in 2013 allowed a glimpse of the cryptid of the lake, and I on this day in 2019, a glimpse of her observation.

Orvar also begins his story with a retrospect revealing feelings of long belonging to this place. Our driver and I have just arrived at his home when Orvar points to a potted plant in a windowsill:

> Right in this spot in the house stood my aunt, she was visiting from America, and it was the same day the Americans landed on the moon, when she told me that when they moved into the house in 1895, my grandfather carried her sister, who was very young, and my grandmother carried that cactus over there.

The cactus would, if still alive and thriving (I do not know), be 130 years old now, time materialized, and it functions as a hub where time, place, and kinship run strongly intertwined from his grandmother and grandfather, through the house's four generations, to himself and his children. He continues by telling us about the very old family line he belongs to. He shares memories from meetings with relatives with us and shows us the family's coat of arms. The first stop, on our way to the place of his observation, is a church that has a central place in his ancestral history. Orvar's potted plant, the family's imprints in the landscape through buildings and farms, which he shows us during our travel in the landscape, point both backward and forward. He has been here for a long time, as in a forward motion initiated long before he was born. A motion that is brought to life when I ask him to tell me about his Great Lake Monster observation.

The informant Fjälla makes a similar connection when we meet for an interview in March 2022. She takes me through the provinces of Jämtland and Härjedalen, and we drive to both her parents' farm, the home

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she shared with her husband, and to the summer pasture, where she has lived a seasonal pastoralist lifestyle since she was a little girl. Later in the interview – after arriving at her current farm, feeding her sheep, and when her dog has placed her head in my lap for some cuddles – Fjälla reflects on her relationship with this place as she comments on the shifting socio-ecological dynamics she has observed in the region. Drawing on her lived experience, she articulates a distinction between two modes of engaging with the environment: one rooted in "nature experience," the other in "land use." The former reflects an emotionally situated, culturally mediated relationship with place, one she associates with her childhood, while the latter is shaped by instrumental and economic rationalities, materializing in developments such as large ski resorts with "ski-in, ski-out" lodging. These orientations correspond, respectively, to intimate, place-based sociality grounded in shared lifeworlds, and to more abstract, transactional forms of interaction marked by anonymity and detachment.

As a short detour, I will lastly allow myself a comparison with another Nordic lake monster, Selma in Seljordsvatnet in Norway, to accentuate that the processes of connecting the witnessing of a cryptid to the shaping of identities, feelings of belonging to a landscape, and a sense of place is after all perhaps not exclusive to the Jamtlandic region. For over 250 years, stories of this lake serpent have circulated in this Norwegian community, embedding the creature in the cultural landscape and local identity. Bernt Solvoll, cultural consultant in the municipality of Seljord, told *The Guardian*'s reporter Flora Botsfjord in 1999 how he, some time after commencing his position, began to wonder when Selma would "welcome" him. And then, finally, one calm afternoon, as he is driving along the shore of the lake, the water suddenly begins to stir. For approximately ten minutes he witnesses waves forming and something repeatedly sending up cascades of water, before the lake gradually returns to stillness. He has been approved.

When I ask for an interview regarding *Storsjöodjuret*, the stories originate from other places than I first expected. The pattern that appears suggests that the experience of witnessing the monster is not an isolated incident, neither in the witness's life nor in the realm of narrating. The observers relate the monster to other places, events, and parts of life, and when I ask about observations these relations are brought up. I begin to understand that observations of the local lake monster can be viewed as a reinforcement of person's sense of belonging, and that narrating the observation is a way to share this relationship with others. It peeks into family histories, church history, potted plant cultivation, summer pasture life, lifestyle, heraldry, landscape, and environmental history – and much besides. It becomes clear that the Great Lake Monster connects and in-

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fluences diverse areas of Jamtlandic society and the lives of people here. Through storytelling, people do not simply describe the landscape, they inhabit it, engage with it, and co-construct its meaning. The local ”hidden” lake serpent, in this context, is not just a folkloric figure, nor just an imagined undiscovered species, but a relational entity that mediates human-environment interactions.

Conclusion

This article has traced the evolving uses and meanings of the Great Lake Monster in Lake Storsjön across nearly four centuries, revealing how the figure has served as a dynamic cultural anchor between people, place, and narrative. In conversations with *believers*, it becomes clear that the belief in a cryptid is embedded within a broader cultural understanding of landscape as affective, relational, and historically situated. The natural environment, often associated with notions of “home”, is not merely a backdrop for these stories but is actively constituted as the Great Lake Monster’s landscape. This landscape is experienced as sentient and responsive, a co-actor in the narrative relationship, and must be taken seriously in any phenomenologically informed folkloristic or geographic analysis.

The older narratives, rooted in pre-industrial cosmologies, offered vernacular explanations for natural phenomena and reinforced moral and ecological norms. In these stories, the lake serpent and the landscape are inseparable, co-constituting a world in which humans, nature, and the supernatural are entangled. The serpent is not merely *in* the lake; it is *of* the lake. These tales also converge around the Frösö runestone, where the monster serves as a mythic explanation for a tangible cultural landmark, anchoring oral tradition in the material landscape.

With the onset of industrialization, urbanization, and scientific rationalism, a new interpretive framework emerged. The being was reimagined as a cryptid, an object of empirical curiosity and speculative zoology. Yet even within this modern framing, the observation narrative remains deeply place-bound. The act of witnessing the creature becomes a means of expressing both a sense of belonging and a claim of place. In this way, the cryptid takes on the role of a *genius loci*, a spirit of place that mediates between personal experience and collective memory.

The continuity between older legends and newer memorates reveals how folklore adapts to changing cultural conditions while maintaining its role in shaping spatial imaginaries. The early narratives were embedded in everyday ecological relationships, while contemporary accounts often reflect more individualized, yet no less meaningful, engagements

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with the landscape. Together, these stories form a bridge between shared cosmological interpretations and modern, often zoologically framed, understandings of the phenomenon.

In reflecting on the enduring presence of the Great Lake Monster in local storytelling, it becomes clear that such figures are not merely remnants of a mythic past, but active participants in the cultural and spatial life of a region. They offer a lens through which to examine how people make sense of their environments, negotiate belonging, and sustain memory across generations. By attending to the interplay between narrative, landscape, and belief, this study contributes to the inquiries of folklore as dynamic modes of world-making, one that continues to shape how we inhabit and imagine place in an ever-changing world.

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[1] I will use both names in this text.
[2] The word used in Swedish is sjöorm.
[3] In the translation from nineteenth century Swedish to an enjoyable text in English, I have made minor artistic choices in relation to the rhythm and flow of the text, while at the same time trying to stay as close to original wordings and particular meanings as possible. The same applies to all the stories retold here.
[4] The earliest mentioning of this name in connection to the Frösö runestone and/or the Great Lake Monster that I have found is a footnote in historian Frederick Suhm's collections on Danish history (1779:117): "This Kettil Runske's name is nevertheless known in Norway and Sweden, where similar stories are told about him. There is a handwritten description of the Frösö Stone whose author states that this runestone, very differently depicted by Worm, was erected by Kettil Runske to bind a large sea serpent in Östersund in Sunne parish in Jämtland. The author of this description, made in 1635, is named Morten Pedersen Herdal."
[5] Translated into contemporary Swedish, the inscription reads: "Östman, Gudfasts son lät resa denna sten och göra denna bro, och han lät kristna Jämtland. Åsbjörn gjorde bron. Tryn och Sten ristade dessa runor" (Williams 1996).
[6] A similar report was in 1955 written down from an informant born in 1861 in Tand (The Map of Nordic Folklore).
[7] The all too warm and sunny side, my comment.
[8] Fäboden in Swedish.

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The Flight to Šatrija Hill

Lithuanian Folk Legends of the Witches' Sabbath

Andrius Kaniava

Abstract
This article examines Lithuanian folk legends concerning the witches' sabbath and its associations with the landscape. Although witch-hunting began later in the Baltic region, Lithuanian folklore shares thematic elements with European traditions, including magical flights, devil worship, and the legend type that features a farmhand as an external observer. A distinctive feature of the Lithuanian legends, however, is their profound connection to the landscape. The site traditionally identified as the location of the witches' sabbath, as depicted in both folk legends and Lithuanian witchcraft trial documents, is Šatrija Hill. Šatrija is a historical site that evolved from an Iron Age hillfort to a legendary place of witches' gatherings. This study analyses 99 folk legends concerning the witches' sabbath from the Lithuanian Folklore Archives. The folklore material is discussed alongside witchcraft trial documents, with a focus on identifying the predominant narratives, geographical locations associated with the sabbath, and the manner in which these folk legends intertwine with the landscape.

Keywords: Witches' sabbath, Lithuanian folklore, witchcraft trials, folklore and landscape, Šatrija Hill

Witches are among the most prevalent characters in Lithuanian folklore, and, in contrast to the portrayal of witches in fairy tales, where a witch could be represented either as a benevolent or a malevolent character (Racėnaitė 2022), in folk legends witches are invariably depicted as evil beings that inflict harm upon people. In these narratives, the folkloric witch is capable of casting spells on people, causing illness to villagers or their livestock, transforming people into animals, and stealing the milk from cows. Moreover, witches are sometimes believed to act in more hei-

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nous ways, including killing people and making them insane, or even consuming the blood of infants (Vėlius 1977). According to folk beliefs, witches are closely associated with the Devil, either working together with him or as his subordinates. Compared to folk legends that concern other mythological beings, stories about witches are more frequently categorized as memorates, a term coined by C. W. von Sydow (1934) and describing a type of folk narrative that is presented as derived from personal experience.

The *demonic witch*, a character constructed by demonologists during the witch-hunt period in early modern Europe, had a strong influence on later vernacular beliefs concerning witches. Folk legends about the burning and drowning of witches bear a striking resemblance to actual historical events from the witch trial period, which ran in Lithuania from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, with the last recorded witch trial in 1776 being substantially later than in most other parts of Europe. However, scholars from Lithuania and Latvia posit that the character of the witch in Baltic folklore still retained some of its pre-Christian attributes, which were closely connected with pre-Christian religion, knowledge and helping people instead of harming them. Most folklorists who wrote about witches agree that the concept of the witch (*ragana*) as a deity underwent a shift in meaning after Christianization (cf. Vėlius 1977; Beresnevičius & Čaplinskas 2001; Laime 2024).

Among the numerous features of the folkloric witch, one important and yet under-explored aspect in Lithuanian folkloristics is the interconnection between witches and the landscape. In folklore studies, placelore adopts the so-called "modern" approach to landscape, which posits that landscape functions as an active entity that captures and transforms meaning. This approach asserts that landscapes primarily exist in the human mind as feelings, meanings, and ideas (Darvill 2005; Mulk & Bayliss-Smith 2005; Racėnaitė 2012). This is where the concept of mental landscape comes to the forefront. The idea of mental landscape is understood through the study of placelore, place names and people's stories, rather than focusing on physical or geographical aspects of places. In this approach, meaning of a place is perceived as flexible and always changing, while such places form a *storied world* that is based on phenomenological understanding of place (cf. Jackson 1996; Ingold 2011). This flexible, ever-changing conception of place is also evident in contemporary placelore research (Valk & Sävborg 2018:7–8). Folk legends and placelore in general become a very important instrument in researching mental landscapes and storied worlds.

The witch, as a mythological and folkloric character, plays a significant role in the placelore of various landscape types in Lithuania. According to Vykintas Vaitkevičius, the researcher of pre-Christian sacred sites and

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Lithuanian placelore, there are numerous locations across the country called *Ragankalniai* (Witches' Hills) and *Mergakalniai* (Maidens' Hills), which are often associated with various witches' activities. Mythological stones and old trees are linked to witches, either by being called "the seat of the witch", or by being connected with their festivities in folk legends. Swamps, marshes and hollows are also often associated with witches and devils, being identified as their dwelling place (Vaitkevičius 2003; Vaitkevičius 2004). A particularly noteworthy group of sites in Northern Lithuania are called *Raganinės* – these are the deep parts of a river, where there was a traditional custom of bathing in the river during certain calendar festivals (Vaitkevičius 2002). However, the most salient aspect related to the landscape is the folk legend type of the witches' sabbath. According to these legends, witches from all across Lithuania convene annually in a specific location for an assembly that includes festivities, dancing and meeting their leader, who is often portrayed as the Devil. These narratives sometimes feature an outside individual – a farmhand, a servant, a neighbour, or a family member – who observes the witch's magical practices and is subsequently transported to the meeting place together with the witch. This is a widely known folk legend motif that was recorded in different parts of Lithuania. The folk legend type concerning the witches' sabbath is a prominent narrative of many European countries' folklore as well. In these narratives, one single location is usually referenced more frequently than others, thereby becoming the designated place for these meetings. Notably, while locations such as *Blåkulla* in Sweden or *Lysa Góra* in Slavic countries are predominantly mythical, having multiple real-life counterparts and possible locations, Lithuanian witch legends are typically localized at a specific place, namely Šatrija Hill in Northern Lithuania. Šatrija, a medieval hillfort, was inhabited by Baltic tribes until the thirteenth century. As early as the seventeenth century, it acquired a new meaning and came to be known throughout Lithuania as the primary location for witches' meetings.

This article suggests that the witches' sabbath folk legend type exemplifies a profound interconnection between folklore and landscape. In the Lithuanian context, Šatrija Hill in western Lithuania holds a distinctive significance. In this article I intend: (1) to identify the main features of Lithuanian Folk legends about the witches' Sabbath, including its main motifs, geographical distribution, and European context; (2) to present Šatrija hillfort, and how its significance was reshaped in modern times, becoming a widely recognized location of the witches' sabbath in Lithuanian folklore; (3) to further contextualize this topic with the broader landscape of witches' meetings in Lithuania, including the context from Lithuanian witchcraft court case files.

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Lithuanian Folk Legends about the Witches' Sabbath

The concept of the witches' sabbath, while recognized earlier as well, was properly established by Western European demonologists in the sixteenth century (Goodare 2016:73–76). According to the Latvian ethnologist Sandis Laime, the witches' sabbath is a component of the *demonic witch* folkloric character, which was significantly influenced by the church (Laime 2024). This type of witch is depicted in folk legends and folk tales as the servant of the Devil. Folk legends about the witches' sabbath constitute a significant portion of Lithuanian witchcraft folklore. For the purpose of this study, I analysed 99 archival folkloric texts, the majority of which remain unpublished. The earliest documented legends were recorded in the first half of the nineteenth century, mostly in the northern parts of Lithuania, particularly in the Žemaitija region in the west, where witchcraft trials were most prevalent during the early modern period (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of locations where folk legends concerning witches' sabbath were recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Map: Author.

Lithuanian folk legends about the witches' sabbath can be distinguished into two main groups. The first group, comprising 29 folk legends, encompasses general observations made by the storytellers regarding witches and their meetings, with no specific plot. The second and more significant group of folk legends consists of 70 texts that revolve around a narrative about an individual observing a witch obtaining magical flying abilities and coming together with her to the place of the sabbath. This

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particular folkloric narrative is also the most pertinent one in folk legends about the witches' sabbath in other countries (Jauhiainen 1998:179–181; Klintberg 2010:275–283; Laime 2024:304–312). Folk legends in both groups contain information on how the phenomenon of witches' sabbath was conceptualized in folklore.

> Around St. John's Day on Šatrija Hill, once a year there is a gathering of witches and sorcerers. Witches from all over Lithuania and Poland gather on the hill. When they are all gathered, the chief warlock comes either from Rīga or from Mitava. The witches tell him about their deeds. When they fly to the mountain, they do such on all sorts of things: a beehive, a broom, a stick. Only they cannot fly on one with a burnt end, because their ass gets hot. When they fly, a strong wind comes, a whirlwind, and the weather gets worse, so that the witches cannot be seen (LTR 2413/107).

The folk legend quoted above comprises numerous elements that are prevalent in folklore concerning the witches' sabbath. First of all, time and place. According to the examined legends, hilltops are the most popular type of place for the witches' gathering, mentioned in 55 of the analysed texts. Of these hills, Šatrija Hill in western Lithuania merits particular attention, identified as the site of these gatherings on 49 occasions. Another notable location for the sabbath is the city of Kyiv in Ukraine, mentioned nine times. Subsequent sections of this article will delve into specifics of both Šatrija and Kyiv, as well as other potential locations for witches' meetings. For now, I would note that these places are supposed to be "dreadful, remote places, most often bogs" (LTR 2989/415), though other landscape objects such as hills, woods, lakesides, fields, and meadows have been also mentioned. The remoteness of such place is not always specified, but often implied. For example, according to some legends, an uninvited person arrives at the site of the sabbath and in the morning he is often left alone and spends several years attempting to return home (LTR 368/322; 397/89; 783/467, among others).

The aforementioned text includes a detail regarding the timing of the sabbath as well, which is Saint John's Day, or the summer solstice. In the context of Lithuanian folklore, the summer solstice is the prime time for anything related to magical practices. According to folklore, "witches and sorcerers can do much harm to common people, especially during Saint John's Day" (LTR 2560/400). Consequently, the summer solstice is frequently regarded as the time of the witches' sabbath, as evidenced by 24 archival texts. It is interesting that in Latvia, Saint John's Day is frequently mentioned as the time of the witches' sabbath in witch trial records, but not in folk legends (Laime 2024:148).

The meeting itself is often described as a huge celebration or a ball,

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with "music and dancing" (LTR 5038/5), as a place where "witches and sorcerers were dancing and having fun all night" (LTR 1678/14) and so on. According to certain legends, during the sabbath, witches engage in horrific and even macabre activities, including the eating of dead horses (LTR 1167/15) and even human corpses (LTR 2069/64; 2989/422). One such legend describes the event as a "Devil's wedding" (LTR 1514/27), while other texts depict witches dancing and feasting with devils (LTR 344/725; 1418/550; 1514/27 and others). Notably, the role of the Devil as the leader of witches is a recurring theme. The Devil is often portrayed as an old man with a long beard (LTR 494/38). Witches have to bow before this man (LTR 1833/1150), or collect berries for him (LTR 2171/26), and they must also report to him on their malevolent actions (LTR 2413/107). Sometimes the leader of the witches is very clearly identified as the Devil, even called Lucifer (LTR 1418/551), or a "Little German" (LTR 2812/89a), which is a common portrayal of the Devil in Lithuanian folklore (Vėlius 1987). A particularly vivid example of the commander of the witches dealing with his subordinates is worth quoting:

> Once a soldier spent a night at a farm. In the evening, when everyone went to bed, the soldier saw the mistress of the house taking some ointment, putting it on her armpits, turning around a few times, and flying out through the chimney. What kind of sorcery is this? Then the soldier took the ointment and put some of it on the pestle. The pestle moved a bit, then turned a few times and flew out through the chimney. Then the soldier put some ointment on the calf, and the calf vanished as well. Now was the time to try the ointment for himself. As soon as the soldier anointed himself, he too flew through the chimney and after a brief moment appeared on top of Šatrija Hill. Several hundred witches were gathered there. The soldier spotted his mistress among the others, the pestle and the calf were also there, so he stood beside them. Suddenly, two gentlemen appeared and started walking among the witches, praising the ones who worked well, and punishing those who didn't. Lastly, the gentlemen came to the mistress and asked who the soldier was and why he had come to the hill. The mistress didn't know what to say and remained silent. One of the gentlemen then put a collar around her neck and started beating her with some wire tool, so hard that her flesh started coming loose. After the procedure, both gentlemen and all the witches disappeared, and only the soldier, pestle, and calf were left on the hill (VUBR F1-F646, pp. 242-243).

This legend provides a comprehensive account of the events that occurred at the witches' sabbath, while also introducing a recurring folkloric theme from Lithuanian witch legends. This typically involves a male bystander, living at the same house as the witch (usually a farmhand or a servant). This individual witnesses a witch (his female mistress, the wife of the landlord, etc.) making a magical substance that enables her to fly or even teleport herself to the place of the sabbath. The most frequently referenced substance in folktales is an ointment or

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mash, mentioned in 25 instances. Rye and buckwheat play a significant role in its preparation. In the majority of these legends, the witch applies the substance to her armpits, nose, ears, or eyes and then vanishes, either through the chimney or the window, or simply vanishes into the air. The most common means of transportation that witches use to get to the sabbath are a broom (8 legends), a beehive (6 legends), also a mortar and pestle, a sauna whisk, and a tree trunk are mentioned.

The narrative typically continues with the farmhand (or a servant, a child) mimicking the actions of a witch by applying the same magical substance to himself, which transports him to the place of the witches' sabbath. In the majority of the folk legends examined in my research, the farmhand ties himself to a heavy object (usually a big pestle), but this doesn't prevent him from arriving at the witches' meeting place. In certain instances, he collides with the chimney, roof, or treetops during his flight. At the meeting, the servant recognizes his female mistress among the other witches, and she often warns him to not speak about this to anyone. This folk legend type exhibits a range of variations of its finale. The most prevalent one involves the servant inscribing or uttering some religious Christian phrase, which culminates in the disappearance of the entire sabbath event:

> Some force took him to Šatrija Hill. There he saw his mistress Daubrienė with a girl among the other guests. Daubrienė told him that now he had to join the sorcerers' society, and the farmhand agreed. But instead of the Devil's name, he wrote down the name of Jesus Christ in the book. Immediately the palace collapsed, the witches and sorcerers disappeared, and only the farmhand with the book remained (LTR 2273/2).

In folk legends, Christian symbols and practices, such as crosses, holy water, prayers, and a recitation of names from the Bible, including Jesus Christ and other biblical figures, are often employed as a way to ward off malevolent entities, including devils, witches, or sorcerers. Two additional texts about the witches' sabbath include a similar narrative to the one quoted above, where the servant is instructed to inscribe his name in a book and pledge his allegiance to the devil. However, he decides to put a holy name instead and everything disappears. Other examples include phrases such as "for the love of God" (Basanavičius 1997:369), "oh, Holy Virgin" (LTR 4056/36) and similar expressions. Another, more severe conclusion to this narrative involves the punishment of witches upon their return home. The following day, the man who witnessed the sabbath informs his lord, who subsequently beats his wife (LTR 865/135; 1426/4), throws her out of the house (LTR 935/11), or even executes her. The latter conclusion of the legend resembles witch trials, which frequently includ-

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ed the burning of the accused witches (LTR 898/122; 1172/5; 1678/14).

Most of the Lithuanian folk legend types examined in this study bear notable similarities, albeit with distinctive details, to legends from Scandinavian and Baltic countries (cf. Christiansen 1958; Jauhiainen 1998; Klintberg 2010; Laime 2024). Lithuanian folk legends about the witches' sabbath fall under the two migratory tale variants distinguished by Reidar Th. Christiansen: variant 3045 ("Following the Witch") and variant 3050 ("Witches' Sabbath). The latter, according to Christiansen, is generally told as personal experiences rather than epic legends (Christiansen 1958:48). In other words, these texts should be comprehended as memorates. According to Lauri Honko, "through them [memorates] we grasp the living essence of folk belief, the supernatural experiences of the people. Belief in the existence of spirits is founded not upon loose speculation, but upon concrete, personal experiences, the reality of which is reinforced by sensory perceptions" (Hakamies & Honko 2013:139). The fact that the majority of folk texts regarding the witches sabbath are presented as memorates shows how these narratives are manifested in folk belief. This representation of witchcraft and, more broadly, magical folklore can be traced back to the processes of the early modern period, particularly witch-hunting, which significantly influenced the perception of witches and carried this perception to modern-day folklore. The influence of witch-hunting on witch-related folklore necessitates a brief discussion of witchcraft case trials as an additional context for the case of the witches' sabbath.

Witchcraft Court Cases

Witch-hunting and its trials in eastern Europe emerged later than in other regions on the continent, during the sixteenth century, and persisted throughout the eighteenth century. The earliest documented instance of a witch trial in Lithuania dates to 1552. However, historians argue that similar phenomena must have happened earlier as well, even before the Reformation (Jablonskis & Jasas 1987; Jasas & Vėlius 2001). From 1569 to 1795 the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was in the federative union with the Kingdom of Poland, thus forming the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In contrast to Poland, however, where the Inquisition had been active since the thirteenth century, there was no established Inquisition in Lithuania. This fact, coupled with lack of involvement from the Church in investigating and convicting witches, resulted in a scenario where all witch trials until the eighteenth century landed in the hands of secular courts. These courts included castle courts for cases where the accusant

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was from the nobility, peasants' cooperative courts for villagers, and estate courts handled the trials for the serfs (Zujienė 2015). It was not until the early eighteenth century that the church and state began to regulate witch trials. However, smaller local courts, operating under the influence of estate lords, continued to accuse people of witchcraft until 1776, when the higher authority court in Warsaw finally forbade the persecution of individuals for witchcraft and sorcery in Poland and Lithuania (Beresnevičius & Čaplinksas 2001:571; Zujienė 2015:95).

Witch trial documents in Lithuania remain an under-researched area, with a significant portion of trial records and associated documents either lost or still undiscovered (Ragauskas 2019:211). However, it is important to note that the scale of witch trials in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was significantly smaller than those in Central Europe. A study of the trial records reveals that approximately 400 individuals were accused of witchcraft during the time of the witch trials, of which only 20 per cent received a death sentence and another 14 per cent were completely acquitted (Zujienė 2015). During these trials, both men and women were accused of using magic to cause harm to others in various ways or of desecrating holy artefacts. Because the trials were left to the jurisdiction of secular courts, the accusation of a person often became a way to deal with personal issues and enemies. The majority of witch trials were initiated by noblemen or even by the villagers being the accusants, while the church and its clergy were not involved in the process.

A notable aspect of the witchcraft trial case files is the incorporation of folkloric motives from folk legends into the confessions of alleged witches and sorcerers. This phenomenon has been observed in other countries as well, where folk narratives and practices that were prohibited by the church intertwined together in the testimonies and confessions during these trials (cf. Klintberg 2010; Laime 2024). A significant number of defendants, often subjected to torture, not only admitted to using spells or incantations to cause harm, but also claimed to have been taught by the Devil and to have worked for him. This narrative of alleged witches collaborating with the Devil became more prevalent in eighteenth-century trials (Zujienė 2015).

Given the relatively late conclusion of witch trials in Lithuania, we can see narratives from the same folk legend types that were recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries being employed as accusations, testimonies, or, most frequently, as confessions in the trials. This phenomenon demonstrates not only the influence of early modern demonology to subsequent folkloric motifs, but also suggests that certain characteristics of the folkloric witch may have originated from the witch as a pre-Christian mythological being. According to the Lithuanian folklorist Norbertas Vė-

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lius, the documents of Lithuanian witch trials reveal how folklore, Christian beliefs, and remnants of pre-Christian mythology are mixed with the European view of witches, as well as with popular literature of the time, such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Jasas & Vėlius 2003:429). Vėlius, as well as other scholars specializing in Lithuanian mythology, posits that the depiction of the witch in these trial documents includes many features of the pre-Christian priest or even a goddess *Ragana*, encompassing remnants of practices, incantations, etc. This perspective is further concluded by Goodare, who, after comparing witch-hunt trial testimonies from different European countries, argues that certain concepts pertaining to the witches' sabbath have been assimilated by demonologists from folklore (Goodare 2016:137).

Naturally, participation in the witches' sabbath became one of the most prominent crimes that alleged witches confessed to. Vėlius argues that this narrative was more influenced by the literature and modern popular beliefs about witches than by the witch as a mythological being (Jasas & Vėlius 2003). Similar observations have been made by European researchers as well; for example, Goodare states, while speaking about the development of the witch-hunt ideology in the late sixteenth century, that

> The debate about witches' flight fed into the next phase of demonological development, in which the focus was on the witches' sabbat. This made sense, since flying witches were clearly going somewhere. Their destination, it could now be seen, was the place where they gathered to worship the Devil, so it was important to establish more about this (Goodare 2016:73).

The Lithuanian historian Aivas Ragauskas conducted research on sixteen witch trial cases from 1641–1746, in which the phenomenon of flying witches was documented (Ragauskas 2019). According to this research, confessions often incorporated elements and narratives from folk legends, with people stating that they were flying to meet their superior (often identified as the Devil) at a specific place (such as Šatrija Hill, among others). Some of these confessions described shapeshifting into crows and other animals. Furthermore, some defendants confessed to using magic ointment, which they rubbed on their armpits in order to be transported to the witches' meeting place. Compared to folk legends recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, witch trials often depict the sabbath in a more detailed way, describing the Devil, feasting, drinking and orgies that allegedly happened on the hill.

Locations cited in the trial documents as places of the witches' sabbath include various swamps, hills, and an old oak. Notably, just as in folk legends, Šatrija Hill emerged as the most prevalent destination described by the accused witches. Šatrija Hill was mentioned in a broad region, ac-

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cording to Ragauskas' study its documented mentions extending up to 64 kilometres away from the hill (Ragauskas 2019:244-246). Ragauskas's research indicates that Šatrija Hill was identified as the place of the witches sabbath as early as 1696. The study also indicates that, although witch trials were held throughout Lithuania, the majority of the cases involving the witches' sabbath were from the western region of the country.

Šatrija Hill

As Lauri Honko has posited, the elements of migratory legends tend to be localized in different settings. This phenomenon is especially evident in the context of historical legends and placelore. For instance, globally known narratives concerning the creation of stones, hills, streams, or lakes must be linked to local landscape features in order to become a part of local tradition. There is a good reason why local legends are often associated with distinctive features of the environment, or can simply catch a person's eye – Honko calls it "milieu dominance" (Hakamies & Honko 2013:173–188). This is very well demonstrated by the legends about the witches' sabbath, which in different countries or regions are always localized at different sites that often are distinguished in the landscape. As previously demonstrated, Šatrija Hill is by far the most prevalent location for the witches' sabbath in Lithuania, as evidenced by its presence in both folklore and witch trial records. In contrast, in Latvia, where the folk legend type of the witches' sabbath has more different variants and features than in Lithuania, the precise location of the sabbath is seldom specified. The only location mentioned repeatedly is *Zilais kalns* (Blue Hill), an undisclosed mythical site that has no connection with the actual landscape (Laime 2024:148). The Latvian *Zilais kalns* resembles folk tradition in Sweden, where the primary location for the witches' sabbath is *Blåkulla*, which also means "Blue Hill". According to Klintberg, *Blåkulla* is above all a mythical place, despite a small number of locations in Sweden being identified as *Blåkulla* in folk legends (Klintberg 2010:275). In Poland, Ukraine, and other Slavic countries, the place of the sabbath is often called *Lysa Góra*, the "Bald Mountain" (Levack 2016). Conversely, Lithuanian Šatrija Hill is more similar to such places as Heuberg in Germany or Domen in Norway, which are real landscape objects that were identified as the main place for the witches' sabbath in folklore (Goodare 2016:136).

The word *šatrija* in the Lithuanian language translates to "angry, crazy woman who is hard to live with". The examples of the historic usage of such word are limited to western Lithuania (LKŽ: šatrija). As previously

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Figure 2. Šatrija Hill, facing from the south. Photo: Author.

discussed, the name Šatrija Hill was recorded in witchcraft court cases beginning in 1696, suggesting that the name likely was much older. This historical and cultural association with witchcraft made the name of the hill into a common word for a witch-like woman. Also, in folk legends, the name of Šatrija Hill is often thought to have originated from the word *šatra*, defined as "long and thin wooden pole or a branch" (LKŽ: šatra), sometimes used for hitting another person as a physical punishment. In one particular legend, a farmhand, upon arriving at the hill and seeing the sabbath, beats all the witches with a broom (LTR 4727/151).

The Šatrija in question, today better known in Lithuania simply as "Šatrija Hill" (Šatrijos kalnas) in Telšiai County, was historically a hillfort of Žemaitija,[9] featuring featuring a wooden castle on top and an Iron Age settlement encircling the hill. According to archaeologists who have conducted excavations at Šatrija and its environs, the earliest artefacts found at the hillfort are dated to the second to fourth century CE, with the latest ones from the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries (Valatkienė 1986; Karalienė 2010; Daubaras 2013). The majority of the archaeological findings are typical of Iron Age hillfort settlements in Lithuania, including iron tools, brass jewellery (bracelets, brooches, chains), and ceramics. Excavations at Šatrija were infrequent, primarily conducted in areas of future pathways and stairs, and we still lack a comprehensive understanding of Šatrija hillfort in pre-Christian times. A very broad chronological timeline, spanning over one thousand years, offers limited insight into the site's actual prehistoric development. However, the fact that Šatrija was a hillfort indicates the first stage of its development as a significant element in the landscape.

In addition to its territorial significance, Šatrija Hill is believed to be

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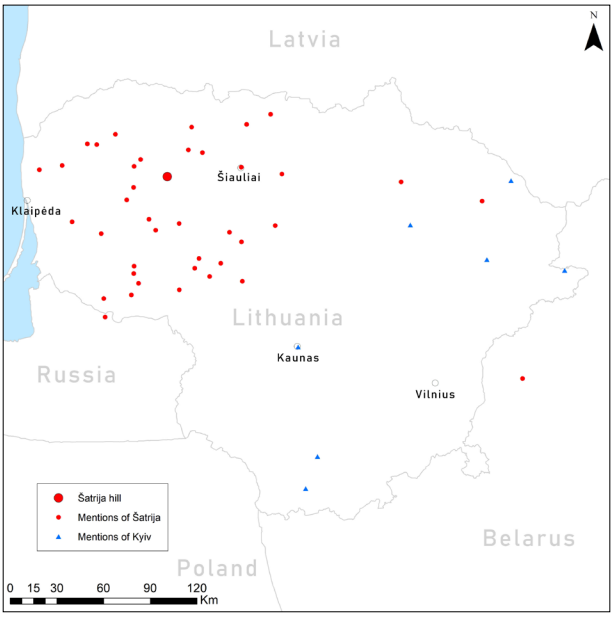

Figure 3. Map of locations where folk legends concerning Šatrija Hill and Kyiv were recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Map: Author.

one of the most important pre-Christian sacred sites in Žemaitija (Vaitkevičius 1998:324–328). This claim is often backed by contextual data, including subsequent historical events and nineteenth–twentieth-century folklore. The Christianization of Žemaitija occurred relatively late, at least by European standards, in 1413. One of the earliest Christian churches in Žemaitija was built in the small town of Luokė, a town near Šatrija Hill, around 1421, commissioned by Vytautas Magnus, the Grand Duke of Lithuania (Vaitkevičius 1998: 327). Even more, the very first bishop of Žemaitija resided in Luokė, although it was not the administrative Catholic centre of the region (Valančius 1972:57). During the early stages of Christianization, churches were often built near or even on top of the sacred sites of the pre-Christian religion. This suggests that the town of Luokė and Šatrija Hill were significant components of both Žemaitija's land structure and its sacred landscape.

The significance of Šatrija is further reinforced by folklore tradition. I have already presented all the main narratives about witches and how the sabbath in these legends often takes place at Šatrija Hill. The mapping of those legends pertaining to the witches' sabbath reveals that the majority of these narratives are located in western Lithuania, spanning a wide area. The distance from the village where the legend was recorded to Šatrija Hill is often considerable, in some cases even more than 100 kilometres (Figure 3). However, the folklore of Šatrija Hill is not limited to legends about witches. In the field of Lithuanian placelore, folk legends concerning giants has a particular significance: "The giant lived by the mountain

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and went to Luokė for his mother's funeral. As he walked, his boots filled with soil and he emptied them: one at Girnikai, and the other one near Luokė, which became Šatrija Hill. When he came back, he sat down and wept for so long that he left the lake of Bulėnai there" (LŽV: Girnikai).

Short aetiological legends such as this one, which often explain the origins of various landscape features and how they were created by the giants, are a common feature of Lithuanian folklore. According to another folk legend, recorded in 1938, Šatrija Hill originated as a grave mound for the deceased wife of a giant named Alcis (LTR 1832/312). The same story was also published in 1837 (Jucevičius 1959:566). Other variants concerning giants and Šatrija Hill include the following: one in which a giant, carrying a hat full of soil, is frightened by dogs barking at him, and drops the soil, thus forming a hill (Spudytė 1993:17); and another in which mice are gnawing at a giant's pockets full of soil (Andriusevičius 1970:247). In Lithuanian folklore, giants are often associated with the shaping of the landscape, and the majority of folk legends concerning giants pertain to the creation of hills, lakes, or rivers (Kerbelytė 1970; 2019).

Another notable folk legend type in Lithuanian folklore, often indicating the significance of a place, is about the church inside the hill: "In the old days people told the tale of a church built on top of Šatrija. That church belonged to the Swedes and it went underground. Consequently, on the top of Šatrija Hill nowadays one can see a slight dent" (LTR 1058/179). According to legends, there is a hole on top of Šatrija Hill, through which one can access the church (LMD I 667/1) or hear its bell ringing (LTR 6414/26). Folk legends concerning sunken churches, manors, and even entire towns are common in Lithuanian folklore. These legends typically recount the genesis of a significant landscape object, such as a hillfort, a burial mound, or a lake (Kerbelytė 1970:140–166). The burial of the building is often associated with a religious confrontation (e.g., Christian churches sunken by pagan gods), historical events (e.g., the covering of churches, manors, or castles with soil by the Swedes, as evidenced in the case of Šatrija), or human disobedience to God and subsequent punishment. In folk legends about Šatrija the circumstances of the church disappearing underground are often left unspecified, as is often the case with placelore. However, the fact that this type of folk legend was associated with the hill points to its significance.

I would also like to discuss one more type of folk legend, which is about an entity believed to reside within the hill of Šatrija. According to these legends, the guardian of a treasure is said to reside inside the hill, warning people not to dig there (Spudytė 1994:24). Alternatively, in one legend a child of a local farmer encounters "little devils" who live inside Šatrija (Andriusevičius 1970:248; Spudytė 1994:22). Two folk legends,

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in particular, have garnered significant interest. Those are the stories about a person entering the hill and meeting a girl inside:

> A man named Pašakarnis from Kirkliai was ploughing on the hill of Luokė (Šatrija). He let his horse free for a while and fell asleep. In a dream he saw a maiden asking him to meet her at midnight. In the middle of the night he came to the hill, saw a terrible giant toad coming out, and ran away. As he ran, he heard coins pouring inside the mountain. The maiden then said: I am unhappy that I had to stay here for a hundred years. But after that I will come out together with my child and we will fight all of Russia together (LTR 776/33a).

This text, together with a similar one about a girl inside Šatrija (LTR 783/600), employs a romantic and patriotic narrative. Such legends were particularly common during the period 1918–1939, a time when Lithuania regained independence, and folklore was profoundly influenced by romanticism. In the example above, a man encounters a girl, who, one may assume, represents the country of Lithuania, a nation that had been "sleeping" for hundreds of years and now, following its independence, will strike back against its occupiers. This folk legend resembles another important folk legend type, the one about an army sleeping inside the hill, awaiting the moment they are needed in battle to defend the country (Kerbelytė 1970:166–170). The fact that Šatrija Hill is the subject of such legends demonstrates that in the early twentieth century it was perceived not only as a "witches' hill", but also as a focal point of Lithuanian national identity.

Kyiv and Other Locations

In this final section of my article, I would like to address a few other locations identified in folk legends and witchcraft case files as the sites for witches' sabbath. Before discussing some notable individual cases, it is imperative to acknowledge the city of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. In the first half of the fourteenth century, Kyiv and its surrounding regions were incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, after the conquests of Grand Duke Gediminas and later his son Algirdas. Kyiv remained part of Lithuania and later a part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth until the middle of the seventeenth century, when it was occupied by Russia. These historic ties with Kyiv, along with Kyiv's religious status as one of the main Orthodox cities, most likely influenced its perception in Lithuanian culture, as well as folklore.

The representation of Kyiv in Lithuanian folklore remains a subject that requires further research. However, there is evidence to suggest that it was

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regarded as the foremost foreign city associated with magic, akin to the role played by Wittenberg in the folklore of Central and Northern Europe. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Wittenberg was depicted as the hub of magic teaching, at first by being associated with Faust and the subsequent German grimoire tradition, while later Wittenberg was often identified as the place where the alleged lost *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* are kept (Davies 2009:119). Wittenberg's prominence as the place for sorcerers' training in magic is also notable in Norwegian folklore, as well as in the printed grimoires (Ohrvik 2021:120–122). A brief review of broader Lithuanian folklore related to witchcraft and sorcery reveals that Kyiv plays a similar role in Lithuanian folk legends. According to these legends, sorcerers are believed to study at a magic school in Kyiv, and witches and sorcerers are sometimes identified as coming to Lithuania from Kyiv. Some folk legends feature a segment in which the protagonist travels to Kyiv in order either to perform a magical task or to meet someone who knows magic. Finally, according to the research conducted in preparation for this article, no other foreign city is mentioned even once as the place for the witches' sabbath, only Kyiv. Kyiv as the site of the witches' sabbath is frequently mentioned in the folklore of Ukraine, Poland, and other Slavic countries (Kerbelytė 2011:260).

In Lithuanian folk legends, Kyiv is mentioned as a site of the sabbath nine times. In contrast to Šatrija, Kyiv is mentioned in the eastern and southern regions of Lithuania, and not at all in Žemaitija (Figure 2). It is uncertain whether the people in Lithuanian villages who told these legends knew the actual geographical location of Kyiv, or if the city simply became part of the witchcraft folklore tradition. However, they often conveyed the impression of it being a distant land where witches meet: "A place far from Lithuania" (Basanavičius 2003:260); "In the old days, witches flew through the chimney even to the city of Kyiv" (LMD I 660/122); and similar texts. According to one witches' sabbath legend, Kyiv is "the capital of witches and sorcerers" (LTR 374d/2354).

A comprehensive analysis of 99 folk legends revealed that 49 of these texts make reference to Šatrija Hill, while 9 identify Kyiv as the place for the sabbath. The remaining legends describe witches gathering at various unspecified locations, including hills, fields, swamps, lakesides, and riversides. Only in five instances are specific locations mentioned, and just one of these (Skaistakalnis Hill in Panevėžys) can be identified today. This situation further underscores the significance of Šatrija Hill as a focal point for these narratives. As for witchcraft trial cases, the locations mentioned outside Šatrija are all approximate, including a pond in the village of Maželiai and a hill near Šaltuona River (Ragauskas 2019:245–246).

One last thing worth mentioning is that there are other hills in Lithuania that bear the name Šatrija. There are 22 such hills in western and central

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Lithuania (Vaitkevičius 1998:32; Vaitkevičius 2003:44–45). However, none of these hills possesses a similar level of significance as Šatrija Hill near Luokė. The majority of these other hills, also named Šatrija, are currently unlocated, with their existence known only from documentation from the interwar period. Notably, Šatrija Hill in Žemaičių Kalvarija features in local folklore, specifically the legend of witches "sliding down the hill" (Vaitkevičius 1998:269). Another notable Šatrija Hill, located at Paežeriai, is associated with witches' meetings (Vaitkevičius 1998:540). Finally, I may mention two more places, both also located in Žemaitija and linked to the Šatrija of Luokė. The first location is a hill known as Raganos Kuprė ("Witch's Hunch"), situated approximately 35 kilometres south of Šatrija. According to local legend, a witch who resided there used magic ointment to fly to the sabbath at Šatrija Hill (Vaitkevičius 1998:392). The second location is Čerauninkalnis ("Witches' Hill"), approximately 50 kilometres to the west of Šatrija, where, according to folklore, witches would rest while travelling to the sabbath (Vaitkevičius 1998:259–260).

Conclusion

Folk legends concerning witches' sabbaths are profoundly influenced by the demonology and witch trials that characterized the early modern period in Europe. The Lithuanian case is consistent with this broader trend. Witch-hunting was adopted rather late in the Baltics, leading to many similarities to the main themes of other European countries' folklore. The thematic elements of these legends, such as the preparation for the flight (illustrated by the application of magical ointment to specific body parts), the choice of magical transportation (e.g., brooms, beehives, pestles, bewitched animals or even shapeshifted humans), the activities during the sabbath (e.g., devil worship, drinking, dancing), and the prevalent narrative of the farmhand following witches to the sabbath, all bear striking resemblance to broader European folklore. And while it is still important to analyse and compare this material, the most intriguing thing are the features that make the folk legends in question stand out.

A notable aspect of Lithuanian folk legends concerning witches' sabbaths is their profound interconnection with the landscape. Witches attend their meetings at a specific place, and the flight to that place is often a very important part of the narrative, which means that the location has to be remote enough for the characters of the story to fly to it. This is probably why some of the most renowned European locations associated with the witches' sabbath are mythical sites. The villagers who primarily told these stories might have lacked sufficient knowledge of broader geography,

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leaving them unable to incorporate actual places in the narrative. However, Lithuanian folk legends concerning the witches' sabbath are predominantly centred on a single location: Šatrija Hill in western Lithuania.

Šatrija Hill could be perceived as a *re-storied* site, a place whose function and meaning shifted through time. From approximately the second to the thirteenth centuries it was a fortified hillfort with a settlement around it. The earliest testimonies from witchcraft trial cases mentioning Šatrija as the place of the sabbath were recorded in seventeenth century. During witch trials, pagan practices were still widely in use, especially among the villagers, and in many ways a witch represented the opposition between Catholicism and pre-Christian religion. From the early nineteenth century until today, numerous folk legends have been recorded concerning Šatrija. These legends continue the narratives from witches' trials, incorporating new elements, as well as adding a new meaning to the hill with patriotic narratives. We can see from this timeline how different periods of Šatrija's history happened in close succession. This situation facilitated the transition of ideas and meanings, thereby reinforcing the enduring significance of Šatrija. It is worth noting that at some point, at least in folk legends, Šatrija also adopted narratives that are typically associated with important sacred sites of pre-Christian times, such as legends about an underground church or a sleeping army. This reveals another aspect of the same landscape object – Šatrija Hill – and how different meanings often coexist in the same place, making it a multidimensional part of the mental landscape.

Šatrija Hill is the main place for the witches' sabbath in Lithuanian folklore. However, geographical limitations have been observed – the scope of these legends is confined to a radius of approximately 100 kilometres from the hill (with a few exceptions), a phenomenon apparent in witchcraft trial documents as well. According to legends from other regions of Lithuania, witches meet at unidentified hills, bogs, lakesides, or fields, and the few exact locations that are mentioned either in the folk legends or the witch trial records do not seem as prominent. Noteworthy among these locations is Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. It functions as the primary foreign city associated with black magic in Lithuanian folklore, analogous to the role of Wittenberg in the folklore of Western and Northern Europe. Other types of Lithuanian folk legends suggest that Kyiv was believed to contain a school of magic for sorcerers, and in the narrative of the witches' sabbath it acts as the faraway place where witches meet.

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LŽV: *Lietuvos Žemės Vardynas* [Lithuanian Place Name Catalogue], Institute of Lithuanian Language.

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[1] Following international terminology, the term "witches' sabbath" is employed to refer to this folk legend and the phenomenon itself. It should be noted that the word "sabbath" is never mentioned in the legends themselves. In Lithuania, witches attend "meetings", "balls", "parties", or even "conferences".

[2] Ninety-nine texts analysed in this research were recorded in 88 different sources from various parts in Lithuania, including archival files from the Lithuanian Folklore Archive as well as published folklore collections by Jonas Basanavičius. The earliest materials include three Lithuanian Scientific Society (LMD) files compiled between 1874 and 1927, representing some of the first systematic efforts to document Lithuanian folklore. Also, five sources are drawn from Basanavičius' published collections, from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A significant portion of the material (54 Lithuanian Folklore Archive (LTR) files) come from the interwar period (mostly 1927–1939), when folklore collection was organized largely by individuals. Among these, 12 folklore collections were assembled by schoolchildren. From the postwar period (1948–1979), the archive includes 26 files with folk legends about the witches' sabbath, marking a shift toward more professional collection of folklore in Lithuania. Beginning in the early 1960s, professional folklore expeditions became prevalent, with contributions from leading folklorists such as Norbertas Vėlius, Jurgis Dovydaitis, and others. Some of these later files also include material from student ethnographic expeditions, including those organized by the University of Vilnius.

[3] All folk legends cited in the article underwent a preliminary editing process prior to translation, in order to convey their content to the international reader in the clearest manner possible, without compromising on its integrity.

[4] The number following the letters "LTR" (an abbreviation for Lietuvių Tautosakos Rankraštynas, "Lithuanian Folklore Archive") serves the purpose of identifying the specific text within the archive.

[5] A total of 70 folk legends have been identified as being based on this particular narrative. Of these, some possess unique variants of the beginning of the story that are worth mentioning: the magical mash has small black snake-like tongues coming out while the witch makes it (LTR 494/38); the witch bathes in a hot tub and then vanishes (LTR 1744/57); the witch hides wings (the kind of wings left un-specified), brushes with them at her armpits, and flies to the sabbath (LTR 3116/1365); the witch or witches plants buckwheat seeds inside the house, they grow, blossom, ripen and die in a few moments,

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and the witch uses them for the magical ointment (LTR 792/146; 2641/68; 5058/204). [6] Memorates are often classified as a distinct category, rather than as a type of folk legend (e.g. Hakamies & Honko 2013:139). For instance, Klintberg (2010) decided to exclude memorates from his catalogue of Swedish folk legends. However, in Lithuanian folkloristics, memorates are considered a type of folk legend, that contains elements of personal experience, while exhibiting plot and narrative features derived from folk tradition (Kazlauskienė 2004). The majority of folk legends concerning the witches' sabbath fall into this category. These legends possess the stylistic features of a memorate, yet the plot of these legends is well established and international. Lauri Honko suggests calling this type of legends, which have the features of both memorates and folk legends, "belief legends" (Hakamies & Honko 2013:141). However, in this article I use the term "memorates", aligning with the established Lithuanian tradition. [7] Compared to numbers in Western and Central Europe, where around 90 per cent of the people accused of witchcraft were women, in Lithuania only around 60 per cent were women – a situation similar to Latvia, Estonia, and Finland (Zujienė 2015). [8] It is noteworthy that in Lithuanian witchcraft trial documents, Šatrija hill is occasionally referred to as "Bald Mountain" as well (Ragauskas 2019). This practice likely comes from the influence of Slavic tradition, and rather written down by the person filling the files, and not by the accusants themselves. There is no record of Šatrija being called "Bald Mountain" in folklore. [9] Žemaitija (Samogitia in Latin) is a historical, cultural, and ethnographic region of Lithuania, once part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, boasting unique history, traditions and dialect. During the time when Šatrija functioned as a hillfort, Žemaitija engaged in conflicts not only with the Livonian Order but also with the Duchy of Lithuania.

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Elves in Distress

Icelandic *Huldufólk* Legends in Light of Nineteenth-Century Internal Migration

Joshua Lee

Abstract

The Icelandic *huldufólk* (hidden folk) transitioned from dangerous, unpredictable beings to the pastoral ideal of conservative *Icelandicness* over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Contemporary *huldufólk* legends often feature humans protecting *huldufólk* from construction projects or other dangers threatening local landscapes, or conversely emphasize the revenge sought by *huldufólk* if landscapes are destroyed. I examine two subgenres of Icelandic *huldufólk* legends: *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* (midwife to the fairies), a migratory legend type, and *nauðleitan huldufólks* (hidden folk seeking aid) as classified in the Icelandic folklore database *Sagnagrunnur,* to find forerunners to the aforementioned contemporary legends. Positive interactions within these legends reflect nineteenth-century socioeconomic changes: population growth, internal migration, and the displacement of the rural poor. I contrast these two legend types with a larger corpus of *hefndir huldufólks* (hidden folk's revenge) legends, highlighting how internal Icelandic displacement and close or home settings characterize the positive interaction legends, but not the ones about negative interactions. This difference is gendered, with female storytellers' repertoires proportionally likelier to contain positive interaction legends. In contrast, *hefndir huldufólks* legends negotiate danger within a wilderness landscape disconnected from internal migration, and potential fears surrounding the loss of children in harsh environments rather than economic hardship.

Keywords: Iceland, legends, elves, huldufólk, migration, folklore, agriculture, displacement

Icelandic *huldufólk* (hidden folk) beliefs feature prominently in contemporary Icelandic folklore, international media concerning Iceland, the Ice-

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landic tourism industry, and Icelandic conservation discourse (Markham 1982:2; Lyall 2005:3). These modern legends are usually connected to construction sites and development plans, and scholars have remarked on how elves tend to be emblematic of a conservative *Icelandicness* that resists social change and modernization (Hafstein 2000:95). Actual belief varies and has waned in the twenty-first century: just under half of Icelanders surveyed in 1974 answered that elves were either probable or certain to exist (48%), whilst in 2006 a similar survey found 27% of Icelanders with the same belief, and in 2023 this had dropped to 20.7% (*Icelandic Folk Belief Survey* 2023:75). Contemporary Icelanders employ elf legends as a means to advocate for environmental conservation and to push back against governmental centralization and urbanization, as well as to conserve cultural values (Hall 2014:4). Icelanders cite the need to protect elves' places of habitation, or to avoid elf revenge, and have taken a custodial role towards these supernatural creatures as a proxy for local environmental preservation. This understanding is distant from medieval and early-modern conceptions of *álfar* and *huldufólk,* which depict them as dangerous, unpredictable, and potentially divine or diabolical, beings to be avoided, warded off, or appeased (Gunnell 2017:203). Evidently, a shift has taken place: elves went from being the primary manifestation of the Other in Icelandic folklore to exemplifying the pastoral ideal of the traditional Icelander (Hafstein 2000:89, 98–99).

This article examines positive interactions between Icelanders and *huldufólk* in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century legends. The legends selected for study here are those tagged as *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* (midwife to the elves) and *nauðleitan huldufólks* (hidden folk seeking aid) in the Icelandic folklore database, *Sagnagrunnur*. These 111 legends mirror the modern story pattern of *Icelanders helping elves* and, in examining them, I seek to identify who is telling these more positive elf-related stories, what sort of positive (or negative) interactions are going on in the legends examined, and what meaning(s) contemporary Icelanders found in these stories of in-group and out-group interactions. I then compare these to 204 legends in the extreme negative: *hefndir huldufólks* (hidden folk's revenge), using this contrast to highlight elements of the positive-relation legends.

In his examination of Danish legends, Tangherlini analyses *macro-, meso-*, and *micro-levels* to answer *who* is telling *what* stories, and *why* specifically these stories (1994:36–38). The macroscale concerns historical trends that affect the lives of storytellers: essentially the political, social, and economic context. Tangherlini's mesoscale is the repertoires of a hundred "exceptional" storytellers. The mesoscale can instead be a domain: the narrative structures and limits surrounding a particular area of

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folkloric knowledge (Tangherlini 2018:4–7; cf. Dégh 2001:77–79). The microscale focuses on storytellers' biographies, examining how personal idiosyncrasy and life circumstances might factor into the stories they tell, as well as how they conform to the demographic trends identified in the previous levels (Tangherlini 1994:36–38).

My study adapts this framework to uncover how *huldufólk* legends reflect Icelanders' changing relationships with local landscapes, and how engagement with what I term "positive interaction" or "elves seeking aid" legends may have been gendered. My macroscale is the changing social and economic conditions in Iceland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Due to geographical limitations and the lack of digitized information on informants' biographies, the microscale must be discarded. Instead, two mesoscales are employed. The first is the narrative domain of Icelandic *álfar/huldufólk* legends. The second, more specific mesoscale is my selected corpus of the 111 "elves seeking aid" legends. Trends identified within this lower mesoscale are related back to the macroscale: economic and social changes within Iceland during the nineteenth century. These trends are filtered through the limits of the domain: any specific trends may be representative of narrative convention rather than reactions to macroscale events (on the other hand, the first mesoscale may also reflect on the macroscale). This framework allows an exploration of not only what sort of exchanges happened in these potentially positive interactions between in-group and out-group, but by whom these stories were told, and why. Strategies for navigating supernatural encounters can apply more broadly to macroscale-level social or economic concerns seen through the looking-glass of the *huldufólk* narrative domain.

Iceland in the Late Nineteenth Century

Iceland's nineteenth-century historical conditions provide the macroscale, the larger context within which these *huldufólk* legends were told. Like many nations, Iceland underwent dramatic social upheaval during the nineteenth century. Iceland was under Danish rule and had not been self-governed since 1262. The eighteenth century was catastrophic. Smallpox and other disease outbreaks, famine, and a volcanic eruption reduced the Icelandic population by roughly 10,500 between the years 1783 and 1786, and Iceland did not again reach 50,000 until several decades into the 1800s (Karlsson 2000:177–181; Magnússon 2010:21).

At the onset of the nineteenth century, the country was sparsely populated and reliant on livestock agriculture. Reykjavík, the largest settlement, had a population of 307 in 1801, and most of the population of

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47,000 lived on farms (Karlsson 2000:185). These farms were organized into *hreppar* (sg. *hreppur*), communes of twenty or more farms whose central function was to administer poor relief. The Icelandic societal model required persons to be tied to farms, whether as owner, member of a household, or as a contracted labourer or domestic servant, and this was enforced through laws compelling everyone to have a fixed place of residence, or prove their access to sufficient land to feed a cow or six ewes (Magnússon 2010:22–26; Karlsson 2000:231). This societal model had remained remarkably stable for a millennium. Pastoral farming of sheep and cattle formed the backbone of an agricultural system which, despite relatively low productive output, was extremely labour-intensive (Karlsson 2000:27, 55). Roughly 35–40% of the Icelandic population throughout the nineteenth century were domestic servants or farm-labourers working on a yearly contractual basis. Written sources from early in this period reveal an obsession with food, as hunger always threatened, and although the last famine was in 1803, the population boom of the later nineteenth century meant that access to food remained a concern for a large percentage of the Icelandic population. Women often performed similar work to men on farmsteads, and a series of laws in the latter half of the nineteenth century granted women the right to equal inheritance (1850), the right to personal autonomy at age twenty-five (1861), and the enfranchisement of widows who owned farms in local elections (1882) (Magnússon 2010:22–23, 273–274). This political push towards equality masked gendered realities in farming and fishing workplaces which continued into the twentieth century (cf. Hastrup 1998:153). Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir has demonstrated how women venturing into the wilderness or public sphere were portrayed within folktales as positive, if this was temporary, but as a threat to social order if permanently assuming masculine identities (2021).

The first broad social change had already begun by the nineteenth century. In 1786, to combat famine after a volcanic eruption, the Danish government lifted the Danish Crown's monopoly on trade. Any Danish citizen was then permitted to trade with Iceland, and six coastal harbours were turned into trading towns. In 1854, further limitations on trade were abolished: foreigners were allowed equal trading rights with Danish citizens. This led to an immediate influx of foreign goods, with 30% of imports coming from countries beyond Denmark in 1856 (Magnússon 2010:182, 244). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, trade with Britain grew exponentially, primarily sheep for silver or gold, a rarity in previous Icelandic trade (Karlsson 2000:246; Magnússon 2010:32). Trade in luxury goods also rose dramatically, with imports of tobacco, coffee, sugar, and spirits tripling or more in the century (Karlsson 2000:227).

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The second, greater change was internal. The population gradually rose due to a decline in child mortality, the age of marriage falling, and the subsequent increased birth-rate. By 1855 it had reached 65,000, by 1870, around 70,000. This population increase strained the agricultural system, and people began to establish farms further inland on marginal, less productive land. This expansion went well during a relatively warm period in the 1830s and 1840s. In 1855, an epizootic scab disease spread from English sheep brought to Iceland to improve breeding stock, and in subsequent years the Icelandic flock was reduced by 40%. At the same time, the average temperature dropped by 1.12 degrees (Celsius), and 1859 was the coldest year on record. Many marginal farms failed around this period. Numerous families were driven to poor relief, and the number of paupers more than doubled during the 1850s and 1860s (Magnússon 2010:26–30; Karlsson 2000:224–230).

Poor relief was the responsibility of one's native *hreppur,* a tradition dating back to Commonwealth Iceland. Icelanders could, however, win the right to poor relief in a different *hreppur* by spending ten years residing there. Local authorities resorted to extreme measures to move families on before they reached this point, displacing them from familiar social and physical landscapes, and maintenance of paupers was sometimes auctioned off to the lowest bidder (Magnússon 2010:27; Karlsson 2000:55, 252). There was an intense social stigma attached to being on poor relief, with terms like *sveitalimur* (a term perhaps best translated as 'rural appendage') used derogatorily (Magnússon 2010:27). Despite the legal requirement to be tied to a farm, labourers and poor families migrated to coastal villages, and the fishing industry boomed in the latter half of the century (Karlsson 2000:224–225). These fishing villages were also stigmatized as antisocial places characterized by violence, alienation, and degeneracy (Hastrup 1998:58, 139). Many Icelanders' ties to the landscape, mediated through production of food and previously legally reinforced, were dissolved in practice, if not in law. The population boom combined with the scab epidemic and climate deterioration of the 1850s caused an unprecedented degree of internal migration, as families searched for poor relief, new land to farm, or access to the sea.

This period of displacement, population growth, and change, alongside the increase in trade with new foreign countries (primarily Britain) provides the contextual macroscale for the legends told and collected at the time. Traditional relationships to the land and reliance on land and sea for food production were challenged both via larger-scale imports, and by the local landscape's inability to sate the hunger of a growing population.

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The Narrative Tradition of *Huldufólk*

The domain, or first mesoscale, of this study is the narrative tradition surrounding *huldufólk* legends in Iceland. The terms *huldufólk* and *álfar* ('hidden folk' and 'elves') are used interchangeably throughout this essay, following prominent folklorists such as Jón Árnason and Terry Gunnell, but a recent survey of folk belief demonstrates that although 40.1% of Icelanders see no distinction between the terms, 20.7% do (Icelandic Folk Belief Survey 2023:80–82). The term *huldufólk* may have arisen as a way to avoid saying *álfar,* perhaps for fear of summoning these capricious creatures. The first surviving instance of *huldufólk* is from the rhyming verse *Jarlmanns rímur* (*c*. 1500) (Þorgeirsson 2011:53). The term was frequently used in medieval Icelandic texts alongside the term *áss* or *æsir* ('god', 'gods') and *huldufólk* were possibly worshipped as minor pre-Christian deities tied to the land (Gunnell 2007:120–127). Alaric Hall suggests that *álfr* was another term for *vanr,* a member of the secondary tribe of pagan Scandinavian deities that held associations with nature and fertility (Hall 2007:216). This association was not distinct, and *álfar* seem to have overlapped with all manner of supernatural creatures: dwarves, trolls, and the nebulous *vættir* (Jakobsson 2015:216). Conceptions of *álfar* evolved, and somewhat stabilized, in the following centuries. In fourteenth-century Icelandic romances, they began to take on associations with specific rocks or boulders (tethered as Icelanders were to farms), theft of children, and issues in childbirth: all common themes associated with elves across various folkloric traditions (Gunnell 2007:120). Elves, here, become intimately tied to landscapes in a distinctly local sense. Here, too, they begin to mirror social change: in *Þáttr Þiðranda ok Þórhalls* in GKS 1005 fol. (*Flateyjarbók, c*. 1390), elves are depicted as being forced to move at the onset of conversion (Hafstein 2000:97). Seventeenth-century scholars debated how elves fit into biblical cosmology and proposed alternatively that they were human and spirit hybrids, that they were some kind of evil or demonic spirits, or fallen angels (Gunnell 2017:203–206). At this point, *huldufólk* began to take on the traits common in nineteenth-century folklore: they lived in dwellings much like the Icelanders' own, albeit inside hills or boulders, and they owned livestock and did agricultural labour (Sveinsson 2003:176).

Nineteenth-century depictions of *huldufólk* generally conform to a pattern of being the social Other. They had their own churches, kings, and beautiful clothing, mirroring Icelandic society whilst remaining an outgroup, with whom it was dangerous to interact (Sveinsson 2003:178). They lived in rock formations near farmsteads: stones, hills or cliff-faces, occupying a peripheral place between human abode and wilderness (Ege-

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ler, Jónsdóttir & Jónsson 2024). They were often invisible but could make themselves visible at will (Sveinsson 2003:176). They often communicated to humans through dreams, a nuance characteristic of Icelandic folklore. Positive interactions did occur, but if one refused an elf's hospitality, the elf might take cruel, unpredictable, and potentially long-lasting revenge (Aðalsteinsson 1993:125–130). *Huldufólk* legends included illicit romances between humans and elves, groups of hidden folk engaging in festivities during holidays (typically Christmas Night or New Year's Eve), and elves seeking human aid with childbirth (Aðalsteinsson:123–126). These are far more varied than the modern story pattern previously detailed. Elves also began to feature in the nationalist cultural milieu: Indriði Einarsson's *Nýársnóttin,* written in 1871, featured an *álfkona* protagonist in a newly designed Icelandic "national-costume". Terry Gunnell posits that these theatrical elves had a long-lasting influence on shaping modern conceptions of the *huldufólk* as conservative, nationalist representatives of Icelandicness as a whole, divorced from their local landscape-based context (2012:322).

The second mesoscale is my corpus, derived from the *Sagnagrunnur* database and comprising two parts. First, the motif of *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* ('midwife to the elves', sometimes also termed *álfkona í barnsnauð*, 'elf woman in labour'), indexed as ML 5070 by Reidar Christensen. This is a migratory legend type with variants across northern Europe. There are 61 legends of this type in *Sagnagrunnur,* excluding the four Scottish variants. The second section comprises 50 instances of *nauðleitan huldufólks* (hidden folk seeking aid) legends; a further 34 overlap with *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* and are grouped in that category.

This created a corpus of 111 legends. This analysis was accomplished through use of the text analysis tool *Voyant,* which allows for the rapid identification of quantitative word frequencies (and patterns therein) within my second mesoscale, although manual compilation of inflected forms was needed. This provided a distanced perspective on what Linda Dégh terms the "selection from sets and subsets" of motifs in legend creation (2011:421). *Voyant*, however, cannot identify lexical variation or context. Therefore, I also incorporated close reading of the corpus to identify individual or lexical idiosyncrasies and qualitative information, for example, in the heterogenous rewards received from *huldufólk*. I have included my own count of narrative elements from my reading where appropriate.

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Data from *Sagnagrunnur*	*kona* (woman) - all inflections	*maður* (man) - all inflections	*hún* (she) - all inflections	*hann* (he) - all inflections
Combined corpus 111 legends, 19,485 total words	294	174	1,021	531
ljósmóðir hjá álfum (midwife to the elves) 61 legends, 12,760 total words	198	127	689	383
nauðleitan huldufólks (hidden-folk seeking aid) 50 legends, 6,725 total words	96	47	332	148

Table 1: Gendered signifiers.

An emphasis on female characters is immediately apparent. This is unsurprising for the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* legends but is also true of the *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends. It could be thought that men are instead referred to by profession; however, adding a male-associated occupational term like *bóndi* (farmer, in all inflections) only adds 56 instances, and fails to account for female-associated occupational terms like *húsfreyja* (housewife, 19 instances). The female dominance of these specific legends holds true for their informants. Of the entire legend corpus on *Sagnagrunnur* (11,044), 6,276 have a gendered informant (*heimildamaður*) listed.

Although the numbers are not exact (we lack details for roughly half), this is probably representative, in a loose sense, of Icelandic tradition and shows female informants telling approximately 32% of Icelandic legends, while male informants told 68%. There were more male storytellers overall, but the stories in which *huldufólk* require assistance of some kind were slightly more likely to be told by women, and feature more female characters than male at a rate of roughly two to one. Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir has demonstrated that Icelandic women's repertoires were more likely to contain supernatural encounters and specifically *huldufólk* legends (2023). This trend appears magnified within *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* and *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends. Although rarer than male storytellers overall, women were more likely to have a *huldufólk* legend in their repertoire, and even more likely to have a legend from these two groupings, than men were.

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Data from *Sagnagrunnur*	Total	Male	Female
Legends with gendered *heimildamaður* (informant)	5,937 out of 11,044	4,055 68.3%	1,882 31.7%
Huldufólk-legends with gendered *heimildamaður* (informant)	635 out of 1,002	352 56.4%	272 43.6%
nauðleitan huldufólks legends with gendered *heimildamaður* (informant)	32 out of 50	15 46.9%	17 53.1%
ljósmóðir hjá álfum legends with gendered *heimildamaður* (informant)	30 out of 61	13 43.3%	17 56.7%

Table 2: Informants by gender.

Types of interaction and exchange between *huldufólk* and Icelanders can be understood using Tangherlini's version of Wilhelm Nicolaison's legend structure (1987). Nicolaison's (1987:72) model builds upon the six-part model developed by William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (1967), deeming three narrative elements necessary, *orientation, complicating action* and *result*, whilst *abstract, evaluation* and *coda* remain optional. Tangherlini takes these three necessary elements and adds a fourth element, *strategy,* to better characterize protagonist reactions to the *complicating action* (2018:4–5). In this study, the *orientation* is the macroscale identified above, the threat/disruption aspect of the *complicating action* is the request for aid (and thus extended interaction with an out-group), the *strategy* is either to render or refuse aid, and the *outcome* is whatever reward or repercussion comes from the employment of the strategy (Tangherlini 2018:4–5). In the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* legends, the type of assistance requested is a given, but the type of aid sought in the *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends may also indicate what socio-cultural concerns these stories are alluding to. Additionally, Bo Almqvist has identified two strains of the Icelandic iterations of *ljósmóðir hjá álfum:* "the Reward Redaction" and "the Eye Ointment Redaction," the former referring to tales in which the midwife receives some sort of fantastical reward, the latter where the midwife is given (and then often loses) second-sight (Almqvist 2008:295). These Icelandic legend-characteristics in *l*jósmóðir can be examined alongside the human-elf interactions in *nauðleitan*, as shown in Figure 1.

Almqvist's identification held true to an extent for the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* stories: there were 54 instances of an inflected form of the word *auga,* in 16 of the 61 stories. Almost all (7/8) instances of the word *gull* were from this corpus as well: rewards ranged from golden purses and coins to textiles like silk or velvet to magical items (e.g., sand that turns to gold) (Combined Corpus). Close reading shows five instances where

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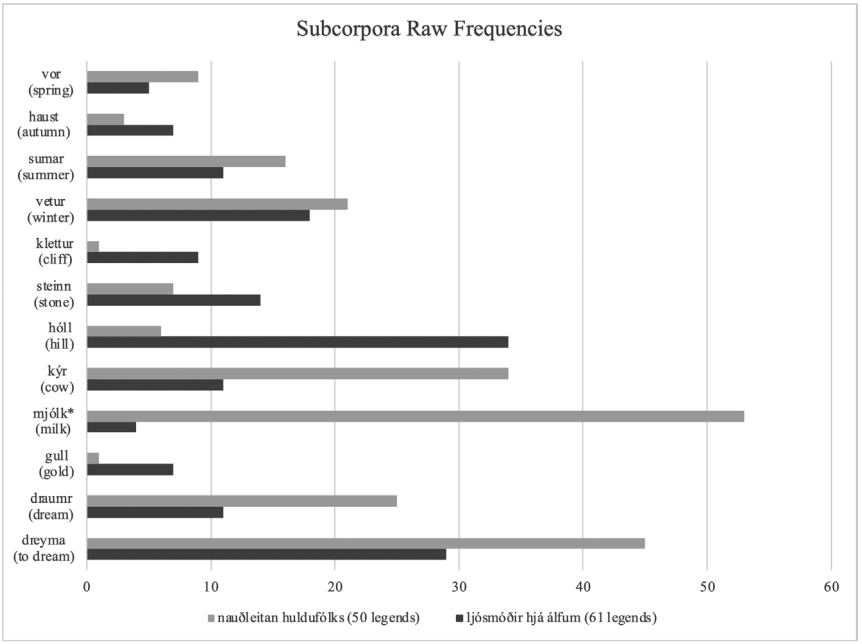

Figure 1.

the reward was that no mother or child would die under the midwife's care again, perhaps reflecting concerns about the high rate of child mortality. Almost a third of children died during their first year between 1815 and 1855 (Karlsson 2000:224). The following legend from Fljótshlíð in southern Iceland is typical of the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* (midwife to the elves) type:

> Þorbjörg Þorláksdóttir was once washing laundry in a stream near the farm Teigur, when an unfamiliar man came up to her and asked her to help his wife who had not been able to give birth. She went with him up the hayfield and saw her surroundings change then, and saw a small turf house, which she had never seen before. She went in with the man and saw a woman there on the floor and two other women standing over her. She laid hands on the woman and the woman immediately gave birth. The man offered her porridge, but she declined the offer. He then accompanied her home and repaid her with a beautiful silk skirt which remained in her family for a long time. He also added that she would be a lucky midwife (Guðni Jónsson 1940–1957, I:72–75).

The exchanges in the 50 *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends are far less fantastical. There are, of course, aspects of exchange that cannot be characterized simply through lexical frequency: in 30 out of the 50 stories, there is some type of request for farm resources: either milk (some form of either milk or milking was mentioned in 22 legends in this section), use of sheep or cattle, or simply food (here I rely on close reading, as *Voyant*

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is unable to identify these *in toto*). In seven instances, the hidden folk perform some type of assistance around the farm in exchange for these farm resources. Temporal markers are also a little more common here, with seasonal terms *sumar,* and *vetur* and *vor* (appearing as *vorið, vortími* and *vorlag*) appearing relatively more frequently (interestingly, the correlation with *haust* is inverted). Term frequency, however, must be combined with an informed *pars pro toto* reading of legends as examples of the subcorpus. A typical legend following this exchange pattern is as follows:

> The storyteller's parents moved from Hlöðuvík to Hælavík in the spring of 1884, with a small livestock herd after many years of hardship. Only a few ewes were brought, but the penned ewes on Strandir usually milked well. One evening it was as if two ewes were milked dry just when they had been herded. That night the housewife dreamed of a woman who said she had milked the ewes because she desperately needed milk for a young child. She hoped that she would not need the milk any longer than half a month. After that time had passed the housewife dreamed about the woman who thanked her and said she would look to repay the couple's farm and gave them blessings. Many things went well in Hælavík thanks to the elf-woman after that (Arngrímur Bjarnason & Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1954–1959, III:106–108).

Several stories have similar gifts of goods, less fantastical than in the *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* stories: a silver spoon and a pound of tobacco, a silver belt (four legends), or a rose-red skirt. These *huldufólk* lack the wealth they are sometimes associated with elsewhere. Some stories included no recompense, whilst some had generalised rewards in terms of "prosperity on the farm forever after".

Almqvist observes that the Icelandic versions of these stories feature less harmful outcomes than in other traditions, with no permanent blindness or other damage befalling the midwives (Almqvist 2008:296–297). In my corpus, the request for aid was refused in three instances, and in one other, the human fulfilling the request told others about it. In all four this led to negative consequences, with livestock or even children dying, alongside a more general curse to live in poverty.

Henning Feilberg notes that the element of dreaming, and the uncertainty as to whether events take place in the waking or dreaming world, is a uniquely Icelandic variation of the "midwife" legend type (1910:71–73). Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir identifies this as particularly prominent within female repertoires (2023:171–173). Discussion of dreaming demonstrates the limitations of Voyant: an inflection of the verb *dreyma* appears 29 times, in 18 of the 61 *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* legends. It appears 45 times, in 31 of the 50 *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends. Secondary indicators of dreaming complicate this slightly: inflections of *vakna* 'awaken' appear more frequently in *ljósmóðir* (16 instances) than *nauðleitan* (7). Closer examination reveals that occasionally a protagonist awakens

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after meeting with a *huldukona* or *huldumaður,* and occasionally before, setting these encounters in the middle of the night but only sometimes within dreams (if one takes the protagonist awakening at face value). Given this ambiguity, the element of dreaming appears more explicit within *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends, but sleep providing an avenue for supernatural interaction is present in both legend types.

The Term-Frequency Inverse-Document-Frequency (TF-IDF) analysis in Figure 2 compares the terms most likely to differentiate these two corpora, that is, which terms are most indicative of that corpus:

This confirms various aspects of the raw frequency analysis: *mjólka* (milk) is integral to non-midwife positive interactions. Eyes, a part of the international midwife-tradition, are strongly indicative of the *ljósmóðir* legends and relatively absent in the *nauðleitan* corpus. The inflected verb *vaknar* here is also of note, as is *askur* (bowl). Current limitations in automatic lemmatization of Icelandic (the term *huldufólk* itself, *inter alia,* is not labelled correctly) make it necessary to present the unlemmatized, inflected word-forms here. Despite these limitations, a lemmatized version provides further insight as shown in Figure 3:

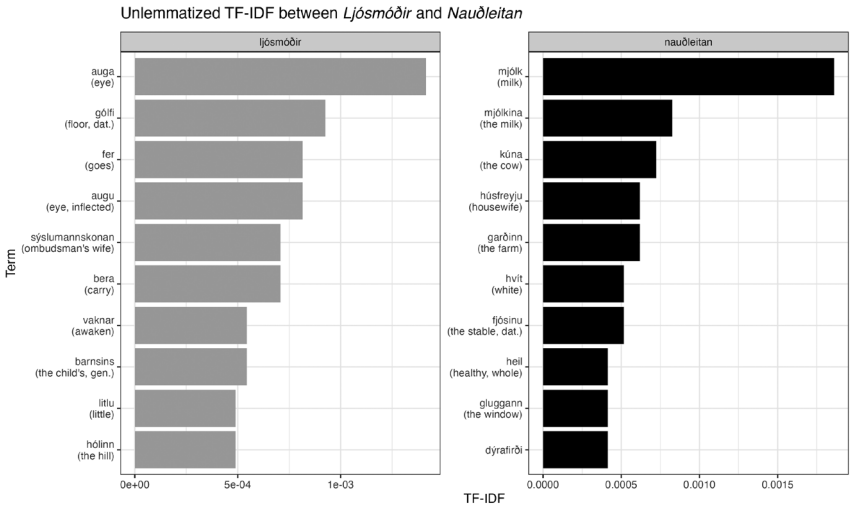

Figure 3.

Almqvist and Kirsi Kanerva have written excellent analyses respectively of the *ljósmóðir* stories and the role of eye damage in early Icelandic literature (Almqvist 2008:273–325; Kanerva 2013:7–36). The fantastical nature of the rewards and the slightly lower frequency of the dreaming motif may indicate a strong international tradition in which the narrative structure was more fixed: local storytellers had fewer reasons and opportunities to localize the narrative to reflect shifting societal concerns. In

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contrast, the requests and rewards of *nauðleitan* would have been commonplace in everyday life, tied to local food production or rooted in local landscape (indeed, the lemmatized TF-IDF indicates that these aid leg-

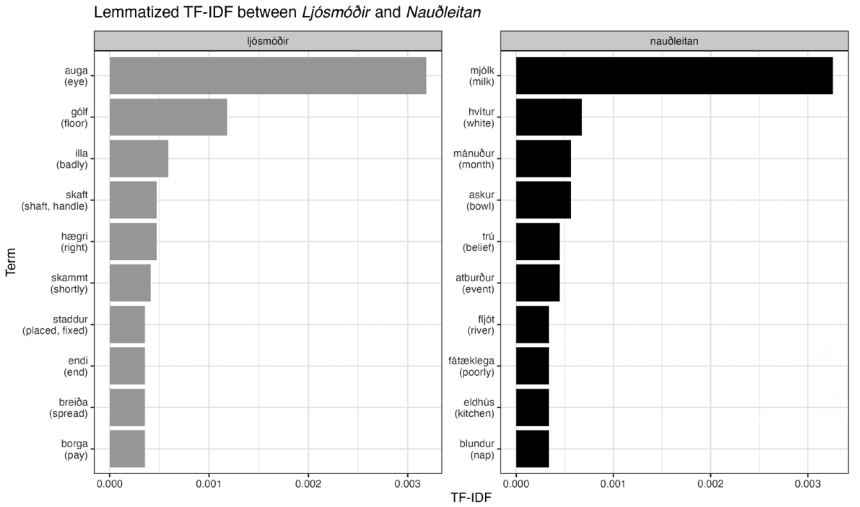

Figure 2.

ends are as strongly correlated with *mjólk* as the midwife legends are with *auga*). Although insecurity about food was by no means new to Iceland in the nineteenth century, the degree of agricultural strain was unprecedented. Even the material rewards are luxury goods of the sort that were now being imported into Iceland: fine cloth, tobacco, silver goods. Along with the relative lack of narrative constraints in comparison to the *ljósmóðir* corpus, this may indicate that these stories better reflect sociocultural anxieties of the time, as they are more grounded in nineteenth-century Icelandic lived experience of food scarcity. The increased emphasis on dreaming, a traditional Icelandic folkloric element, may further indicate the localized nature of these tales when compared to the *ljósmóðir* legends, although this is by a small margin, and may also be related to female storytelling (Magnúsdóttir 2023). This is not to say that the *ljósmóðir* stories lacked sociocultural meaning, nor that they were divorced from local landscapes. There was, after all, a reason why they were repeatedly told, into the twentieth century, and the stories continually feature the "midwife" venturing into the local landscape where the *huldufólk* dwell. Almqvist has explored potential reasons for the proliferation of these stories, highlighting potential anxieties in young women surrounding pregnancy and childbirth, concern over access to skilled midwives in rural communities, and the possible popularity of these legends amongst midwives themselves (Almqvist 2008:310–312). Although child mortal-

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ity declined sharply, anxieties surrounding childbirth remained, allowing for the continued transmission of these tales. The *huldufólk* here are linked to specific societal fears, though less localized to Iceland or to the nineteenth century, distancing them from the evolution of *huldufólk* from foreign Other to distinctly Icelandic. Given Almqvist's prior analysis, the remainder of this essay will focus on *nauðleitan*, although it refers to *ljósmóðir* for additional context.

Positive Interaction Legends

In the *nau*ðleitan legends, the most common pattern can be described as follows: the threat/disruption constitutes a request for either food or the means to create food, from an out-group. This carries with it the double threat of risking interaction with an out-group and the loss of one's own resources. The strategies are either acquiescence or refusal. The outcome for the former is mixed: sometimes there is no repayment, and the status quo is maintained. Sometimes there is some sort of material reward, or help. If the request is refused, misfortune follows, possibly involving the death of livestock or people (the sample size for refusals is very small, however). Such are the acts of a desperate, starving, possibly displaced out-group. The message is apparent: in a time of scarcity, those in need must be helped, despite their not being from one's own local community.

Icelandic society remained quite homogenous in the late nineteenth century, and so the identity of the out-group is not immediately apparent. One obvious possibility is foreign merchants, who began to visit the country in 1854. Some descriptions of the hidden folk, as here from a *ljósmóðir* legend, suggest this: "Here it is significant that hidden folk have connections with other lands and deal with their own kind's merchants who sail between lands and who buy and sell with others even though we cannot see them" (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:16–17). The emphasis on merchants travelling to other lands could reflect the British merchants who came to Iceland in the latter half of the nineteenth century (or the Danish merchants who held exclusive trading rights with Iceland before that). Some of the rewards received, such as the silver spoon and pound of tobacco, are essentially trade goods (Þorsteinn M. Jónsson 1964–1965, V:125–126). But this interpretation fits neither context nor pattern of exchange. Rather, spoon and tobacco are in exchange for fodder for a hidden-woman's livestock for the winter (Þorsteinn M. Jónsson 1964–1965, V:125–126). Nor do legends outside the "request-for-farm-resources" group fit the sort of exchange typical between Icelanders and foreign merchants. In one, Sveinbjörn Jónsson, a farmer from Ysta-Skáli, is asked

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(in a dream) to help an elf-woman ill with dysentery (Þórður Tómasson 1948–1951, III:112–113). In another memorate, the informant Margrét Árnadóttir tells of an ongoing friendship with a hidden-woman in Hreiður with whom she exchanges advice, favours, and coffee (Guðni Jónsson 1940–1957:145–147). These are neighbourly interactions, not the short-term exchange of trade goods.

Furthermore, the similarities between *huldufólk* and Icelanders are emphasized in the legends. In the following passage, the wife of a *sýslumaður* (an ombudsman) has just been granted the ability to see the *álfar*:

> It is said that there were great rocks and big boulders near Burstafell; the sysselman's wife saw now that this was indeed different than it seemed, and these were actually all sorts of dwellings, houses and a big village; it was completely full of people all behaving just like any other people, mowing and raking and tilling hayfields and meadows. It had bulls, sheep and horses and all went inside as other farmhands did, and likewise the people went with other people and did as they saw fit (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:15–16).

The *huldufólk,* although a dangerous out-group, are essentially Icelanders. When interpreted through the context of the macroscale, the hidden people resemble the out-groups from the late nineteenth century that would need farm resources or food, who could repay in the form of labour (or not repay the aid at all), and who are most similar to Icelanders albeit strangers, are either those on poor relief or those migrating internally. These were Icelanders, and so socio-culturally familiar, but strangers to the farm or region, in a nation where everyone was supposed to be tied to a farm. Before the population boom, internal migration was primarily tied to predictable patterns following seasonal work, but population growth jeopardized this predictability (Magnússon 2010:30). A series of governmental petitions and bills from 1859–87 grappled with the strain on the poor relief system, indicating towards contemporary anxieties (Karlsson 2000:230–232). The intense social stigma that accompanied being on poor relief (and thus receiving food/farm resources from others, an extra step away from land and independence) made the destitute an out-group within their own country. The elves in the *nauð*leitan huldufólks legend type are cast as those whose bonds to their local landscapes, seen so prominently in other *huldufólk* legends, have been severed, as they no longer provide sustenance.

This interpretation frames the exchanges in these legends as benevolent, and largely they are. They promote a prosocial and potentially one-sided exchange of resources in a society where a common reaction to the poor was to drive them away from one's *hreppur* (Magnússon 2010:27). Nevertheless, two undercurrents may highlight potential anxieties motivating the exchanges in the *nauðleitan* legends. The first is the negative

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outcomes when the resources are refused. There are only three instances of this within the *nauðleitan* legends, but there are several more within the *ljósmóðir* corpus, and nineteen legends overall overlap with *hefndir huldufólks*. These involve conflict surrounding land or resources: the stories that involve "elf-revenge" may indicate a fear of societal breakdown due to the strain on the traditional agricultural system. Secondly, the seven exchanges in which farm resources are exchanged for labour fold these Icelanders back into the traditional social order as essentially labourers-for-hire, reinforcing the conservative social order that primarily benefitted those 15–20% of Icelandic men who owned at least a small farm of their own (Karlsson 2000:261). The exchange of a set amount of farm resources for a set amount of work mirrors the annual contracts that these labourers were given (Magnússon 2010:23). Despite this, given the alternatives of expulsion or lack of aid, these legends encourage prosocial acceptance of those who had become untethered to their original locality by food-scarcity, bringing them back into communion with the local landscape.

The female-centric aspect of the 111 legends discussed can be partially explained by anxieties surrounding childbirth manifesting in the *ljósmóðir* stories, following Almqvist's rationalization (Almqvist 2008:310–312). That this tendency towards both female characters and female informants holds true for the *nauðleitan* legends (albeit to a slightly lesser extent) indicates that there is something more happening. It may instead have to do with narrative location: these tales involve the *huldufólk* coming to the farmstead rather than a human venturing to a wilderness or partially wild liminal setting, traditionally solely the domain of Icelandic men. Kirsten Hastrup observes that gender continually influenced both Icelandic spatiality and specifically food production, and perhaps in both *ljósmóðir* and *nauðleitan* legends, *huldufólk* venture to female-specific domains (1998:154–160), or, as Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir suggests, already exist there, on the edges of the household (2023:170). Magnúsdóttir further identifies dreams as an especially prominent narrative feature in stories told by women, a factor previously discussed as especially prominent within the *nauðleitan* legends (2023:171). As demonstrated, both *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* and *nauðleitan huldufólks* legends were predominantly told by women. Perhaps a confluence of factors influenced this: narratives centred on the household, reproductive anxiety (for the *ljósmóðir* legends), narratives dealing with the distribution of food (in *nauðleitan huldufólks*), and featuring female supernatural characters, all possible signs of what Magnúsdóttir terms "women's narrative tradition" (2023:173).

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Negative Interaction Legends

These analyses of the positive interaction legends have been tested by comparison to 226 legends in *Sagnagrunnur* tagged *hefndir huldufólks* (hidden folk's revenge). I have excluded two for being prologue-like in nature. There are nineteen that overlap with either *nauðleitan* or *ljósmóðir*, as stories of failed potentially positive interaction. I have separated these into a distinct comparative corpus, resulting in 205 *hefndir* legends as one sub-corpus and 19 overlapping legends as another. When compared under the same categories as Table 1, one finds that there are marked gendered differences in *hefndir* compared to the combined positive-interaction corpus:

Data from *Sagnagrunnur*	*kona* (woman) - all inflections	*maður* (man) - all inflections	*hún* (she) - all inflections	*hann* (he) - all inflections
hefndir huldufólks (hidden-folk's revenges) (205 legends)	300 rel. freq. 9,279	219 rel. freq. 6,773	852 38.6% of sing. pron	1,353 61.4% of sing. pron
Stories that overlap (19 legends)	56 rel. freq. 16,204	40 rel. freq. 11,574	218 63.9% of sing. pron	123 36.1% of sing. pron

Table 3: Gender signifiers in comparative corpus, to be compared with Table 1.

The low frequency of *maður* is because men are often referred to by name (Eyjólfur, Jón á Stapi, etc.) or by profession in this body of legends. The relative prominence of male storytellers in *hefndir* relative to *nauðleitan* and *ljósmóðir* holds true in the (limited) storyteller data:

While indicative rather than precise, these data again suggest that negative-interaction legends (hidden folk's revenge) reflect the informant ratios found in *huldufólk* legends as a whole (see Table 2). Although female informants provide only 31.7% of the total legends on *Sagnagrunnur* (with tagged informants), they provide 43.6% and 43.5% of *huldufólk* legends and *hefndir huldufólks* respectively, indicating that while hidden-folk legends of all sorts were slightly more popular amongst female storytellers, prosocial-interaction legends (or potentially prosocial, in the case of the overlapping legends) were far more popular with them than *hefndir huldufólks* or others.

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Data from *Sagnagrunnur*	Total	Male	Female
hefndir huldufólks (hidden-folk's revenges) excluding overlap	131 out of 204	74 56.5%	57 43.5%
Overlapping legends	8 out of 19	4 50%	4 50%

Table 4: Informants by gender in comparative corpus, to be compared with Table 2.

The content of *hefndir* also seems to differ from that of *ljósmóðir* and *nauðleitan*. There is far less emphasis on resources and resource-management, with terms such as *mjólk* and *kýr* occurring less frequently, indicating that the revenge is not directly aimed at food production. Protagonists appear to be younger (and male): inflections of the terms *piltur* and *drengur* appear far more frequently, and *hefndir* legends emphasize youth through other phrases, for example, *var* á unga aldri ('was of young age') or *var á tólfta árinu* ('was twelve years-old'), and so on (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:78–79; Þorsteinn M. Jónsson 1964–1965, V:92–94).

Terms such as *steinn, klettur,* and *hóll* reflect narrative and location in *hefndir huldufólks,* indicating the common theme of a boy throwing stones at a hidden-folk dwelling, and demonstrating that these tales usually include humans going to *hólar* (hills) which hidden folk live in, rather than the reverse (although in *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* legends, landscape-features are also common, marking where the midwife goes to assist the birth). Other terms, such as *smali* (shepherd), *bóndi* (farmer), and *húsfreyja* (housewife), do not appear to follow a particularly strong pattern:

Due to the large size difference between corpora, considering relative frequency (raw frequency/total word count) may prove useful, as in Figure 4.

One can surmise from this that female storytellers might centre stories closer to the domestic sphere, as hidden folk come to the home to request aid, and that, while prosocial interactions may affect milk or livestock, antisocial interactions seem to affect these less often. Negative-interaction stories seem to have a particular interest in child protagonists, although female storytellers were still more likely to tell *hefndir huldufólks* legends than other, non-*huldufólk*-related legends (cf. Magnúsdóttir 2023). One can also assess this, as in Figure 5, via a lemmatized TF-IDF, to assess the relatively important terms when comparing the combined "aid" legends (*ljósmóðir* and *nauðleitan* together) to *hefndir huldufólks*:

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Term frequency:	Combined corpus (*ljós* + *nauð*); 111 legends 19,485 tw	*hefndir huldufólks*; 205 legends 32,332 tw	*ljósmóðir hjá álfum*; 61 legends 12,760 tw	*nauðleitan huldufólks*; 50 legends 6,725 tw	overlap (*hefndir* plus either *nauð* or *ljós*); 19 legends 3,456 tw
*mjólk** (milk)	57	18	4	53	6
kýr (cow)	45	39	11	34	6
smali (shepherd)	9	21	8	1	5
húsfreyja (housewife)	19	18	4	15	4
bóndi (farmer)	56	95	42	14	14
stúlka (girl)	66	77	54	12	17
piltur (young boy)	8	16	5	3	0
drengur (boy, lad)	13	77	10	3	1
steinn (stone)	20	103	13	7	0
hóll (hill)	40	91	34	6	10
klettur (cliff)	10	38	9	1	2

Table 5: Raw term frequencies across subgroups.

Verb and noun forms indicating aid stand out here, as well as *kaupstaður* and *garður* indicating sites for positive interactions, whilst *grjót, kasta* and *smali* witness the disturbance the (usually young) protagonist of the *hefndir* legends creates within the environment, and *hefna, hefnd,* suggest consequences. This analysis indicates conclusions similar to the more targeted relative word frequencies in Figure 3.

Word tallies can only indicate broad overviews and must be combined with close reading. A typical story from *hefndir* is as follows:

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A small boy on Dyrahólaey was very impudent and full of misbehaviour. The talk was that elves lived in the cliff on the island but the boy did not believe that. He poked at the cliff with a stick and relieved himself over the path on the cliffs where he thought there might be elves underneath. One time he did not come home and not a thread was found after much searching. Yet scraps of his intestines were found across the island. Clairvoyant

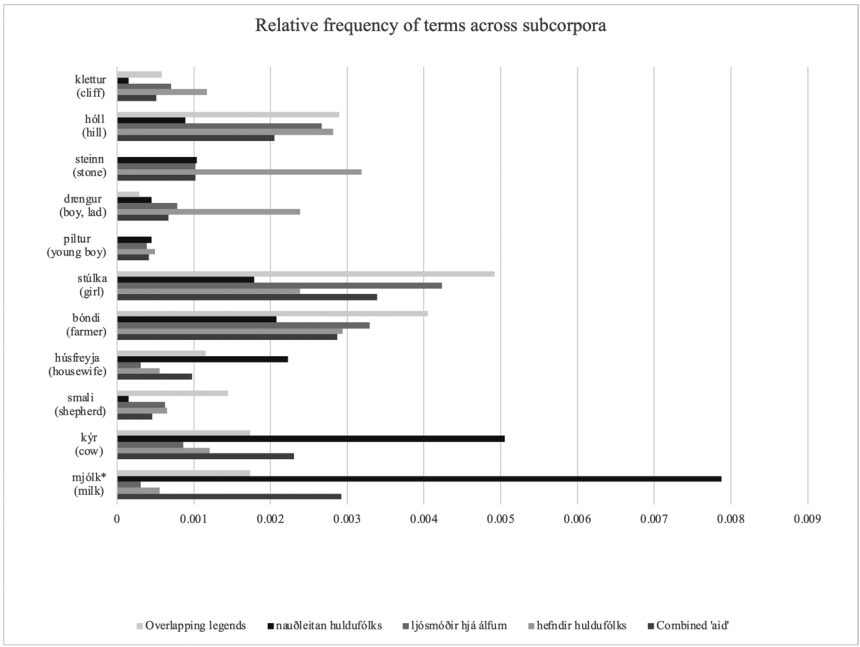

Figure 4.

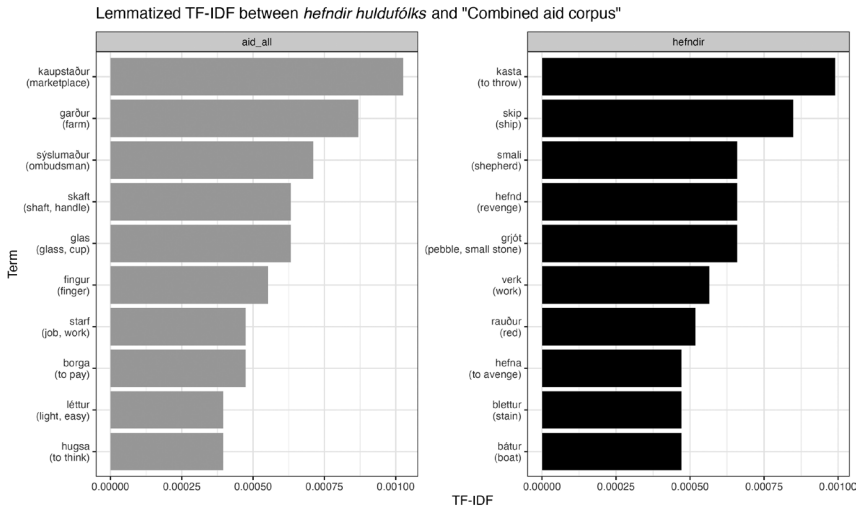

Figure 5.

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> men saw him above on the cliff and sometimes heard his cry on the land up there (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, III:59).

While there are other patterns here, as *hefndir* is quite a broad category, revenge for youthful folly seems to dominate this legend-type:

> There is a stone on Pétursey which folk believed that the hidden folk might be in and parents banned their children from playing near the stone. One boy did not obey and was always playing near the stone. The boy disappeared and could not be found. During the winter the farmer saw his son come into the barn twice in tattered clothes, and during the spring his skeleton was found next to the stone (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, III:60).

Although contemporaneous with the positive interaction legends, the chief concerns appear to be unrelated to food production and population growth, but instead perhaps reflect concerns about child mortality (or the destructive potential of children's naughtiness) and the dangers of the natural landscape. *Hefndir huldufólks* legends take place on the peripheries of farmsteads or just beyond them, further into wilderness landscapes. Child mortality decreased rapidly throughout the course of the nineteenth century, perhaps indicating that these legends originated from an eighteenth-century social context. Children frequently worked and played unsupervised, ranging beyond the farmstead, so perhaps adult audiences continued to find meaning in these legends. They may be didactic, teaching children to heed their parents' warnings and more broadly encouraging obedience to the older generation (or pre-existing customs), a social conservatism somewhat reminiscent of the prosocial legends. These stories involve the child venturing out of the farm landscape into wilder environs: going to where the *huldufólk* are, rather than the inverse, and they discourage disrespect of local landscapes. These differences in location, protagonist, and didactic tone contribute to a different narrative attitude towards hidden folk than that of *nauðleitan huldufólks:* here they are bound to, rather than displaced from, local landscapes, and represent different environmental and developmental fears.

The legends that overlap between *nauðleitan* or *ljósmóðir* and *hefndir huldufólks* have a more similar profile to the former two categories regarding pronoun- and storyteller-gender as well as content keywords, suggesting that they conform more the narrative lens of the prosocial-interaction legends (a prosocial interaction gone wrong) than the purely antisocial *hefndir huldufólks* legends. The *huldufólk* as representative of the internal migration of displaced, poverty-stricken Icelanders in the mid-nineteenth century only holds true for the prosocial stories, and specifically *nauðleitan huldufólks,* and the *huldufólk* remain representative of fears surrounding dangers inherent in landscape, although both repre-

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sent the potential for danger from without the homestead (see aforementioned consequences of not rendering aid to the *huldufólk*).

The *Huldufólk* as Icelandic Out-group

The (relatively small) quantitative analysis facilitated by *Voyant* allowed me to highlight associations with gender, landscape, and recurring features of these legend types (such as milk), while close reading identified narrative trends within *strategy* and *outcome*. These, placed within the larger context of societal change, illuminate nineteenth-century counterparts to twenty-first-century depictions of humans aiding distressed elves. The identification of the *huldufólk* with the rural poor within the *nauðleitan* legends points forward to the twentieth-century view of *álfar* as "like Icelanders from two or three centuries back" (Hall 2014:9; Hafstein 2000:95). Modern *álfar* still subsist on the livestock-herding that dominated the old Icelandic agricultural societal model (Hafstein 2000:95). The negative interactions in *hefndir huldufólks* appear to lack this association between *huldufólk* and rural agriculture, with less emphasis on indicators such as *mjólk* or *kýr* (see Table 5), but place more emphasis on *hólar, steinar,* and other *huldufólk* habitats. They are more directly tied to landscape than to *huldufólk*-human similarities and food production. The negative-interaction stories lack the twentieth- and twenty-first-century identification of *huldufólk* as quintessentially Icelandic, and thus as people to be aided. The negative-interaction stories instead may reflect general anxieties surrounding child mortality or danger associated with wilderness. The legends in my main corpus mirror the modern pattern of Icelanders helping the elves, even if twentieth- and twenty-first-century aid consists of preventing urbanization rather than sharing resources, that is, preventing the separation from a local landscape rather than aiding the victims of prior displacement (Hafstein 2000:99). Valdimar Hafstein sees the dichotomy as reversed: the agents of modernity now represent the Other (2000:101). This need not be the case. As Hafstein himself notes, the rural population went from 87% to 8% of the total during the period 1890–1990 (Hafstein 2000:95; *Hagskinna: Sögulegar hagtölur um Ísland* 1997:Tafla 2.7). The association of the *álfar* with the rural poor identified here may have broadened during the twentieth century to encompass the rural population in its entirety during this urban demographic shift. Rural living became far less common and increasingly both idealized and othered, just as *huldufólk* were to be temporally distanced from modern Icelanders. Hastrup's characterization of the farming community's semantic importance to "Icelandicness", despite the rapid decline of the urban population (1998:46), mirrors Hafstein's observations of the *huldufólk* in the

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contemporary Icelandic cultural consciousness (2000:95). Farming communities were symbolic of quintessential Icelandicness but had become increasingly remote from the everyday life of many Icelanders, just as the elves had become. Further research might examine the 77 legends tagged as *verðlaun huldufólks* (hidden folk's rewards) to see if they conform to the patterns identified in my corpus of positive-interaction legends, as well as involve a more rigorous temporal dimension to assess precisely how these trends evolved over this period.

There is a strong association with both female informants and female characters in the positive-interaction stories, suggesting these stories existed primarily within a female storytelling tradition, but less so in negative-interaction legends such as those of *hefndir huldufólks,* indicating a preference for positive-interactions within female storytelling. The legends in *nauðleitan huldufólks* and *ljósmóðir hjá álfum* had relatively stronger focus on food production, livestock, and childbirth, indicating higher emphasis on these topics, both within female storytelling and specifically within positive-interaction *huldufólk* legends compared to negative-interaction *huldufólk* legends.

The *nauðleitan* legends, and to a lesser extent those of the *ljósmóðir* corpus, thus reflect anxieties surrounding the population boom and resulting displacement within Iceland from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. They, like *huldufólk* legends of the late twentieth century, provided a discursive means to come to terms with (or resist) societal change and navigate changing cultural relationships to landscape. The pattern of exchange across the corpus encourages assisting out-groups, whether with medical needs such as childbirth, or in the sharing of resources in a rural setting where this was crucial to survival. The assistance rendered may have a socially conservative element that reinscribes the old agricultural societal model, re-placing the displaced poor.

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[1] This article grew out of ideas initially developed in PhD coursework at UC Berkeley, where I am working on developing theories of early narrative, emphasizing Old Norse literature and Icelandic folklore. Earlier drafts of this paper have been presented at SASS. I am grateful to Timothy Tangherlini and Kate Heslop for their comments on these earlier drafts, as well to as the referees and editors of Arv for their helpful suggestions. That said, all mistakes and infelicities in the manuscript are my own.

[2] For further information on Sagnagrunnur, see Terry Gunnell's account of the database's early days (2010); or alternatively visit the current iteration of the database at ismus.is/tjodfraedi/sagnir/.

[3] This does not mean that this sort of analysis cannot be done with Icelandic material, and one may look to Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir (2015) and Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir (2021) for such work.

[4] Potential avoidance of the term álfar is akin to the early-modern taboo against speaking the devil's name (cf. Woods 1959:76–77), and the subsequent proliferation of euphemisms for the devil (cf. Valk, 2001:45).

[5] For examples, see Henning Feilberg (1910:69–84).

[6] This corpus is composed of legends from: Árngrímur Fr. Bjarnason (1954; 1959); Bjarni Harðarson (2011); Einar Guðmundsson (1932); Guðni Jónsson (1940–1957); Helgi Guðmundsson and Árngrímur Fr. Bjarnason (1933-1946); Huld: Sagn alþýðlegra fræða íslenzkra, (1935–1936); Ingólfur Jónsson (1974); Jón Árnason (1954–1961); Jón Þorkelsson (1956); Magnús Bjarnason (1950); Oddur Björnsson (1977); Ólafur Davíðsson (1978-1980); Rauðskinna hin nýrri, vol. 1. (1962); Sigfús Sigfússon (1982-1993); Sigurður Nordal and Þórbergur Þórðarson (1962); Torfhildur Þorsteinsdóttir (1962); Þorsteinn Erlingsson (1954); Þorsteinn M. Jónsson (1964–1965); hereafter simply "Combined Corpus".

[7] I have included here raw word counts and total words, so that readers may calculate relative word frequencies should they wish.

[8] It must be noted that, due to Icelandic grammatical structure, this pronoun analysis may be taken as indicative of larger difference, but does not stand alone as evidence of gender

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disparity.

[9] "Þorbjörg Þorláksdóttir var eitt sinn að þvo þvott í læk við bæinn Teig, er til hennar kemur ókunnugur maður og biður hana um að hjálpa konu sinni er ekki gat fætt. Hún fer með honum upp túnið og sér hún þá umhverfið breytast og lítinn torfbæ, sem hún hafði aldrei séð fyrr. Hún gekk inn með manninum og sá þar konu á gólfi og tvær aðrar yfir henni. Hún fór höndum um konuna og fæddi hún þá. Bauð maðurinn henni graut, en þekktist hún ekki boðið. Þá fylgdi hann henni heim og launaði henni með fagurri silkisamfellu sem lengi var til meðal afkomenda hennar. Einnig lagði hann það á, að hún yrði heppin yfirsetukona." All translations are my own.

[10] "Foreldrar sögumanns fluttu frá Hlöðuvík til Hælavíkur vorið 1884 með lítinn bústofn eftir mikil harðindaár. Fært var frá fáeinum ám en kvíaær á Ströndum mjólkuðu venjulega vel. Kvöld eitt var því líkast sem tvær ærnar væru þurr-mjólkaðar þegar þeim var smalað. Um nóttina dreymdi húsmóðurina konu sem sagðist hafa mjólkað ærnar því sig hefði sárvantað mjólk handa ungbarni. Vonaðist hún til að þurfa mjólkina ekki lengur en hálfan mánuð. Að þeim tíma liðnum dreymdi húsfreyju aftur konuna sem þakkaði fyrir og sagðist að launum skyldi líta til með búsmala þeirra hjóna og bað þeim blessunar. Var margt sem vel gekk í Hælavík þakkað álfkonunni eftir þetta."

[11] For example, in "Huldukonan í Miðdal" the protagonist Valgerður awakens as an unknown woman comes into her room, leaving vaknaði ambiguous: has she really awakened (Guðni Jónsson 1940-1957, II:2)?

[12] A TF-IDF (Term Frequency – Inverse Document Frequency) chart takes each word in a text and measures how important each word is to that text, or in this case, body of texts, when compared to another corpus or multiple other corpora: words frequently used in one corpus, but rarely in the other(s) score higher. TF-IDF calculates the word frequency (how common a word is to a single corpus) and multiplies it by the inverse document frequency (how rare a word is across the compared corpora). This is the most common method to parse texts in digital library search engines (Beel et al., 2016).

[13] This choice is not without precedent, see: Sigurður Ingibergur Björnsson, Steingrímur Páll Kárason and Jón Karl Helgason (2021). The word-counts and word-frequencies in Fig. 1, Table 5, and Fig. 4 were lemmatized individually.

[14] For further examination of dreaming in Icelandic folklore, see Gabriel Turville-Petre (1958).

[15] "Hér af er merkjandi að huldufólk hefur aðdrætti frá öðrum löndum og höndlun við síns slektis kaupmenn sem sigla á milli landa og höndla so saman hvörjir við aðra þó við sjáum þá ekki."

[16] "Er svo sagt að nálægt Burstafelli séu klappir miklar og björg stór; sá nú sýslu-mannskonan að þetta var raunar öðruvísi en sýndist og þetta voru í raun allt bæir, hús og þorp stór; var það allt fullt af fólki sem hafði allt atferli sem annað fólk, sló og rakaði og yrkti tún og engjar. Það átti naut, sauði og hesta og allt gekk innan um annan búsmala; og eins gekk fólkið með öðru fólki og vann það sem því sýndist."

[17] Other huldufólk legend types also involve movement through landscapes, for example, in stories of hidden-folk trouping during Christmas or New Year's night. This may have facilitated the identification of huldufólk with migration, but these stories are more closely tied to landscape features, similar to the later discussion of hefndir huldufólks. For an example of this type of legend, see: "Flutningur álfa og helgihald" (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:120).

[18] Both are tagged on Sagnagrunnur, but "Enn af háttum huldufólks" is a prologue-like commentary on huldufólk legends (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, III:6), the other, "Inngangur að 2. grein K. – Álagablettir", is also an inserted prologue (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:463).

[19] Lemmatization is the reduction of each word to its dictionary form. For an explanation of TF-IDF as a methodology, see note 12, and for a discussion of the use of TF-IDF methodol-

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ogies in an Icelandic context, see Sigurður Ingibergur Björns-son, Steingrímur Páll Kárason, and Jón Karl Helgason (2021).

[20] "Smaladrengur í Dyrahólaey var mjög ósvífinn og látæðisfullur. Talið var að álfar byggju í klettum í eynni en strákur var ekki trúaðar á það. Hann pjakkaði með stafnum í klettana, 'brá brókum' yfir gati sem þar var á klettunum af því hann hann hélt að þar væru álfar undir. Eitt skipti kom hann ekki heim og fannst ekki þrátt fyrir mikla leit. Þó fundust úr honum garnirnar í slitrum um eyna. Skyggnir menn sáu til hans yfir holunni og stundum heyrðust óð hans á land upp."

[21] "Í Pétursey er steinn sem fólk trúði að huldufólk væri í og bönnuðu foreldrar börnum sínum að leika sér við steininn. Einn drengur hlýddi þó ekki og var alltaf að leika sér nálægt steininum. Drengurinn hvarf og fannst ekki. Um veturinn sá bóndi son sinn koma inn í fjósið tvisvar sinnum tötralega klæddan og um vorið fannst beinagrind hans hjá steininum."

[22] On the decrease of child mortality, see: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon (2010:30); on eighteenth-century Icelandic mortality rates, see: Gunnar Karlsson (2000:177–181).

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“To Women This Is Not To Be Told”

Secrecy in Contraception and Abortion in late Medieval Scandinavian Medical Texts

Ailie Westbrook

Abstract
In reproductive medicine in late medieval Scandinavia, different kinds of secrecy are a through line. Secrecy can indicate privacy or propriety – elements of the reproductive process that are concealed from view out of shame and social taboo. Secrecy can also indicate the illicit nature of fertility management that is concealed to avoid punishment or stigma. Yet another facet is not secret in this sense of unknown or guarded knowledge, but instead indicates something that is known but ought not to be spoken about openly. Tension between the inaccessibility of reproductive matters to men, and those men’s suspicion of women’s motives, creates an uneasy push and pull between discovering women’s reproductive secrets and keeping them hidden. This dynamic plays out in surviving late medieval medical texts, in which reproductive knowledge and control are assigned to women, but also, paradoxically, concealed from them.

Keywords: Abortion, contraception, medicine, women’s health, secrecy, hidden knowledge

Contraceptives and abortifacients exist in several late medieval medical compendia from Scandinavia, which express varying attitudes towards their use. Some evince sympathy for women who might be afraid to undergo pregnancy and birth, others a suspicion that control over their own reproductive lives might enable women to commit, or conceal, sexual transgression. This anxiety around concealment is one of the common threads in discussions of contraception and abortion in medical texts in this period. Karma Lochrie comments that the power of secrets is not in the actual content of knowledge per se, as it is “a manner of rhetoric, and

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its power lies less in what is kept hidden than in the dynamic between the 'knows' and the 'know-nots'" (Lochrie 2012:93). This dynamic is complex in late medieval Scandinavia, with suspicion of women's motives on the one hand, and the desire to maintain concealment of reproductive matters, which were traditionally within the feminine sphere, on the other, often in tension.

These cultural tensions are especially clear in medieval medical texts, here defined as medieval manuscripts that self-identify as containing healing knowledge, for example through claims that a particular herb or remedy "heals" or "helps" the body, which encode expectations about women's bodies, desires, and practices. Monica Green (2008:11) writes that medical manuscripts are "crafted documents meant to serve specific, historically contingent purposes" and that they should therefore be analysed using the skills we apply to literary documents. Medical manuscripts, as crafted documents, can be understood themselves as a kind of performance. Naomi Preston writes of the culinary and medical compilation of Anne de Croy, that the "collection should not be viewed as a straightforward instruction manual for the preparation of everyday medicines and culinary concoctions, but should be understood as a memorialisation, a performance of knowledge" (Preston 2024:209–10). As documents, they represent the owner and compiler's erudition, access to different forms of knowledge, and authority. Their relationship to actual medical practice, particularly folk medical practice, is murky and difficult to determine. However, even though medical texts cannot be said to accurately represent women's reproductive medicine in this period, the texts are written on a shared cultural understanding of who uses contraceptives and abortifacients, when, and why. The kind of healing performance expected is implied in the text, even if it was not instantiated.

In a discussion of how folklore's concentration on performance can be valuable to medieval studies, Lindow (2018:4) compares manuscripts to "scripts," writing that

> we have the scripts, and sometimes through other documents or archaeology an idea of what the theater was like, but we missed the performance. It is easiest to stick to analysis of the script – in this metaphor the manuscript text – but we owe it to ourselves to get an idea of what people did with the script: how actors might have declaimed the lines and what the interaction with the audiences might have been like.

If we imagine medical texts as a script of healing, we can learn about expectations of the performance. Who the abortionist and patient are presumed to be, when such procedures are imagined to be used, and when they are appropriate.

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There have been several studies on abortion and contraception in medieval and early modern Europe, especially in the legal sphere. Wolfgang Müller (2012), for example, traces the ways the legal codes developed over time in their approach to abortion. Sara M. Butler (2011) discusses "abortion by assault" in late medieval English legal cases. In a medical context, Jennifer Evans (2014), in her study of aphrodisiac medicine, discusses contraception and the role aphrodisiacs play in fertility management. Maeve Callan (2012) also explores the phenomenon of divine abortion and the disappearance of foetuses from the womb in medieval Irish penitentials. In works on medieval Scandinavia, however, the focus of research on medieval women's reproductive health has tended to be on childbirth. There have been studies, for example, on the archaeological evidence for infanticide and death in childbirth (Wicker 2012; Sellevold 1989), descriptions of birth and parental relationships in religious and miracle texts (Cormack 2008; Fröjmark 2012), the role of magic in birth (Mundal & Steinsland 1989), depictions of birth in artworks and ballads (Møller-Christensen 1944), or, as in the case of Grethe Jacobsen's 1984 survey of possible sources for childbirth, all of the above. However, less attention has been paid to women's medicine in the medieval medical texts, perhaps because, as Jacobsen (1984:95) notes,

> With few exceptions the study of gynaecology and obstetrics was in the hands of male thinkers whose ideas and concepts were based on the classical philosophers, not on empirical study. Their writings reveal little about women's physical and social conditions but quite a lot about men's ideas concerning women and reproduction.

For studying the reality of women's reproductive lives, these sources are problematic, however studying the "men's ideas concerning women and reproduction" can still be illuminating because they demonstrate the cultural circumstances in which women pursued fertility management strategies.

In this article, I am not focusing on the moment of abortion or contraceptive use, but on the ways that medical texts contribute to and reflect beliefs and assumptions about fertility management, beliefs that affect men's and women's response to abortion and contraception. Specifically, I will examine how silence, suspicion, and perceptions of secrecy operate in cultural ideas about the prevention and ending of pregnancy.

I begin with the legal context, examining how the law codes can reveal the kinds of taboo that surround contraception and abortion and prevent open discussion of these matters, and then move to discussions of contraception and abortion in late medieval Danish and Swedish medical texts. I draw on three main manuscripts for this discussion: Upps D600, a Danish

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compilation of medical texts and herbals from around 1450; NKS 66 8vo, a manuscript from fourteenth-century Denmark containing a collection of works attributed to Henrik Harpestreng, the famed thirteenth-century doctor; and X 23, a Swedish manuscript containing a translation of *Liber Herbarum*.

Legal Context

Abortion was not specifically prohibited in any of the Swedish, Danish, or Norwegian secular laws until the early modern period, but is discussed in the context of laws on slander or in regulations for religious penance. For example, Anders Suneson, the thirteenth-century Archbishop of Lund, wrote on abortion: "On abortion. If a woman has committed abortion, and it can be proven that the foetus was ensouled, the mother and father shall be punished with the same penance which is the custom for manslaughter" (*Danmarks Riges Breve* 1938:92).

The connection between abortion, at least after the ensoulment of the foetus, and murder or manslaughter should be understood in the context of European legal thought. Müller (2012: 2) comments that the legal theories of Italian jurists such as Azo and Gratian characterized the killing of a foetus in the womb as homicide after the ensoulment of the foetus – which occurred "forty or eighty days into the pregnancy, depending on whether the expected baby was a boy or a girl" (Müller 2012:2). The difference in gender came from Aristotle, who believed that male and female foetuses formed their bodies at different rates. This reasoning was particularly widespread in ecclesiastical sources and "[b]y 1250 it must have been known all across the Latin Christian world, from Portugal and Ireland in the extreme west to Poland and Hungary in the east" (Müller 2012:2). In Sunesen's statute, we can see this idea spread to Scandinavia some decades earlier, at least in learned ecclesiastical circles, likely due to his studies abroad in "theology and law in France, Italy and England" (Murray 2017:99).

Notable in Sunesen's statute is that although he attributes the action of abortion entirely to the woman, he punishes both the mother and the father of the foetus, identified not by their relationship to one another, but their relationship to the child. The implication is that the abortion was partially caused by the actions of the father, perhaps by refusing to take responsibility for his child. The statute, by always imagining some culpability resting with the father of the foetus, assumes that the proximate cause of an abortion is likely to be the difficult and unsupported circumstances of the mother. This, however, does not seem to be typical

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in medieval Scandinavia. Heinonen (2024:10) notes that infanticide and abortion were strongly linked to women in the medieval law, writing that "Since pregnancy, giving birth, and childcare belonged to women's area of life, the crime of killing a child was strongly linked to femininity."

Abortion is also discussed in the first book of *Yngre Västmannalagen* in Chapter 25 (*Vm bælgmorþ*): (1838:109–110): "A woman is accused of intentional abortion. If there are witnesses and certain testimony, whether it is seen on her nipples or [alternatively] women are witnesses to the fact that she was pregnant, she is fined six marks." As was often the case in the medieval period, acquittal or conviction relied on personal reputation. As can be seen in the text, physical evidence is required, but only of the fact of pregnancy. Witnesses comment on her *spinom* or nipples, or bear witness that she was pregnant (*haffwande*). The collection of facts (used to be pregnant; no longer pregnant) and the general view of the community determines whether an abortion occurred, presumably depending on beliefs about the kinds of social circumstances that will result in a woman seeking to terminate her pregnancy.

Crucially, it is women who must bear witness to the pregnancy. It could be the case that the law is referring to proto-midwives (these laws were from before the institution of midwifery) or helping women of the kind that appear in Danish law to examine women claiming to be pregnant after the death of their husband: "If a wife says she is with child after the householder is dead, then she shall keep her property undivided for twenty weeks. Thereafter good women shall see to and decide what the case is" (Tamm & Vogt 2016:244). "Good women" appear in several of the medieval Danish laws to examine women on reproductive matters, suggesting reputable matrons in the community. However, an examination by a "good woman" after an abortion would have been little use in determining whether she had once been pregnant.

It could also be the case that the pregnancy was generally known and observed by the community, yet the law requires witnessing by women. In this case, it may be that even if the same information is available to both men and women, the law assumes special knowledge in women. Alternatively, even if the same information was available to both men and women, the law may instead be reflecting a norm of who was considered qualified to notice a pregnancy. Secret knowledge is then not actually made secret by who knows it, but rather who is allowed to speak it.

Restrictions on speech also feature in the last form of law in which abortion appears: laws against slander. For example, in the *Äldre Västgötalagen* (1919:63), a regional Swedish law from the thirteenth century, the *firnær orþ* (abusive words) are accusations that "a woman has had sex with her father, has aborted her child, or has murdered her child".

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It is notable that, in this case at least, *Äldre Västgötalagen* distinguishes between the killing of a pre- and post-delivery child, although it considers the two equally serious. Mitchell (2011:151) writes that these accusations "conjure in gendered terms the most despised and serious vices the medieval Nordic mind could imagine." Yet, at the same time, silence is to be maintained about these sins, which are a matter for private consultation with priests, not for public discussion. In this case, the inflammatory nature of the accusation and a desire for public peace is the reason for the rule, rather than a general prohibition on speech in this area. Yet prohibitions on speech for reasons of public peace can also apply to more informal social restrictions on speech that cause distress or discomfort.

The lack of speech and secrecy concerning the loss of pregnancies or infants, deliberate or accidental, is a thread that runs through many of the accounts examined in this chapter. This secrecy is double-edged. Harris-Stoerz (2012:266) identifies "a pervasive fear of what evil women might do through their control of the birthing process. Women were portrayed as untrustworthy tricksters, apt to take advantage of any special concessions granted to them, or to falsify pregnancies, or to foist bastard children on their husbands, or even to kill their own children."

Yet fears of sexual transgression such as fornication and especially adultery did not always simply manifest as action against abortion by men. Sara Butler (2011:792) in her study of abortion by assault in late medieval England, points out that in many cases "abortion by assault" seemed to be perpetrated by lovers and even husbands. She asks: "How often did suspicions of a wife's adultery lead a husband to turn to abortion? The medieval world's censorious stance on the female sexual nature must have egged on some husbands' fears when informed about an unexpected pregnancy." It is likely symptomatic of the suspicious attitude of many medical texts and accounts of infanticide that this element of abortion, despite being common in legal records in Europe, does not seem to feature much in the Scandinavian imagined practice of abortion in medical texts.

Substances to decrease desire were often accompanied by an underlying assumption in medical texts that it would be men, not women, who would administer them. Cultural assumptions in medical texts therefore resemble the legal situation, where sexual behaviour – marriage, seduction, sexual assault – is portrayed as being under male control. Miscarriage, abortion, and infanticide, however, occur in a reproductive context where men traditionally have no access. Jacobsen (1984:109) comments that the man was "given control over the social and economic conditions governing reproduction; but he was also excluded from the greater part of the process, especially the culmination, the birth itself." This ambiva-

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lence can be seen clearly in the laws that struggle to maintain a veil over women's matters while simultaneously trying to police them.

This is reflected in medical texts, which, unlike cures aimed at lust, tend to assume that abortifacients are administered by women. Contraception, however, is between the sexual encounter and the reproductive process, and therefore in an ambiguous area of knowledge and control. That ambiguity results in remedies in medical manuscripts that do not necessarily present contraception as knowledge belonging to, or even accessible to, women. This is unlike the presentation of, for example, abortifacients.

At the same time, however, the choice of whether or not to use contraceptives is still not always presented as belonging to men. Choices in women's fertility are therefore understood as more complex in these manuscripts than existing within the spheres of masculine or feminine control. Knowledge about reproductive control is therefore a site of negotiation. There is tension between the desire to shroud the mysteries of women in secrecy for the sake of decency, and the desire to penetrate the secrets of women out of suspicion, for fear that they were misusing their limited control over the reproductive sphere.

Contraception

Prescriptions for both contraception and abortion appear in Danish and Swedish medical manuscripts. In this section, I will analyse two contraceptives, both from the manuscript Upps. D600. One from the text *Liber Herbarum*, and one from an unnamed medical text, which for ease I will refer to as D600 here. Both texts include comments from the writer speculating on the reasons for a woman to consume them. Grethe Jacobsen (1984:92) comments that women were unable to control when they got pregnant in the Middle Ages and "[p]reventive measures were known but neither effective nor safe in this period." While this may have been true in reality – Riddle (1999) has a higher opinion of the efficacy of these kinds of remedies – nonetheless the medical manuscripts themselves evince a belief that contraception can prevent pregnancy. The claim to efficacy may, of course, have been an exaggeration or a convention of the genre to bolster the authority of the text, but the focus of my analysis is not on the use of the remedies themselves, but what the commentary reveals about who was assumed to be using contraception and why.

In *Liber Herbarum*, a herbal treatise attributed to Henrik Harpestreng, a compilation of different medical texts, the eighth virtue of *Galanga* (probably *Alpinia officinarum*) is listed as: "if a woman holds it in her mouth, chewing, and has sex with a man, she will barely be able to con-

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ceive, but to women this is not to be told." The perspective of this cure is clearly masculine. Despite the fact that the contraceptive action is actually performed by the woman in this sexual encounter, it is the man who is presumed to have the knowledge and the ability to direct her to do it. However, unlike the aphrodisiacs in the previous chapter, where the decision to administer cures for lust is assumed without controversy to be in the hands of a male figure, this text demonstrates anxiety about the information getting into women's hands. The assumption seems to be that if women were told how to prevent conception, they would misuse the information. Although many contraceptives also had an anaphrodisiac effect, they may also have had a socially aphrodisiac effect in that they gave women license to have sex without fear of the consequences, undermining social control over sexual behaviour.

Contraceptives and abortifacients were by no means unknown in the medieval period, but some were clearly written about with ambivalence. Monica Green (2008:222) cites an example of a warning that a contraceptive is not to be revealed to all women. She also comments that "contraceptives were eliminated from most of the vernacular translations of the Trotula addressed to women" (Green 2008:177), despite the fact that the knowledge of contraceptives was often attributed to women, specifically sex workers. Nevertheless, Green (1990:60) also claims that "the Constantinian corpus displays no signs of wholesale adaptation to the moral dictates of Catholicism on issues of sexuality or, consequently, of contraception." Efforts at censorship were not universal by any means.

Despite the suspicion of this warning in *Liber Herbarum*, however, D600 (196–230) in the same manuscript presents the fear of the reproductive consequences of sex much more sympathetically: "Those women who do not wish to become with child because they are afraid to die or for other reasons then shall she eat the bone which is in the heart of a hart." The woman is instructed to eat a bone from the heart of a deer and carry the uterus from a goat that has had a kid. Evans (2014:118) includes both harts and goats in a list of animals considered particularly lecherous. In this cure, particularly, the goat is also noted as already proven fertile. It is surprising that these objects should be talismans against conception when each of them has such a clear link to sexual fertility. As Norrman and Haarberg (1980:131–132) comment: "Such is the psychological mechanism at work that it is precisely on the most specific level that variations occur, however strange this seems when it involves diametrical oppositions and inconsistencies."

The last part of the cure at first glance seems more straightforward in its promotion of infertility. Smearing or stepping over women's blood could perhaps have a symbolic emmanogogic function: preventing con-

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ception by provoking menstruation. However, as Cathy McClive (2016) has shown, as least in the early modern period, while the connection between cessation of menstruation and pregnancy was understood, it was not considered absolute proof of pregnancy, since some women could be pregnant and still menstruate, or become pregnant never having menstruated. Evans (2012:4) has also argued that emmenagogues were also considered fertility enhancers. The cure could, however, simulate miscarriage, given the blurred line between contraception and abortifacient especially in a context where quickening is the most reliable method of confirming pregnancy, and abortion before the point of ensoulment was not considered punishable. It may be the case that, rather than writing off the power of the goat uterus as simply having a sexual connotation that might work equally well for fertility and infertility, we should consider the significance of a womb that has once been occupied, now being empty. Perhaps both the latter cures are in fact promoting infertility in the same way. Rather than prevent conception, they prevent a continued pregnancy.

Clearly, there were differences in how different people approached the topic of contraception in this period, but one key element of both texts – the more suspicious and the more sympathetic – is in the tension between the designation of reproductive concerns as women's business that ought to be kept concealed from the public eye, and suspicion of women that leads to the desire to penetrate that secrecy for fear that it is misused. That is, the tension between propriety and suspicion.

In the case of D600, the writer offers one reason that a woman might choose to use contraception – fear of death – but then, evincing little concern, adds "for other reasons" without seeming to be as worried as the writer of *Liber Herbarum* about the appropriateness of those reasons. In *Liber Herbarum*, however, it is clear that the writer is so suspicious of the motives of women that the knowledge of contraception should be kept from them entirely. It suggests that there is no valid reason for a woman to take a contraceptive, or at least, that arming women with that knowledge would be more dangerous than any possible benefit. It seems, then, that *Liber Herbarum* included the cure so that men could control their own fertility, but included the warning to prevent women's control of their own fertility in situations in which it might conflict with their partner's wishes. Alternatively, the property could have been included for no practical reason at all, but simply out of a desire for scholarly completeness, reflecting the late medieval interest in generation (Green 2008:205). Certainly not being allowed to inform a woman why she should have to continually chew galangal during a sexual encounter might have made practical implementation of this cure difficult, perhaps suggesting it was

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never intended for actual use.

This "virtue" is absent in an earlier, related manuscript, *The Danish Herb Book*, which notes that Galanga is good for cold stomachs, increasing lust, and swollen testicles, with no mention of a contraceptive use at all. At first, this suggests that there may be some mediation occurring. Perhaps the writer of *Liber Herbarum* believed that contraceptive information that should be concealed from women could be added safely in Latin, which women were less likely to be able to read than the vernacular. However, the same contraceptive information can be found in a Swedish manuscript that translates and mixes both *Liber Herbarum* and *The Danish Herb Book*, from the manuscript X23, dated to around 1500. This manuscript was first associated with Olaus of Torpa, but shortly after its creation, it was owned by Christina Månsdotter, an aristocratic woman from Sundby, and is now called Christina Månsdotter's Leechbook. This version of *Liber Herbarum* gives a slightly different warning: (The seventh [virtue] is that if a woman has it in her mouth, chewing with wine, and courts with a man at night, she shall scarcely become pregnant. And this shall the man not explain to the woman, but keep it secret" (Klemming 1883:72–73).

While the manuscript does not say anything about its own production, we can see an imagined context of use in the phrasing. Hellwarth (2013:45) argues that women could belong to "textual communities" which allowed for the sharing of texts:

> These communities could, and did, use their shared "literacy" to interpret, perpetuate, and rebel against the cultural structures that defined women and their relationship to God, to men, and to mothering. They did this through dissemination of knowledge, through oral transmission (reading aloud, gossiping, teaching), and through private and public reading.

However, this is not precisely the form of public literacy imagined in the text. Rather, the phrase "women are not to be told" implies a literate man sharing the knowledge in the text orally with a woman. The writer clearly centres a (literate) male figure, who disseminates secret information to women who cannot access it on their own. The context of that dissemination is not clear from the text, but the impersonal language in the Latin contrasts with the warning in the Swedish. Unlike the Latin, the Swedish uses the definite article, meaning that the person who might tell the woman is in fact the same person as the man she "courts with at night". The Latin cure might indicate a textual community centred around a treacherous man, but the Swedish cure clearly identifies the sexual context in which it expects men to communicate this contraceptive to women.

Although *Liber Herbarum* and this Swedish translation seem to imagine

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this knowledge spreading to women through men, at least for the Swedish translation, we have evidence that this was not the case. The manuscript was known to have been owned by Christina Månsdotter, a (presumably) aristocratic woman from Sundby, who may have been the same Christina Månsdotter who later become a nun in Vadstena and helped to write A 80 (Birgitta Andersdotter's breviarium and prayer book), a book in Swedish and Latin. She was known to have owned the book before 1519, which means that she received the book shortly after its creation. The warning in the Swedish failed to prevent women's access to this information. A man (the scribe) did, in fact, communicate information about contraceptives to a woman. The act of writing the contraceptive in *Liber Herbarum* facilitated the translation of it and allowed a confirmed case of a woman having access to it.

The ease with which the contraceptive ended up in the hands of a woman and the possibly sexual context of imagined use may have created some anxiety in later readers of *Liber Herbarum* about the misuse of the information. The warning on its own, and the possible protection of the Latin language was no longer understood as sufficient, because the explanation of the contraceptive use was crossed out. This section is the only part where some of the text is crossed out. In fact, both sexual uses of Galanga (the other one being an aphrodisiac) were crossed through. This could be understood in two ways: the first is that this was an attempt to prevent this dangerous information from being read; the second is that the crossing out was supposed to indicate disapprobation without actually removing the information. The text is still legible. Adams (2015:192) suggests that a code in a different manuscript, NKS 66 8vo, a version of *The Danish Herb Book*, may also not have been actually intended to conceal the meaning of the sentence. He notes that a key added to the end of the manuscript that lists various gynaecological cures includes a line in code: "A simple key (a = 1, e = 2, i = 3, o = 4, u = 5), is all that is required to decipher the text as 'prouocat foetum', which leaves us wondering whether this is a genuine attempt to disguise the words, or whether the scribe simply could not bring himself to mention induced abortion explicitly."

In both cases, it may be that the point is to make a show of concealment to indicate that it ought to be concealed, without actually concealing the information.

If we do understand this as an attempt to delete this material, there is yet another possible method of mediation here, representing not just a desire to conceal the information, but anxiety that the methods already employed were not sufficient. This could mean either that it might still be possible for women to access the text, or simply that they thought that any audience for these cures was dangerous. Unlike the exhortation

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not to tell women, however, this method of mediation is not necessarily gendered. The later reader who crossed out this section of the text may have felt not just that it was unsuitable for women's eyes, but also that it was unsuitable for men. This is made more likely by the fact that the sixth virtue of galangal is also crossed out. That property is: "that if someone eats it morning or night and holds it in the mouth when he has sex with a woman, he does not lose his powers and his love will please women greatly." Although this cure does discuss women's sexual enjoyment, its focus is not on female sexual behaviour, but instead on male. The man in the cure is pleasing women in the plural, clearly extramaritally. Unlike the contraceptives and abortifacients in extended versions of the Trotula that Monica Green (2013:222) describes, this property is aimed at improving male sexual performance.

The inclusion of this remedy in the text demonstrates a perspective that may explain the difference between the contraceptive in *Liber Herbarum* and in D600. The contraceptive in D600 appears between cures for a suffocating womb and tapeworms. While the cures in *Liber Herbarum* are focused on masculine enjoyment, the imagined women of D600 are themselves the patients.

Abortion

Texts such as *Liber Herbarum* and D600 demonstrate very different underlying assumptions about the purpose of contraceptives. Neither text, however, includes explicit abortifacient recipes, although they include remedies that may have been understood to provoke miscarriage. Sara Butler (2011:782) acknowledges that many of the cures written down that claimed to aim at curing menstrual irregularities, among other things, likely were responding to a real need, but points out the necessity of understanding that some remedies may have had multiple purposes, and that illicit aims such as abortion may have been understood to result from remedies to purge dead foetuses and cure menstrual irregularities while "masking the intent".

However, even if the texts of Upps. D600 do not include explicit abortifacients, both *The Danish Herb Book* and *The Stone Book* do. *The Danish Herb Book* and *The Stone Book* are two of three texts in the manuscript NKS 66 8vo which were attributed to Henrik Harpestreng. Both texts were marked as being copied by the scribe Knud Jul (Kanutus Yuul), who was associated with the Cistercian monastery in Sorø in the early fourteenth century. This section will focus on two abortifacients in these two texts.

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In *The Stone Book*, a text based on *De lapidibus,* a twelfth-century text by Marbode of Rennes (Bullitta 2017:6, ft. 26), in turn largely based on Damigeron's work on stones (Duffin 2007, 326), we have the following entry on *Orites*:

> Orites is the name of a good stone and it is three-natured. One is black. If it is blended with the oil of olives then it heals stings and bites. The second is green and protects from evil animals and serpents. The third has a colour like iron and is one way smooth and the other sharp. It causes women not to get a child. If it is also hung on a woman who is with child, then she loses the child.

Orites is found in both Marbobe and Damigeron and "is the same as *sideritis* or 'mountain stone' and its qualities are like iron. Possibly it was confused with magnetite or some black ore but the insistence by Damigeron and Pliny that it is round makes identification uncertain" (Riddle 1977:79).

This quality of Orites is found in much the same language in *De lapidibus*: "Wearing this stone a woman will not become pregnant/Or if she is already pregnant, she procures an abortion" (Riddle 1977: 80), except that the directions are reversed. For a contraceptive property, the Latin text directs the reader to hang or suspend the stone, but in the Danish hanging the stone provokes a miscarriage. The difference, if it appeared in earlier versions of the text, may simply be attributed to porous lines between early miscarriage and contraception. The stone is clearly generally anti-fertility, perhaps connected to its efficacy against snakes and snake bites. Mitchell (2019:121) comments that women are often depicted in religious literature as "condemned to nurse serpents in Purgatory/Hell, because they have refused to care for orphans, or, in other instances, their own children" or as "a punishment for lust and debauchery". A woman, through the use of this stone, seems to avoid both caring for her child and, depending on how one views childbirth and motherhood, a punishment for lust and debauchery.

The second abortifacient, this time recorded in *The Danish Herb Book*, is in the entry on *pulegy* (pennyroyal, *Mentha pulegium*): "Women with child eat it often. Then she/it will get a dead child." The she/it could refer to the herb itself or the woman. Both use the *hun* pronoun in Danish. Pulegy has long been known as an effective (and very dangerous) herbal abortifacient, with its use documented even today (Feng et al. 2023:43). Unlike other cures in this text, which offer instructions on how to use the herbs, this entry offers a description of use. It also, unlike abortifacients in other manuscripts, does not pretend to be providing this information for the prevention of miscarriage. It seems that the wording of the cure

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is distancing itself from this practice by describing the use of the herb without actually recommending it. *Pulegy* is also native to Europe and therefore would be relatively accessible, perhaps suggesting widespread use, as implied by the text's use of the word "often." The word "often" also appears in *De viribus herbarum*, one of the sources of the text, but in a slightly different context: "Often this herb if a pregnant person takes it up will miscarry" (Macer Floridus 1506:26). In this case, the action is what "often" results in abortion, not that women often take it to cause an abortion. Given the wide use of *pulegy* throughout history, however, it seems likely that both could have been true. Though the text itself does not explain why women "often" use this herb, reading the medical text in conjunction with other medieval sources demonstrates the expectations of the social circumstances of women seeking abortions. Although in the modern era, abortion is largely understood as the deliberate ending of a pregnancy by the pregnant person, the medieval attitude to pregnancy loss and prevention had porous boundaries where "attempts to kill an unborn baby through medication or mechanical means do not dwell on delivery as a crucial juridical or medical marker" (Müller 2012:168–169). It is therefore useful to turn to two discussions of infanticide.

In Vadstena in 1416, the general suspicion of women's "secret" action was illustrated in a letter from Vadstena Convent to the Bishop of Hammer, asking him to pardon a pilgrim called Ingerid, who was under a five-year penance. The letter explains the circumstances of her penance:

> She claimed to have conceived by her lawful husband, and, before the due time, gave birth to a miscarriage in the forest, which was soon taken away by a fierce bear, following its nature, it buried the remains in a hole which it made further away. For this reason, perhaps, the suspicious rarity of a case of this kind and the defective evidence of the said woman, obliged your reverend fatherly care to impose upon her a five-year penance (*Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 16:71).

From the explanation of the letter, we can see both the circumstances that caused the Bishop to impose the penance in the first place, and also cultural factors that the letter writer thought might persuade him to reconsider.

Müller (2012:222) comments that "Because a woman's ability to hide unwanted offspring increased exponentially if she lived with relatives intent on preserving family honor, judges of the Ius commune were bound to investigate socially marginalized suspects far more often than well-established ones" but adds that the greater frequency of prosecutions of "the unwed and downtrodden" does not necessarily mean that in reality abortion or infanticide was less likely among wealthy married women.

However, as the story of Ingerid's lost child demonstrates, there is a

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cultural perception that women who are married and pregnant by their husband would have no reason to kill their child. This assumption can be seen in reverse in Magnus Eriksson's *Landslag*. In the manuscript B 68, at the beginning of *Högmålsbalken* is an image of a woman stabbing an infant. The infant in the image calls out "Dear mother", but the mother responds, "If I let you live, then I will be called a loose woman." This caption demonstrates the cultural assumption that infanticide is connected to illicit sex. The motive for ending a pregnancy or killing a newborn is to prevent a reputation-damaging act from becoming widely known.

The letter also cites the elements of the story that would be suspicious to ecclesiastical authorities, which are illustrative of beliefs about infanticide in the period. The letter refers to the unusual circumstances and "rarity" of the event, but it also comments on her "defective evidence". That is, presumably, the lack of witnesses. A similar problem with lack of witnesses is detailed in a case that Peter Biller (1986:42) analyses: A woman gives birth alone deliberately, without calling any attendants, so that the birth will not be known and she can act secretly. So unusual and suspect was the idea of giving birth alone that Christian V's law in the early modern period actually ordered that women who give birth in such a manner with miscarriage or stillbirth as the result be charged with abortion or infanticide:

> Some loose women become with child, and with their childbirth in secrecy wilfully evade and do not use the properly orderly aids, who could help her and the foetus in such a case, and the same child disappears, or is unjustifiably born dead, or in other ways destroyed, then she shall be considered as if she had deliberately killed her foetus (*Kong Christian den Femtis Danske Lov*:16).

Notably, however, the law again uses the word "loose". There is an underlying implication, as in the letter about Ingerid's situation, that women who have a reputation for sexual transgression are more vulnerable to accusations of abortion and infanticide.

The fact that being alone without witnesses is a suspicious element in Ingerid's story reveals another facet of the concept of secrecy in the context of reproductive health. Childbirth was not open to men and thus was in some ways not a public event, and therefore facts that are verifiable are important to male adjudicators who could not have been present at the birth. The secrecy of childbirth itself is not penetrated, but the externally visible elements of childbirth, such as who attended, can still be used to police reproductive choices. Likewise the externally visible reputation and social circumstances of women can be used to judge whether or not she is likely to commit abortion or infanticide, possibly offering an expla-

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nation for the variance between texts in the concealment of information on abortion and contraception.

Unlike other texts that discuss the prevention or end of pregnancy, the texts in NKS 66 8vo evince much less concern about the secrecy of the knowledge they contain. Perhaps the context of the manuscript offers some explanation. As the text was copied in a Cistercian monastery, it was unlikely that women or lay men would have had easy access to it. Cistercian monasteries, however, were known to provide health care to lay people. The responsibility to care for the sick and poor and also the institution of the *infirmarium pauperum* was included in the Cistercian statutes and the monastery at Sorø is known to have included two infirmaries (France 1992:227). The medical knowledge in texts like the *Stone Book* and the *Danish Herb Book* was therefore likely not intended for use by the person reading the text, but rather a second person seeking treatment. Although invisible in the text, lay men and women attempting to access knowledge about medicine would necessarily have a layer of mediation between them and the text. The monk copying the text at the monastery may therefore have felt that information about abortion and contraception could be safely included in the texts without fear of misuse. In this case, the texts exist in a restricted sphere. Therefore, although the texts seem to be communicating reproductive information without concealment in the text itself, nevertheless the context of manuscript production means that the information is not actually being communicated openly. The later additions to the manuscript where abortion is mentioned in code may therefore represent a later, more openly accessible, context for the manuscript.

However, this interpretation is undercut by the fact that the Swedish manuscript that combines and translates both *Liber Herbarum* and *The Danish Herb Book* includes the same information about pulegy as *The Danish Herb Book*. The earliest associated person with the manuscript, according to the Kungliga Bibliotek ("Kungliga biblioteket, X 23" 2020), is Olaus of Torpa. Perhaps the original writing of the manuscript did reflect circumstances of restriction, even if that was shortly no longer the case, or perhaps, in some cases, the act of writing rather than speaking imposes a sense of restriction to educated people. Although the Swedish manuscript was clearly not created in a context that prevented women's access to the material, given that Christina Månsdotter acquired it soon after it was made, the wording of the cures in the manuscript suggest that its creator assumed that any readers would be men. The difference in the accessibility of the information is therefore not necessarily just about a lesser anxiety over women's access to knowledge about contraception and abortion but could also have been about the writer's (incorrect) estimation of the likeliness of female readers. Alternatively, just as perspec-

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tives and attitudes towards the reasons for contraceptive use among women vary in their tolerance, perhaps this manuscript represents a greater tolerance for more open speech on abortion.

Conclusion

Secrecy has multiple facets when it comes to pregnancy, either in its prevention or in its loss. Secrecy can indicate privacy or propriety – elements of the reproductive process that are concealed from view out of a sense of social taboo. Secrecy can also indicate the illicit nature of fertility management that is concealed in order to avoid punishment or social stigma. Still another facet is not secret in this sense of unknown or guarded knowledge at all, but instead indicates something that is known but ought not to be spoken about openly.

All of these kinds of secret knowledge interact in pregnancy loss and prevention. Tension between the feminine sphere of women's health that is supposed to be inaccessible to men, and the suspicion of women's motives creates an uneasy push and pull between illuminating women's secrets and keeping them hidden. This push and pull plays out in our surviving medical texts, in which reproductive knowledge and control are both assigned to women, but also, paradoxically, explicitly concealed from them.

The reasons for this suspicion can be seen in the type of women who are imagined to be likely to use contraceptives, abortifacients, to commit infanticide, or even to have a miscarriage. That is, "loose" women, to use the term from the early modern period – unmarried or adulterous women. As can be seen in the history of some of the medical texts, the letter from Vadstena convent, and the infant burials in church walls, where imagined constructions of women and their use of fertility management confront reality, there are often mismatches. Nonetheless, the ways in which contraception and abortion are constructed in medical texts, laws, and other normative texts would have been an important facet of women's access to reproductive health and medical care, and whether punishment followed. The fact that Ingerid did not fit the construction of a woman who would commit infanticide won her the support of a letter from Vadstena convent. Likewise, a woman's standing in the community could insulate or expose her to accusations of abortion or infanticide. Much like the contraceptives and abortifacients in manuscripts, women's reproductive choices are caught between required concealment and transparency.

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[1] "Om abort. Hvis nogen kvinde har frembragt abort, og det vil kunne godtgøres, at fosteret var besjælet, skal moderen og faderen straffes med samme bod, som er sædvanen ved manddrabere."

[2] "Vvites cono bælgmorþ æro til wittne oc full skiæl annatigge synes a spinom hænnar æller oc ær quinna witne þær til at hon war haffwande hæte wiþ marcom sæx."

[3] "kono hauæ at faþur sin ællær strukit hauæ barn sit fra sær ællær hauæ myrt sit barn."

[4] "si mulier eam masticatam in ore tenuierit et cum viro coierit vix concipere po-terit sed mulieribus non est dicendum."

[5] "Hwilken qwinne som ey wil worde meth barn forthi at hwn rædes at døø eller for andre

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sage tha skal hwn edæ thet been som j hior te hiærte ær / ffore t s d om quinne bær hoos sigh kot moder aff geedh ther hawer kydh fangetffore t s d om quinne goor ower andre quinne bloodh eller smør sic ther mæth."

[6] "Siwnde är om quinnan haffuer hona i mwnnenom tuggada mz wiin oc hoffuerar mz manne om nattena hon skal naplika warda haffuande Oc thz skal mannin ey oppebara för quinna wthan wel löna."

[7] "6ta virtus est quod si quis eam de mane vel vespere eam commederit et in ore eam tenuerit quandocunque cum mulier coierit vires suas non perdit et amor eius mulieribus multum placebit."

[8] "Orites hetær en goth . sten . oc ær thrinnækyns . En ær swart . Of han blændæs with oli af oliuæ . tha helær han styng oc byt . Annæn ær grøn . oc gømær fra ondæ diur . oc ormæ . Thæn thrithi hauær lyt sum iærn . oc ær annæn wagh slæt . oc annæn wagh hwas . han gør at konæ fangær æi barn . Warthær han oc . a . thæn konæ hængdthær ær mæth barne . tha tapær hun barnæt."

[9] "Hic facit appensus ne fiat foemina prægnans/Si fuerit prægnans mulier cito fundit abortum."

[10] "Ætær konæ mæth barnæ hænnæ oftæ . tha ma hun fangæ døt barn."

[11] "Sepi hāc herbā si p̄gnās sūat abortit."

[12] "asserebat se de viro suo legitimo concepisse et ante tempus debitum abortiuum in nemore peperisse quem mox ablatum vrsina seuicia sue nature sequens vestigia in fouea quam fecit remocius sepeliuit. Pro quo facto forsitan huiusmodj casus suspiciosa raritas et dicte mulieris probacio defectiua quinquennem sibi peniten-ciam reuerendam paternitatem vestram jniungere coegerunt."

[13] Thank you to my anonymous peer-reviewer, who drew my attention to this image.

[14] "kiara mother"; "vil iak thiit lyff vnna tha kallas iak drauls kona."

[15] "Vorder noget letfærdigt Qvindfolk med Barn, og med sin Barnefødsel i Dølsmaal omgaar, og ikke bruger de ordentlige beskikkede Midler, som hende og Fosteret i saadant Tilfald kunde betiene, og samme Barn borte bliver, eller paaskydis at være døt født, eller i andre Maader forkommet, da skal hun agtis saa som hun sit Foster med Villie hafde ombragt."

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A Nineteenth-Century Doomsday Theatre

Eschatology, Time and Matter in the Scandinavian Countryside

Trym Sundby

Abstract
This article focuses on a report describing what appears to be an "eschatological theatre" that took place in Ål, Hallingdal in 1852, in the midst of a pietist revival. I suggest that the phenomenon expresses a specific understanding of providential history, and a specific understanding of the relationship between time, matter, and salvation. Based on Reinhart Koselleck's temporal-historical framework, the article views it as a shared enactment of the return of Christ. It serves as an example that showcases the complex landscape of temporalities that existed in Norway in the nineteenth century. In taking this perspective, the article suggests that radical religious behaviour in this period can be interpreted not only as negotiations with the secularization process, but as religious practices reflecting the continuity of a Christian providential-historical temporal experience.

Keywords: Eschatology, temporalities, historiography, radical pietism, secularization, visions, nineteenth-century Norway

> In the main parish, it was even worse in many places. There were more gatherings, and more of these people. They would show the people all kinds of things that could be done that they said were evil. Some started dancing, and then they rehearsed doing all kinds of things that characterize or are part of dancing. Some practised all kinds of games like musicians and so on. Others pretended to be drunk. They rehearsed ungodliness like drunkards, making noise and arguing. Others acted out with each other, both as married and unmarried people, in every way that could be imagined. And some were enemies, they fought and argued. In short, anything that could be done, they did it. And when the gatherings were held in the living rooms, then one would go down in the basement to present himself to them as the devil, while one went

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> up to the ceiling beams, presenting himself as our common Creator. This included both sexes. This name stayed with many of the persons some time thereafter, and they took on its appearance to display their vices.

The above excerpt comes from Erik Syvertsen Opheim's "book of events", which describes "memorable" events in Hallingdal, Norway. According to its front page, it was begun in 1862, and restored, on 25 June of the same year. Most of the events he describes are lightning strikes, murders, drownings, and so on. One of them, however, is afforded several pages, and that is the religious awaking that took place in Ål Parish in 1852. Opheim titles his description "A piece about a rage or confusion amongst the people of Ål Parish in the year 1852", which implies a negative bias. Tolleiv Skottebøl, the other main chronicler of the revival, is somewhat more positively inclined. He emphasizes that it provided an alternative to the "rationalist" preaching of the state and that it had a positive effect on drinking and violence. Even if the movement, especially during the summer and autumn of 1852, was "blurry and confused" (Skottebøl 1898:279), it led to an improvement of spiritual life in Ål. He took part in several meetings, providing first-hand accounts, but generally positions himself outside of the movement. He describes attending a meeting led by Heie where she would stay "unconscious" until all the attendees had touched her, but he does not participate, thus taking on the role of an observer (Skottebøl 1898:258, 262–263). Despite his negativity Opheim's descriptions largely align with Skottebøl's and other first-hand accounts, such as the ones provided by Reinton (1969:285–290).

Given his attitude to the revival in general, Opheim's description of the "theatre" should be considered polemical. Unfortunately, it is also the only one that exists of this particular event. There is the possibility that he has misunderstood or exaggerated his observations, but as I will show in the following, his description makes sense in light of the other behaviour displayed by the revivalists, and in particular, the influence of one of the leaders of the movement, Helge Erichsen Hagene. In this wider context the theatre can be seen as an attempt to grapple with issues that were of fundamental importance to them and other pietists: the eschatological consequences of sinful behaviour.

The article considers the theatre in terms of the temporal-historical framework of Reinhart Koselleck. It positions it in his broader framework which posits that a major shift in temporal perceptions occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: from a providential-historical experience of time to a progressive, open-ended view of the future. (Koselleck 1985:277–288). While the revival in Ål sits at the tail end of this process, it does not express a "modern" or progressive view of the future. Instead, it frames historical developments typically associated with secu-

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larization or modernity in terms of providential history. They can therefore be understood as an example which nuances this periodization. While the participants in the revival did object to things they deemed sinful, I suggest that it is valuable to see their behaviour not only as "messaging" to other groups, or as reactions to secularization processes, but as expressions of a providential-historical experience of time. The aim of this article is not to describe the religious awakening in Ål in general terms but to discuss Opheim's description of a unique religious phenomenon as regards what it reveals about the landscape of temporal perceptions that existed in Norway in the nineteenth century. I am as much interested in what the theatre reveals about historical perceptions of time as the opposite. My intent with this article is thus to make a contribution to the understanding of the experiences of ordinary Christian Scandinavians in this period.

The revival in Ål was not entirely out of the ordinary in the religious life in Norway in the mid-nineteenth century. It was a time where short-lived pietist revivalist movements flourished and died out all over Scandinavia. They shared some similarities: they could be more or less antinomian, believing themselves unable to sin as a result of their conversion (Gundersen 2022:76–95; Wejryd 2002; 2017). They sometimes existed in a state of tension with the Lutheran church which they viewed as "rationalistic". In some shape or form, and to some degree, they all challenged its authority, claiming their own right to interpret and profess the holy scriptures. Many wanted a return to a more apostolic, less formalistic Christianity based on scripture (Amundsen 2005:308). In form they often harkened back to – or went beyond – the last great revival instigated by Hans Nielsen Hauge at the turn of the century.

In Ål, it began when a young woman called Kari Pedersdatter Heie (1825–1913) claimed to have been visited by an angel and shown images of the afterlife. She started preaching, sparking a wave of piety within the community. This was a common pattern that instigated many similar revivals in the period (Amundsen 1995; Seland 2011). Heie claimed to have been lifeless for a few hours before suddenly waking up with a calling to spread the gospel. During her "sleep" she saw two groups of people: one following the narrow road to heaven, the other joyfully and proudly walking towards damnation. In her visions of hell, she saw particular punishments corresponding to particular behaviours. Witches, for example, would have their hair and fingernails cut off, before having "the flesh scraped off their entire bodies" and thrown into the fiery pits. Their flesh would then grow out again, continuing an endless cycle of torture (Heie 1898:7). Heie's visions and religious admonishments were published in four editions, the last one as late as 1898. The eschatological overtones of her message are clear from the preface to the book, quoting Acts 2:17: "your young men shall

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see visions, your old men shall dream dreams". The version of this quotation in Heie's book is gender-neutral, stating plainly that "Your elders shall have dreams and your young will see visions" (Heie 1898:1) The quotation serves a dual purpose: it establishes to the reader that we are in the last days, and justifies why an angel would appear to Heie. While her visions were striking in their vivid description of the torments of hell, her religious message was not overtly radical in the sense of straying from the teachings of the Lutheran church. She admonished her followers to go to church, to stop drinking, to stop dancing and playing music, to listen to the priest, and to observe the sabbath from 6 p.m. on Saturday (Heie 1898; Sundby 2022).

During the spring and summer of 1852, people in Ål started to faint, shake, cut off their hair, and toss away their jewellery. The revival soon deviated from Heie's traditional, Lutheran admonishments. Some started acting aggressively, demanding that other people throw away anything shiny, even buttons. This change, described by Skottebøl as the revival taking on the character of "fanaticism" (Skottebøl 1898:279), seems to be related to the arrival of a lay preacher from Valdres, Helge Erichsen Hagene. He came to Ål in the summer of 1852, continuing preaching when Heie stopped that same year. Otherwise, little is known about the connection between Heie and Hagene. Skottebøl describes the movement as being at its peak in the summer of 1852, coinciding with his arrival (Opheim 1862:29; Skottebøl 1892:262, 278). In his own description, Hagene describes the summer of 1852 in glowing terms, as a time of "many distressed hearts and tear-filled eyes under the proclamation of the word of God" (Hagene 1854:1) In Opheim's account, the "uproar" died out when Hagene left the area but flared up again when he came back some time later (Opheim 1862:31). He is also quoted as describing those fainting as being "reborn" (Opheim 1862:29).

Hagene was sometimes joined by another lay preacher, Eivind or Even Størkestad, an elderly man who already lived in the area. Seized by the revival, he also started fainting and having visions. He has not left any written material behind. Skottebøl describes Hagene as the "real leader" of the group and Størkestad as his follower, incapable of saying anything that Hagene had not already "whispered in his ear" (Skottebøl 1892:281, 282; Reinton 1969:287).

Fainting Out of Time

Skottebøl argues that the revival in Ål was wholly unique in his time: "in my view, it has no connection to the Lammers revival, even if it arose at the same time; it is quite local, and curiously, almost completely limited to Aal parish. In my understanding, it has no connection to the earlier Haugian

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movement" (Skottebøl 1892:258). The thing that sets it apart, according to Skottebøl, is how Heie's fainting started spreading to other other parishioners: "they fell down as if unconscious [and] lay quite stiff and outstretched on the floor; if you tried to raise them, it was like raising a man frozen stiff. You could pick them up and carry them wherever you wanted" (Skottebøl 1892:263).

For many of the "awakened" people in Ål, fainting or general loss of bodily functions came to represent having undergone a conversion, a fundamental change representing the presence of God in the heart of the believer (Seland 2016:177). One member of the revival described fainting and losing bodily control as "kicking out their sin", a prerequisite for the arrival of the Holy Spirit (quoted in Reinton 1969:287). In another instance, recounted by an eye-witness, a family member who was not a part of the revival was stopped from intervening in a conversion. An unknown figure described as a "leader" is reported to have stopped the family member, saying: "Do not touch him! […] he is almost saved" (quoted in Reinton 1969:288). This behaviour reflects a general pattern shared by Heie and other visionaries in nineteenth-century Norway, where access to the "spiritual" demands a separation from the "material". As with Heie, this understanding also has a temporal dimension, where matter is related to "history", and the immaterial is related to things that lie outside of "history". Reflecting the etymology of *apocalypse* (to unveil), disconnecting from matter through fainting was seen as giving access to the eschatological insights that could not be attained in the material realm (Nielsen 2009:449).

The end of time, which separates history from the events after the return of Christ, thus separating the eschatological implications of actions in history, *from* history, is what the historian Reinhart Koselleck calls the *eschatological horizon.* According to Koselleck, the expectation of a sudden end to history could have profound effects on what could be expected to happen *within* history (Koselleck 1985:3–39, 99–100, 267–289). Christian providential history considered the past and future in chronological terms. Beginning with creation, it then advanced in a sequence of events with little room for "progress" or "change" in between. Without progress, Koselleck claims, expectations of improvement or change were relegated "to the Hereafter", beyond the eschatological horizon (Koselleck 1985:277–278). Depending on other historical factors and developments, this could lead to an experience of time that was "frozen" or static. Without geology or biology for example, the face of the earth and the shape of the animals were also not expected to change (Toulmin 1967:56, 75; Claydon 2020:6–16).

Norwegians in the nineteenth century must be assumed to have had conflicting experiences of time with varying degrees of belief in the end-

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times, and varying access to knowledge that could break the totalizing experience of providential history (Amundsen & Laugerud 2001:277–321). The revival in Ål, however, was predicated on end-time expectations. In Heie's case, fainting gave her access to a vision of the pits of hell. Some parishioners claimed similar insights, claiming to see who would be damned and who would be saved. For others, it appears to be a prerequisite for going through a conversion. Both cases express the understanding that eschatological consequences of present actions (in history), are fundamentally hidden behind the eschatological horizon (outside of history) and that you had to escape history, to see what lies outside of it. The theatre, I suggest, is connected to this eschatological, future expectation, and the uncertainty that it represents.

Of the performance itself, we know only a few details. We do not know whether attendees had a script, or how the scene played out. We only have the stage setup and a description of some key roles. One played God and another the Devil, others functioned as personifications of sins, their actions presumably leading upwards to salvation or downwards to damnation. It could have functioned as a critique of those outside the movement who did not adhere to its norms, but in Opheim's description it appears to be a communal practice engaged in by those who were already a part of the revival. I suggest that its primary function was to work as a shared enactment of Revelation: the performers communally participated in an eschatological meditation on their own lives and the expected eschatological moral implications of present actions. Even if such theatres were rare – perhaps this was even the only one in Scandinavia – it was not impossible as a form of religious practice relating to current theological debates: the path to and meaning of the conversion. Apart from what is expressed through their bodily behaviour, there are few sources detailing how participants in the revival and theatre thought about these topics. Helge Erichsen Hagene, however, wrote and preached about sin, matter, and eschatology to the "awakened" in Ål,

Travelling Preachers and Pietist Eschatologies

Hagene was born on 2 May 1817, on the farm of Hagene in Valdres, Norway. He was known as an autodidact of many talents, possessing notable rhetorical skills. He could to some degree speak English, German, Dutch, and French, and he had travelled widely (Heggtveit 1905:384). Opheim (1862:28) describes him as "very learned, and possessing great wisdom", but always using "strange words". Skottebøl provides the following description:

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> [He was] knowledgeable and talented […] his speech was formally clear and in this respect he excelled compared to many others of his time: but there was always something somewhat veiled and mystical in his speeches that was hard to grasp. As we now know, he was at that time [during the revival] already familiar with most sects such the Quakers, Baptists, and Methodists (Skottebøl 1892:280).

Spending much of his life as a travelling preacher, he also wrote extensively. In *Bidrag til Hans Nielsen Hauges Minde* (1872), he wrote about the life of that famous preacher, the religious landscape of his time, and his own reactions to Haugian understandings of scripture. He invented his own system for "quick writing", using symbols of his own imagination in *Underretning om Hurtigskrift, eller hvorledes man paa en fort og let Maade kan lære, at skrive med Tegn, istedetfor Ord*. He sometimes functioned as a reporter writing about church meetings, and he wrote several hymns. The scope of his audience is uncertain, but it is interesting to note that some of his hymns were published in South Dakota as late as 1896. He also wrote a short description of the revival in Ål titled *Beretning om en mærkelig Oppvækkelse i en af Norges Fjeldegne* (1854). Most of what is known about Hagene comes from interviews conducted by the late nineteenth-century church historians Anton Christian Bang and H. G Heggtveit, and from his short autobiography, *Kort uddrag af min Levnets Historie* (1845).

"The thoughts of the human heart are evil from youth onwards," writes Hagene, remembering his youth. Despite firm admonishments from God, he "thought too much about the [corporeal] world, and [his] heart pounded for its love". It was not until the age of fourteen that he opened his heart to the Lord and decided to serve him. He notes that already at that point he could feel some of "Christ's love, which in later days had given him the courage to leave behind all that he held dear in this world, so that [he] could do our Fathers will, and save some souls for the Lord" (Hagene 1845:2). He goes on to say that in spite of this, the following twenty years were characterized by a struggle between inner and the outer influences, the temporal and the immaterial, a struggle that could only be resolved through conversion:

> I fought against myself and against sin, but because I did not understand that I had to go into my own heart and provide the space for the Lord to do his work in me, I had no power to move forward, I was often overwhelmed by Sin and forgot the eternal for the sake of the temporal. But the Lord did not forget me but waited patiently for me to go through a complete conversion towards him, letting me stand as an infertile tree in these years, hoping I would eventually bear his fruit (Hagene 1845:2).

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The tensions between these dimensions, the role of the will in moving towards conversion, what makes a conversion "complete", and what is attained through conversion, are the fundamental issues he attempts to resolve through his mystical-tropological theology. These were questions that were also at play in the wider cultural context of his time and are posed again and again in various forms throughout his thinking, writing, and religious practices. He appears to be well read, citing, among others, Jonas Ramus and Johannes Tauler (Hagene 1845:12–16). Despite this, the most important contribution to his theological understanding was most likely *Hans Christophersen Feigum* (1797–1873).

Feigum was a self-proclaimed mystic who ran a theological school from his home in Valdres. His pupils stayed at his house, or reportedly even in nearby caves. He is perhaps best known for having experienced a vision where he saw God in the form of a whale and with the teats of a pig, coming up a nearby waterfall towards Feigum's house. In his vision, The God-Whale provided the Feigianists with spiritual nourishment through his milk, while the Haugians whom Feigum despised were denied access. Soon God had filled up a nearby lake, and eventually he would cover several towns with his presence. Hagene was known as one of Feigum's most active disciples in terms of spreading Feigianism (Bang 1910:472). Feigum's theology was markedly tropological in nature, describing a process whereby the individual could only reach conversion through denial of the physical realm over prolonged periods of time, a process symbolized as the exodus. They did not like the Haugians, who they believed did not place a large enough emphasis on the conversion and salvation, and too much on the value of good works, leading them to practise an externalist form of Christianity. Feigium is quoted in Heggtveit (1912:367–368), describing Haugianism as "loose chalk on the wall". The disagreement with the Haugians stemmed primarily from their differing views about the conversion: how to reach it, and what it meant. This difference ultimately has to do with the debate about the *Order of Salvation*, or *Ordo Saluti.* As pointed out by Gilje (2023:53), Hauge believed that inner piety had to be reflected in human action and placed much importance on the moral responsibility of Christians to do good deeds. Salvation was thus not exclusively the work of God but required action from the individual (Gilje 2023:60). In Koselleckian terms, we could describe this position as one where God works through the will of man to effect some progress or change in the material realm. The Feigianists reversed this order, believing that there was nothing one could do in the physical world, within *history,* to be saved. Unlike Hauge, who understood the material accumulation of wealth as a sign of God's intervention and blessing in the present (Dørum & Sødal 2023), the Feigianists believed any good actions had to

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come as a *result* of a conversion, which required separating oneself from all material values. Interestingly, Hagene's later biography of Hauge is hagiographic in tone. He could have changed his stance on him later in life, but at the time of the revival he preached a Feigianist view where, in the *Ordo Salutis,* salvation came first (Skottebøl 1892:281). Some Feigianists delved into religious perfectionism, claiming they could no longer sin after a thorough conversion. Ole Sørflåten, for example, proclaimed that "I am now so free of sin that for a long time I have not felt the slightest sense of it in my heart, and never again will a bad thought arise there" (quoted in Bang 1912:256). Hagene diverges on this point, emphasizing the road to salvation as a continuous struggle, promoting a life of detachment from society and the world. In his autobiography he also writes he did not experience visions in the way Sørflåten did, as they were too "lofty" (Hagene 1845:16).

At an unknown point in his career, Hagene wrote what A. C. Bang called an "allegorical short story" by the name of *En Fortælling om den Store Fyrste Diabolus, Hvorledes han Udgiftede sine Døtre*, or "A Story about the Great Duke Diabolus, and How he Married away his Daughters" (n.d,). On the surface it appears to be an allegorical moral story guiding the reader in the ways of love and marriage, but it also reveals much about Hagene and his view of the world. Its main character has been given the name "Frivillighed" (Free Will), symbolizing the free will man has in relation to sin. Looking for love, he is approached by Diabolus, who offers his daughters to him for marriage. They are given the names "Vanity-Honour", "Eye-Lust", "Flesh-Lust", Worldly-Concern, and "Greed". Later on, the character "Conscience-Pain" is introduced. The moral of the story is that when "Frivillighed" goes through these different spouses, they all lead him to unhappiness because they symbolize temporal qualities: only when he is finally able to deny completely all that ties him to the temporal realm is he able to seek the right spouse: "God's-Love". The story bears some resemblance to John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress. The entirety of the plot can be viewed as an allegory for the process of conversion. In A Pilgrim's Progress, the end stage is symbolized as the Eternal City, while in Diabolus Døtre, the end stage is represented by marriage to "God's-Love". Happiness in this view cannot be attained through love of anything temporal; in fact, he emphasizes that ostracization is the fate of any proper Christian. While happiness is out of reach, this stigma is a sign that you are on the path of righteousness achieved through refutation of the world. Even human thought itself should always be directed towards immateriality and atemporality by adopting a negative position towards the world, allowing God to "act" through the individual will (Hagene 1845:16).

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Because of his strict dichotomy between the material and the immaterial, and the way this relates to history and afterlife, Hagene relates matter more generally to the influence of the devil. This is apparent in the way he thought about temporal measurement. In the nineteenth century, measurements of time in Norway gradually went through a mechanization process (Frykman 1994). This development is often seen as the introduction of "secular time", gradually pushing out "sacred time", thus contributing to secularization itself. But as the historian Margaret Jacob points out, as this process unfolded, "contradictory perceptions of time, secular and religious, existed simultaneously; different times existed in the human mind 'at the same time'" (Jacob 2019:48–49). In contrast to a "pre-modern" conception of time, where the only measurement of its passing was the religiously imbued church bell, the mechanization of time enabled one to believe in the imminent end of days, thus living in one way in providential, biblical time, but at the same time measure the "in between" via the clock. Jacob quotes from the diary of Mary Evelyn (1665–1684). She suffered from what Jacobs describes as a "temporal anxiety", where much time and thinking were devoted to how to best spend one's time, now that it could be measured. Mary wrote rules for "spending [her] pretious tyme well" (Jacobs 2019:53). She would not miss an opportunity for pious life, and so found her good works to be regulated by "secular time", what she calls a "Methodical course of Holy Living. As she writes in her diary, she will "rise by 6 of ye Clock to go to prayers yet I may not miss both ye morning hours for I will not go at ten of ye Clock Prayer because of Crowding through Westminster Hall among ye Lawyers & other Inconveniences. I must pray longer now than when I was at home" (Jacob 2019:54–55).

I quote from Jacob's exposition of this transitory phase here at length because the contrasts and similarities with Hagene's concerns about time are striking. In both cases, one may ask to what degree we are talking about "secular time", or if it might be clearer to think of mechanized or material time understood in terms of particular Christian frameworks. In a curious passage, Hagene considers the passage of time:

> There are 3,600 seconds contained within an hour, if I calculate from 4 hours sleep, that still are far from free from sin, there remains 2700; at least as many sins as this are committed in a day, so that anyone can see that I have the possibility to say, as it is written in the psalm: My sins are like grains of sand on a beach, many-faceted as sunlight reflected in a stream (quoted in Heggtveit 1905:382).

In contrast to Evelyn, Hagene apparently does not see time as a measurement of temporal space allotted to the possibility of doing good works

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contributing towards salvation. Time, once it has been mechanized, is only a measurement of how many sins one can commit. It appears to have become in some sense *material,* just like sand on a beach, but this does not mean that it had become *secular.* For Hagene, the materiality of time appears to be imbued with the influence of the devil, and it is for this reason inherently sinful. In both cases, religious beliefs imbue the now mechanized time with different theological content. The passage underlines one of his fundamental theological beliefs: that good works, being directed towards temporal, worldly things can do nothing to contribute to salvation, and hence, anything that can be measured in mechanical time can only be of a sinful nature. Accordingly, an active approach to conversion, in the degree that it is possible, requires escaping materiality and also material time. This dichotomy between the material and the spiritual, the now and then, is reflected in a general distrust of the senses. The path to the conversion lay in a process of negation from all influence which could be open to the influence of the devil. Hagene would attempt to negate the world through a practice he describes as a literal closing of the physical sensory apparatus, enabling the opening of a spiritual one:

> When I seriously tried to gain access to that place, whose shape and character is built like the heart of man, and many times closed both the eye-gate, the ear-gate, and the speech-exit in the most careful manner, then the fire of the Lord rained down once again; I mean the same fire that Jesus said he had come to throw upon the earth, wishing it was already on fire (quoted in Heggtveit 1905:382).

This passage describes a way of praying that closes off the individual from the corporeal world, in this way it also envelops it in an eschatological timeframe. Closed off from all entry-points to materiality, biblical time emerges: fire strikes in the heart of man reflecting past, present and future, enacting the burning in the present that Jesus will bring at the end of time. This change in the heart of man, at other times called the burning of the "sin root", alluded to here by the reference to Luke 14:29, is the central image of the conversion in Feigianism, where the Holy Spirit battles with the devil in the heart of man (Heggtveit 1912:381).

Returning finally to the case of the "theatre", a central question arises: Why would they perform this elaborate theatrical behaviour if they did not believe anything could be done in the material realm to affect the possibility of salvation? The answer to this question is twofold. It could be that they wanted to set individuals on a path to conversion through a demonstration of man's sinful nature. However, it might also be the case that attracting followers was not the main point of the behaviour. Hagene's preaching on one hand does *warn* against sin, but more than that, it prescribes that people *ru-*

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minate on it. Doing this, through more or less elaborate processes, is key to salvation. Skottebøl summarizes his preaching as dealing with "battle and combat against sin, which had to be hard and long, [one] should gaze into ones own heart and immerse oneself in the visualization of it" (Skottebøl 1898:281). The theatre could well be a communal version of such a practice. Opheim describes one such setting, where they would passionately proclaim their sins to one another: "they yelled at each other to ask for forgiveness and to confess their sins" (Opheim 1862:30). While there is a clear moral element to the theatre, the tropological element is downplayed in relation to the eschatological. It emphasizes that material time is soon coming to an end, and in contrast to the individual experience of conversion the trope here is not exodus, but revelation. The theatre is not meant to convert through tropology, but to reveal in the eschatological sense: the uncovering of a truth brought by the return of Christ.

We cannot know whether Hagene was part of the theatre, but we can say that it reflects the eschatology he preached to the revivalists. It emphasizes the turning away from the world that is required of man lest he be found wanting on the Day of Judgement. In this sense the theatre echoes the eschatology in Hagene's preaching: "it was easy to speak with the people about the heavenly wedding to which they were invited, and about how they in time would clothe themselves in the proper wedding clothes, so they would be found worthy to enter" (Hagene 1854:1). In both form and content, the doomsday theatre reflects ideas already laid out by Hagene in *A Story about the Great Duke Diabolus and How He Married Away His Daughters*. It utilizes the same symbolizing technique of fixing individuals with sinful characteristics. The story elaborates on the eschatological trope of the heavenly wedding. "God's-Love" figures here as a version of the heavenly bride, a representation of Christ, while the marriage between them becomes a figure of the union between Christ and mankind on the Day of Judgement. But in accordance with Hagene's theology, "Frivillighed" never does get to marry "God's-Love", even if he forsakes all the flesh-and-blood wives offered to him by Diabolus. He instead ends up in a trial where Diabolus and his many earthly henchmen condemn him as a heretic (Hagene n.d:28–30). The theatre can be imagined as a rendition of the wedding he does not get to experience, but being a performance in time and space it necessarily cannot show what it aims to portray. It therefore displays only negative behaviours, leading away from salvation. It is not surprising that there are no mentions of anyone representing or performing good deeds, as the movement did not place any theological value on them. Factors moving the individual towards conversion were of a psychological, and immaterial character, taking place in a metaphorical space in which linear time dissolves. Like the confessional gatherings and the introspective

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practices of Hagene, the theatre ultimately grapples with what, in providential history, is an unknown. It nevertheless reflects their position in the wider debate surrounding sin, conversion, and morality.

Conclusion: Nineteenth-century Futures

The behaviour and beliefs discussed in this text illustrate the diversity of temporal experiences that co-existed in Scandinavia in the nineteenth century. It indicates the unevenness with which "modernity" and "secularism" were disseminated across nations, classes, geography, and religious divides. Through this it contributes to nuancing the story of secularism that tends to be told in terms of those that were at the forefront of philosophical development, assuming a trickle-down to ordinary men and women in whose minds different ways of thinking may have persisted much longer. Neglecting their perspective may cause us to misunderstand struggles in communication between intellectual elites and the lower stratum of society in this period, as they may have experienced the world in different ways.

In conclusion, it could be useful to situate Hagene in relation to some other providential historical understandings that existed simultaneously, and mutations in perceptions of time related to secularization processes: progress, acceleration, and the fragmentation of the hegemonic eschatological timeframe. We will begin by returning briefly to the way in which Hagene and his followers saw the relation between the passage of time and the natural world, and how the arrival of mechanical time fits into this picture.

It is debatable whether he considered the world to be "natural" in the modern sense of the word, that is, a realm of matter governed by its own secular-temporal dynamic. If we are to take him at his word, the corporeal world was for him not progressive but saturated with divinely instituted characteristics that are not subject to change until the end of time. It differs from the "medieval world-allegory" that saw God as sustaining nature by constant intervention or as nature actively bringing itself into existence. As pointed out by the historian Katharine Park, the late Renaissance and early modern periods saw a gradual disconnection of agency and morality from nature. Formerly seen as a part of the natural world, they were increasingly shifted onto mankind, and nature thus become more static (Park 2004:54, 64, 68). This did not conflict with the providential narrative, however. According to Stephen Toulmin, well into the late eighteenth century most scholars subscribed to the view of a world set the world in motion with certain (divinely instituted) features. This "Enlightenment" view of the world was equally as static, if not more so, as the medieval world allegorical view. Resting firmly on the six-thousand-year biblical timescale, it does not allow

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for mutability or progress in nature (Toulmin 1965:65–70, 74). The philosophical and technological advances that would make it likely for Hagene to infer mutability in nature or that are commonly associated with historical acceleration had not yet taken place. For example, Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* would not be translated into Danish until 1871, though his theory had been popularized in newspapers before this (snl.no/Artenes_opprinnelse). The first train, which also could have provided a feeling of acceleration, did not depart until 1854 (Bjerke 1987:9). Considering this, he is not an anachronistic individual, but representative of a diversity of possible temporalities in his period.

The introduction of clocks does not appear to have impacted Hagene's feelings of temporal staticity. Mechanical time does not necessarily by itself invoke notions of progress, acceleration, or the mutability of nature. As is pointed out by Koselleck, the clock is a "pre-progressive metaphor: it evoked regularity, the stable household of God, nature, or humans that had been set up and ran steadily, but not their acceleration" (Koselleck 2018:85). For the clock to imply acceleration and thus a speeding up of historical perception it must measure something outside of itself that appears to be accelerating. Nothing about Hagene's descriptions, allegory, or theology implies that he registered this type of temporal acceleration. When Hagene says "det haster med tiden" (Opheim 1862:28), he does not necessarily imply a quickening of history in the way that would be caused by a reduction in the period between the introduction of new unrepeated events, but as an expectation that the eschatological horizon is approaching. The world was, as he described it, past summer, and entering autumn (Helge 1854:1). He thus adheres to a non-progressive eschatology which sees the future as predetermined by extra-historical forces, in other words, an experience of acceleration that is based on expectation, rather than the quickening of contemporaneously occurring historical events (Koselleck 2018:95, 98). As Koselleck (2018:94) writes, such an expectation has its "guiding points entirely outside of time". It could convey a sense of the need to hurry, as it appears to do in the case of Evelyn, but this is dependent on her particular theology that places value on "good deeds". Hagene's perception also contrasts with other nineteenth-century religious movements, such as the Latter-Day Saints, who believed that certain actions had to be done *within* history, to bring about its end (Blythe 2021:4).

Through the example of the "doomsday theatre", I have tried to show one example of the diverse landscapes of temporalities that existed in the nineteenth century, and how different understandings of the providential-historical narrative could lead to different symbolic or semantic understandings of the environment. The theatre expresses a pre-progressive providential-historical temporality that sees the external world as immutable but al-

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lowing for the individual to change its relation to it. While the theatre could also be understood as a form of social commentary or critique, I suggest that explaining it by recourse to its temporal logic reveals aspects of the behaviour that do not primarily revolve around the movement's relationship to other segments of society. Instead of a justification for belief, it becomes an enactment of belief. This perspective avoids making the presupposition that the participants had a reflexive understanding of their own temporal perception. It explains the theatre instead as a shared experimental Christian practice reflecting a particular eschatology made possible by the continued existence of the Christian providential-historical timeframe in which its participants understood their past, present, and future.

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[1] "Men i hovedsognet var det paa mange steder enda verre. Der holdtes oftere forsamlinger, og var mere af disse folk. Der toge de seg til i forsamlingene at vise folket alleslags ting som kunde gjøres, som de sagde var ondt. Nogle begyndte at danse, og da øvede de sig i alleslags ting der carakteriserer eller pragtiserer dansen. Nogle øvede seg i alleslags spill som spillemænd osv. Andre vare som de vare drukkne. De øvede sig i all ugudelighed som drankeren gjør med støi og uenighed. Andre lagde sig med hverandre, baade som gifte og ugifte folk i alle slags maader som tenkes kan. Og nogle var uvenner. De sloges og trætede. Kort sagt, alt hvad som tænkes kan at gjøres, saa gjorde de det. Og naar forsamlingerne holdtes inde i stuerne, da reiste en ned i kjælderen for at forestille sig for dem som djævelen, og en opp på slinderne for at forestille sig som vaar fælles skaber. Dette var alt af begge kjønn. Dette navn fikk mange af dem bære en tid efter, som de da toge sig skikkelse til at vise sine streger." All translations in this article are done by the author if not otherwise stated.

[2] For an overview of the revival in Ål, see Sundby 2021.

[3] Research funded by the Research Council of Norway, grant number 334603: Religious and secular worldmaking: Narrative cultures of utopian emigration and the formation of modern regimes of attention (NC-RoA).

[4] There are two digitized versions of the book avaiable at Nasjonalbiblioteket.no. The oldest one (n.d), lacks the title of the 1899 version, *Syner af Himmerig og Helvede.* This might be due to the missing front page. Both versions share the longer subtitle: *Abenbarelse, som viser os Mennesker, hvor nødvendigt det er at gjøre sand Omvendelse og søge en levende og saliggjørende Tro og Forening med vor Herre Jesum Christium, om vi skulle blive delagtige i himmelske Herlighed og undgaa Guds Retfærdige Fordømmelse, Dom og Helvedes Ild og gruelige Smerter, som alle uomvendte syndere evig maa erfare I den brændende Sø foruden Ende.* For more on the book itself, see Sundby 2021.

[5] I base my definition of secularism and its relation to the experience of historical time in this period in the following pages on Koselleck, *Futures Past*: *On the Semantics of Historical Time* and his essay "Does History Accelerate?" in *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, Cultural Memory in the Present (2018).

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Book Reviews

Collecting, Publishing, and Networking in the Legacy of Grimm

Gunnel, Terry (ed.): Grimm Ripples: The Legacy of the Grimms' Deutsche Sagen *in Northern Europe. Brill, Leiden & Boston 2022. 591 pp. Ill.*

When the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm are mentioned today, both professional folklorists and laymen probably think primarily of the brothers' collection of fairy tales, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen,* which was published in seven editions with supplements and revisions between 1812 and 1858. During the nineteenth century, however, it was the brothers' collection of legends, *Deutsche Sagen,* published in two volumes (1816, 1818), that was considered more important, at least for the emerging scholarly study of folklore. The most obvious explanation is probably that the genre of legend was better suited to the nationalistic aspirations aroused by the changed national borders after the wars in the early nineteenth century.

Participants in the international symposium held in Amsterdam on the occasion of the bicentenary of *Deutsche Sagen* were not satisfied with that explanation. Under the leadership of the British folklorist Terry Gunnell, working at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík, they took on the task of reaching a deeper understanding of the cultural ripples that influenced the intellectual climate in Northern Europe between the first edition of *Deutsche Sagen* (1816) and the second edition of *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* (1864).

The book has eighteen authors, mainly folklorists, but also literary scholars, cultural historians, and linguists. All the Nordic countries, including Estonia but excluding Denmark, are represented. In addition, there are researchers from Scotland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Germany, plus two Scandinavianists from California. In order to achieve the desired result, it was decided not to focus attention on the content of the Northern European collections, but on the introductions to the books and the mutual contacts between the collectors, primarily their correspondence.

In a review like this there is no room to do justice to all the individual contributions. Instead I single out factual information that I found new and thought-provoking, in the hope that it will attract others to read the whole book. For anyone working with the ideas that were current in Northern Europe during the nineteenth century, it offers useful source material.

The two volumes of *Deutsche Sagen* contain 91 legends recorded from oral tradition and 494 taken from printed literature. Approximately twenty informants can be identified with certainty. A third volume promised in the preface to volume 2 never came to fruition, possi-

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bly as a result of the lukewarm reception received by the first two volumes, or perhaps because Jacob Grimm instead devoted his energies to his *Deutsche Grammatik*.

Despite its name, *Deutsche Sagen* actually contained legends from other countries: Switzerland, Holland, Austria, France, Alsace-Lorraine, and Schleswig (which at that time still belonged to Denmark). In the wake of its publication, the collecting of national legends began in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Ireland, but it was fairy tales that were published. An exception was Finland, where the publication of the *Kalevala* in 1835 would shift the whole focus to epic poetry. Although fairy tales and legends were also collected in Finland, this happened later than in the other Nordic countries. There was some national disappointment when it was discovered that the Karelian poems were of Russian origin and that the Western Finnish fairy tales were related to those in the rest of Scandinavia.

Joep Leerssen describes how the Brothers Grimm used linguistic theories to understand the oral tales. In linking tradition and mythology, they believed that the legends expressed dark collective memories from ancient times. By approaching the folk narratives with scientific methods, the Brothers Grimm laid the foundation for modern folkloristics.

In his text Leerssen provides a useful survey of the terms that appear in the rest of the book, for the benefit not only of its readers but also of professional folklorists and others who wish to orient themselves in the worlds of folk storytelling. In particular, he dwells on examples of how places and emotions are linked together in what he calls topo-narratives, legends explaining place names, from the Old Testament to modern guidebooks for tourists.

Legends were regarded as good material with which to build new forms of national art and culture, which an independent nation needed for its own self-image and to gain respect from others. The early collections were given national titles, as if the tales were the property of nations and not local communities or individual storytellers. The collected legends also became required reading for schoolchildren so that they would learn the traditional values of the nation to which they belonged.

At first the scholars sat in libraries and compiled material from printed sources, but they gradually switched to recording oral histories on field trips, which had the effect of gradually highlighting the individual storytellers and their communities.

The Norwegian priest and historian Andreas Faye noticed how the collecting of peasant traditions created an incentive to view history from the bottom up. The grandparents of the farm workers were presented to the world as the genuine representatives of the national heritage and patriotic sentiment. Terry Gunnell even suggests that the nineteenth-century collectors of popular traditions could be regarded as the founders of the socialist movements that emerged in the early twentieth century.

The literary scholar Holger Erhardt of Kassel shows how the Romantic turn in the German-speaking lands diverted interest away from classical antiquity and later French influences and instead sought out the pre-Christian Germanic period. A parallel to this is the Gothic League in Sweden, founded in 1811 with the aim of replacing the French influence that had been strong during the reign of Gustaf III at the end of the eight-

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eenth century. Instead they wanted to revive the rugged Nordic temperament of the Viking Age. What began in Germany as patriotic resistance to Napoleon gradually turned into an increasingly nationalistic quest for a lost German history. Erhardt follows how the Brothers Grimm, in their collecting work, combined Johann Gottfried Herder's idea of a national *Geist* with practical models from Clemens Brentano's and Achim von Arnim's collection of German folk songs, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1806–1808).

Mathias Thiele's (1795–1874) examples of Danish folk legends, *Prøver af Danske Folkesagn* (1817), was Scandinavia's first planned and comprehensive field collection of folklore. Wilhelm Grimm welcomed it in a letter and Jacob Grimm reviewed it in a German journal. The folklorist Timothy R. Tangherlini of Berkeley provides maps that let us follow Thiele's collection journeys, which were often on foot.

Thiele chose to work as a librarian, graphic artist, and illustrator. Later in life, he published in edited form the legends from the earlier collection, expanded with 300 new examples, several of which were taken from printed works. In that book, *Danmarks Folkesagn* (1843), Thiele proposed four new categories of legends: historical legends, local legends, nature legends, and supernatural legends. Although later research has preferred other categories, Thiele's work served as a model for future collections in the Nordic countries and a model for genre analysis.

The aforementioned Andreas Faye (1802–1869) is presented in the book by the Norwegian cultural historian Herleik Baklid. Faye's *Norske Sagn* (1833) is the earliest collection of folktales in Norway. Faye collected the legends through conversations and correspondence with his informants as well as from printed topographical sources. Like Thiele, he proposed his own categorization of the legends based on the Norwegian material: supernatural beings, warriors and kings, Saint Olav, the Black Death, historical legends, diverse legends. He placed the first five categories in their respective cultural-historical contexts, but supplemented this with relevant (Northern) European parallels. The sources of all the texts are stated.

The Norwegian folklorist Ane Ohrvik of Oslo takes Peter Christen Asbjørnsen (1812–1885) as an example of how wide-ranging the intellectual networks of the time could be. Ohrvik has read 1,621 of Asbjørnsen's letters, which represents 27 per cent of the letters he actually received. There are letters from 500 individuals and from ten institutions. Seventy per cent of the letter writers lived outside Norway. The Northern European intellectuals expressed a genuine desire to share knowledge with each other, they informed each other of their publications, and they sent their books to each other. It was an especially popular habit to exchange photographic portraits of themselves (the daguerreotype was invented in 1839).

According to the folklorist Line Esborg of Oslo, Jørgen Moe's 58-page introduction (in addition to 115 pages with references, footnotes, variants, and counterparts) to the second edition of *Norske Folkeeventyr* (1852) should be regarded as Norway's first scholarly treatise on folktales. Moe showed that the fairy tales have distinctive national features, chiefly in their descriptions of nature and places. (Terry Gunnell believes that it was Moe who introduced the concept of "type" for fairy tales and legends, which later became the basis

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for Aarne-Thompson's classification of fairy tales). From then on, editions of fairy tales in Norway could be treated as scientifically, academically, and culturally significant.

In 1825 a book was published in London with the title *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*. It was well received and was translated into German by the Brothers Grimm the following year, possibly as a break from the tedious work of copying the entire catalogue of the Kassel Library by hand. In German it was given the title *Irische Elfenmärchen* and Wilhelm Grimm wrote an anonymous review praising it in a German newspaper.

The Irish folklorist Éilís Ní Dhuibhne Almqvist reveals that the author of the Irish collection of legends, who was also anonymous, was one Thomas Crofton Croker (1798–1854), an Irishman who had moved to London at the age of 18. Either he had heard the 27 legends in the book before leaving Ireland or they had been sent to him by letter. He wrote vivid descriptions of narrative situations that he had obviously never experienced personally. He seems to have invented some of the stories. The author's assessment is that Croker was a talented amateur and a pioneer in documenting folklore in Ireland. As regards the content and style of oral storytelling in Ireland, however, he is not a reliable source.

The foremost collector in Scotland was John Francis Campbell (1821–1885), born in an aristocratic family on the island of Islay, educated at Eton and the University of Edinburgh. He began to collect fairy tales in earnest when he read Asbjørnsen and Moe's Norwegian fairy tales and realized that he had heard several of them in the place where he grew up. He corresponded with George Webbe Dasent (1817–1896), who had translated the Norwegian collection, and he made plans to undertake similar fieldwork in Scotland. The result was *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, which was published in four volumes between 1860 and 1862. The Scottish folklorist John Shaw shows how Campbell was influenced by the Brothers Grimm and by Asbjørnsen and Moe, but also how he had his own theories about the origin and transmission routes of fairy tales, about genre definitions and boundaries. He did pen portraits of storytellers and discussed how folk narratives could be used as source material for understanding older cultures and social values. Campbell laid the foundation for later folkloristic fieldwork and publications, and his efforts eventually led to the establishment of the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

The first translation of *Deutsche Sagen* into another language appeared in 1830. It was translated into English by William John Thoms (1803–1885), the man who coined the term *folklore*. Thoms worked as an antiquarian and librarian, but had the goal of publishing a collection entitled *The Folk-Lore of England*. What was missing was the material. The British folklorist Jonathan Roper, of the University of Tartu, describes how Thoms's professional life and other commitments prevented him from working in the field. He made three appeals in different journals, but the result was meagre. During the nineteenth century several collections of European folklore were translated and published in England, but it was not until 1890 that England acquired a comprehensive collection of its legends. It was Edwin Sidney (incorrectly called Stanley in the book) Hartland who published the collection *English Fairy and Other Folk*

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Tales. For a couple of years Hartland was president of The Folklore Society in London, which Thoms had co-founded in 1878.

The literary scholar Kim Simonsen, Amsterdam, presents the priest Venceslaus Ulricus Hammershaimb (1819–1909), who has come to be regarded as the father of the Faroese nation. His magnum opus is the *Færøsk Anthologi* (1886–1891). It consists mainly of legends of the supernatural, all recorded from oral sources, but not only by Hammershaib himself. Unfortunately, there is no information about the informants.

Hammershaimb had indirect contact with the Brothers Grimm through his correspondence with the Danish philologist Carl Christian Rafn (1785–1864), who in turn had corresponded with the Brothers Grimm. Both Rafn and the Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab, of which he was secretary, were advocates of the pan-Scandinavian movement, which was anti-Germanic and anti-Slavic.

Konrad Maurer (1823–1902) was born in Frankenthal but went to Berlin to train as a lawyer. The folklorist Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir describes how he came into contact there with Jacob Grimm, who convinced him that it was important to study linguistics, history, literature, and local legends in order to understand the society in which one intended to practise law. Maurer took him at his word and went on to collect legends in Bavaria and Iceland. There he encouraged Jón Árnason and Magnús Grímsson to resume their interrupted collecting of Icelandic folklore. Maurer would play a role in Iceland comparable to that played by George Stephens both there and in Sweden.

In 1839, the librarian and later professor Finnur Magnússon (1781–1847) distributed a questionnaire to the clergy in Iceland urging them to record folklore about places, events, and beliefs, but with scant results. When George Stephens made the next attempt six years later, it led Magnús Grímsson and Jón Árnason to start their collecting in earnest. Together they published *Íslenzk æfintýri* in 1852, which, despite the title, contained more legends than fairy tales, and which emphasized in the preface that the material represented the Icelandic nation. As for the internationally disseminated migratory legends included in the book, the publishers stress their specifically Icelandic characteristics.

Terry Gunnell highlights the significance of Konrad Maurer (alongside Finnur Magnússon and George Stephens) for the genesis of Jón Árnason's great work *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* (1862–1864), from which several legends were soon translated into English. One of these was the legend of the Lady of the Mountain (Fjallkona), who became an Icelandic counterpart to Mother Svea, Germania, and Marianne, a mythical mother of the nation. She is depicted in a famous painting by the German artist Johann Baptist Zwecker, against a backdrop of Icelandic mountains, with a crown of ice on her head, a raven on her shoulder, a Viking sword in her hand, and runes at her feet.

Estonian linguists maintained contacts with the universities of Göttingen, Kassel, and Berlin, just as the Brothers Grimm were in touch with colleagues in Tartu in particular. The literary scholar Liina Lukas of Tartu introduces Friedrich Reinhold Kreuzwald (1803–1882), of Estonian origin but bilingual, who published the first collection of legends in the Estonian language, *Eesti-*

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rahwa Ennemuisted jutud ja Wanad laulud (1860–1864). Kreuzwald had already compiled and published the influential *Kalevapoeg,* simultaneously in Estonian and German. It may be noted that among those who documented Estonian folklore in the nineteenth century, only a few were of Estonian origin.

As a student at Åbo Akademi, Adolf Ivar Arwidsson (1762–1843) came into contact with members of the Gothic League in Sweden, and during a yearlong visit to Uppsala in 1817–18 he forged personal contacts with several of them. In Finland he became one of the leading figures in Åbo's Romantic circles. Back in Sweden, he was employed at the Royal Library in Stockholm, where he became a colleague of Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius. In compiling *Svenska fornsånger,* which was published in three volumes in 1834, 1837, and 1842, he enlisted the help of several of the leading Swedish collectors of the time.

The folklorists Ulrika Wolf-Knuts and Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch of Åbo show how Arwidsson inspired the historian, folklorist, and educator Oskar Rancken (1824–1895) to document the traditions of the Swedish-speaking population in Finland. When Finland became a Grand Duchy under the Russian Tsar, it felt important that the country could retain the old Swedish constitution and legislation. Rancken published an anonymous appeal in a Swedish-language newspaper in Vasa in which he urged readers to record folk traditions. He himself did not publish any collection of Swedish-language legends. Instead, these were included in the great work *Finlands svenska folkdiktning,* three volumes of which were edited by the assiduous fieldworker V. E. V. Wessman (1879–1958).

The book *Grimm Ripples* illustrates some of the advantages and disadvantages of presenting projects in edited volumes. As with published proceedings from conferences, it is beneficial to be able to read each scholar's personally formulated account of the topic that has been studied. One disadvantage is that the levels of the individual contributions can vary in different respects: researchers who report their own findings in a limited field can go into such detail that the broad outlines become unclear, while authors who have been tasked by the editor to elucidate a topic that is not their special field can write superficial texts that miss important points. It is left to the reader to assess what information is relevant in the many different texts if they are to arrive at an overall picture. With the large number of contributions in this volume, that is no small challenge. In many cases, the individual texts provide information that supplements what we already knew about the efforts of early folklorists in Northern Europe in the nineteenth century. Here the interested reader will find valuable information both about specific national conditions and – above all – about the extensive international contacts between researchers. The ideal would be to have a summary of the disparate picture of these contacts that is painted by the eighteen essays in the book.

Terry Gunnell deserves praise for bringing the project to a successful conclusion, like the hero of a folktale. It would be asking him to perform a superhuman feat by connecting the eighteen separate texts into a coherent unit whole, with the overall outlook of an omniscient author and on a uniform analytical level, following the intellectual ripples and all the lateral currents since Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm first threw the

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stone into the water. As a reader, one is left alone in the rippling waves, filled with wonder and admiration for the joy of research and the respect with which our bygone colleagues approached the folktales, and for the broad-mindedness and generosity with which they shared their ideas and results with each other. Imagine a person living some way into the twenty-third century reading what folklorists then will be writing about the ripples left by, for example, Jean-François Lyotard's stone – his thesis about the death of the grand narrative!

Unfortunately, the book is marred by inadequate proofreading in some of the German and Swedish texts.

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The "Then" and the "Now" in Constructing the "Here" of a Historical Site

Anne Eriksen: Borre, Hafrsfjord og Stiklestad: Fortidsformateringer fra 1600-tallet til i dag. Scandinavian Academic Press/ Forente forlag, Oslo 2024. 325 pp.

How did the consciousness of Norway's formation, the idea of a "cradle of the Norwegian nation", develop? Anne Eriksen explains how a similar, albeit more simplistic, question posed by a journalist inspired this voyage of intellectual discovery across the various suggested birthplaces of the kingdom of Norway. Put simply, this is the overarching goal of *Borre, Hafrsfjord & Stiklestad*: to investigate how three different medieval locations ingrained in Norwegian national consciousness developed over time as historical sites, through the many different, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory projects of Norwegian nation-building and constructions of identity.

Ultimately, this book provides an approachable presentation of complex themes, and an overall stimulating concept, centred around the idea of the "then" meeting the "now" on what is perceived by many in Norway to be hallowed ground, and, as the author states, this meeting between the then and the now being what constructs the "here" of a historical site (p. 11). The book is by and large a splendid and accessible attempt to guide readers into the afterlives of mythic-historical locations in Norwegian cultural memory. The locations themselves provide links between the present and the past, but the book simultaneously presents the long journey of the locations from the past to the present, and the long and multi-faceted creation of said links.

While this is not a theory-heavy book, it is easy to get engrossed in the highly interesting and well-illustrated theory sections. The book's central framework, the idea of the "formatted past" is a fascinating methodological lens through which to interpret the constantly shifting perceptions and uses of historical sites such as these three (p. 20). In the theoretical introduction, it is also linked with welcome reflections on François Hartog's now-famous concept of "regimes of historicity", where movements in the field of history are tied to whether there is a predominant orientation towards the past, future, or present (pp. 27–28). Hartog's theories are not as deeply embedded in the book as the concept of the formatted past, which is in some ways a shame, as the idea of differing orientations and "regimes" determining various centuries' often different relationships with Borre, Hafrsfjord, and Stiklestad

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as historical sites is a deeply relevant one for the structure and concept of this book. Nevertheless, it is a useful concept both for Eriksen to bring up, and for the reader to have in mind while progressing through the following chapters.

Some small comment should also be made on the author's and the book's relationship with actual history and the medieval past. As a scholar of cultural memory and heritage in the last few centuries, the author is understandably hesitant to fully grapple with the study of the Middle Ages. The reader of this book should thus not expect deep academic inquiry into the medieval histories of these places specifically or of the early kingdom of Norway more generally. In fact, the author spends a lot of time stressing this point (e.g., p. 16). As such, the book mostly detaches the sites from their medieval origins. From a medievalist's perspective this is obviously regrettable, but overall it is a completely reasonable demarcation given the book's focus. One might have wished for a separate chapter on the earliest historical context, which might have helped ease readers more seamlessly into why these places and their place in memory are being discussed, but as it stands, the brief chapter on the medieval written sources is both helpful and important, and does go a long way towards filling this gap. Overall, it should indeed be said that despite a difference in perspective, reading this book as a medieval historian is no less rewarding than reading it as a scholar of history culture or cultural heritage. Eriksen manages to be both interesting and educational on the memory and usage of the medieval past, and while some of us might always wish for more, she does pay due diligence to the medieval sources and medieval research. In addition to the brief survey of the material, there are frequent references to important debates on historicity and older historiography (e.g., pp. 51–54, 82), and in a sense the book as a whole functions as a magisterial historiographical survey, only one with the perspective firmly focused on the historical sites' later existence (particularly during the last four centuries) rather than their origins.

The overall division of that survey is accomplished in a very practical way, effectively splitting the material three ways twice. First, the book is divided in terms of periodical concepts, where three phases are identified: the establishment of the locations as objects of knowledge, their role in and manipulation by national cultures and national movements, and their more contemporary inclusion in more modern views of cultural heritage. Throughout this structure, Eriksen takes us on a step-by-step chronological journey through the afterlives of these three central national-historical locations. Each section is divided into sub-sections for each of the three locations, thus providing a rather rigid walkthrough with the potential to usher unfamiliar readers into the historiography without sacrificing intellectual depth.

The first stage in the process described by the book is the initial establishment of these sites as objects of knowledge. Eriksen rightly points out that while both the places themselves and stories about them obviously existed before, it is only from the seventeenth century onwards that they become objects of formal historical inquiry, where professional scholars would devote time to establish the facts about them through (perceived) scientific methods. Readers are here led through some of the oldest historical research projects in Norway, such as the now foundational Tormod Torfæus and the search for Harald Fairhair's grave.

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In the second section, Eriksen moves the lens onto the connections of the places to rising Norwegian national identity, and its use by various groups, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Eriksen skilfully weaves the national identity tied to the locations into other elements of nation-building and national romanticism to a point where the book almost becomes a miniature history of Norway through the lens of historical agents' relationships with these "cradles". Examples of this can be found in the description of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's speech at Stiklestad for the national convention of the newly founded (or technically soon-to-be founded) political party Venstre – itself tied to nationalist sentiment in the period (pp. 158ff.), and an even more emotionally laden patriotic speech given overlooking Hafrsfjord, "our holy saga fjord", by a local priest in front of the then Swedish-Norwegian king Oscar II (pp. 152–153). In both these cases, the book shows the role of the two battle sites in particular in the growing Norwegian self-image, and their embrace by nationalist movements seeking Norwegian independence. Similarly, it is also in the national cultures section that Eriksen tackles the more infamous moments of these places as historical sites, namely their shared usage as propaganda platforms by the Nazi-allied National Unity party during the Second World War. By doing so, she clearly illustrates the conflicting political perspectives and nationalisms surrounding them in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century.

This focus is woven seamlessly into the third and final section, cultural heritage, where the author discusses contemporary, or at least post-war, formatting of these sites. Borre, Hafrsfjord, and Stiklestad, symbolic of Norway as a whole, were deemed to need liberation from Nazi occupation and the darker associations with the National Unity party. Moving away from individuals, the book illustrates the first conscious effort to make these places holistic and unified locations of national commemoration, as described regarding Stiklestad on pp. 246–247. Furthermore, Eriksen shows how the last few decades of formatting the past have tended to bring together all elements of political and cultural use of the locations, in order to create and shape the idea of "historical places". Importantly, however, the author still gives a critical reading of these attempts, showing how they too carry their biases and forced narratives (pp. 265–268). As such, the book goes a long way in showing that these historical sites are very much still under (literal and metaphorical) construction, and that the "cultural heritage" wave is merely the last and most recent in a succession of formatting efforts and recontextualizations.

As the author poignantly concludes, "Historical places do not emerge on their own." (p. 329). There is always a continuous process of creation and indeed, formatting. In this sense, the identity of a historical site also contains the disseminations, experiences, narratives, and remembrances of different people, groups, and identities across centuries, whether it's archaeologists, nation-builders, radical or conventional politicians of various stripes, local patriots, religious authorities, or the population at large. This ongoing process, and the need to understand the long history of a historical site *as* a historical site, is something this book consistently calls attention to.

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Antisemitism from a Historical Text Perspective

Leif Carlsson: "Fiender till hela mänskligheten". Judefientliga bibeltexter och tolkningar. Universus Academic Press. Lund 2024. 177 pp. Ill.

In this book the religious scholar Leif Carlsson examines antisemitism, meaning hate and hostility against Jews, both in older times and more recently. To understand the underlying mechanism behind antisemitism, the author turns to biblical texts and statements from clerical representatives throughout the history of the church. The starting point is some verses in the gospels and in the writing of the apostle Paul, arguing that it was the Jews who crucified Jesus, thereby committing deicide. The author, however, is of the opinion that everything indicates that it was the Romans, not the Jews, who crucified Jesus. Non-biblical sources describe the governor Pontius Pilate as cruel and "crucifixion-obsessed". The author seeks to show that the biblical verses in question do not refer to all Jews at all times, but need to be understood in their contemporary social context where Jesus criticized the Jewish Pharisees. The author here joins the liberal theological scholars who argue that the biblical texts cannot be read literally and interpreted as historical sources. This has, however, been the case when antisemitic opinions have been expressed at different times throughout history. One should bear in mind that both Jesus and Paul were Jews. Paul practised a Jewish lifestyle, celebrated Jewish holidays and preached in synagogues. The author finds it hard to believe that Paul could be the author of an anti-Jewish text in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 2, verses 13–16. This could be a later addition when the hostility against Jews had increased. This interpretation, however, rests on a weak foundation.

The author regrets the fact that antisemitism later on, due to misunderstandings, came to build on the biblical statements about the death of Jesus. Whether it is a matter of misunderstandings or not is, as I see it, less important. The main thing is that these writings have strengthened antisemitism. This can be deplored by a scholar, but the scientific task is not to look back and criticize what happened historically, but instead to highlight what happened and make an effort to explain it.

Antisemitism grew stronger as time went by after the crucifixion of Jesus. In the early church, the Christians were initially in the minority and subject to persecution. The Jews, on the other hand, enjoyed a privileged status up until the beginning of the fourth century when Christianity became the Roman state religion in 312. In the new constellation of power, the Jews were gradually marginalized by the emperors and the Christians became the ones who could feel superior. Laws against the Jews were introduced.

The so-called theology of replacement implied that the Christians had assumed the role of God's people and that the role of the Judaism thereby was over. The church father Augustine (354–430) strengthened a prevalently negative view of the Jews. They were seen as being non-spiritual, false and hypocritical, but they were not to be persecuted or killed. They should know their inferior status compared to Christianity.

The author uses the first two thirds of the book up to p. 113 to discuss anti-Jewish statements in the gospels, in the writings of the apostle Paul and in the old church under the Roman Empire. In the last third of the book, from p. 115 onwards, the author takes a look at conditions closer to our present time.

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He demonstrates how, in the 1930s and 1940s, antisemitism manifested itself in Sweden in the conservative religious newspaper *Göteborgs Stiftstidning*, which had 2,500 subscribers. The editor and minister Ivar Rhedin sided with Hitler as soon as he took power in 1933. Hitler was perceived as a counterforce against the Bolshevism of the Soviet Union, but also against the Jewish-dominated West, which was accused of having started the Second World War. The positive view of Germany in the newspaper is also explained by the fact that the reformer Martin Luther was German. The newspaper stuck to its pro-Nazi attitude all through the Second World War but was at the same time opposed to the prevalent use of racial biology to justify antisemitism. The only solution to the problem of the Jews was for them to become Christians. Therefore, the newspaper supported the Christian mission among the Jews.

One can wonder how the readers of *Göteborgs Stiftstidning* reacted to the pro-Nazi stance. On two occasions, a letter to the editor from Axel Larsson in Bollebygd was published. In 1939 he objected to the statement that there was an ongoing war between the world Jewry and the German people. He referred to the story about the good Samaritan who helped the wounded man even though he was a Jew. Similarly, Christians in Germany should help the Jews in their vulnerable situation. He cautioned against a situation in Sweden where "Nazism unnoticed becomes the prevailing attitude among many individuals in the church" (p. 130). In a letter to the editor in 1940, Larsson was again upset about how the Jews were treated and how Christians in Germany supported the government's antisemitism. "From a Christian point of view, this is very concerning" (p. 132). It is interesting that these letters to the editor were published despite the fact that the editorial board in its comments was opposed to the content.

Following the passing of Ivar Rhedin in 1953, there was a clear need for *Göteborgs Stiftstidning* to distance itself from the anti-Jewish and pro-Nazi stance. Instead it was the responsibility of the church to counter antisemitism.

In a later section (pp. 149ff.), the author looks for some ways forward to counter present-day antisemitism. This antisemitism is mainly based on anachronistic interpretations primarily of biblical writings, which are not opposed to Jews in general, but concern situations existing at the time when the texts were written. Jesus and Paul were not anti-Jewish. Once people understand this, there will be no grounds for antisemitic attitudes. The author finds support in current biblical research from various parts of the world. "A number of bible scholars have pointed out Christian misinterpretations of biblical writings, and how these were wrongfully passed on as negative arguments against the Jews" (p. 164).

To conclude, the present book, being a historical text study, is of timely value now that antisemitism is on the rise in various parts of the world. The author's interpretations, relating to current international biblical research, should be able to remove some of the basis for antisemitism. The book should be brought to public awareness and discussed in the public arena now when the issue of the war against its neighbours by the state of Israel is a topic of political discussion.

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Women's Voices in Northern European Witchcraft Trials

Liv Helene Willumsen: The Voices of Women in Witchcraft Trials. Northern Europe. Routledge Studies in the History of Witchcraft, Demonology and Magic. Routledge, London and New York 2022, xviii+491 pp.

Liv Helene Willumsen is Professor Emerita of History at the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø. She is both a historian and a literary scholar, and she has published a number of articles and books on memory culture, women's culture and the history of Northern Norway. Not least of all, she is a prominent author of articles and books on witchcraft and witch trials in Northern Europe, often with a clear gender perspective and comparative perspectives. Her doctoral dissertation in history from the University of Edinburgh from 2008 was about a comparison between witch trials in Scotland and Norway.

It is in the perspective of Willumsen's overall academic writing that the present book must be seen – it is an expression of a common concern in her research, namely transnational analyses of witchcraft, witchcraft and gender. It has been published in a well-regarded monograph series, which gives Willumsen deserved prestige as a prominent researcher in this field.

The structure of the book is ambitious. Through a close reading of 23 trials – in which a total of 24 women were accused of witchcraft – in the Spanish Netherlands, Northern Germany, Denmark, Scotland, England, Norway, Sweden and Finland, Willumsen continues her comparative, transnational studies of witchcraft cases. The period for these trials is 1590-1685, i.e. almost a hundred years and in a period when the (Northern) European witchcraft trials underwent major changes both legally and procedurally, ideologically, theologically and politically. These changes are presented to some extent in the introductory chapter and in the subchapters, but they are not actively discussed in the concluding chapter. The concluding overview of unpublished sources and bibliography (pp. 444-465) is impressive and shows Willlumsen's broad orientation and deep expertise.

In the introductory chapter, Willumsen gives a detailed and pedagogical account of her theme, the sources used, the methods and structure of the book. The chapter also presents a useful review of previous relevant research. To a certain extent, this review has the character of name dropping, as it is not always clear how Willumsen herself relates to or has used this research. Willumsen draws alternately on her expertise in history and her expertise in literary studies. This interdisciplinary perspective has yielded a result that is both readable and stimulating.

Special note should be made of Willumsen's use of narratological perspectives, which in many ways are also close to folkloristic analyses of oral transmission, oral culture and the relationship between writing and speech. She analyses in a fine and nuanced way how the source material reflects cultural, legal and confessional differences. Willumsen clearly focuses on how this source material as written sources reflects the speech of the accused, the legal norms and "the voice of the scribe".

In the concluding chapter, Willumsen identifies ten central factors that she claims can be compared between the different trials: the confessions of the accused, the statements of the witnesses, narrative structures, elements of orality, the interrogations, the use of torture and coercion, forced narratives, the voice of law and scribes, and – not least – transnational transfer of ideas. A central point in

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the concluding analysis is how ideas about magic and witchcraft were spread along different channels and by different media across national borders and confessional differences.

Willumsen's main idea is "that voices can carry meaning" (p. 370). At the same time, it is likely that the voices that Willumsen attempts to identify have been interwoven in a complex network of voices – from above, from authorities, ideologies and strategies, and from below, from highly local and even personal agendas and conflicts, where in part new ideas and narratives have provided instruments for conflict, accusations and power. For all these voices, "witchcraft" was a common denominator, but the dissonances in this language were conspicuous, and they shifted in time and space.

One of Willumsen's methods – close reading of a small selection of court cases from eight northern European areas – has many parallels in past and present historical, folkloristic and anthropological research. The method has its obvious strength in studying textual expressions in detail, assessing nuances, interactions between actors, strategies and protests in a concrete, normative context, namely the legal process. This method produces interesting results, which are especially summarized in the book's tenth and last chapter.

At the same time, it can be said that this method has its limitations. A central question concerns representativity. It is assumed that the 23 court cases from seven northern European "countries" are typical and have a meaning that exceeds themselves. This is, for example, the dilemma of the so-called microhistory in a nutshell. Willumsen is not, however, a microhistorian, since her comparative method goes far beyond the microhistorical, which often only suggests parallels and comparability.

Another dimension of the question of representativity concerns what Willumsen herself puts forward as the most important, namely gender. It is an acceptable choice to focus on "the voices of women", but what about "the voices of men/children/old people" etc. in the historical records? Would such perspectives have given different results? Another question concerns the selection of geographical areas. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sweden and Finland were one state under one monarch, and Denmark-Norway was a so-called dual monarchy. In Denmark-Norway there were differences between legal practice, administrative order and political authority, but ideology, theology and politics were essentially identical. "Finland" for its part had a partly very different culture, with a Finnish-speaking population with few common references with the Swedish population, but "Finland" had no separate legislation or politics to distinguish it from today's "Sweden". Willumsen does not find any major differences between Denmark and Norway or Sweden and Finland.

A third, hyper-complex question concerns the confessional differences. Both legally and theologically, there were significant differences between the Catholic Spanish Netherlands, Anglican England, Calvinist Scotland and Lutheran Sweden (with Finland) and Denmark-Norway. These variables, which had an impact both on the voices of the authorities and on the response from the common people, receive little attention.

Despite these critical remarks, it is undeniable that Liv Helene Willumsen's book represents new knowledge, fascinating perspectives and an invitation to renewed research.

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