



The 16th Bergen International Postgraduate Symposium in Old Norse Studies 2025

*Research Group for Law and Culture in the Premodern
North, University of Bergen*



UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

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Programme

Monday 7th April (Jusbygget – Auditorium 3)

Directions: <https://link.mazemap.com/CvTUEvsc>

09:00 – 09:15 Welcome

Liturgy and Christianity (chair: Helen F. Leslie-Jacobsen)

09:15 – 09:45 Rhiannon Warren (University of Cambridge)
Liturgical booklists in the Máldagarbækur: the Problem of the 'Brefér'

09:45 – 10:15 Alison Owen (University of Cambridge)
In defence of the Old Norwegian Homily Book

10:15 – 10:45 Saskia Rath (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel)
Narratives of Religious Conversion and Christianization in Old Norse Prose

10.45-11:15 Coffee Break

Poetry and Language (chair: Judy Quinn)

11:15 – 11:45 Miriam Conti (University of Bergen)
"I know the pieces fit, but I watch them fall away". A Comparison of Edda R and Edda A

11:45 – 12:15 Cornelius Bøe Vestvik (University of Bergen)
Hrymes and Hvatnots: Alliteration in the Poetic Edda

12:15 – 12:45 Joe Hobson (University of York)
Men Causing Misery: Words for Grief in Old Norse Poetry

12:45 – 13.15 Tommy Sargeant (University of Cambridge)
Kennings in Christian Poetry

13:15-14:15 Lunch Break

New Approaches to People and Sources (chair: Miriam Conti)

14:15 – 14:45 Lara Harris (University of Cambridge)

"Class and Gender in Medieval Scandinavian Medicine: Huskurer and the Voice of Women"

14:45 – 15:15

Erin Benton (University of Aberdeen)

Medieval Dis/ability Complexes: Embodiment, Emotionality, and Disability in Legendary Narratives

15:15 – 15:45

Kendra Nydam (University of Cambridge)

Phantom Women: Programmes of Genealogical Pseudo-History in Medieval Icelandic Sources

15:45 – 16:15

Tonje Waldernes (University of Bergen)

The Difficulty of Dating Medieval Norwegian Script: A Charter Approach to the Paleographers Dilemma (Tonje)

Tuesday 8th April (Jusbygg II, Auditorium)

Directions: <https://link.mazemap.com/XOuDRIfh>

Keynote Lecture (chair: Helen F. Leslie-Jacobsen)

9:00 – 10:00 Hannah Burrows (University of Aberdeen)
"No such things as accidents"? Motivation, Mind and Justice in Medieval Icelandic Law and Literature

Laws (chair: Judy Quinn)

10:00 – 10:30 Annabelle Chua (University of Cambridge)
Ein lög? The Legal System in *Íslendingabók*

10:30 – 11:00 Nikolaus Frenzel (University of Liverpool)
Landmunr: Viking Homesickness in its Narrative and Exilic Contexts

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break

Mythology and Texts (chair: Miriam Conti)

11:30 – 12:00 Claudia Comyn (University of Cambridge)
Fyr mold neðan: The Geospatial Chthonian of *Völuspá*

12:00 – 12:30 Cougan Betts (University of Aberdeen)
The Norse Realms and their Contradictions: Is there One True Understanding?

12:30 – 13:00 Maryann Pierse (University of Aberdeen)
From Rome to Reykjavík: Saturn and Njǫrðr in the Wormianus Recension of *Snorra Edda*

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch Break

Unsung Heroes (chair: Sebastian Pohland)

14:00 – 14:30 Daniel Rusu (University of Bergen)
The Riddarasaga Berserkr: A Figure of Anti-Chivalric Satire?

14:30 – 15:00 Raphael Cotterau (University of Bergen)
"Glory comes along the blade": Symbolism and Relationships between Swords and Heroism in *Fornaldarsögur*

15.00 – 15.15 Coffee Break

People and Gods in Prosimetra (chair: Dale Kedwards)

- 15:15 – 15:45 Hilkea Blomeyer (University of Tuebingen)
Ok hefir nú sannazt þat, er ek sagðá þér – Kaleidoscopic Narration in the
fornaldarsögur
- 15:45 – 16:15 Max Thorne (University of Aberdeen)
Alfǫðr: Medieval Material or Pre-Christian Practice?
- 16:15 – 16:45 Ambra Ventura (University of Bergen)
Others All The Way Down – Medieval Icelanders As Ethnographers Of The Ancient
Past
- 16:45-17:15 Alan Davey (University of London)
‘Mad about the skalds: þættir and sagas of Poets’

Wednesday 9th April (Jusbygget – Auditorium 3)

Directions: <https://link.mazemap.com/CvTUEvsc>

Digital and Visual (chair: Jens Eike Schnall)

- 9:30 – 10:00 Olga Kalinovskaia (University of Bergen)
A Myth about a Myth: The Reinvention of Old Norse Mythology in Video Games
- 10:00 – 10:30 Sebastian Pohland (University of Oslo)
Traversable texts: Conceptualising the Modern Interactive Digital Edition
- 10:30 – 11:00 Anika Stoll (University of Bergen)
Digital science communication of Medieval archaeology in Bergen
- 11:00 – 11:30 Emma Radcliff (University of Cambridge)
Recurrent Zoomorphic Motifs in 6th to 10th century Scandinavian Art

12.00 – 14.00 Visit to the Special Collections 12-14 (with Lunch in the Meantime)

Scandinavian and European Culture (chair: Pierre Bigot)

- 14:15 – 14:45 Jonas Zeit-Altpeter (University of Bonn) (on Zoom)
Vita til sanns at satt er. Gerald of Wales and the King's Mirror
- 14:45 – 15:15 Liz Windisch (University of Aberdeen)
Seascapes and Fish Sticks: The Cultural Anatomy of a Medieval Icelandic Food
- 15:15 – 15:45 Nansý Sunadóttir (University of the Faroe Islands)
Bromance in the Runsivals stríð (The Battle of Roncevaux)
- 15:45 – 16:15 Saskia Cowan (University of Bergen)
Brynhildr of the Ballads

19:00 Conference Dinner

Abstracts

Liturgical Booklists in the *Máldagarbækur*: the Problem of the 'Brefér' (Rhiannon Warren, University of Cambridge)

A juxtaposition lies at the heart of the study of the medieval Icelandic liturgical book: while extant manuscript evidence consists mostly of fragments for monastic use from the diocese of Skálholt, analysis of the máldagarbækur reveals a wealth of book-lists detailing volumes used in the Parish church in the diocese of Hólar. However, even within the máldagar, clear examples of books used for the liturgy of the hours are few. Observance of the divine office was evidently important in the medieval Icelandic church. Liturgical prescriptions emphasise observance of matins in both festal and ferial contexts and Grágás' Christian Law legislated priests must perform mass, matins, and evensong on all holy days in the church he was ordained in.

This paper examines the observance of the Liturgy of the Hours in the medieval Icelandic parish church, making use of surviving manuscript fragments, biskopasögur and liturgical prescriptions. I will argue the apparent lack of breviaries (books containing chants, prayers, and readings necessary for the office arranged according to the liturgical year) is a product of both the difficulty of categorising a given fragment as a breviary and misunderstandings of the term brefér in the máldagar.

In Defence of the Old Norwegian Homily Book (Alison Owen, University of Cambridge)

The Old Norwegian Homily Book, written around 1200 AD in Old Norse, has sometimes been dismissed as a preacher's handbook whose sermons were never delivered. However, internal evidence in this sermon collection suggests that they were indeed preached in church services - and even if it were only a handbook, that would still show the kind of material that was thought appropriate for preaching on the northern periphery of Christian Europe. I propose that the Old Norwegian Homily Book offers an opportunity to study the mixture of Latin European influence and vernacular expression in sermon form, such as with the original and beloved 'Stave Church Homily'. It could also serve as the missing link between clerical learning and lay piety, representing what may have been, for many ordinary people, the only teaching on Christian doctrine and ethics they ever received in their own language. This paper will make a case for further study of the Old Norwegian Homily Book, whose translation into English would increase its availability for those studying medieval European sermon-writing and lay piety more generally.

Narratives of Religious Conversion and Christianization in Old Norse Prose (Saskia Rath, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel)

In this paper I present my PhD project on Narratives of Religious Conversion and Christianization in Old Norse Prose. It explores how conversion narratives are constructed in Icelandic sagas and related texts, shaping underlying structures of meaning.

The study provides a comprehensive research overview, highlighting theories and approaches to religious conversion in medieval literature, with a particular emphasis on narrative aspects. The corpus includes Sagas of the Icelanders, *þættir*, Kings' Sagas, and other related texts, allowing for a rich analysis of individual conversion experiences as well as the Christianization of entire peoples.

Key themes include the depiction of paganism, foreshadowing of Christianization, the clash of paganism and Christianity, and (re-)presentation of religious change. I explore the narrative elements and structures that build conversion narratives, tracing their origins and role in constituting structures of meaning that are underlying the texts. This enables a broader contextualization of Old Norse conversion narratives within European learned literature of the Christian Middle Ages.

In essence, the research endeavors to shed light on the profound impact of Christianization on the identity and ethos of medieval Icelandic society as it is expressed in the texts and its narrative implementation into literature.

The second part of the paper provides insight into my current work, demonstrating how literary motifs are employed in different 'Conversion *þættir*' found in various redactions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*.

“I know the pieces fit, but I watch them fall away”: Edda R vs Edda A (Miriam Conti, University of Bergen)

The Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda GKS 2365 4to (R) is one of the most important witnesses of Old Norse and Germanic poetry, and it has been at the centre of scholarly attention for centuries. It shares part of its content with AM 748 I a 4to (A), which is a more fragmentary witness.

The prestige of R sometimes creates an editorial bias. With the exception of evident instances of textual corruption (e.g. the omission of *helgar* in the first stanza of *Völuspá*), many editions tend to prefer the readings of R, even where A clearly has older or semantically preferable alternatives.

This paper will discuss a selection of instances which have not received sufficient attention in the comment apparati of the most used critical editions, as well as the shared scribal errors in both R and A. The selected instances are part of the preliminary findings in my ongoing thesis about Eddic intertextuality and compilation in a diachronic perspective.

Hrymes and Hvatnotts: <hC> Alliteration in the Poetic Edda (Cornelius Bøe Vestvik, University of Bergen)

This paper analyses based alliteration in the Poetic Edda and uses this analysis as a tool to uncover whether the language contained the phonemes /ɣ/, /l/, /ŋ/, and /ʍ/. Data derived from this shows that <hr>, <hl>, <hn>, and <hv> could quite freely alliterate with themselves, among themselves, and with <h> + vowel, providing strong evidence against the existence of the voiceless phonemes, and strongly indicates that <hC> had not yet undergone assimilation at this stage. Moreover, if the assertion of the first grammarian is to be believed - that /h/ did not change its articulation in any environment, and on the basis of runic evidence, which shows that *hagall* often behaves similarly to *fé*, together with the alliterative behaviour of /h/, it is argued that /h/ in this stage of the language could have had a velar place of articulation in all environments, i.e. [x].

Men Causing Misery: Words for Grief in Old Norse Poetry (Joe Hobson, University of York)

Sif Ríkharðsdóttir asserted in 2017 that the study of emotions in the field of Old Norse existed on the periphery of current scholarly interest; this lack of study of the history of emotions more broadly, however, dates back to, at the very least, Barbara H. Rosenwein's comments about the state of the field in 1998. In recent years, the lacuna has begun to be dealt with and some headway has been made, yet scholarship on some emotions remains rather elusive. Grief is one such understudied emotion, particularly from a lexical perspective; indeed, Old Norse lexicosemantics appears to be an area of study greatly neglected. This paper emerges from research aimed at beginning to fill this gap in Old Norse history of emotions and lexical studies. In this paper, I will examine the usage of a particular grief word in Old Norse poetry, by exploring cases of *tregi* 'sorrow' in both eddic and skaldic verse. Such a branch of grief seems to display a certain proclivity towards being inflicted upon women by men, and is, thus, without parallel elsewhere in Old Norse poetry. This paper will, moreover, help to articulate that words for grief, such as *tregi*, in Old Norse were not synonymous nor their usage fortuitous. This paper will, therefore, demonstrate the undeveloped possibilities of Old Norse lexicosemantics, for understanding not only grief, but also other emotions of the Viking Age.

Kennings in Christian Poetry (Tommy Sargeant, University of Cambridge)

This paper will examine how kennings for Christian objects in Christian skaldic poetry developed, using the corpus published in *Poetry on Christian Subjects* as part of the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* series. This paper will build on Fidjestøl's concept of 'sogekvæde', where, through the widespread adoption of literacy, some skaldic poems ceased to be compositions aimed at extolling an event or person personally known to the audience and instead used prior compositions of a historical event to create new compositions about this same event. For Christian skaldic poetry, the development of literacy and exposure to Latin models means such Christian poems are often heavily inspired by, or are re-compositions of, Latin ecclesiastical poetry. It will be shown that many of the distinctive kennings for this Christian corpus are adaptations of Latin phrases. This is highly innovative as the non-Christian kenning corpus is stable, with innovatory kennings typically only possible either through an inversion of an existing kenning formulation, or through *nýgerving*.

This paper will also suggest that these intertextualities were apparent to the audience. This demonstrates the likely ecclesiastical audience of Christian skaldic poetry. The paper will also consider how this textual dependence for these kennings creates a metaphorical quality. Scholarship is divided on whether kennings typically play a metaphorical role with the surrounding verse, however, these innovatory Christian kennings frequently impart additional meaning drawn from the source text and so are distinctively metaphorical.

"Class and Gender in Medieval Scandinavian Medicine: *Huskurer* and the Voice of Women" (Lara Harris, University of Cambridge)

This paper explores the manuscript *Huskurer och Signerier på Danska* ('Home Remedies and Charms in Danish'), a 16th-century medical manuscript of Danish origin housed at the Swedish Royal Academy of Letters (Vitterhetsakademien). Until very recently, it had been almost entirely forgotten, only having been very briefly mentioned in two articles in the past 100 years.

Out of the 40 Scandinavian medical manuscripts that have survived from the late Middle Ages (ca. 1550), *Huskurer* stands out as the only one that includes women as medical authorities. It mentions a *gammel kvinde fra Halland* ('an old woman from Halland') who treated a patient for lip cancer, placing her authority at least on par with— or possibly even above— Salernitan medical figures, who for the most part remain unnamed. The author also betrays a preference for empirical evidence over classical medical texts, as is suggested by his postscript *og de er forsøgt* ('this [remedy] has been tried').

The manuscript also appears to be aimed at the working classes. This is reflected in the author's choice of ingredients for the remedies, which are mostly inexpensive and accessible herbs. This is particularly significant in the sections on women's health. Given that childbirth was one of the most dangerous moments in a woman's life, most contemporary manuscripts offer recipes with high-priced ingredients such as frankincense, cinnamon, and saffron—plants that only the elites could afford. However, *Huskurer* provides thoughtful and sophisticated recipes that are also economical, making them accessible to impoverished women.

Medieval Dis/ability Complexes: Embodiment, Emotionality, and Disability in Legendary Narratives (Erin Benton, University of Aberdeen)

The central role that bodies take in society, as well as in our own cognitive and emotional processes, has been relatively neglected until fairly recently. There have been numerous recent studies on bodies and embodiment in Old Norse narratives (Künzler, Ríkardsdóttir, etc.), but disability has proved to be an elusive subject to analyse in the medieval period, particularly when using modern models. On the surface, the medieval disabled body seems to spark contradictions. With the influx of scholarly thought on medieval embodied cognition and embodied emotions, it has become apparent that examining these aspects as holistically connected can lead to further understandings of both the body and of narrative structures. Using Dan Goodley's Dis/ability Complex and related theories, I seek to answer one of the apparent paradoxes posed by the medieval disabled body: if emotional expression can be represented by physical *ability* and action, why are some of the most emotive characters are physically *disabled*? This physical emotionality of several dis/abled characters in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Völundarkviða*, and others will be compared, demonstrating how embodied subjects, such as dis/ability, pain, and anger are connected, and how this constructs not just the literary body, but the narrative itself.

Phantom Women: Genealogical Pseudo-History in Medieval Icelandic Sources (Kendra Nydam, University of Cambridge)

Icelandic authors of the *Íslendingasögur* and *konungarsögur* were often preoccupied by matters of genealogical descent, devoting large swaths of their manuscripts to the tracing of illustrious lineages from the earliest legendary heroes and kings to the most prominent contemporary Icelandic families. These genealogical records are also home to a surprising number of female figures and matrilineal connections to illustrious or legendary lines. Many of these claimed female ancestors are likely invented, yet they appear to have been legitimised just as fully as their male counterparts in the genealogies, creating an intriguing dichotomy with the largely patrilineal, male-dominated historical record of the Old Norse world. This paper will explore the possible social and political motivations behind this practice of inserting fictitious matriarchs into the lineage of prominent kings, nobles, and legendary figures from Norway, Sweden, and other Scandinavian regions, investigating how these pseudo-historical female figures fit into the larger framework of other literary programmes employed by Icelanders seeking to establish their identities and elevate their status within the medieval Norse world. The practice illustrates early understanding of the persuasive power of written record in the complex interplay between myth making and identity formation, potentially expanding our understanding of how medieval Icelandic society prioritised notions of heritage and legitimacy while navigating a period of cultural assertion and expansion.

The Difficulty of Dating Medieval Norwegian Script: A Charter Approach to the Paleographers Dilemma (Tonje H. Waldersnes, University of Bergen)

Traditionally, it is believed that Latin script was introduced to the Nordic region by missionary monks in the 11th century, several centuries after it had first been adopted. By that time, the script had already undergone various trends and improvements, fashion expressions, and time-saving adaptations, allowing for a traceable chronology from majuscule to uncial, Carolingian minuscule, and later to Gothic script. The delayed introduction to Norway resulted in a somewhat mixed amalgamation of elements from several script types encountered throughout the medieval period. In addition, very few scribes included dates or even a signature during production in manuscripts. This makes dating Norwegian script challenging, often leading scholars to interpret words or syllables instead, often simultaneously.

This is where Charters come in. Often overlooked in Manuscript studies as a whole different change, Charters contain both a specific date and the name of the scribe, and comes with an internal proclamation of its originality (or if it is a copy). Focusing on Charters instead of Manuscripts, this paper presents an engaging and interdisciplinary exploration of previously excluded materials and methods in the realm of Norwegian Paleography. Limiting the temporal frame to between 1300 and 1500 it addresses the challenges of accurately dating medieval manuscripts lead by the question «Is there a pattern in the use of graphemes in selected West Norwegian charter scripts from between 1300 og 1500?». The discussion highlights the complexities involved in script dating and contributes significantly to our understanding of medieval Norwegian writing practices and norms.

Ein lög? The Legal System in *Íslendingabók* (Annabelle Chua, University of Cambridge)

The law is everywhere in *Íslendingabók*. From the separation of Iceland into quarters, to the calculation of the calendar, to the Commonwealth's conversion to Christianity, *Íslendingabók* credits major developments in the history of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth to its legal system. Yet, while much scholarly attention has been directed to analysing the symbolic role which the law plays within *Íslendingabók*'s greater foundational narrative, there has yet to be a systematic analysis of how the legal system itself is presented.

This paper seeks to engage with *Íslendingabók*'s portrayal of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth's legal system on its own terms. By combining analysis of *Íslendingabók*'s textual history and close reading of the work, this paper lays out the model of the legal system which *Íslendingabók* implicitly constructs. This model is then analysed compared to the legal system portrayed by the *Grágás*, and significant points of tension, contradiction, and corroboration between two of our most important sources on Old Icelandic Law are highlighted and explored. This research thus sheds light on a key aspect of *Íslendingabók* which has long been neglected, but which has critical implications on our understanding, not only of *Íslendingabók*, but of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth as a whole.

Landmunr: Viking Homesickness in its Narrative and Exilic Contexts (Nikolaus Frenzel, University of Liverpool)

Within Old Norse sagas, *landmunr* 'homesickness' (from *landr* 'country' and *munr* 'mind, memory, desire') occurs only in *Orkneyinga saga*, *Bjarnar saga* and twice in *Óláfs saga Helga* (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874), depicted for the 10-11th centuries. It seems typographically divergent that *landmunr* occurs so infrequently within a culture that characteristically ventured from home (c.f., Douglas 2010). Resultantly, this raises many questions, namely why saga-writers needed to discombobulate characters in foreign environments? Additionally, *landmunr* occurs exclusively for exiles, which permits investigation between emotion and law, and feeds into the discourse of legal scholars such as William Miller (1992). Lacking the "physical reactions" typical of saga-described emotion (c.f. Rikhardsdottir 2017), I consider that *landmunr* was utilised by saga-writers to trigger narratives, akin to transgression triggers described by Shortt Butler (2016), to shift action back to the characters' home country. We should consider *landmunr* under a different cognitive form which relates to political and geographical environments. This paper thus demonstrates that *landmunr* was a literary tool to motivate behaviour within legal and cognitive frameworks and exhibits the link between mind and environment for the Norse in both language and actions.

***Fyr mold neðan: The Geospatial Chthonian of Völuspá* (Claudia Comyn-Paine, University of Cambridge)**

This paper will focus on a few individual stanzas of the Eddic poem *Völuspá*. This famously shadowy text presents ongoing challenges for philologists, and interpretations of the poem are speculative at best. In this talk, I will look at the chthonian can not only boost our literary analysis of this poem, but also help us make more sense of the information we have.

I will begin with a very brief definition of the term ‘Chthonic’ or ‘Chthonian’, as understood within the fields of Classics and psychoanalysis. This term derives from the Ancient Greek *χθών*, ‘earth’ or ‘subterranean’, and typically refers to deities and ritual rites associated with the classical underworld.

I will then move on to look at several stanzas relating to the earth and subterranean spaces. I will acknowledge the challenges faced in translation and literary analysis of these stanzas; I will then discuss how an understanding of the chthonian spaces and their properties can act as a revelatory key to the rest of the poem. The goal of my wider research is to build a new definition of the chthonian with reference to this poem, which can ultimately lend useful vocabulary for cross-comparison with other sources.

The Norse Realms and their Contradictions: Is there One True Understanding? (Cougan Betts, University of Aberdeen)

We know from primary sources such as the Eddas and the Sagas that there seem to be some conflicting depictions and understandings of the 9 realms. These contradictions make it difficult to understand the cosmology and aesthetics of the realms. The purpose of my paper is to address whether there was ever one true understanding of the Old Norse realms or if the conceptions of these realms were ever-evolving. My paper will evaluate four of the nine realms (*Helheimr*, *Niflheimr*, *Ásgardr*, and *Jötunheimr*) and how they were understood throughout the different sources in terms of: Spatial relationships; Aesthetics; Role and meaning. There is previous research to indicate that Snorri's bipartite conception of Hel as both a personification of death and as a realm is somewhat flawed due to Skaldic poetry never having mentioned Hel as a realm and vice versa for Eddic poetry (Christopher Abram, 2006). This could be for literary purposes or a temporal evolution, but it demonstrates how sources can contradict in their understanding of a realm. As for spatial relationships between the realms, Eldar Heide (2014) suggests that despite the contradictions there is a system to the cosmology due to passageways being re-used in the literature. I will cover the ideas of each chapter and explain why these ideas are crucial to my ongoing research into the conception of the Norse realms as opposed to Snorri's writings.

From Rome to Reykjavík: Saturn and Njörðr in the Wormianus Recension of Snorra Edda (Maryann Pierse, University of Aberdeen)

This paper explores the interpretation of the Greco-Roman figure Saturn as the Norse *vanir* Njörðr, in the Codex Wormianus *Prologue* of the thirteenth-century poetic treatise *Snorra Edda*. Codex Wormianus is one of the four main manuscript witnesses of this seminal work of Old Norse literature, and contains unique material in the *Prologue*, not found in the Uppsaliensis or Regius Codices. In an explicit case of *interpretatio norroena* (in which foreign concepts, especially mythological figures, are glossed or translated as Norse ones),¹ Saturn, the euhemerised Roman god of wealth and agriculture, is equated with Njörðr, the *vanir* of the sea. This choice of equivalence provides a unique site to investigate medieval Icelandic engagement with Latinate culture and its integration with Norse traditions, as well as ideas about agency, masculinity, and succession and kingship. Furthermore, the connections between the two figures highlighted in the *Prologue* have significant ramifications for readings of Njörðr's character in *Gylfaginning*.

The *Riddarasaga Berserkr*: A Figure of Anti-Chivalric Satire? (Daniel Rusu, University of Bergen)

This presentation analyses various *berserkr* encounters in two original *riddarasögur*, *Ectors saga* and *Kirialax saga*, highlighting an antithetical relationship between the knightly protagonist and the unchivalrous *berserkr*. I argue that this dichotomy was a deliberate narrative device, in which the indigenous motif of the *berserkr* was employed as a prime counterexample to chivalry. This opposition is reinforced by the many similarities between the knight and the *berserkr*, contrasted with the latter's ethical deviations. Both sagas depict the *berserkr* as part of the social and military elite. Their foreign ethnicity becomes an integral aspect of their identity, as they are consistently described as *svartir* yet distinct from the subaltern *blámenn*. Their ethnicity is further linked to their pagan identity, shaped by the non-European settings of the sagas, which transform the once-Odinic *berserkr* into a Saracen. While the *berserkr* is portrayed as equal to the knightly protagonist in military prowess and social standing, they also embody anti-chivalric qualities, such as moral corruption and the use of unchivalrous weaponry – characteristics aligned with satirical representations of chivalry. The shared identity of the *berserkr* and knight as duellists and challengers enables the *berserkr* to function as a substitute for the 'evil' or anti-knights found in other European romances. This paper is connected to my ongoing master's thesis, titled "*Berserkr* and the Trespass of Chivalric Virtues: A Norse Motif Adapted to the *Riddarasögur*."

"Glory comes along the blade": Symbolism and Relationships between Swords and Heroism in *Fornaldarsögur* (Raphaël Cottureau, University of Bergen)

This presentation will prefigure my thesis, which shall explore the relationship between legendary blades and heroism in *fornaldarsögur*. Main research question is the following: "How does the occurrence of mythical swords in *fornaldarsögur* determine the uprising of heroism within them".

First example of the presentation will be on how the presence of legendary blades influences the development of heroic figures, differentiating between swords as triggers (initiating a hero's transformation) and as reinforcers (enhancing an already established hero's might). The analysis will also, in the future, address how swords are distinct from other magical artifacts in saga narratives.

The presentation will also include a focus on curses on swords, making a distinction between those that serve as narrative details versus those that are central to the plot; making the emphasis on curses impact the story in different ways. The study also considers how swords are obtained, contrasting those given (often by a father or mentor) with those taken (through combat or grave-robbing).

Selected *fornaldarsögur* includes *Völsunga saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, *Örvar-Odds saga* and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, alongside *Kormáks saga* and *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, which share thematic elements with *fornaldarsögur*. The research employs comparative and literary analysis, focusing on how these swords shape characters and contribute to their heroic identity.

Ok hefir nú sannast þat, er ek sagða þér – A Kaleidoscopic Approach to the Narrative of the *fornaldarsögur* (Hilkea Blomeyer, University of Tuebingen)

The *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* were for a long time criticized for their repetitive use of stock characters and motifs. Finnur Jónsson among others likens their narratives to a kaleidoscope that creates new compositions through the repeated re-configuration of the same elements. Marianne Kalinke recycles this picture and suggests to see this not as a weakness but innovative strength of the *riddarasögur* and subsequently *fornaldarsögur*. In this paper I will therefore present a new methodological approach by introducing the idea of kaleidoscopic narration, in order to shine a light on the creative strategy that is employed in the texts. Taking Kalinke's ideas as a starting point, I suggest that this narrative mechanism is based on the idea that new episodes and sagas can be created from a repository of common elements. The second part of the talk will focus on how kaleidoscopic narration integrates itself in the narrative in the form of a case study. Selected episodes from *Örvarr-Odds saga* and *Hervarar saga* will be analysed and compared with each other. I intend to show the different ways the narrative technique influences our understanding of the text and is itself influenced by the audience's expectations of the *fornaldarsögur*. The aim is to showcase how the use of the kaleidoscopic approach may help in gaining a differentiated insight into the perception of genres and the constitution of a canon in Old Norse literature.

Alfǫðr: Medieval Material or Pre-Christian Practice? (Max Thorne, University of Aberdeen)

Old Norse *Alfǫðr* (ENG. 'All-Father'), is an epithet ascribed to the Norse god Óðinn in a number of places¹, most notably in the poem *Gylfaginning*. The titular king Gylfi asks, "Who is the highest and most ancient of all gods?"². His question is answered thusly:

"Sá heitir Alfǫðr at váru máli,..." "Hann smíðaði himin ok jǫrð ok loptin ok alla eign þeira... Hitt er mest er hann gerði manninn ok gaf honum ǫnd þá er lifa skal ok aldri týnask, þótt líkaminn fúni at moldu eða brenni at ǫsku. Ok skulu allir menn lifa þeir er rétt eru siðaðir ok vera með honum sjálfum þar sem heitir Gimlé eða Vingólf, en vándir menn fara til Heljar...."³.

"He is called All-father in our language,..." "But his greatest work is that he made man and gave them a soul that shall live and never perish through the body decay to dust or burn to ashes. And all men who are righteous shall live and dwell with him himself in the place called Gimle or Vingolf, but wicked men go to Hel..."⁴.

Many scholars have pointed out the obvious⁵. The author may as well have started this description with 'He is called our father in heaven'. It is tempting to disregard *Alfǫðr* as a Christian invention. However, I would argue that the use of the term *Alfǫðr* harkens back to legitimate pre-Christian practice and belief in Viking-Age Scandinavia, and perhaps further still.

Others All The Way Down – Medieval Icelanders As Ethnographers Of The Ancient Past (Ambra Ventura, University of Bergen)

The aim of this paper is to explore the othering strategies employed by Icelandic saga authors in the *fornaldarsögur* and attempt to uncover the reason why these othering strategies were necessary. In doing so, it builds on Margaret Clunies Ross' reading of these sagas as fantastic ethnographies by questioning the way the categories of ethnicity and gender are used to not only separate the Norse people depicted in these narratives from other ethnic groups, but also to make *forn öld* Norse people and society other from 13th century Icelandic society. Of the many ethnic groups that the Norse came in contact with in the *fornaldarsögur*, Sámi people were identified as the obvious cultural other, and as such will be the main focus when analysing groups other than the Norse. Questions of identity, ethnicity and gender will be approached through the use of Medieval race theory, exoticism, and the Medieval Christian worldview. An attempt will be made to explain how far this othering is taken, and the judgement associated with it, through the use of a new theoretical model here presented and called Layers of Identity.

‘Mad about the skalds: *þættir* and sagas of Poets’ (Alan Davey, Birkbeck College, University of London)

This paper will present emerging findings from my research into *þættir* which feature poets in the courts of Norwegian rulers and how these might connect to the emergence of *Skald sagas* as a debated but recognised literary sub genre of the sagas of Icelanders. The paper will set out some of the characteristics of *þættir* about poets and the notion of the arrival at court as a sometimes hazardous but necessary rite of passage – one where the threat to the poets’ own identity and lives is ever present and how the degree of danger changes with the manuscripts where the *þættir* are recorded. Finally it will briefly point towards possible connections and differences between *skald þættir* and *skald sagas* and the way in which the sagas might be seen to take further a fascination with the figure of the poet for an Icelandic audience.

A Myth about a Myth: The Reinvention of Old Norse Mythology in Video Games (Olga Kalinovskaia, Universitetet i Bergen)

In this paper, I explore the ways in which Old Norse mythology is represented in video games – a constantly expanding medium – and examine its connections to both scholarly knowledge of pre-Christian religious traditions in Scandinavia and primary medieval sources from Norway and Iceland. For this analysis, I focus on two video games in which Old Norse mythology plays different roles and is interpreted in distinct ways: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* and *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*. Both games are widely recognized for their commercial success, as evidenced by sales statistics and industry awards.

Video games must meet the needs and expectations of their audience in order to be commercially successful. At the same time, like any other creative medium, they reflect the worldviews and beliefs of their creators, while also influencing players' perceptions of both fictional worlds and real historical settings. Medieval-themed video games, in particular, contribute to shaping popular images of the Middle Ages. As interactive media, they not only depict historical and mythological narratives but also allow players to engage with them, making video games a powerful tool for cultural transmission. But how is the medieval past represented in these games? And how does their depiction relate to medieval source texts, historical imagery, and later medievalism?

Traversable Texts: Conceptualising the Modern Interactive Digital Edition (Sebastian Pohland, University of Oslo)

As digital capabilities in the humanities increase and more and more digital edition projects manifest, many have asked what digital editions can provide aside from the already realised ease of use of a digitized printed edition? Peter Aarseth's 1997 thesis 'Cybertext : Perspectives on Ergodic Literature' offers a framework on analysing texts in which reader and author/editor interact, like, e.g., video games. My talk will explore the argument put forth by Edward Vanhoutte in 2011 that perhaps it is time to think of an 'ergodic' edition, which would bring interactivity and collaboration to the digital edition in ways that printed editions are not able to. I will discuss the advantages and shortcomings of such an approach and show my current vision of the sort of interactivity possible and useful today.

Digital Science Communication of Medieval Archaeology in Bergen (Bachelor's thesis) (Anika Stoll, University of Bergen)

This presentation will outline the scope of my bachelor's thesis in archaeology, which explores the advantages and challenges of digital science communication in medieval archaeology. Using examples from projects such as *Bergen Anno 1320* and *Tidsvis*, I will analyze how digital tools shape public engagement with archaeological research. My approach is grounded in blended learning theory, which provides a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of these digital methods. Additionally, I will contextualize these examples within broader trends in science communication by examining other ways medieval archaeology has been communicated to different target demographics in Bergen.

Recurrent Zoomorphic Motifs in 6th to 10th century Scandinavian Art (Emma Radcliff, University of Cambridge, Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic)

This project aims to analyse the forms and distributions of early Scandinavian zoomorphic art, especially where visual themes recur but no species can be conclusively identified. Much attention has been paid to the appearance of notable animals in Migration Period through Viking-Age artwork—wolves, eagles, boars, etc.—but much less to zoomorphs which cannot be assigned a species. Despite this, particular animal image-forms of inconclusive species appear across media in ways which indicate they would have been recognizable motifs with, perhaps, a broadly-understood meaning. My goal is not to assign them a species, as I am unconvinced they were meant to represent one according to a modern understanding; rather, I seek to determine the contexts in which these motifs recur and draw conclusions based on medium and origin.

Vita til sanns at satt er. Gerald of Wales and the King's Mirror (Jonas Zeit-Alt peter University of Bonn/UiB)

The first part of the Old Norwegian *King's Mirror* (*Speculum regale*, mid-13th century), the so-called 'Merchant's Chapter', narrates a number of Irish marvels and miracles. Many of them are known from earlier texts, but by far the closest parallel is found in the *Topographia Hibernica* (first version 1187) by the Cambro-Norman cleric Gerald of Wales. These similarities were noted early on, but the transmission of the material was described as 'merely oral' by older scholarship. Recent research has re-assessed this relationship and argued for a written source for the Norwegian text. The focus in all of this scholarship has been on the comparison of individual stories and motifs.

However, when widening the focus and taking the marvel section as a whole, it appears that there are further close parallels between the *King's Mirror* and Gerald's text. There are similarities in structuring principles, surrounding discourse, and some verbal parallels. The present paper argues that this makes it unlikely that transmission of the Irish material was oral and vernacular. Instead, the *King's Mirror* appears to make productive use of the *Topographia* as a model. It thus attests to the transfer of continental Latin learning to Norway through the British Isles.

Seascapes and Fish Sticks: The Cultural Anatomy of a Medieval Icelandic Food (Liz Windisch, University of Aberdeen)

This excerpt belongs to the ongoing doctoral research project *The Saga of Fin and Bone: Deep Mapping the Medieval Icelandic Marine Food System*. By combining textual analysis of Old Icelandic sagas, legal codes, and religious writings with archaeological evidence, this interdisciplinary study uncovers the cultural, economic, and ecological aspects of the medieval Icelandic marine food system. This project sheds light on early marine resource exploitation and offers insights into food sovereignty, sustainability, and human-sea relationships, lessons that resonate with today's global fishing crisis. The heart of this project centres around *skrei*, or “stockfish”, the Viking Age product of air-dried fish which survives in modern Scandinavian food culture. Taking examples from the Eddas, *Íslendingasögur*, *Grágás*, and material culture, this chapter considers the marine cosmology of the Norse, religious valuation of marine foodstuffs, and traditional Norse fisher-farmer society to evaluate the significance of Old Icelandic *skrei*.

Bromance in the *Runsivals stríð* (The Battle of Roncevaux) (Nansý Sunadóttir, University of the Faroe Islands)

In this presentation, I will discuss the bromance in the Faroese ballad *Runsivals stríð* (The Battle of Roncevaux) by analyzing the connections between the characters and how they interact with each other. The presentation will be based on my master's thesis, in which I aim to explore how masculinity and homosociality are portrayed in the Faroese ballads *Emunds ríma* (Emund's ballad) and *Runsivals stríð*.

The ballads are about the Roman emperor Karlamagnus (Charlemagne) and his Paladins, particularly Rólant (Roland) and Ólvar (Oliver), and correspond to a certain degree to the French chanson de geste *The Song of Roland*. In *Emunds ríma* a young Rólant kills the giant Emund to save Karlamagnus, and the story continues in *Runsivals stríð*, where Emund's father wants revenge, and the battle of Runsival takes place. All of Karlamagnus' Paladins are killed in the battle, and he avenges their deaths. Both ballads are categorized as heroic ballads in *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad*.

Homosociality was the norm in the feudal society, the man-woman pair was not regarded as a major priority before the courtly love. A great example of homosociality is the friendship between Roland and Oliver in *The Song of Roland* in which Roland cries and faints after losing his friend Oliver, and the poet states: "See how they part with such great love". In the Faroese ballads, their love for each other is well hidden beneath the fighting and the blood.

Brynhildr of the Ballads (Saskia Cowan, University of Bergen)

The Faroese ballad *Brynhildar táttur* makes up the second part of the *Sjúrdar kvæði*, which consists of three ballads (*Regin smiður*, *Brynhildar táttur* and *Høgna táttur*) that together tell a variant of the legend of Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer (the Old Norse-Icelandic *Sigurðr fáfnisbani*, the Middle High German Siegfried, known in Faroese as *Sjúrdur*). However, despite the popularity of Brynhildr (Old Norse-Icelandic *Brynhildr* and Middle High German *Brünhild*) in the field of Old Norse-Icelandic and Middle High German studies, the Faroese material – first recorded in the 17th century – has rarely been included as a point of study. This is in part due to the Faroese material having been regarded as of lesser quality or derivative of the Old Norse-Icelandic and Middle High German materials, and therefore not of interest. This presentation is the beginning of a potential PhD project with the aim of dispelling such notions, and to fill the gap in scholarly literature by analyzing the Faroese character Brynhildr and juxtaposing her to her European analogues.

