The “Us” in the Other: 
The *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* in the Icelandic Saga Literature

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Abstract

The thesis investigates how the Finnar and Skraelingar are depicted as Others in the Icelandic saga literature, and what this reflects about the Norse group identity at the time they were written. It traces through the various traits and stereotypes ascribed to these Other cultural groups, the most prominent being sorcery, nomadism, and being non-agricultural, and shows how the Norse were situated from each. Throughout the sagas and through a lens of Christianity, the Norse position themselves as superior to the Finnar and Skraelingar, and use the negative imagery of these groups to further raise their profile in the narrative. By pulling this relationship apart, I show how the Finnar and Skraelingar are essentially similar in the eyes of the Norse, and further, that the depiction of the Skraelingar is based on a finite model of the Finnar.
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1. Introduction: The Icelandic Identity Reflected in the Finnar and Skraelingar as Others

In this thesis I aim to investigate the Icelandic sagas’ portrayal of the social categories of Finnar and Skraelingar, which are positioned as Others relative to the saga-projected “us,” and present how these reflect upon the Icelandic group identity which the sagas can be seen as a product of. Additionally, I compare these two similar literary portraits and argue how they are structurally related, asserting that the image of the Skraelingar is directly modelled on the one projected on the Finnar by the sagas’ narrative voice.

Theme and Scope: Extracting Identity Through Text

In the Icelandic Saga literature, readers are frequently exposed to a people belonging to the peripheral North called Finnar, a literary category based on the ancestors of the present day Sami and Finns.¹ Whether treated pragmatically by the Norse as useful trading partners, magicians for hire, a minority to be taxed, or simply as vile creatures, the Finnar can be identified in the saga as an estranged Other, more often than not in a hostile fashion, but always as something radically distinct from the Norse social identity.

To the far west, on the Canadian coast of Labrador and Newfoundland, another people, called Skraelingar,² are portrayed in a similar manner throughout the saga literature, wherein they appear as the malicious, ugly, and supernatural people of a foreign and mysterious land. According to the sagas, the people this category is built upon were encountered during the Norse attempts to settle the mythicized Vínland.³ There are uncertainties as to which exact arctic tribe the Norse are supposed to have met, but archaeological evidence suggest Norse encounters with both Thule- (the proto-Inuit of Labrador) and Beothuk-tribes (arctic Indians based on Newfoundland).⁴

Analyzing the sagas’ portrayal of the Finnar and Skraelingar is ultimately intended as a study of the social structures of the Norse-Icelandic world view, relying on the premise that a collective world view can be regarded as partially reflected in the Icelandic sagas.⁵ Doing this, we approach the source material as expressions of a collective mentality, a term annalist Aron Gurevich used when studying the “psychological framework shared by people of a given society united by a

² We are here dealing exclusively with the Skraelingar as given through the Vínland-sagas, not taking into account the treatment of e.g. Greenland-Skraelingar found in other non-saga works.
³ There are uncertainties as to which exact arctic tribe the Norse are supposed to have met, but archaeological evidence suggest Norse encounters with both Thule- (the proto-Inuit of Labrador) and Beothuk-tribes (arctic Indians based on Newfoundland): Robert McGhee, Ancient People of the Arctic (Vancouver, 1996), 206.
⁴ Robert McGhee, Ancient People of the Arctic (Vancouver, 1996), 206.
⁵ A manuscript was the product of both individual and collective contributions: Hans Jacob Orning, The Reality of the Fantastic: The Magical, Political and Social Universe of Late Medieval Saga Manuscripts (Odense, 2017), 30.
single culture”.6 This involves a strict treatment of the source material as historical remains, regarded as a central influence in the contemporary socio-cultural sphere at hand, as opposed to approaching it as historical accounts, what the texts are asserting per se.

In this study we are thus not interested in these portrayals in order to say something about the historical situation of e.g. Sami- or Inuit-people, the people on which these respective portraits are based. Instead we are interested in the writers themselves, the Icelanders, their authorial environment, and subsequently how they identified the world around them and their place in it. By this, our timeframe is set to when the sagas were written, and thus read, contemporarily influencing and reflecting a belonging world view, roughly dated to the span of year 1200 to 1350.7 Geographically we are in the least treating the studied source material as expressions of an Icelandic culture in which the sagas were written. Both this spatial and temporal scope can be regarded as rather conservatively placed, as both in reality stands variable to how long and how geographically far the saga literature can be said to impact and reflect the collective world view in question.8 The sagas may well have influenced Norse ideas of the world after 1350, as it may well have influenced more than just the Norse people of Iceland.9

Historiography: How this Thesis Adds to Studies on Norse-Icelandic Identities

The primary aim in studying these portraits lies in discussing how they stand as reflections of a Norse identity, typically in how the Others, signaled as far removed from the Norse “us,” stand as characterized negations or counterparts to what the Norse saw themselves as. The use of the theoretical concept of Otherness in saga studies, central throughout this paper, was most prominently introduced by Kirsten Hastrup in 1985 in Culture and History in Medieval Iceland.10 Hastrup sees the sagas projection of Otherness as distinctly contingent with what she dichotomizes as “the social” and “the wild,” a spatial division that symbolically places the Icelandic “us” within the farmstead fence and the Other outside, belonging to the essentially uncivilized “wild.”11 Although I argue the use of the farmstead fence as being far too narrow in representing an Icelandic

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6 Aaron Gurevich, Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages, ed. Jana Howlett (Cambridge, 1992), 4, 11 (quote on page 4).
7 Massimiliano Bampi states how some konungasögur were written already in the late 12th century, and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson dates most of the fornaldarsögur to have been written by the end of the 14th century: Massimiliano Bampi, “Genre,” in The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London, 2017), 4-15, at 4; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, “Fornaldarsögur,” in Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingtid til reformasjonstid, vol. 4 (Copenhagen, 1959).
8 See page 8-9.
9 This is exemplified as I ask who we are to regard as the possessors of the saga world view later in this chapter.
11 Ibid., 140-143
experience of a societal center and an oppositional periphery,¹² I broadly apply Hastrup’s general approach and toolset.

Heavily influenced by Hastrup, Sirpa Aalto advances the study of Otherness in saga literature in *Categorising Otherness in the Kings’ Sagas*, published in 2010.¹³ Here, the sagas’ projection of the Other is regarded as “a fundamental building block of group identity to define who belongs to ‘us’ and who the Others are.”¹⁴ Aalto’s work is particularly relevant as she places substantial emphasis on the Finnar and their projected Otherness.¹⁵ Also important to studies on the Finnar-portrait is Sverre Bagge with his *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson’s Heimskringla*,¹⁶ written in 1991, and Hans Jacob Orning with *The Reality of the Fantastic*, published in 2017. Where Bagge maintains the Finnar as stereotypical sorcerers and a staple Otherness in the saga literature, Orning goes deeper in investigating their magical role and the role of saga-magic in general.¹⁷

All of these scholars provide valuable insights and analyses, drawn heavily upon in this thesis. However, in the trodden path of looking at Otherness as reflecting world views, neither Aalto, Bagge, nor Orning applies this angle in the direct study of how the Norse saw themselves, leaving a reflected Norse image as merely indirectly implied, where it could be asserted more explicitly. Continuously pointing to the Finnar as Others, while also recognizing the projection of Otherness as expressions of cultural identity, these scholars come short in exploring what these portraits imply in regards to a described Icelandic identity. In my analysis of the Finnar and Skraelingar I situate these distinct Others directly as counterparts to the Norse, accessing a negated rendition of how the sagas view and identify a Norse “us.” As the Other is depicted as ugly, uncivilized, and generally inferior, the self-image of the “us” is interpreted as being one of beauty, sophistication, and general superiority. How a group defines Others as different constitutes the ways in which the circle of familiarity, the categorizing force itself, is identified; the Others are either like that which we are not, or not like that which we are.

In line with how little they appear in the saga literature, a lot less is written in regards to the Skraelingar. As E. A. Williamsen states in his article of 2005, most studies on the Vinland-sagas and

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¹² See page 72-73.
¹³ Sirpa Aalto, *Categorising Otherness in the Kings’ Sagas* (Tampere, 2010).
¹⁴ Ibid., 13.
¹⁵ Of the several distinctly non-Norse categories studied by Aalto, the Finnar are by far given the most thorough examination.
¹⁷ Orning’s work exclusively deals with the fornaldsögur, and its more specific takes on saga-magic should by that not be represented too broadly. Orning’s chapter on working with sagas as historical remains should also be noted as methodologically important to this thesis: “Using ‘unhistorical’ sagas as historical sources,” in Orning, *Reality of the Fantastic*, 21-43.
the *Skraelingar* have been “historical and archeological in nature,” primarily focusing on the historical probability of the events and descriptions accounted for in the sagas. Aligning myself with Williamsen I find these sagas, and the *Skraelingar* in particular, to have received far too little attention as literary creations of the Icelandic culture. However, where Williamsen, and the few others invested in this more modern approach to *Vínland*, seem content with analyzing the *Skraelingar*-Otherness in a limited, literary context, I expand the interpretational context as well as directly applying the *Skraelingar*-Otherness in reading the Icelandic group identity.

Scholarly investigations of the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* and their representation in the Icelandic world view are generally confined to a textual saga-context, ignoring the material and broader cultural context of the societies in which these literary categories were produced and received. As such the *Finnar* are typically depicted as sorcerers, and not much else. In my reading of the respective Others I expand these images by including the material objects and spatial circumstances with which the Other is associated in the sagas. Beyond being vile sorcerers, the *Skraelingar* and *Finnar* should also stand largely defined as hunter-gatherers, as nomads, and more importantly as non-agricultural. These are traits I argue to be of high significance when looking at how these categories were understood by a general Icelandic population.

Frequently stepping out of the confined context of saga literature, I investigate the Icelandic perception of the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* in a more inclusive sense than previously done, by questioning the cultural importance of the material surroundings seen as particularly present, or absent, in the portrait of the Other. Through the points discussed above, this thesis innovates upon how the *Skraelingar, Finnar*, and the group identity of the sagas’ “us” have been studied to date.

Beyond the Icelandic identity, the other primary aim of this thesis lies in comparing the two literary categories of *Skraelingar* and *Finnar* by systemically investigating their similarities and differences. The hypothesis in this project surrounds the question of how the Icelanders, when considering several peoples of distinctly different actual characteristics (meaning that they must have been fundamentally different in both behavior and appearance), belonging to two dramatically different locations, could assign these to what appear to be very comparable categories. The overall similarity of the portrayal of the two peoples has been observed by historians before, e.g. by Jeremy DeAngelo in his essay *The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar.”* If their portrayal in the saga literature can be argued as sufficiently similar, this stands as a legitimate premise for the discussion.

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19 Likely due to only appearing in two sagas and by that representing a small and ignorable part of the saga world view.

20 As I argue later on, Williamsen has a far too nefarious reading of *Vínland* itself, having the land being identified by its demonized inhabitants far beyond reason.

on whether the image of *Skraelingar* can be identified as a recycled version of the image first constructed and applied to the *Finnar*. The word “recycled” is meant to analogize the modification of an existing stereotype, already projected onto the people denoted in the term “Finnar,” applied in the creation of a new category, the *Skraelingar*.

A similar theoretical approach is seen in John Lindow’s 2003 essay *Cultures in Contact,* wherein Lindow argues that *Heimskringla*’s Odin as a literary construct is modeled on the Norse conception of a stereotypical *Finnar* sorcerer. Backed by Lindow I claim that the *Finnar* possess an archetypal Otherness in the Sagas, as one of the most central and most encountered social categories, distinctly signaled as “non-Norse.” This stands as one of the premises of my discussion as I argue that the image of the *Skraelingar* is directly dependent on the one applied to the *Finnar*, revealing the *Finnar* as structurally influencing far more than their given category.

Source Material: Working Across Saga Genres

The field being Icelandic saga literature, the selection of source material is dictated by where in this broad corpus the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* appear as characters. In regards to the *Skraelingar*, only two sagas, *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlendinga saga*, the *Islendingasögur* commonly known as the *Vínland*-sagas, are relevant. Where the *Skraelingar* are exclusive to these two alone, the *Finnar* are frequent to both the *konungasögur*,

25 *fornaldarsögur*,

26 as well as being present in *Egils saga* and *Vatnsdeila saga*, two *Islendingasögur*.

As genres, these three types of sagas are categorized by definitive differences, partially by when they were written, but primarily by how they narrate distinctly different eras and events. Of the *konungasögur*, Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla*, written c. 1230 (Snorri died in 1241),

27 is my principal source. In this, the narrative revolves around and traces the lineages of Swedish and Norwegian kings from the legendary *Ynglingar*-dynasty to the death of the pretender Øystein Møyla in 1177. *Egils saga*, *Vatnsdeila saga*, and the *Vínland*-sagas are all written around the same time as *Heimskringla*,

28 but are as typical *Islendingasögur* focused on the colonization and early history of Iceland.

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22 This stands as a plausible as the *Finnar* is based on a people known and written about long before the Norse encountered the arctic people represented by the sagas’ *Skraelingar*, showing the *Finnar* as having been an established part of the Scandinavian demography long before the *Skraelingar* appeared as something to be categorized.


24 Ibid., 103-105.

25 The *Finnar* are quite frequent throughout, but with notable presences in *Ynglingasaga*, *Haralds saga hins hárfraga*, and *Ólafss saga Helga*.

26 Notable presence in *Órvar-Odds saga*, *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, and *Keitils saga hgang*.


28 *Egils saga* is by Chris Callow dated to c. 1220, and *Vatnsdeila saga* to c. 1280: Callow, “Dating and Origins,” 22, 24, respectively.
Where the sagas of these two genres are both very similar in style and written around the same time, the *fornaldarsögu* differs thematically and were likely not written before the 14th century.\(^{29}\) The typical *fornaldarsaga* tells of Norwegian kings and heroes on fantastic adventures. In *Örvar-Odds saga*,\(^{30}\) we see the giant Örvar-Oddr on a heroic warrior adventure around northern Europe, and in *Ketils saga hængs*,\(^{31}\) the half Finnar, half Norse, Ketil ventures north vanquishing trolls and jötnar. Unlike the *Islendingasögu* it is only the mainland Nordic world that is involved, and unlike the *konungasögu* the sagas are all set before *Haraldr hárfagri* united a (west-) Norwegian Kingdom.

Where these circumstances adds to defining the genre-differences, the main characteristic of the *fornaldarsögu* exists in its violent and dramatically supernatural world. Here we see an abundance of trolls, giants, and mythical beings, as well as other supernatural elements, on a frequency greatly surpassing our other two saga-genres. In this, Hans Jacob Orning points out that “the content of the *fornaldarsögu* is far removed from the historical realities in which they were written,” constituting a clear genre-distinction to other sagas regarded as much more “realistic.”\(^{32}\) Since scholars initially started using sagas as remains of contemporary attitudes and world-views, they have been far more reluctant to acknowledge the more fantastic *fornaldarsögu* as legitimate sources in this regard. Opposing this, Orning advocates for how the *fornaldarsögu* stand equal to other genres in this approach, as he holds that there is “no principal difference between using ‘realistic’ and ‘non-realistic’ genres as records in this sense.”\(^{33}\) What is meant by this, is that the way they are used as reflecting attitudes and views, leaves the question of whether the sources authentically narrate an external reality, unimportant in our specific regard. In line with this view, I treat all three saga-genres as historical sources in similar ways and on similar terms. The terms “fornaldarsögur” and “konungasögur” are after all modern applications, and should not be taken as genre-categories contemporary to saga writing, as the neither these terms nor any equivalent appear in the sagas.\(^{34}\)

The difference between the *fornaldarsögu*, and the *konungasögu* and *Islendingasögu*, is a dramatic one, but so is the temporal distance between then narrated worlds of the former and the two latter. As I shall go deeper into in my chapter on the *Finnar*, the fantastic and supernatural

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\(^{29}\) Mathew Driscoll states how there are no traces of any manuscript prior to 1300: Mathew Driscoll, “Introduction.” In Mathew Driscoll et al. *The Legendary Legacy: Transmission and Reception of the Fornaldarsögu Nordurlanda* (Odense, 2018), 9-17, at 10.


\(^{34}\) Bampi, “Genre,” 6.
world of the *fornaldarsögur* is placed in a past distinctly different era than the realistic worlds represented in the other genres, while both may stand as testaments to Norse views of different eras of a single world in development. By looking at the totality instead of the separate parts of the sagas as a gathered societal corpus, and at the structure more than on the specific narratives, a broader and more general Norse perception of can be discovered through our cross-genre approach.

**The Reflections of World Views: The Historical Anthropological Approach**

In the 1970s the studies of sagas saw a revitalization in the form of interdisciplinary approaches to history, inspired by the French Annales School founded in 1929. This development would see its most dominant impact in the anthropological perspectives on history. In its original outset from the annalists, this development had asserted itself strongly in continental medieval studies, which in the 1970s had gained a prominent position in saga studies. In his essay on the historiography of saga studies, Knut Helle states that “the historical-anthropological approach aimed to use the historical sagas as sources for explaining the general political, social and cultural patterns and mechanisms [in a given society].” In this approach, the use of the source material as historical remains was and remains a key aspect, as the sagas used are seen as products and expressions of the cultural and social structures of the milieu in which they were written.

This thesis aims to position itself in this methodological field when looking at the Old Icelandic saga literature’s portrayal of the social categories that are the *Finnar* and the *Skrælingar*. This involves, first and foremost, the selected source material used exclusively as historical remains, meaning that the sagas are interpreted in terms of what they reveal about the writers and their authorial environment, contemporarily, disregarding how they as accounts may or may not be authentic in their description of the past they are intended as testaments to. This implies that although the sagas’ rendition of the *Finnar* and *Skrælingar* are undoubtedly based on, and referring to, actual people, whose social category were likely recognized both by those belonging and not belonging to said categories, our study will be somewhat limited to these as literary constructs. By this, the *Finnar* and *Skrælingar* are primarily analyzed as phenomena manifested in literature, as categories occurring in, and confined to, text.

The concept of world view sees a wide range of uses and implications both in- and outside the field of history, but to Aalto, firmly placed in the historical-anthropological approach to saga studies, “the concept of ‘world view’ is generally understood to be ‘a set of fundamental beliefs, values, etc., determining or constituting a comprehensive outlook on the world; a perspective on

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36 Ibid., 62-63. Translated by myself.
life.” Aalto distinguishes between mental and visible world views, where the latter is restricted to the visible geographical world and the former is an extension of this, including how people view other groups of people and their position in the world, relevant to this thesis’ focus on Finnars and Skrælingar. As mentioned, Kirsten Hastrup was one of the first to thoroughly apply the notion of world view in the studies of sagas. In her work Hastrup presents a scheme of how Icelanders thought about and experienced the world around them, based on saga readings. Aimed at the Icelandic society contemporary to the writings of the sagas, Hastrup not only read the sagas as remains of the world view of the writers, but also the Icelandic society in a general sense, where the writers were seen as reflecting social and mental structures far beyond their individual world view.

Behind this lies the idea that collectively shared ideas and conceptions of a given culture could be discerned and studied through literature, with a premise existing in that said literature was being written and read to the sufficient extent of it being representational for the society intended in the scope of the study. As expressed by Aalto, the use of the term world view often refers to a collective perception, and with it a shared collection of beliefs. However, determining any such perception does not necessarily determine its possessors.

**The Possessors of the Saga World View: A Paramount Question Left Unanswered**

When working with the source material in the way discussed above, an immediate question appears in who we are to regard as the owners of the world view reflected in the sagas? As asked by Aalto facing the very same question in her work with the kings’ sagas, should the world view be seen as “Icelandic, Norwegian, Scandinavian or Old Norse”? What sense of group identity lies at the roots of saga production?

After the settling of Iceland, a distinct Icelandic group identity must inevitably have been formed, but at what rate and state a notion like this had developed at the time the sagas were written, is not easily determined. As Iceland can be recognized as something of a societal conclave, given its geography as an island, there is perhaps much suggesting that the Icelandic community would have been particularly quick in encouraging a group identity distinguishing Icelanders from Norwegians or Scandinavians. Additionally, Iceland’s free-state period, contrasting the Norwegian political system, and the political turmoil that was to put Iceland under Norwegian rule in 1262, at the height of saga production, are also elements that would influence the formation of a distinctly Icelandic group identity.

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39 Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*, 136.
Conversely, the historical context of the age of saga writing also contains circumstances heavily indicating a more inclusive group identity amongst Icelanders, primarily the Norse-Icelandic people’s Norwegian heritage. The common history and the culture, religion, and language, which were very similar in the two societies, would all have contributed to a shared identity with the Icelanders and their Norwegian neighbors, as something more resembling a Norse-Icelandic identity. This is further strengthened in that Iceland was positioned on the outskirts of the known world, which could weaken the experience of Iceland as the center of the world. This experience could potentially have been essential in maintaining Iceland and its people, as a part of Norway, since the development of group identities tends to be geographically ego-centric. Additionally, Iceland depended on Norway for timber for ships and boats, a crucial element to a seafaring culture. If Iceland was explicitly experienced as peripheral, its connection to the Scandinavian mainland was perhaps a particularly lingering one.

Regardless of to what extent the Icelanders identified themselves as sharing a sociocultural sphere with Norwegians, Aalto points out the importance of Norway to the group identity and world view reflected in the Icelandic sagas, as “the Icelandic identity is negotiated especially in relation to the Norwegian identity.”42 This is a matter to consider when discussing the social structures as they appear in the saga literature.

Another element to consider when posing such questions is whether the sagas reflected world view is a collective or one more limited to an enclosed writers-milieu, something Aalto states as dependent on “the role of collective and cultural memory in saga writing.”43 Following Aalto, this is pointed out as a matter of some debate. As previously mentioned, the world views reflected in some sagas are regarded by several medieval scholars as those of a collective. However, regarding the kings’ sagas as an example, Ármann Jakobsson argues that these were written by clergyman and chieftains for other clergymen and chieftains, and should be far removed from representing the thoughts and experiences of the general population.44 Opposing this notion of sagas as by and for the Norse elite can be examined by exploring the source material with a variety of origins within the saga literature. As the many different texts reflect corresponding ideas about the world, they can easily be recognized as reflecting corresponding ideas within a collected elite, and by that confirming at least some level of collectivity. Beyond this, the task of accurately pinning down the different shared elements and composing an intelligible distinction between the collective world view or a much narrower authorial environment as represented, is one left unattended in this thesis.

42 Aalto, World View, 325.
43 Ibid., 321.
44 Ármann Jakobsson, I leit að konungi. Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna (Reykjavík, 1997), 47.
What then does it mean to study the Icelandic mental world view through the lens of saga literature? The answer to this relies as we have seen on investigating the origin of the saga, the degree to which it was written as reflecting the writers’ world view, and to what degree said world view was shared by a bigger collective. Are the sagas reflecting views and identities of the writers, Icelanders, or Scandinavian Norse in a much broader sense? Advocating for the latter more inclusive regard is how the konungasögur in particular must be seen as operating with a protagonist “us” that includes far more than just Icelanders, as these sagas primarily revolve around Norway and the “Norwegian Norse.” Going forward, how the sagas were read and, in that sense, could have been a manifesting part of the recipients’ world view, is also something to take into account; the sagas could constitute both a product and a producer of one’s understanding of the world. By this, as we know these sagas to have been popularly read in Norway,45 we may regard the sagas’ “us” to both reflect and promote a group identity including more than Icelanders alone.

On the other hand, when posing the sagas as reflecting a Norwegian world view, the geographical proximity to the actual people denoted in the term “Finnar” is one quickly challenging the dramatic attitudes projected towards the Finnar. As we shall see, the sagas are consistent in portraying the Finnar as distinctly different to the Norse, but looking at some Norse living close to and thus being familiar with the Finnar first hand, the sagas’ depiction of these Others is hardly one reflecting the view of such specific Norse.

A good example of this is exists in the Norwegian Ohthere of Hålogaland, who according to the chronicles of Orosius reported to King Alfred the Great of Wessex about his life and the land he came from.46 A part of Ohthere’s account presents him as living further north than any Norwegian, and as regularly dealing and trading with the Finnar,47 also speaking their language.48 Through this, Ohthere not only lived close to the Finnar, but he also knew and understood them. In this, Ohthere and the many other Norse living in similar relations to this regional neighbor, should be identified with world views not matching the sagas’ rendition of the Finnar as e.g. supernatural sorcerers. The people on which the category of Finnar is based, were after all not able to display the many incredible feats seen in the sagas. As strange and non-Norse as the Finns and Sami may have been experienced as by those Norse in question, these experiences were in all likelihood not in accordance with what the sagas depict.

47 Whitaker, Ohthere’s Account, 2-3.
48 Not in any of the sagas are the Finnar portrayed as speaking any language other than those used by the Norse.
Here we see someone we generally would regard as Norse, situated contrary to the sagas’ sentiment and attitude towards the North and the Finnar. By this, Othere is either a Norse not in line with the saga world view, or not a part of the Norse in the sense conveyed by the sagas. Besides problematizing who we have in mind when talking about a saga identity and world view, this example also points to a more universal element in categorization of different social collectives; the categories are fundamentally dynamic, and their demarcations less clear cut the closer we are to their borders.\(^{49}\)

The point in presenting these unanswered questions is to give an idea of what we are studying, and why determining this is a challenge, as well as revealing the ways in which studies like these may prove fruitful to understanding the world views in the Icelandic society during the age of saga writing. This gives a general overview of the historical landscape affecting the impact of any approach like this, but also leaves us with a rather big uncertainty in terms of what we are ultimately studying beyond the saga literature. Circumventing the determination of the exposure of the different sagas, a task crucial to the very implications of any conclusion, is to be left undone. Yet in doing so, these loose ends are not to be discharged as unimportant to this thesis, but regardless something that does not stand as a liability given that the scope of this thesis is limited to studying the saga literature and not the historical circumstances surrounding saga production. Leaving this topic, we may be secure in knowing that the sagas can, at the very least, be regarded as reflecting the world views of their limited authorial origins, if not the world views of the general Norse-Icelandic population in a broader sense.

In relation to this, the term “Norse” is mainly intended as designating the Icelandic people, but could also include those belonging to the same sociocultural sphere, e.g. Norwegians and some Danes and Swedes contemporary to the culture at hand. In this thesis however, the term “Norse” will always be limited to those represented by the literature in question, as stated a limitation contingent with historical circumstances not further explored in this thesis.

**The Image of Otherness in the Saga Literature**

As this study analyses the portrayal of Finnars and Skraelingar, the essential endeavor lies in investigating a given group’s depiction and understanding of certain social categories signaled as not belonging to the group in which the categorizing force posits itself. This is hardly attempted without encountering the concept of Otherness.

The terms “Other” and “Otherness” see varied use with different implications depending on where and how they are used, but generally point towards the way in which a selected social

\(^{49}\) This final point will be handled throughout when looking at how the Finnar and Skraelingar as Others can be seen as occasionally assimilated with the saga “us.”
collective experiences and identifies an external group as something distinctly excluded from the categorizing force, the “us.” A concept mainly applied in anthropology, Otherness is used in studying a culture through its typically egocentric world view, according to the notion that a group’s own identity is defined and constructed by exclusion. Following this, the “us” is understood as partly defining what they are by constructing an Otherness as a model of what they are not. Such a construction is generally based on, and referring to, actual existing groups encountered by the categorizing “us,” but may also denote a fictive group without it involving any lesser experience of the group as an Otherness. This emphasizes how an Otherness is a constructed category, connected to the categorizing group in question, primary to its bond with the actual people it is intended to denote in the external world, outside of the world view in which the category is upheld. The Others are, in other words, not the people or creatures which it is signaled as denoting, but moreover a mental entity, collectively maintained by the categorizing society as the “us.” This illustrates how imaginary creatures like trolls or goblins may constitute Otherness on the same level as those constructed on foreigners, typically encountered in the geographical periphery of the “us” and appearing and behaving in ways resulting in the experience of said people as different, and by that “not us.”

Following this, an essential part of analyzing the Finnar and Skraelingar consists of continually defining the respective social categories as Others. In the source material’s depiction of both Skraelingar and Finnar there is an apparent underlying attitude which, regardless of whether they are viewed in negative or favorable ways, generally signals that they are regarded as something distinctly “not Norse.” Pointing at these social categories and labelling them as ones of Otherness is perhaps a somewhat obvious move. A clear value lies, however, in looking at how, and in what way, the Skraelingar and Finnars’ status as human is different from the human status of the “us,” in order to see what role these Others play in the world view reflected in the sagas at hand. This is most typically expressed through the viewer’s description and treatment of the subject – in this case how the Norse saga-perspective sees and treats the Skraelingar and Finnar, as well as the subject’s own described behavior, how the Others are shown to act themselves.

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50 Gurevich, Historical Anthropology, 202-203.
2. The Portrayal of the Finnar

In the universe of the sagas, the Finnar represent the geographically close, neighboring people of the North, with social and economic ties to the Norse. At the same time, they are portrayed standing as a mysterious and strange people, placed further away from the Norse group identity than most other saga-people. In this chapter I will analyze the sagas’ portrayal of the Finnar. I will show how they are asserted as a deviant and dominated opposition, but also point to how they occasionally can be seen depicted against their stereotype, blurring the lines between the Norse “us” and the Finnar as an “Other.”

When considering the sagas, Jeremy DeAngelo notes that “the qualities attributed to the Finnar are remarkably consistent and can be found in any of the saga genres that include them as characters.”51 Although I will argue for how the differing worlds of the konungasögur and the formaldarsögur imply certain demonizing characteristics on behalf of the Finnar, their projected stereotype itself is certainly one consistent within the saga corpus as a whole.52 The Finnar are only seen in two of the Íslendingasögur and are depicted in complete coherence with the portrayals seen in the konungasögur, making it unnecessary to distinguish between these two genres when talking about the Finnar portrayal in general.53

The Term “Finnar”

First off, how are we to regard the term “Finnar?” As Alto explains, “the words Finnr, Fiðr and Finni denoted a Sámi man, [and a] Sámi woman was called either a Finna or a Finnkona.”54 In this the Finnar are understood as ethnically referring to the Sami ancestors. However, in the same work Aalto also states that “depending on the point of view and the source, the word Finn could denote 1. the Sámi people; 2. Finns or Sámi; 3. Finns and Sámi”.55 In line with this last quote we see the term in the sagas as mostly denoting the Sami people, but also occasionally as Finns, a people mainly residing in what the sagas refer to as Finland. Yet, in works discussing the term “Finnar”, Aalto herself and other scholars consistently use the term as being synonymous with the Sami, seemingly exclusively. In addition, John Lindow states that “we would now call ‘this Finn’ a Sami,” as if it were still applicable to the contemporary Sami people.56 This use, besides being somewhat inappropriate if we are to understand the Sami of today as identical to their ancestors of several hundred years, further supposes the idea that “Finnar” are unquestionably referring to the

51 DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 258.
52 The Finnar are in the sagas most frequently depicted in the kings’ sagas.
53 As such I will not attain to any genre-difference when facing the Finnar of the Íslendingasögur and the konungasögur.
54 Aalto, Categorizing Otherness, 116.
55 Ibid., 117.
56 Lindow, “Cultures in Contact,” 91.
medieval ancestors of the Sami, exclusively, where it could be argued easily that the term denotes a more inclusive category.

There is consensus in that the Finns and the Sami of the Middle Ages were distinctly different peoples by 1000 BC, genetically and culturally, and that their shared language also split into two or more unintelligible variations, further separating the two people.\textsuperscript{57} Despite this, many Norse, particularly those residing on the Saga Island, may very well have been oblivious to the fact that there existed a distinction between the Finns and the Sami.\textsuperscript{58} Although the Norse inhabiting areas close to Finnmork and Finland, and other regions travelled by these nomadic and pastoral people, no doubt were aware of this distinction between the two ethnicities (as well as several distinctions made between tribes and clans within these people, respectively), there is little that points to the Norse acknowledging such differences in the sagas.\textsuperscript{59} It likely follows that the Norse, when speaking of Finnar, were operating with different premises than those applied in the contemporary categorization of the medieval Sami, despite the latter being partially founded on the former.

The reason for why the term is generally used in exclusive reference to the Sami, contemporarily, is exemplified in Aalto’s emphasis on the Sami being the most surely denoted, more often than not. As she states, the term is rarely seen as definitely referring to the Finns alone, as King Óláfr Haraldsson’s plundering expedition to Finland “is the only episode in the Kings’ sagas that can be said to concern the Finns and not the Sami for sure.”\textsuperscript{60} However, I find this use to be careless, given the established actual distinction between the two people, as well as being directly inconsistent with the very same scholars concluding the term as including both the Finns and the Sami whenever the topic is discussed.\textsuperscript{61} In line with Aalto’s own conclusion, but counter to her general use of the term, we should thus not regard the term “Finnar” as solely denoting the Sami, nor use the terms different denotations interchangeably. We note that the term more often than not refers to the Sami, but beyond this, in this thesis, I am not distinguishing between the Sami and the Finns as the historical people designated in the term.

\textsuperscript{57} Lars Ivar Hansen and Bjørnar Olsen, \textit{Hunters in Transition: An Outline of Early Sámi History} (Leiden, 2014), 133-134.
\textsuperscript{58} There are discussions on whether saga-terms as “troll” or “giants” sometimes are used as synonymous with, or confusingly referring to, “Finnar.” As I am limiting myself to focusing on the term “Finnar” I will not engage in these.\textsuperscript{59} Even in \textit{Heimskringla} alone, the term “Finnar” is used for people in both Finnmork and Finland, the latter being the region of Finns, a people by then firmly established as agricultural.
\textsuperscript{60} Aalto, \textit{Categorizing Otherness}, 124.
\textsuperscript{61} Orning, \textit{Reality of the Fantastic}, 96 (see discussing footnote); John McKinnel, \textit{Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend} (Cambridge, 2005), 76-77; Margaret Clunies Ross, “Introduction,” in \textit{Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society}, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Odense, 2003), 7-18, 12; Bagge, \textit{Society and Politics in Snorri}, 216. None of the authors in question should be accused of not recognizing the difference between the two people denoted in the term, but their occasional pragmatic use is however somewhat sloppy.
As we are investigating the Finnar primarily as a literary category given through the sagas, this poses no issue, but it is worth keeping in mind when faced with the eventual implications of how the Norse regarded the Finnar. By this we are left with the simple point being that “Finnar” is often taken in contemporary discussions as synonymous with “Sami,” but when examined, is immediately identified as a different or more inclusive category by the very same scholars, making for an inconsistent and misleading use of the term by Aalto, Lindow, DeAngelo, and several others. As DeAngelo himself starts off in his essay on the Finnar, the term refers “in modern parlance, [to] the Sami and the Finns.”

Conjuring Storms and Nightmares: Finnar as Sorcerers
Although very few sagas can be seen as yielding the center stage to the Finnar, Finnar-characters do occasionally play substantial roles in certain scenes and often stand out in these instances as they show paranormal or otherwise anomalous behavior, not associated with Norse normality. The most distinct example of this is their practice of and relation to magic. Magic is sometimes connected to, or practiced by, Norse characters, yet, in the literary corpus of the konungasögur, it is a definite rarity. For the Finnar this is the opposite, as they are seen accompanied by their sorcery more often than not. Following this, magic may be regarded as the single most stereotypical characteristic of the Finnar depicted in the konungasögur, something I will claim to also be the case in the fornaldarsögur.

In the Ynglingasaga the Swedish king Vanlande travels to Finland and beds Driva, the daughter of the warlord Snö. Upon leaving for Uppsala, Vanlande promises to return to Driva, but breaks this promise as he stays for 10 years. In revenge Driva hires Huld, a seiðkona (sorceress), to make Vanlande travel back to Finland or have him killed. When Vanlande then attempts to leave Uppsala, his men refuse to let him do so, stating his desire to be caused by Finnar-sorcery. When Vanlande is forced to stay, he is in a nightmare killed by the malicious Mara, which is conjured by Huld. Later when Vanlande’s two grandsons want their father Visbur killed, the same Huld uses her powers to help them with this, the price being that the Ynglinga-family are to be forever plagued by parricides.

As Vanlande’s men are stating this to be the magic of the Finnar, we regard Huld as a Finna. By this, a major prophetic element, determining the whole subsequent history of the Ynglingar in the Heimskringla, can be ascribed to the Finnar and their sorcery. Without reading

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62 DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 257.
63 Aalto, Categorizing Otherness, 133.
64 Unless stated otherwise, all in-text references to different king’s sagas are found in Snorre Sturluson, Norges Kongesagaer, trans. Anne Holtsmark and Didrik Arup Seip ed. Finn Hødnebø and Hallvard Magerøy (Oslo, 1979).
65 Ibid., 23.
66 Gurevich, Historical Anthropology, 112.
too much into this, we may quickly note how such a plot-element associated with Finnar-behavior, occurring in the very beginning of Snorri’s Heimskringla, may have made a particular impact on readers, as this Finnar activity stands as a major and lasting source of misfortune to these Norse ancestors.

In Saga Hálfdanar svarta, when food and mead magically disappears from a feast, King Halvdan has a Finn captured and tortured for information as he is expected to be either responsible or know who is. After denying any knowledge of the event, the kings’ son, Harald (later “Fairhair”), helps and escapes with the Finn to a chieftain who admits to the crime and who also foresees Harald as the coming gatherer of the realm. Although no direct reference is made to point out the chieftain as a Finn, a clear association stands, connecting the magic disappearance and foreseeing with Finnar-activity.67

In Haralds saga hins hárfragra, Harald, now king, is invited home by the Finn Svåsa, where his beautiful daughter Snøfrid offers him mead. When drinking this, the king immediately desires to sleep with Snøfrid, indicating the mead to have been enchanted in some way. Harald is only allowed to sleep with Snøfrid if he marries her, which he does. The king is then said to love Snøfrid so intensely that he completely neglects his kingdom and duties as a king. Snøfrid gives birth to four sons before dying, but without “losing color” or decomposing.68 After having mourned heavily for three years, the king is convinced to change Snøfrid’s clothes. When they move her body, it suddenly gives off a horrid smell and as they burn the corpse “worms and lizards, frogs and toads flood out of it, all kinds of nasty bugs.”69 As this happens the king quickly comes to his senses, to his men’s joy.

Although there are no immediately explicit motives for why the Finnar would want this, the corruption of the king’s mind and the disruption of his rule and thus his kingdom’s prosperity, is seen as done by their conscious hand, using magical abilities and items. Here, the Finnar are again established as dangerous, as seen in Ynglingasaga, but also as hostile without direct provocation. From the moment the king is shown visiting Svåsa and until he burns the body of Snøfrid, he is in the willful control of the Finnar, who in this must be identified as hostile aggressors.

In the examples above, the supernatural powers of the Finnar seem to exist in a rather abstract state, either manifested in or revolving around sleep, or as the foreseeing practiced by Huld and the Finn chieftain.70 However, later, in Haralds saga hins hárfragra, we are told of a more tangible kind of sorcery. Here we see King Harald’s son, Eirik, come upon the beautiful Gunnhild

67 Lindow, “Cultures in Contact,” 95.
68 Snorre Sturluson, Norges Kongesagaer, 71.
69 Ibid., 72: My translation, as are all other following translations to English from Icelandic, Norwegian, and Danish saga editions, unless stated otherwise.
70 Although not explicitly related to any supernatural activity, the hanging of king Agne by the Finn Skjálv, was also done in the king’s sleep, further associating the hostile behavior of the Finnar with sleep.
living with two Finnar as their sorceress-apprentice. When enraged, the Finnar are said to have “the earth turn” at their will as well as making “anything living fall dead before their eyes.”\textsuperscript{71} As these powers are never demonstrated, they do lose weight as an example given that the writer could have intended them as mere figments, since the ability to kill everything looked upon is of a caliber not seen elsewhere in Heimskringla. However, in Óláfs saga Helga, the Finnar display a similar supernatural control over the surrounding elements when King Olav and his men are chased by a Finnar-army after having plundered in Finland. After escaping to their ships, the Finnar conjure bad weather and stormy seas, attempting to sink the Norse fleet. Adding to this specific kind of sorcery, DeAngelo hints at the foretold death of King Halvdan in Saga Hálfdanar svarta as plausibly caused by Finnar weather-manipulation, as it is the warm weather that weakens the ice which the king breaks through before drowning.\textsuperscript{72} While I myself read this as a farfetched connection, it is a plausible additional example of hostile weather-sorcery acted towards Norse royalty, strengthening this circumstance as a saga-motif.

Although the supernatural abilities of the Finnar are generally aligned with their typical role as an oppositional enemy, and thus used to harm, their sorcery is also seen benefitting the Norse as they are occasionally shown to cooperate or exchange favors with the Norse. An example of this is found when Chieftain Thorir Hund is given twelve reindeer-shirts, enchanted so that they are “stronger than chainmail,” one of which saves Thorir Hund’s life when he is delivered a blow by King Olav in Óláfs saga Helga.\textsuperscript{73} Likewise, in Saga Inga Haraldssonar, Sigurd Slembe is generously hosted by some Finnar who build him two ships out of leather and sinew, which are stated to be “so quick that no other ship could outrace them.”\textsuperscript{74} Although there is no explicit mentioning of these ships being enchanted or otherwise built using magic, it is insinuated, or should at least be regarded as the product of some paranormal force, considering how the Norse, as a sea faring people, were no strangers to building ships. As clearly seen, the use of or connection to magic is a staple part of the Finnar activity, and by that, magic is easily implied as present even in cases where it stands as merely possible.

Similarly, Chieftain Raud the strong in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, a skilled sorcerer himself, is stated to have had a large group of Finnar at his court, which “helped him whenever he needed it.”\textsuperscript{75} Again, no explicit mention of the presence or nature of Finnar-sorcery is seen, but is nonetheless heavily implied as a part of the given circumstances and the association with Finnar and magic is further enforced by Raud being a sorcerer himself. The sorcery of the Finnar is also

\textsuperscript{71} Snorre Sturluson, Norges Kongesagaer, 76.
\textsuperscript{72} DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 259.
\textsuperscript{73} Snorre Sturluson, Norges Kongesagaer, 415.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 614.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 186.
found directly favoring the Norse when the Finnar are presented as sharing their knowledge of the supernatural with the Norse, as in the mentioned case of Gunnhild residing with the two Finnar as their sorceress-apprentice.

A final example depicting the Finnar behavior as heavily connected to sorcery is displayed in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, when the Norse Øyvind is tortured by the king for refusing to be baptized and denying the Christian faith. Before dying, Øyvind utters, “I cannot receive any baptism, for I am a spirit that the Finnar have brought to life in a human body, using sorcery; my father and mother were unable to have children.” After this, Øyvind, who is described as having known more sorcery than most, dies. This scene may be regarded in several ways, but regardless it bolsters the establishment of the Finnar tie to the mystic and supernatural. From the perspective of Christianity and the king, the Finnar are shown, as we shall see elsewhere, to represent a human faction that stand irreconcilable with the Christian faith. The very life of Øyvind is the work of Finnar magic and therefore he seems to be physically unable to take on the new faith, or leave behind the old.

Whether the conjuring of Øyvind is to be understood as an act of sympathy towards Øyvind’s parents or as a convenient opportunity taken to meet some mystic Finnar ends, it is hard to say. After all, Øyvind is opposing the church, and if in line with the interest of the Finnar, he may represent a tool, summoned by the Finnar to obstruct the crown in ways they themselves perhaps were unable. The meaning and implications of these circumstances will be discussed further when looking into the relationship of the depicted Finnar heathenism and the Norse Christianity. However, regardless of the conclusions made on that front, the scene stands as a testament to a rather powerful display of Finnar sorcery, the very conjuring of a living (and Norse at that) man.

The Finnar sorcery is as stated a staple stereotypical trait of the Finnar. Besides signaling a distinct difference to the Norse who are rarely seen trifling with the supernatural, it is indirectly constituting an opposition to the Norse on several fronts, namely by being a de facto non-Christian, and generally illegal, practice, in addition to being the weapon that is frequently used as against the Norse. In this respect, the sorcery may be regarded as the Finnar alternative to Norse military power. Besides being signaled as mysterious and unavailable to the Norse, the Finnar sorcery never seems to have its strength depend upon numbers in people, which can otherwise be seen as one of the key factors in Norse conflict. As the Finnar generally appear in small numbers, the sorcery

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76 Ibid.
77 See chapter 5.
78 The Finnar are inherently adept at sorcery where the Norse typically have to undergo apprenticeships.
79 This is evident and present across and throughout several Old Norse law books, e.g. in the Gulathing law: “GL 28,” and “GL 35,” in Gulatingslovi, ed. Knut Robberstad (Oslo, 1939).
allows the Finnar to pose a considerable threat, despite being outnumbered, giving an otherwise dominated people the occasional upper hand. By this we see the sorcery of the Finnar as the perhaps most essential and prominent stereotypical trait, a trait that constitutes the Otherness of the Finnar as dramatically distanced from the Norse, being one of clear deviancy and hostility.

**Tented Marksmen: Finnar as Nomadic Hunter-Gatherers**

The other stereotypical characteristics of the depicted Finnar often require or call upon supernatural imagery, but often in a less dramatic sense when compared to the Norse normality. If we again recall the two Finnar living with Gunnhild in Haralds saga hins hárfagra, another thing stated about these dangerous people is their proficiency with bow and arrow, as they are said to “hit everything they aim at.” This characteristic of excellent marksmanship is frequently depicted as a typical Finnar trait. When looking at two different men named Finn found in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar and Óláfs saga Helga, respectively, both are said to be of Finnar-blood in addition to being particularly good marksmen. This not only connects the Finnar culture or tradition to that of marksmanship, but also implies that the Finnar are inherently good marksmen by blood-ties, as the skill of these two men, otherwise affiliated with the Norse, is implied to be inherited.

In a world where few animals were hunted using melee weaponry, the very presence of a bow (outside of armed conflict) is easily associated with hunting. The portrayal of the Finnar as hunters is something partially enforced in that they are seen using and trading in skin and leather, as when Thorir Hund attains the Finnar-made tunics constructed of reindeer skin, or when the Finnar build Sigurð Slembe’s ships out of skin and sinew. The two men teaching Gunnhild magic are also said to be “as good as dogs on tracking, [...] and can outrun any man or beast.” Now, while the ability to track, also implied as a Finnar-quality elsewhere, corresponds directly to hunting, a more stereotypical trait seems to be the Finnar as quick and generally mobile, particularly on skis.

The sagas’ depiction of the Finnar as particularly mobile, as skilled marksmen, and as frequent skin- and leatherworkers, work together in portraying the Finnar as essentially nomadic. Through these associations, they are established as either a hunting or herding people. Besides this being somewhat exotic, mainly living as nomadic herders and hunters, the most important implication of the nomadic role lies in what it is not. The Finnar are not agricultural; they do not sow crops. As the Norse were firmly integrated in an agricultural way of life, the aspect of being settled farmers should be seen as a defining aspect of the culture and identity of the Norse people. Through this, several of the most prominent stereotypical traits of the depicted Finnar, those

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80 Snorre Sturluson, Norges Kongesagaer, 76.
81 The name Finn is sometimes shown to imply a relation to the Finnar or Finnar-qualities, but not necessarily so.
82 Snorre Sturluson, Norges Kongesagaer, 76.
implying the pastoral and nomadic lifestyle, point towards a way of life that is dramatically different from that of the Norse. Later, I will thoroughly discuss the implications of this, arguing for how this places the Finnar as deviant and uncivilized in the eyes of the Norse “us.”

**Taxation and Plundering: The Finnar as a Dominated Opposition**

When examining the characteristics of the depicted Finnar, these are typically evinced in ways that place the Finnar in an opposition to Norse characters, or the Norse identity in general. The sorcery is, as we have seen, mostly used in a hostile manner directed towards Norse characters, or in aiding some specific Norse in the harming of other Norse. In addition to being a practice and behavior rarely seen in the Norse themselves, this sorcery thus places the Finnar as an enemy in recurring conflict with the Norse. As nomadic hunters, or more importantly as a non-agricultural people, we have seen how they are placed in a cultural image distinctly irreconcilable with the Norse essential way of life.

This polarized relationship between the Norse and the Finnar, being one of inherent opposition, is also apparent in how the two typically interact, even without the presence of sorcery or explicit cultural differences. In several kings’ saga excerpts, void of descriptions of the Finnar as anomalous, a clear opposition is still seen, one in which the Finnar are consistently dominated by the Norse. This domination is most clearly seen in how the Finnar are stated to be regularly taxed and raided by the Norse. Despite not belonging to any Norse political entity and without any mention of Norse “protection,” sources depict finnferð and finnskatt (“Finnar-tax,” the exclusive right to tax the Finnar) as a tribute collected without the return of any particular benefit of patronage that would be expected, were it to be considered a more friendly arrangement. In Óláfs saga Helga, Thorir Hund and Hárek are appointed by King Knut as lendmenn (a title similar to the later baron), and are given the finnferð as a gift. Thorir Hund is later said to receive great wealth through the finnferð. This exemplifies how the finnferð was not only very valuable, but also something to be given away by the king, seemingly without the Finnar having any say about the arrangement in which they had a central role. In another scene, in Óláfs saga Helga, Hárek is said to hold the finnkauping (Finnar-trade). Here, the control over the Finnar-trade is presented without mention of taxation, suggesting a less subjugating alternative to the Norse interaction with the Finnar, although the finnkauping implies the possibility to manipulate and control the terms of the valuable trade.

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83 See chapter 6.
84 In Håkon Håkonssons saga, the Finnar-tax is also fought over by the King’s men and another Norse faction.
When arguing this to be a signal of Norse dominance, one may note that the sagas attest to the trade and taxation without mentioning any conflict in which the Finnar are involved. If we should view the taxation as peaceful, we may suggest that the Finnar were regarded as somewhat willing and by that could been read as having gotten certain benefits beyond paying off potential pillagers. A secure trade would, after all, be considered a benefit if we take the portrayed Finnar as interested in Norse goods.

No matter what we may derive about the actual historical circumstances, the scenarios depict arrangements crucial to the livelihood and political situation of the Finnar, with the Finnar themselves being completely absent. This at the very least yields an image of the Finnar as a subjected faction, either not in control of its own role in the trade-relations at hand, or more likely taxed by force and commercially dominated by the Norse.

The sagas show frequent and seemingly unproblematic slaughtering of Finnar, both by Norse factions in and outside of the “leading” Norwegian power, which again suggests a scenario in which the Finnar were neither tolerated nor protected to any degree. In the Ynglingasaga, the Norse King Agne is plundering with his army in Finland when the Finnar Chieftain Froste meets him in battle with an army of his own. Without further ado, Froste is defeated and killed alongside many Finnar, and Agne takes Froste’s daughter and son with him. Here, we not only see the Norse defeating the Finnar by a great margin, but we also see the casual plundering of Finland, also noted in the mentioned Óláfs saga Helga, as was it a commonplace occurrence.

In the examples above we see how the Finnar are further established as an Otherness in opposition to the Norse, partially in that they stand as a faction to be attacked. In a military scale, the Finnar are never seen as the aggressors of conflict, implying the Norse to possess a military dominance over the Finnar. This dominance is further evinced in the Norse control over the finnferð, finnskatt, and finnkaup. Consequently, we are left with a depiction of the Finnar in the kings’ sagas that signal them as collectively weaker and lesser when placed in opposition to the Norse, as they so often are.

An aspect partially explaining the portrayal of the Finnar as such, can be found in how they are connected to the North. In his study of the sagas’ depiction of the Finnar, DeAngelo argues for how the Finnar’s stereotypical attributes, effectively placing them in opposition to the Norse, are aligned with attributes associated with the North, and that the literary portrait should be seen as broadly defined by this association. As he states:

85 Aalto, Categorizing Otherness, 127-128.
86 DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 270.
There are many stereotypical qualities attributed to the Finnar in the sagas, but the most prevalent – their pastoralism, their opposition to the Norse, and their pagan sorcery – are tied to the features associated with the North.\textsuperscript{87}

As we shall see in later chapters, the dramatic portrayal of the Finnar can be partially seen as a result of the North being identified as a particularly harsh environment, by e.g. not accommodating for “sophisticated” Norse agriculture. In addition, as the chaotic counterpart to the Norse world center of order, the North stands as a peripheral region wherein mystic beings, trolls and other malignant forces fester. In this, the North connotes a lesser land, inhabited by a lesser people. When discussing the implications of the Finnar belonging to the North, I will argue for how the attributes of this region also can be recognized as manifested in the portrayal of the Skraelingar, who despite standing as similar to the Finnar, are seen as belonging to a completely different environment.\textsuperscript{88}

Leaving this for now, we simply note the Norse understanding of the North as being partially manifested in the Finnar, at the very least by having them belonging to a distinct periphery, yet again placing them in a juxtaposition with the Norse “us” that is derived from the Sagas. The Finnar are undoubtedly portrayed and read as not belonging to the Norse lands, and are subsequently “misplaced” when seen there, as the Norse are when venturing out in theirs.

\textbf{Friendship, Marriage and Assimilation: Bypassing the Oppositional Role}

When investigating the Finnar portrait, their role as enemies or otherwise opposed to the Norse, is an apparent tendency. However, it is important to maintain that this is just that, a tendency, as the occasional exceptions to this general rule serves to show in which way and how strong the Otherness of the Finnar is projected. Following this, the Finnar are not always presented as an enemy or an opposition. We recall the Finnar generously hosting and building ships for Sigurd Slembe in \textit{Saga Inga Haraldssonar}, and Thorir Hund who is given the enchanted shirts in \textit{Óláfs saga Helga}. Although, as with the finnkaup, we may expect these scenes to imply the exchange of goods or favors, and by that not necessarily signal friendship beyond more than mutual interest, but regardless it is at least an example of collaboration. Similarly, the Finnar residing at Raud’s court in \textit{Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar}, who is said to help him whenever needed, are also placed in clear consolidation with the Norse chieftain.

In these examples, it is important to note how Sigurd Slembe is a pretender to the throne in the civil war; that Thorir Hund is central in the rebellion against King Olav; and that Raud is a noted contender of the King’s Christianization of the realm.\textsuperscript{89} Through this, these discussed

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} See chapter 7.
\textsuperscript{89} Snorre Sturluson, \textit{Norges Kongesagaer}, 606-08 (On Sigurd Slembe), 436-438 (On Thorir Hund), 186-188 (on Raud).
unhostile manners in which the Finnar are depicted can in fact be identified as being indirectly hostile towards other factions within the Norse society. As in these examples, such other factions are often firmly established as the leading political power, by representing the crown, the church, or both. Revealing a pattern in which the Finnar are aiding Norse factions conflicted with the crown and the church, which should not be surprising given how we have seen the crown systematically exploit the Finnar through finnkaup and -ferd, and the church to condemn the sorcery essential in the Finnar portrait. As well as representing powerful forces disfavoring the Finnar, the church and the crown are also two formally established institutions, and are very definite and discernible factions in the sagas for the Finnar to be positioned against. In social and political narratives where factions as delimited categories are often blurred, these two institutions, and their relational standing within social and political landscapes, should in the sagas be seen as the most easily understood.

Additionally, these two powerful institutions and their interests should be recognized as particularly impactful to the Norse socio-cultural sphere and group identity, perhaps most crucially by partaking in the very production of this identity through the written. In the sagas, the church stands as a central influence, e.g. by being the institution from which most written works in the Middle Ages were produced. Thus, if the crown and the church signaled the Finnar as lesser, this significantly impacted the Norse view of the Finnar as such, especially when it comes to this view as reflected in the sagas. By this, the church and the crown may be considered as situated at the center of the Norse society, and subsequently at the center of the defining power of what it means to be Norse.

Consequently, when the Finnar are depicted as being somewhat consolidated with the Norse, they still stand as oppositional in a very significant way; when these Norse themselves are identified as opposed to the church and crown. Although this somewhat punctures the perception of the Finnar as occasionally placed in friendly relations with the Norse in general, it would be inaccurate to regard these factions, with which the Finnar are found to be occasional allies, as not Norse. Following this, it is perhaps reasonable in these cases to view the Finnar portrayed as opposed to the crown or Christianity as institutions, but not necessarily the Norse as a whole. This conclusion can also be derived when considering scenarios in which the Finnar are teaching or aiding the Norse with sorcery, a behavior initially read as consolidating between the two, but that regardless would be seen as being in conflict with Christian interests within the Norse culture.

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90 “GL 28,” and “GL 35,” in Gulatingslovi, ed. Knut Robberstad (Oslo, 1939). Several laws also state it as illegal to be in contact with the Finnar, see Else Mundal, Fjöld Veit Hon Freða: Uvalde Arbeid Av Else Mundal (Oslo, 2012), 239.
91 Margaret Clunies Ross, Prolonged Echoes. Volume 2: The Reception of Norse Myths in Medieval Iceland (Odense, 1998), 82.
The *Finnar* are typically depicted and signaled as being dominated by the Norse. This, as a tendency in the sagas, is also something periodically challenged when the *Finnar* are depicted in ways, not only signaling a more even power-relation between the two, but also in ways that suggest the *Finnar* to have the upper hand. This is partially seen in their magical powers, shown to be dangerous, and in their great bowmanship. As staple qualities to the stereotypical *Finnar*, these attributes are undoubtedly something connoting the *Finnar* as a force to be reckoned with. Further, the *Finnar* chasing King Olav and his men, where many Norse are killed, also stands as a testament to how the *Finnar* may be victorious in military conflict, and thus challenge the binary notion of the *Finnar* as dominated by the Norse.

Moreover, certain examples also show how the *Finnar* are depicted and treated in ways as crossing the boundaries between the social categories by assimilation. If we recall King Agne as he defeats the *Finni* Froste and takes his children with him, we may question whether this is intended to be read as an adoption or an act of sympathy from the King’s behalf that could stand as conforming the two cultures. Although it is likely read as unwanted on the children’s behalf, they are not implied to be enslaved or otherwise mistreated, but rather the opposite, as Agne complies with the children’s wish and holds a feast in the late Froste’s name. If King Agne is portrayed as welcoming the two *Finnar* into his own Norse family and community, he might be implied to welcome the two as Norse. Granted, the *Finnar* children immediately kill the king, breaking any supposed unity between the two factions, but the question regarding the King’s intention still stands. Another more tangible example can be seen when Harald, in *Haralds saga hins hárfagra*, gets four sons with his wife Snøfrid, a *fínnkona*. This marriage alone implies a certain approximation between the two social categories, but them having children effectively blurs the line between *Finnar* and Norse as one would have to ask oneself whether these are now Norse or *Finnar*, if not both, a question not necessarily answered easily.

When looking at marriages between the *Finnar* and the Norse we may note that in the sagas we exclusively see Norse men taking *Finnar* wives, men that tend to be kings or chieftains. Further, these women are mostly daughters of *Finnar* kings or chieftains themselves. Although marriages like these are regarded as formalized alliances, and not just arrangements made out of love or desire, we may note how they, as in the examples above, signal a consolidation between the two distinct social categories.

Lastly, perhaps the ultimate example of such assimilation can be seen with the sagas’ occurring characters named Finn, which are consistently referred to as being of *Finnar* ancestry, as well as showing *Finnar* characteristics, particularly bowmanship. We see these characters fighting and living alongside the Norse, seemingly integrated in the Norse culture. Apart from their name and their *Finnar* bowmanship, are they then not Norse? The examples discussed above are meant to
show how the oppositional role, which the Finnar in many ways are given, are occasionally bypassed, and that the Otherness projected upon the Finnar as an ethnicity, is a category not completely rigid. Despite how remarkably consistent the depiction of the Finnar is across the sagas, we occasionally recognize the Finnar outside of their given portrait, e.g. by appearing as something more like the Norse “us” than otherwise signaled.\textsuperscript{92}

The Fornaldarsögr: A Different Era

When regarding the Finnar as they are depicted in the fornalddarsögr, not much distinguishes itself from the portraits of the other two saga-genres. As stated by others, the Finnar-portrait is remarkably consistent, even across saga genres. Also here they stand strongly associated with bowmanship, reindeer, and the nomadic and pastoral lifestyle, separating them from the settled and agricultural Norse. The three Finnar-enchanted arrows given to Odd by the Finnar king Guse, in Örvar-Odds saga, resemble very similar plot elements found in the konungasögr. In addition, the Norse King Ring marrying the beautiful Hvit, daughter of a Finnar-king, directly mirrors motives we have seen well established in the konungasögr, of Norse kings Marrying Finnar women.

If looking at how the portraits of the different genres can be seen as differing, however, there are a few elements worth pointing out. The physical appearance of the Finnar is not mentioned in the Íslendinga- or konungasögr, beyond mentions of the beauty of a Finnkona. In Örvar-Odds saga, as the mother of the Norse Grim is married, she beholds a Finna with fur all over his face, a glimpse causing Grim to be born with the same strange appearance.\textsuperscript{93} A comparable and unfortunate appearance is also seen later in the same saga where Agmund is sent to the Finnar at a young age, and returns with a miscolored face and with long hair growing in front of his eyes.\textsuperscript{94} If we are to read these appearances as reflecting a general Finnar appearance, we may take Örvar-Odds saga as presenting a portrait that differs from the ones seen in the konungasögr, and elsewhere. Where the Finnar are seen as interacting with the Norse without being mentioned as having anomalous appearances, they were likely read as looking somewhat normal, pointing to the Finnar of the fornalddarsögr as potentially considered more alien.

The Finnar as given in the fornalddarsögr are barely mentioned in relation to trade, and are never shown to be involved with any finnferð or finnkaup. As these are elements of the sagas that we have seen to be partially signaling a Norse political and economic dominance over the Finnar, this can potentially be identified as a substantial difference between the two portraits when regarding the sagas independently. As the fornalddar-Finnar aren’t shown to be taxed by the Norse,

\textsuperscript{92} Williamsen, “Boundaries of Difference,” 471.
\textsuperscript{93} Arrow-Odd: A Medieval Novel, 1.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 10
they were likely read as not being so, illustrating one of the several ways in which the two different portraits were written and read between the genres, and the different eras these genres are aimed at narrating.

Despite these discrepancies, the fornaldarsögur depicts, as scholars agree, a Finnar corresponding well with the one presented in the other two saga-genres.\(^5\) This is largely due to how the genres all maintain the most essential and stereotypical trait of the Finnars, their practice of sorcery and their connection to the supernatural. In the fornaldarsögur, this association with the supernatural stands well in line with the general abundance of supernatural elements.\(^6\) Here, the practice of sorcery is much less of a rarity, and as such the Finnar join the ranks of troll, giants, elves and other beings of a supernatural nature. Thus, in a world and era filled with magic, the Finnar are one of the several staple categories associated with the supernatural. In addition, Norse characters are depicted as more prone to the use of sorcery than they are seen to be in the more realistic Íslendinga- and konungasögur.

Although the fornaldarsögur were likely written in the late 13th century,\(^7\) the depicted events are placed prior to the settling of Iceland and the accounts narrated in the other saga-genres.\(^8\) As the sagas in question are presented as historical works we should assume that they were read and written as reflecting the world in that succession. In this order, we see that the old world is filled with magic and the supernatural, whereas the new is much less so. Further, the events of the konungasögur show a decrease in non-Finnar supernatural appearances as the timeline develops and the realm is Christianized.\(^9\) In the very beginning of Heimskringla, in the Ynglingasaga, we hear of Odin, the mortal forefather of the Norse and a skilled sorcerer, before we are introduced to a series of events containing supernatural events in the prehistoric times. Then, as the following sagas go on to depict the kings’ lineages from the 10th century, there is a rapid decrease in depicted supernatural events.\(^10\)

In line with this decrease in the supernatural, we note how the increased influence and power of the church is fought forth, as the Christianization of the Norse realm is one of the most central themes in the konungasögur.\(^11\) As sorcery is an explicitly condemned practice in medieval Christian law, we identify how the growing church-power results in a diminishing magic practice within the Norse society. In this, we may regard the saga-world as developing and removing itself

\(^5\) DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 258.
\(^6\) Orning, “Legendary sagas as historical sources,” 69.
\(^8\) See page 5-6.
\(^10\) Ibid., 215-17: “On the supernatural level there is clearly an evolution in Snorri's picture of history. At the same time, there is a close parallel between his understanding of the supernatural in the pagan and the Christian period.”
\(^11\) Aalto, Categorizing Otherness, 183-84.
from heathen practice – not based on when the sagas were written, but on when the depicted events take place.

As we have seen, the Finnar remain much the same across this timeline, whereas the surrounding environment changes dramatically. This points to a new quality of the Finnar: they are of the old, the heathen and now illegal world. As the new world with its centralized king- and church-power is established, the old one is left as a flawed past according to this new defining interest within the Norse society. Hence, the Finnar appearing outside of the fornaldrarsögur are by their stereotypical qualities stuck in an undeveloped past, constituting the Finnar as temporarily misplaced. Not only is their sorcery illegal in the eyes of Christianity, it also signals them as being out of time, and by that not belonging to the world at hand. Consequently, we see how the supernatural relation, as the most essential stereotypical attribute of the Finnar, is placing them as not belonging to the “new” Norse world, an additional way in which the Finnar Otherness is depicted as inherently alienated and flawed.

**Concluding the Image: The Consistent Depiction**

To conclude the sagas portrayal of the Finnar, we see that there is not much challenging the consistency within this depiction, and that this consistency exists throughout the fornaldar-Íslendinga- and konungasögur. The world and environment of the fornaldrarsögur is pointed out as dramatically different from that of the two other discussed genres, without this changing the Finnar as characters notably.

In this, the quintessential Finnar can be summarized as being much like the two teachers of Gunnhild – magic, nomadic, and hostile, but eventually vanquished by the superior Norse. Recurring motifs seems to enforce a moral in that one should not trust the Finnar, as they are both deceptive and unpredictable in their mystic nature, a mysticism I have argued to be traced to a spatial and temporal periphery. In line with this, the interactions between the Finnar and Norse present a narrative structured on an exchange of provocations spanning across sagas and actors within, underlining an inherent opposition between the two factions in a principal sense. In this, we see the typical Finnar and the typical Norse as adversaries, albeit clearly favoring the Norse as the dominator and representation of proper normality.

As an Otherness the Finnar can be said to represent an antithesis to the Norse, wherein their most essential characteristics are deviant to their Norse counterpart. The Finnar’s condemned magic, unsophisticated nomadism, and role as the politically and commercially dominated, reflect the Norse as a frugal, sophisticated, and superior people, when such a great distance is signaled between the two categories.
Despite the discussed consistency, we occasionally see the *Finnar* in allegiance with certain Norse factions, as friendly where they are typically hostile, and also sometimes as militarily superior where they are typically the dominated ones. As should always be kept in mind when investigating an Otherness in a culture’s projection of “us” and “them,” social categories and their contained images are dynamic and never completely rigid. In line with this, we see the stereotypical image attached to the *Finnar* as without a doubt consistent, but nonetheless occasionally punctured in the saga literature. Concluding this chapter, we leave the sagas’ image of *Finnar* described by DeAngelo: “from a vast array of possible defects, the *Finnar* are consistently tarred with a small yet potent combination of flaws—a lack of civilization, oppositional intent, and magical ability”.102

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102 DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 258.
3. The Portrayal of the Skrælingar

Two of Karlsemne’s men fell, and many of the Skrælingar, yet the latter had the upper hand.
- Eiriks saga rauða

While discovering Greenland, and the coasts of Labrador and Newfoundland, the Norse encountered a native people whom the sagas state they both traded with and fought against. These natives were given the name Skrælingar. In this chapter I will investigate the portrayal of the Skrælingar as given in Grønlendinga saga and Eiriks saga rauða, the two Íslingingasögur known as the Vinland-sagas, and present how the Skrælingar are characterized with a dominating, derogatory attitude, as an alienated Other. Subsequently I will show how the Skrælingar-portrait can be seen as inconsistent in its demonizing characterization, most importantly by representing the people that inhibited the Norse from settling the cherished Vinland. As we observe the depicted Skrælingar, we recognize them as a distinct Otherness in the Norse worldview, but also see how this category is breached. As with the Finnar, this is seen as we either identify the Skræling Other to be acting outside of its projected character, or recognize it as something more similar to the Norse than that which is generally implied.

The Term “Skrælingar”

Binding the category is the term “Skræling.” In investigating the Norse meaning of the word, Finn Gade states its meaning as obviously derogatory, referring to the physical appearance of a person, as weak, poor, or meagre, exclusively in a negative sense. While partially agreeing with this definition, Michelle Lappi also presents several alternative Old Norse definitions of the word, where designating the native inhabitants of Greenland and North America, without any inherent attitude, stands equally apparent as the intended use. In relation, William Thalbitzer points to how the term could have originated from the Old Norse verb skråla, meaning “bawl/shout/yell,” a plausible reading as the sagas depict the Skrælingar as repeatedly screaming when frightened or fleeing.

104 As mentioned, archaeological evidence suggest encounters with both Thule- (the proto-Inuit of Labrador) and Beothuk-tribes (arctic Indians based on Newfoundland): Robert McGhee, Ancient People of the Arctic (Vancouver, 1996), 206.
105 We are dealing exclusively with the Skrælingar as given through the Vinland-sagas, not taking into account the treatment of the Greenland-Skrælingar found in other non-saga works.
108 William Thalbitzer, Fra Grønlandsforskningens første Dage (Copenhagen, 1932), 14.
The description of the Skrælingar found in Eiríks saga rauða of “ugly little adults” could match the potential use of “Skræling” as denoting a certain physical appearance. Where “ugly” generally holds a devaluing connotation, “little adult” is easily paired with “weak,” a significant flaw in the eyes of a culture focused on the beauty of strength and the physically capable.\(^\text{109}\) As the Norse culture is recognized as one particularly concerned with physical appearances, we can be sure of taking “ugly” as more than a trivial remark; something enforced by another common translated alternative being “malignant looking.”\(^\text{110}\) However, as this example of Norse description of the Skræling physical appearance is the only one suggesting such a match between term and description, we are left with a mere correlation of the term’s potential meaning in the sagas at hand.

How we are then to define “Skræling” and consider its use remains inconclusive as there is a clear lack of consensus on the matter.\(^\text{111}\) Further, the sagas’ intended use of the word does not necessarily reflect its general use amongst the broad Norse culture, and thus postulating it as heavily derogatory risks unfortunate modern readings, given the implications that follow, whereas a more neutral assertion leaves many interpretive doors open. The word could have been either neutrally descriptive in designating a subject’s geographical habitation, highly demeaning in naming a subject by a negative attribute, or both, which would be the most dramatic categorization, fixing place with inferiority. It is then unknown whether the word is semantically derogatory or not, and we shall leave it as that, but still take with us is the very potential for inherent devaluation.

The Vinland-Sagas

In comparison to the Finnar, the Skrælingar are a rarity in the sagas, as they only appear in the two Vinland-sagas. Furthermore, both sagas are largely concerned with the same people and similar events, showing the two sagas as essentially different takes on the same story.\(^\text{112}\) Despite this, the sagas make for rich sources when investigating the portrait of the Skrælingar, as the Skrælingar are given substantial and central roles in both sagas, somewhat making up for the lack of appearances across the saga-genre. The following summary of the Vinland-Sagas will have a strict focus on the context of the Norse encounters with Vinland and the Skrælingar. Substantial parts of both sagas are therefore left out as they are not deemed important to the scope of this thesis.

In the Grønلendinga saga, Bjarne Herjolfsen attempts to sail to his father on Greenland but ends up by the coast of Vinland. Back on Greenland, Herjolfsen’s experiences reach Leiv, son of Eirik Raude, who leads an expedition to Vinland. The land is described as being rich in resources


\(^{110}\) Sverrir Jakobsson, _Approaches to Vinland: A Conference on the Written and Archaeological Sources for the Norse Settlements in the North Atlantic Region and Exploration of America_ (Reykjavik, 1999), 88.

\(^{111}\) Lappi, _“The Hidden Face.”_ 41.

\(^{112}\) Even though several events occur solely in one of the sagas, and details differ between the two, the sagas are of such an overall similitude that some scholars have suggested _Eirik Raude saga_ to be a later version of _Grønلendinga saga._
with mild winters. Upon their return to Greenland, Leiv’s brother, Torvald, gathers another party and heads for Vinland yet again, taking seat upon arrival in the house his brother had built. Exploring the lands further, Torvald and his companions come upon nine Skrælingar sleeping under their boats. All are killed except for one who manages to escape. After this, the Norse suddenly fall asleep. Abruptly, a mysterious voice wakes them up and warns them to board their ship immediately. Shortly after, several Skræling boats are seen and Torvald instructs his men to defend themselves with shields to avoid harming the Skrælingar who proceed to run away, frightened by the Norse. None are harmed except for Torvald himself who is fatally wounded by an arrow. Torvald is buried and his men return to Greenland.

Sometime later a man named Torfinn Karlsemne decides to travel with sixty-five men and women, among them his wife Gudrid, to colonize Vinland. After their first winter, a large group of Skrælingar appear out of the nearby forest before they are frightened by Torfinn’s bull and flee. The Skrælingar flee to Karlsemne’s settlement where they eventually trade skins and leathers for Norse dairy produce. The Skrælingar show great interest in Norse weaponry, but Karlsemne refuse his men to trade any. The following winter, the Skrælingar return in greater numbers to trade. Meanwhile, as Gudrid is sitting with her son a strange pale woman mysterically appears. When Gudrid tells the woman her name, the woman replies, saying she is also named Gudrid. Then a loud noise is heard and the specter magically disappears. The trade is interrupted when one of Karlsemne’s men kills a Skræling attempting to take his weapon. The Skrælingar run away and Karlsemne prepares for their hostile return.

A hard battle is fought in which many of the Skrælingar fall. Amongst the Skrælingar a large and attractive man is recognised by Karlsemne as the people’s chieftain. During the battle, a Skræling picks up a Norse axe and strikes a fellow Skræling to test the weapon, killing him, before throwing the axe out to sea. The Skrælingar eventually flee into the forest and the battle ends. The following spring Karlsemne declares Vinland to be too dangerous and orders the expedition to return to Greenland, concluding the saga’s tales of the Skræling encounters.

In Eiríks saga rauða, Leiv is asked by the Norwegian king to travel to and christen Greenland. On his way, Leiv gets lost at sea and drifts ashore to an unknown place where he collects samples of wine stocks and wheat, said to grow naturally, before returning to Greenland. After hearing about the new land, Leiv’s brother, Torstein Eiriksson, convinces Leiv and their father to join in on a voyage along with a hired crew. The expedition gets off course and drifts near Iceland and Ireland before they end up back in Greenland.

The following fall Torfinn Karlsemne arrives on Greenland and is hosted by Eirik during the

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winter. Talk about *Vínland* interests Karlsemne and, along with Torvald Eiriksson, an expedition is prepared. With a hundred and sixty members, the group explores the Greenland coast on their way to *Vínland* and endures a hard winter. One part of the crew sets off in a different direction than the rest and ends up in Ireland where they are taken as slaves. When Karlsemne and his men reach *Vínland* it is again described as good farmland with rivers full of fish. After a while the Norse are approached by nine skin boats. The strangers wave wooden poles in the direction of the sun, something interpreted as a sign of peace. The Norse responds by displaying a white shield and the two groups move in to study one another. The strangers are described as “ugly little adults, with ugly hair on their heads; they had big eyes with broad cheeks…”

The following spring the strangers, now named *Skraelingar*, appear in greater numbers. Again waving poles, they approach the Norse wanting to trade. Karlsemne again denies his men to trade off their weapons. The *Skraelingar* are paid instead with pieces of red cloth, which they show great interest in, paying more for less when the Norse run low on the ware. The trade is then interrupted by a Norse bull appearing from the forest, scaring the *Skraelingar* who flee by boat.

Later the *Skraelingar* appeared in their boats, this time waving their poles against the sun while screaming loudly. Karlsemne and his men responds by lifting red shields, before the two groups clash together. The Norse are overpowered by the *Skraelingar* in possession of a mystic projectile causing the Norse to run away in fear. As they are fleeing, Frøydis, sister of Leiv, scolds her countrymen for running away from such “weaklings.” As she is with child, she is unable to keep up with the others and is intercepted by two *Skraelingar*. Frøydis picks up the sword of a nearby dead Norse, flashes her breasts and lashes the sword against her bosom whilst screaming. This frightens the *Skraelingar* who run away as the battle ends. Even though the Norse are overrun, it is stated that they only lose two men, whereas the *Skraelingar* lose many.

Karlsemne decides that *Vínland* is too dangerous and the expedition packs up and sets sail for home. On their way they come upon five *Skraelingar* sleeping by the shore. Karlsemne suspects them to be lawless and kills them all. Soon after they come upon five *Skraelingar*, two of which are children. The children are captured and taken home, whereas the adults magically disappear in the ground, concluding the adventures of Karlsemne and his men on *Vínland*, by the account given in *Eiríks saga rauða*.

**The Phantom Menace: *Skraelingar* as Sorcerers**

When looking at the *Vínland*-sagas, the broad similarities between the texts are apparent, particularly when it comes to the role and portrayal of the *Skraelingar*. These natives are of small

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114 “Soga om Eirik Raude,” 316.
115 Ibid.
stature, dressed in skin and mostly seen traveling by leather boats. They trade, fight and communicate and are as such portrayed as people like the Norse, as opposed to beasts or other non-rational beings. But, as such, they are quickly seen as an Otherness through several characteristics deemed deviant to Norse normality.

As with the Finnar, one particularly prominent characteristic is their connection to the supernatural. Looking at the end of the Vínland-expedition in Eiríks saga rauða, the Skraelingar are said to “sink down into the earth.”116 As a display of supernatural powers this ability may be read in several ways, namely as a supernatural manipulation of surrounding elements, ethereal travel, or plain old magic disappearance; all standing as distinctly supernatural in the saga literature.

Equally supernatural is the pale and mysterious woman appearing before Gudrid as the Skraelingar approach the Norse to trade in Grænlendinga saga.117 The woman is odd looking, with enormous eyes, and strangely states her own name to be Gudrid. When the interaction between the two is interrupted by one of the Norse killing a Skraeling, the woman magically disappears, and no one other than Gudrid is stated to have seen her. In this the lady is read as being something of an illusion, a phantom only visible to Gudrid. The purpose behind this phantom, and its specific relation to Gudrid, is remarkably unclear, as neither the phantom nor the context in which it appears explains what and why this strange incident occurs. It is, perhaps, solely intended to have the reader associate Vínland and the Skraelingar with unexplainable supernatural activity, as a reminding signal of the conceptual periphery that the Norse found themselves in. Either way the phantom remains an entity conjured by, or at least in strong connection to, the Skraelingar, as it appears when they do and disappears as they are attacked and run away.

Additionally, the strange projectile launched by the Skraelingar when battling the Norse exemplifies a sorcery that is eventually devastating to the Norse. The spherical projectile is “blue and black, the size of a sheep belly,” and makes an ugly sound.118 As the projectile hit the ground, the Norse become frightened and are suddenly surrounded by Skraelingar on all sides, where only a moment earlier they stood on the beach. After having fled to safety, the Norse conclude that the sudden appearance of outnumbering Skraelingar must have been an illusion, and that “the only real ones were those coming in boats.”119 Where we could have taken the Norse fear as a magic effect of the strange weapon, it is not shown in such a way that we may ascribe it as unnatural and thus tied to some magic trickery involved with the projectile. What we may read in this way, however, is the horde of Skraelingar, later seen to be conjured illusions. As it is this sole act of sorcery that causes the Norse, otherwise shown as the dominant part, to flee, it stands as the battle’s deciding factor. As

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117 “Soga om grønlendingane,” 299.
118 “Soga om Eirik Raude,” 317.
119 Ibid.
the *Skraeling* themselves flee after their encounter with Frøydis, they are victorious per se, but neither are the Norse. As a result of this outcome, the Norse decides to leave *Vinland* for good, showing the sorcery of the *Skraelingar* as having a significant impact in the narrative of the *Vinland*-sagas. The sudden and crucial menace of the many *Skraelingar* is seen to be a phantom one, but nonetheless one driving the Norse from *Vinland*.

Lastly we examine the abrupt sleep that the Norse fall into after having killed eight *Skraelingar* in *Grønlendinga saga*, losing one to escape.\(^{120}\) Here, the Norse are clearly affected by some mysterious force, as the whole group simply lay down and sleep on the shore. As inducing sleep is a common manifestation of sorcery in the saga literature, we might take this as being controlled by the *Skraelingar*, e.g. the one that manages to escape. Although I would argue this magic to no doubt be tied to the *Skraelingar*, it is clear that the link is less direct than e.g. the similar cases seen with the *Finnar*. The question of to what degree this incident can be ascribed as *Skraelingar*-sorcery, along with whether the magic of the *Finnar* should be seen as similar or not, will be discussed when comparing the two categories as practitioners of magic.\(^{121}\) Regardless, we have seen several instances showing sorcery and a connection to the supernatural standing as prominent elements in the *Skraelingar*-portrait.

**Arrow, Fur, and Leather Boat: *Skraelingar* as Nomadic Hunter-Gatherers**

As with the *Finnar* the other apparent trait of the *Skraelingar* lies in their way of life as nomadic hunter-gatherers. Besides their strange projectile, the bow and arrow is the only weapon they are explicitly seen using, something particularly highlighted when Torvald is killed by a *Skraeling* arrow in *Grønlendinga saga*. By the same reasoning used earlier, this alone connotes a strong association to hunting, but when considering the overt presence of animal fur and leathers, hunting becomes an undeniably distinct part of the *Skraelingar* portrait. In the sagas, the *Skraelingar* are seen wearing leather, using boats out of leather, and dealing in “squirrel fur, sable fur,\(^{122}\) and all kinds of leather goods.”\(^{123}\)

The leather boats are also a very salient element as they are seen arriving in these more often than arriving by land, and this adds to the depiction of the *Skraelingar* as nomadic, which is also implied in their status as hunter-gatherers. In this, their mobility should be noted as water oriented, connoting the *Skraelingar* as fishermen and whalers, an aspect that could have placed them as

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\(^{120}\) “Soga om grønlendingane,” 296.

\(^{121}\) See chapter 5.

\(^{122}\) The Sable (“safali” in Old Norse) is strangely not native to America.

\(^{123}\) “Soga om grønlendingane,” 299.
culturally closer to the Norse readers of Greenland and Iceland, for whom whaling in particular was a more common practice than for the Norse mainlanders of Scandinavia.¹²⁴

Again, the status as nomadic hunter-gatherers is perhaps most significant to the Norse reader in denoting an absence of agriculture and settled living. When discussing the implications of this and the significance of agriculture in the Norse society, the *Skrælingar* will be argued to be standing as particularly uncivilized as they are situated in a land of abundant resources and self-growing wheat, a testament to ideal agricultural conditions. The fact that the *Skrælingar* are so heavily depicted as hunters, practically embodying this way of life in so many aspects of their portrait, it becomes an even more prominent attribute when considering how *Vinland* represents a settlers’ Eldorado to the Norse. By this, hunting seems to define the *Skrælingar* to the extent that it would make no sense to regard them without the bow, fur, and leather boat that constitute this role.

**The Naive, Scared, and Weak: *Skrælingar* as a Dominated Opposition**

Beyond what the *Skrælingar* are by themselves, their role in interacting with the Norse more clearly reveals their standing in the Norse social world view. Where their different ways of life create a stark contrast between the two social categories, how they act and are acted against, socially, further establishes the *Skræling* as an Otherness and moreover as an opposition to the Norse. I investigate how this Otherness is socially established as dramatic and derogatory, and consequently point to inconsistencies within this categorization, arguing for how the *Skrælingar* can be seen as stepping out of their general depiction as the lesser and dominated.

Investigating the *Skræling*-portrait, one may argue that a very apparent behavioral characteristic may be found in their naïveté, fear and weakness. In *Grænlendinga saga*, the several events of trading between the two groups are significant in that they manifest the only setting in which we see them both in peaceful circumstances. In both sagas, the Norse are shown to be hesitant and cautious during these trades by not trading weapons, while the *Skrælingar* are far more eager to trade.¹²⁵ When the *Skrælingar* return for a second trade in *Grænlendinga saga*, Karlsenne orders his people to sell only food, leaving the *Skrælingar* “with their goods in their belly” whereas the Norse remain with their goods to keep, implying the *Skrælingar* are left with a temporary gain, where the Norse are better off with a longer lasting value.¹²⁶ A similar instance of trading that leaves the Norse better off is found in *Eiríks saga rauða*, where the *Skrælingar* are desperate for

¹²⁴ Early sources do not explicitly testify for the Scandinavians as whalers, but some sagas depict Norse conflicts over whale carcasses, and in other indirect means establish a connection between Norse and whaling. Trausti Einarsson, *Hvalveitir við Ísland 1600–1939*: Bókaútgáfa menningarsjóðs (Reykjavík, 1987), 35–36.

¹²⁵ Jakobsson, *Approaches to Vinland*, 91.

¹²⁶ “Soga om grønlendingane,” 299.
pieces of red cloth. As the Norse are running out of cloth they keep selling smaller and smaller pieces for more goods, representing the “better” traders.\textsuperscript{127}

Through these aspects, the trades are shown to be dictated by the Norse, portraying the Skraeling as naive in the sense of being easily exploitable. Somewhat opposing this perspective, Sverrir Jakobsson notes that although the trades serve to render the Norse in a favorable light, the claimed commercial naiveté of the Skraelingar’ could have been regarded as a Christian virtue in the authors’ clerical milieu, meaning the Skraelingar were not necessarily seen as bad traders, but rather as less concerned with material goods.\textsuperscript{128} The given situation may well have been intended and interpreted as a display of something other than Skraeling stupidity, but reading it as a depiction of Christian virtues however, only holds at certain angles when considering the Skraelingar’s overall eagerness to trade suggests the opposite of material disinterest.

In another example, things are less up for interpretation: after the concluding battle in the Grænlendinga saga, a Skraeling tests a Norse axe by striking it against a kinsman’s head, seeming surprised when his friend then dies.\textsuperscript{129} Besides appreciating this hilarious scene of great comedic quality we should also digest its implications on serious terms. What does it mean, in the Norse world, to not know what an axe is? Without being able to fully confirm this, there is likely no other human character within the saga literature shown to be oblivious to what an axe is, and there are likely few other objects more staple to the Norse (or European for that matter) culture than this extremely common tool and weapon. Moreover, as the Skraeling decides to “test” such an object by striking a fellow man’s head, and is then surprised at the damage this does, what kind of unfamiliarity with the fundamental rules of the material world is not shown? Through this scene, the Skraelingar are in their curiosity no doubt signaled as unfathomably ignorant and completely alien to knowledge and experience the Norse would regard as completely universal. In this act, and the following surprise of its outcome, the Skraeling show a definite display of naiveté and blunt stupidity, as he is shown to be as uninformed and unexpecting as an infant child touching fire.

The Skraelingar are also identified as easily frightened, as they flee from most encounters with the Norse. In Grænlendinga saga they “flee with their tails between their legs” after the first encounter, as well as run from the bull, leading to the second encounter, before fleeing again at the end of that very same scenario.\textsuperscript{130} In Eiríks saga rauda fleeing is also the general means of departure, and while this could be read as quick exits where exits were due, the writers are explicit in stating the screaming and fear that takes hold of the Skraelingar as they run away.

\textsuperscript{127} “Soga om Eirik Raude,” 316.
\textsuperscript{128} Jakobsson, Approaches to Vinland, 96.
\textsuperscript{129} “Soga om grønlendingane,” 299.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 296.
This fright is perhaps best epitomized by the two Skraeling warriors scared by the pregnant Frøydis hitting her bosom while screaming.\textsuperscript{131} She is described as too weak to keep up with the others, while still able to scare off the Skraelingar. Where the naiveté can be seen as a matter of interpretation, the fright is more apparent in its reoccurrence and explicit depiction, making it a generalizing characteristic more easily pinned on the Skraeling stereotype. In addition, it is an attribute heavily laden with a clear negative value when considering its relation to cowardice, and how this is regarded in the honor-oriented culture of the Norse.\textsuperscript{132} Where stupidity may be regarded as a possessed characteristic, a passive trait, cowardice is constituted by active fleeing and is by that perhaps judged more easily as an action, a choice, with heavier implications towards the Skraeling nature.

Thirdly, the Skraelingar are portrayed as weak. Putting aside the possible definition of the word “Skraeling,” the sagas contains several descriptions where a physical inferiority of the Skraeling, compared to the Norse, is easily deduced. For example, both major battles in the Vinland-sagas are concluded by stating that the Skraelingar lost many men, whereas Karlsemne lost few. There is also considerable focus on the size of the Skraeling force, the amount of people facing the handful of Norse. Despite the fact that the Norse are using far better weaponry, this leaves an overall expression of the Norse as qualitatively superior in something as universal as fighting. Eiríks saga rauða’s description of their physical appearance ties into this point as well, with the Skraeling as a “little adult” giving a clear expression of a less powerful physical agent. Again, Frøydis becomes relevant as she yells at her kinsmen fleeing from the outnumbering enemy; “why do you flee such weaklings?”\textsuperscript{133}

By interpreting these events and descriptions and by taking them as characterizations of the Skraelingar that imply naiveté, frightfulness and physical weakness, we are clearly dealing with a matter of judgement wholly contained within its historical context. Whether an act was regarded as naive to the Norse remains available only as an assumption. We may however say that there is little doubt in that the actions discussed above are unlikely to be in line with favorable characteristics in the Norse world view. Yet, if these examples come short in providing a secure foundation on which to say something dramatic about the general attitude towards the Skraeling, the following killings offer a strong base in which to further support alienating characteristics.

\textsuperscript{131} “Soga om Eirik Raude,” 317.
\textsuperscript{133} “Soga om Eirik Raude,” 317.
Killing *Skraeling*: The Worth of a *Skraeling*

In the two studied sagas, a distinction of the elements that constitute the overall portrayal of the *Skraeling* can be found between the *Skraelingar* behaviour in their given environment, and the environment’s behaviour towards the *Skraeling*. One thing is how the *Skraelingar* themselves are depicted and seen through their own actions, another is how the Norse act towards them, the latter giving a more direct testimony to how the Norse viewed, or should view, the *Skraeling* as an Otherness.

The very first contact between the Norse and the *Skraelingar* mentioned in *Grænlendinga saga* consists of the Norse finding nine *Skraelingar* resting under their skin boats, killing eight of them seemingly without any issue. Similar, in *Eiríks saga rauða*, five *Skraelingar* are sleeping near shore and found by the Norse on their way home from *Vinland*. The five are thought to be lawless, and are all killed. Killing lawless people is a motive in itself, and as such does not call for further explanation in the saga-genre, and they are likely thought to be lawless as they are sleeping outside, *utlegr* (“lying outside”) being an Old Norse legal term denoting someone lawless, banished from society. Despite these *Skraelingar* being recognized as such, we should still ask ourselves why the Norse decide to kill. To which institution do the Norse adhere in this action, in which the authors find it necessary to explain the *Skraelingar* to be lawless? If we don’t assume the Norse as acting on behalf of the *Skraeling* society, then are they performing a judicial duty in a completely foreign land? Either way the Norse can be seen as quite willingly assaulting the *Skraelingar*. Even though the latter example is situated after the main battle, having established violent hostility between the two groups, these events are largely revealing of a fundamental attitude towards the *Skraelingar*; they could be killed without a particular cause, or moreover without the need for the writer to explain any further.

To understand the degree to which a group is subject to alienation as an Otherness, the most extreme and inhumane acts towards members of the group effectively reveal these boundaries; how far from the “us” the Other is. In this case, the *Skraelingar* are positioned as a rather extreme Other by being treated in a way that one expects the Norse themselves would find extreme were it to happen to one of their own. Thus the *Skraelingar*’s lives are of very little importance to the Norse. So the characteristics found in the portrayal and treatment of the *Skraelingar* collectively constitute a dominating negative attitude towards the *Skraeling* as a lesser Other. Yet, as we shall find, there are some aspects in which the *Skraelingar* can be identified outside of this attitude, as something less inferior.

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134 “Soga om grønlendingane,” 296.
135 “Soga om Eirik Raude,” 317.
136 Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*, 142.
The Skraeling as a Similar Other: Stepping Out of the General Attitude

In the first encounter in Eiríks saga rauða, the Skraelingar are waving wooden poles in the direction of the sun.\(^{137}\) This is immediately interpreted as a sign of peace, and responded to with the raising of white shields, signaling peace, also apparently understood despite the two cultures having just encountered each other. When conflict arrives, the Skraelingar signal by waving against the sun, which Karlsemne and his men answers with red shields.

Despite never having met, the groups are successfully communicating by rather unintuitive signaling. This demonstrates a potential cultural link between the Skraelingar and Norse, assumed by the author, in their understanding of these symbolic gestures, illustrating a common ground between the groups.\(^{138}\) The meaning of red and white shields was well-known amongst the Nordic people, and is hence expected to be known also amongst the Skraelingar. Here, the connection between the two people is on a more symmetric level than seen elsewhere, as they are both setting themselves as equals during this sequence of communication.

In the Grænlendinga saga, one Skraeling amongst the many are singled out as being beautiful and large, and therefore expected by Karlsemne to be the Skraelingar’s chieftain.\(^{139}\) Not only is this an example of our previously claimed dominant attitude being lifted, as a Skraeling is portrayed in a physically appreciated sense, but this also exposes the expectation of the Skraeling culture to be similar to the Norse. By expecting similar cultural ideals, as the Norse regarded beauty as a trait related to leadership, the Norse custom is projected onto the Skraelingar, which in a sense can be seen as accepting the Skraelingar as partially likeminded, as partially like the Norse “us.”\(^{140}\)

An acceptance like this is perhaps displayed more clearly when Karlsemne ends up on Markland,\(^{141}\) where the Norse adopt two Skraeling children, teaching them their language and even baptizing them into Christianity.\(^{142}\) Here the Skraeling children are practically accepted into the group, although likely not relieved of the attitude that brought about their circumstances, enslavement also being a possible outcome. In these examples of communication and assumed culture, each of the sagas expresses a similarity between the two groups that circumvent the attitude that I have argued as being derogatory and dominant. Although not particularly crucial in the sagas as a whole, these instances should be regarded as important as they point to the fragility of the portrait placed onto

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137 “Soga om Eirik Raude,” 316.
138 Jakobsson, Approaches to Vinland, 90.
139 “Soga om grænlendingane,” 299.
140 Hanne Monclair, Lederskapsideologi på Island i det trettende århundret (Oslo, 2003), 222.
141 One of the three North American places discovered by Leiv Eiriksson, believed to be on the Canadian coast of Labrador.
142 “Soga om Eirik Raude,” 318.
the *Skraeling*. As I have stated, the *Skraelingar* are generally depicted as primitive or inferior, but that may easily be thrown into question if one accounts for certain perspectives.

The *Skraelingar* can even be seen to gain the higher ground in comparison with the Norse, not only avoiding a derogatory portrayal, but seemingly stepping into the limelight as the winner of certain comparisons between the two. As the *Skraelingar* launch the mentioned strange projectile towards the Norse, we recall how the Norse are frightened and flee as they are scolded by Frøydis.\(^{143}\) In this we see the tables as turned in how the Norse run away in fear, and not the *Skraelingar*. Although stressed as having greater numbers, that the *Skraelingar* were able to overpower the Norse and outmaneuver them with their strange weapon should be seen as them claiming a small victory. A similarly small victory can be seen when Torvald is killed in *Grenlendinga saga*.\(^{144}\) As the two factions clash, the Norse quickly stand victorious, but with a notable loss in Torvald, their leader, dying.

Admittedly done within a clear hostile status as antagonists, and thus not necessarily in favorable lighting, these events are examples of acts where the outcome shows the *Skraelingar*’s abilities as contradicting the image of being weak and inferior. The *Skraelingar* are generally scared and stupid, with inferior weapons, but at times they show wit and prowess.

When studying Otherness in the sagas, Aalto points to the degrees of difference between the Norse projected “us” and “them” as somewhat fluctuating. To Aalto, where a general tendency presents a strict binary positioning of the Other as something completely different and far removed from the “us,” one sees the very same categories occasionally depicted as less clear cut, as the Other is identified as “not so different from us.”\(^{145}\) In the events discussed above, the *Skraeling* Other is identified as less alienated, contrary to the general tendency, and by that they are shown as somewhat similar to the Norse “us.” This happens as the *Skraelingar* are seen acting as, and being treated like, the Norse, and by possessing characteristics also possessed by the Norse. Although we should not imply the overall projection of the *Skraeling* as not being one of extreme Otherness, as there is no doubt that the *Skraeling* is distinctly grouped from the “us,” several isolated incidents show the *Skraelingar* as closer to the Norse “us” than otherwise seen.

Following this, every such portrayal of the *Skraelingar* should be seen as an advance of the *Skraeling*-identity, as the more they are like the Norse “us,” the less they are identified as a subordinate and inferior social category. Of such advances by the *Skraeling* status, the most important can arguably be seen in one collective *Skraeling* achievement; the successful defense of *Vinland*. As the Norse and the *Skraelingar* inhabit the same place, the frequent frictions between the

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\(^{143}\) Ibid., 317.

\(^{144}\) “Soga om grønlendingane,” 296.

\(^{145}\) Aalto, *Categorizing Otherness*, 27.
two can be summarized broadly as a conflict for *Vinland*. In this conflict, the remaining *Skraelingar* must be seen as the “winners.” This means that both *Vinland*-sagas contain an essential narrative element that depicts the *Skraelingar* in quite a favorable manner. The implications of this will be discussed further when looking into the meaning and significance of *Vinland.*

It is interesting to note how such assimilating elements can be found with the depicted *Skraelingar*, particularly, as there are few if any people in the sagas who receive such an overall derogatory and extreme treatment as an Otherness. Even the most dramatic and alienated depictions of a people are seen to occasionally yield to more humane regards, in the eyes of the very same authors, showing rigid distinctions between “us” and the Others to be quite problematic when it engages with dynamic and flexible categories.

**Concluding the Image: The Aliens of *Vínland***

In this chapter we have seen how *Grenlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* ostensibly depict the *Skraelingar* as nomadic skin-clad hunter-gatherers, and as mysterious sorcerers especially capable of conjuring illusions. As well as not speaking the Norse language, the *Skraelingar* act in strange and foreign ways, partially through their supernatural behaviour. Further, the sagas are shown to generally present the *Skraelingar* in a dramatically derogatory fashion, portraying the indigenous as inherently naive, weak and frightened, leaving the favored Norse as brave, strong and clever in comparison. Norse characters are shown to treat *Skraelingar* as an extreme Other through morally unproblematic murders. The sagas’ narrative elements position the indigenous people to act and behave in manners that display them as lesser when compared to the Norse, whereas the Norse actions enforce this attitude through their own treatment of the *Skraelingar*.

In establishing this portrait we have further seen ways in which certain events and depictions are contradictory to this dominant attitude, allowing the *Skraelingar* to occasionally break out of their projected extreme Otherness by appearing as something more similar to the Norse, or distanced from their otherwise dominant portrait. Central to the claim of the *Skraeling* as briefly appearing outside of this dominant attitude, is how *Vínland* stands as a testament to *Skraeling* superiority as they are left as victors in the conflict for the *Vínland*. The *Skraelingar* are undoubtedly carrying an Otherness throughout the sagas, but the nature of the Otherness, and with it the Norse attitude towards it, is shown to occasionally favor the *Skraelingar*, the Other itself, by which we see this particularly derogatory social category as not fixed, but in continuous development and change.

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146 See page 78.
4. Comparing the Others and How They Reflect a Norse Group Identity

At first glance, the two depicted social categories, each representing an Otherness to the Norse, might not be regarded as particularly similar. The Finnar are shown as somewhat integrated into the Norse society, speaking the same language, placed in formalized economic arrangements, and marrying with the Norse, whereas the Skraelingar are explicitly ugly, speaking an unknown language. After all, these are quite prominent characteristics found in the respective portraits. However, when investigating the traits that do stand as common between the two, as well as being distinctly un-Norse, some are not only revealed as particularly substantial parts of the respective images, but also as having fundamental implications for the overall portrait of the two.

In this chapter I compare the Finnar and Skraelingar as saga-projected Others, and investigate how they reflect a Norse group identity by functioning as contrasting counterparts to the sagas inherent “us,” and additionally how they differ in this respect. While being portrayed in different manners, both Others function quite similarly by reflecting the Norse in favorable lighting, provoking the idea of the two portraits as structurally related on a literary level.

How Do “Skraelingar” and “Finnar” as Terms Demarcate a Norse “us”?

Comparing the two we are first confronted with their reference as Finnar and Skraelingar. They are by name denoted as demarcated social categories, and through consistent deviant characterization, these terms are established as markers for people that stand as irreconcilable with the Norse social identity. In combination with signals of distance between said groups and the Norse, these two terms effectively single out and place the Finnar and Skraelingar outside of the categorizing force, the “us.” Once the terms are established in the way they are, they alone work as effective markers of “someone that is not us,” besides the other deviant traits ascribed to the category. In many cases, carrying a non-Norse collective tag can be seen as quite insignificant, as many social categories outside of the Norse society appear as similar and close to the Norse socio-cultural sphere, e.g. Danes and Brits that are identified as non-Norse without being depicted as particularly abnormal.147 In this sense, it is the given group’s presented distance to the categorizing force, that defines the weight a term has in establishing and maintaining borders between the “us” and the given Other.

How then do “Finnar” and “Skraelingar” as terms demarcate a Norse group identity?

Although its definition varies somewhat, the term “Norse” is widely used and understood by historians today as referring to “Norway and its colonies down to the 14th century” (sometimes loosely including Norway and Sweden).148 However, although used in line with its etymology,

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147 Aalto, Categorizing Otherness, 74-76. These are additionally situated further away from a large part of the Norse society, than the Finnar are.
“Norse” originating from “norænn,” primarily meaning the northern people and/or language (contextually read as northern Scandinavia), the term itself is rarely used as designated a Norse collective in the sagas. The historical people we today refer to as Norse, did not likely walk around calling themselves Norse, nor did they necessarily hold and recognize this category above more intimate and immediate ones, like group identities based on the family, farmstead, or social standing within these social arenas. Regardless, the “us-them” distinction between Norse and non-Norse is no doubt evident, although somewhat vague with fluctuating borders. This is partially given by how it is established by terms like “Finnar” and “Skraelingar,” and how the very use of these terms effectively creates a Norse category by negation, simply by how it is identified as never applying to the people we now consider Norse.

As terms and their meanings are established and understood, some are done so with an inherent regard of an “us,” in how they refer to certain social groups, some of which are identified as “Others.” Of such terms, some are in line with the rather broad category that is the Norse, that is to say that people labeled as being from Hlaðir, Borgarfjörður, or Brattahlíð, are all recognized as being a part of what the sagas generally signals as the “us,” while other social tags like “Skraelingar” imply its referents to be firmly placed outside. In isolation we see how “Skraelingar” and “Finnar” as terms alone, on account of who it is used as referring to, reflect an “us” as being one of definite exclusion of Skraelingar and Finnar, with few exceptions. Although the extent of this impact should not be exaggerated, the Norse are by this partially defined and categorized by never being referred to as “Finnar” or “Skraelingar,” as carrying this label implies a placement outside of the Norse socio-cultural sphere.

On the surface these terms offer a rather simple understanding of how the Norse categorized and saw themselves, as binary placement does little other than drawing a line without saying much about the “us” in question. This line, however, is still imperative as it constitutes the borders of the “us” effectively, not offering much content in itself but containing the characteristics depicted as part of the collective Otherness and in turn presenting this as a contrast to the “us.” For example, when we see Chieftain Raud the strong, firmly situated as a Norse, as a sorcerer, he is practicing deviant and non-Norse behavior. While this should be seen as somewhat challenging his status as (proper) “Norse,” he is acting out this deviancy on an individual level, whereas the sorcery of the Finnar is ascribed as a collective trait thanks to how the term signifies a non-Norse people.

Knowing what a Finnar is, and knowing this to be far removed from the saga-“us,” allows for the use of the Finnar as a tool to recognize when we are dealing with someone non-Norse.

150 Snorre Sturluson, Norges Kongesagaer, 186-188.
We have seen this Otherness sometimes be unfixed and of a varying degree, presenting some Finnar and Skrælingar as similar to the Norse. However, as a clear general tendency, initial in every appearance of a Skræling or Finna, the Otherness is central as it works as a conceptual backdrop unto which we read the depiction of the two people. When depicted as practicing magic or needlessly killed, whether or not they are part of the Norse group identity is imperative to how we read the situation and its implications. Thus, the very general but nonetheless paramount similarity between the Skrælingar and Finnar, which we must keep in mind when comparing the two as depicted from the Norse perspective, lies in their denotation as an Otherness, as non-Norse.

The Beautiful and Strong: The Physical Self-Image of the Norse

Beyond their common status as an Otherness, several characteristics distinguish the Finnar and Skrælingar from each other. The physical appearance of the Skrælingar is something that the saga writers point out and devalue, whereas the Finnar are rarely mentioned in terms of looks, disregarding the reoccurring motif of the beautiful Finnkona. When considering how anomalous physical appearance must be rather influential in terms of experiencing and determining an Otherness, as physical attributes should be recognized as particularly easy to use for identifying someone as unusual and fixing stereotypical characteristics unto, this difference can be seen as a big one.

Placed besides the explicitly ugly haired, small, and malicious looking Skrælingar, while signaled as being worlds apart, the Norse can’t help but to appear as beautiful people, towering as physical manifestations of the benevolent. In placing the “us” in such a strong juxtaposition with the Skrælingar, the saga-writers are indirectly asserting the “us” as neither looking ugly, weak, nor malicious, and beyond a mere negation placing the “us” as the opposite. As demonized as your counterpart is, so angelic are you, and in the sagas we see the Skrælingar heavily demonized, and heavily contrasted with the Norse.

Now, the fact that the Finnar are rarely displayed in this way does not mean that they were to be read as physically akin to the Norse or looking pretty, but it does involve less of a difference, in line with how we see the Finnar as less dramatically different form the Norse. If we recall the furry-faced Finna in Örvar-Odds saga and the later transformation of the young Agmund, whose face is filled with dark hair, we may take these episodes as testaments to a described

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151 Aalto, Categorizing Otherness, 122.
152 Women in general seem to be carrying a fundamental social mobility in the sagas, as they are much less affected by the stereotypes of their belonging ethnicites and cultures. When regarding women, they are primarily portrayed as women, seemingly somewhat consistent across dramatically differing social categories.
153 Hans Jacob Orning interprets Keitl saga Høngs as depicting the Finnar as explicitly ugly, although I myself read this as more implicitly present: Orning, Reality of the Fantastic, 96.
appearance that, as well as being ugly, is ugly in much the same way as the *Skrælingar*. Isolating these rare descriptions of the *Finnar*, we question whether these similar appearances are connected in some way, by a structural relation of the two depicted portraits, or if black hair is to be considered a Norse archetypal ugly feature regardless of its coincidental presence in the *Skrælingar* and *Finnar*.

The *Finnar* sorcery could also be a trait connoting a certain anomalous physical appearance, as most other supernatural beings are of the mythic kind, namely trolls, giants, and elves, which are primarily recognized by their dramatic appearances. If the sagas reflect a world view where the sorcery of the *Finnar*, along with other characteristics, groups them with these other mythical beings, this may result in the Norse experiencing the *Finnar* as similar to such creatures, beyond their practice of magic. Following this the *Finnar* may be read as “looking supernatural.” As defined by sorcery as the *Finnar* are, such an appearance may very well have been an association held by the Norse reader. Further, the more the Norse stand as distanced from sorcery, the more they are thus distanced from “looking supernatural” or “mythical.” In this sense, a supernatural or paranormal appearance of the *Finnar* reflect the Norse as looking “natural” or normal, if not pretty, in comparison.

Similarly, the nomadic lifestyle of the hunter-gatherer of the North also connotes certain features that implies a certain appearance, by reading hunters as residing in the wild and thus appearing wild or unkempt. We can also examine how the *Finnars’* looks might have been indirectly constituted by their skin and pelt-garments, a characteristic that applies just as much to the *Skrælingar*. If the skins worn by the *Finnar* and *Skrælingar* can be considered a continuation of their physical looks, then what one wore has a significant impact on how one was regarded. Thus the non-Norse clothing of the *Finnar* and the *Skrælingar* meant that they were also regarded as looking non-Norse. Again, this reflects an image of the Norse as “normal” contrasting an abnormality, but more specifically testifies to how this normality is one with a different or more conservative use of pelts, an appearance less associated with a nomadic lifestyle and “the wild.” Obviously the Norse commonly wore animal pelts, as it also was a luxurious commodity, but in this, the way and extent to which it was used is key, as the saga writers clearly point to the Others’ use of such garments, where this is not emphasized at all in the depictions of the Norse. As it is

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156 Giants in particular are by Clunies Ross considered the manifestation of extreme otherness in the sagas, partially by their deformation and ugliness: Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society* (Odense, 1994), 66-69, 164-65.
emphasized in the depiction of our Others, and consistently so, it is read as distanced from the normality of the Norse “us.”

Contrary to the Skrælingar, the Finnar are not experienced with an appearance sufficiently anomalous for it to be mentioned. Despite this, I still argue the sagas as presenting the Finnar with an anomalous appearance similar to the Skrælingar, although mostly indirectly through association. Regardless of whether this holds or not, we must note a significant difference between our two instances of Others, as the Skrælingar are explicitly deemed ugly, and the Finnar are at least not markedly so. Beyond the simple remark of the Norse looking normal and their projected Others not doing so, we see specific ways in which this abnormality is manifested. And when this explicitly involves a devaluation of the abnormal, the physical appearance of the now normal Norse is favored, showing the sagas to present its “us” appearing beautiful, big and strong, as well as the civilized counterpart to an unkempt and wild people.

**The Rational and Superior: The Reflected Norse Demeanor**

In the *Vinland-*sagas the Skrælingar and the Norse are emphasized as not understanding each other, whereas such miscommunication never occurs with the Finnar. The fact that the Finnar and Norse seem to understand each other effortlessly is not remarkable, as several foreign people in the sagas interact without difficulties communicating, where this otherwise would be historically expected. As such, the Finnars' unproblematic communication with the Norse does not stand as a quality in itself, but when aligned with the Skrælingar-encounters it becomes a key aspect in which the Finnar stand depicted as somewhat similar to the Norse. In this we see another essential difference between our two discussed Others. The Finnar are verbally understood, not overlooking the many ways in which they are mystical and exotic, and the Skrælingar are not. We recall the several non-verbal ways in which the Norse and the Skrælingar do communicate, to point out that this feature does not have to imply an unsurpassable cultural barrier, but when compared to the Finnar, it becomes a substantial distancing element.

As a cultural difference, this circumstance alone has quite a significant impact, as many behavioral elements of the Skrælingar are not only not recognized by the Norse, but also never understood, as the Norse cannot have the exotic behavior explained by the Skrælingar themselves. This plugged bottleneck of information positions the Skrælingar as dramatically deviant in much of their behavior, a deviancy that underlines the stupidity and strangeness we are shown the

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159 The importance of garments is more thoroughly discussed in chapter 6, where I explore the implications of the Skrælingar and Finnar not practicing agriculture.

160 We e.g. see Sigurdr jórsalafari in *Heimskringla* travelling around the Mediterranean, meeting several kings and other chieftains. Although it may be implicitly expected, there are no references to any-language barrier between Sigurdr and the local ones he meet and communicate with.

161 See page 32.
Skraelingar as representing. Again positing the Skraelingar as a stark contrast, we see how this reflects a Norse identity. In a saga-world where almost everybody “speaks Norse” the Skraelingar are left lacking, while the Norse possess an essential ability to communicate. Being able to communicate on this “Norse level,” also taking into account the probable cultural pride that revolved around the literary eloquence of Icelandic prose and verse, suggests the Norse identity to include a superior orientation of the social space.

With their high regard for lawmen, skalds, and social institutions founded on language, the Norse are clearly presented as highly rational when compared to the primitive Others, who are not even able to speak properly. Many Norse readers no doubt understood the concept of a foreign language, without it necessarily implying an immediate ignorance prior to a less demonizing cultural difference. However, when paired with the other demonizing characteristics also accompanying the Skraelingar portrait, the Skraelingar stand as lacking a superior, and inherently Norse, ability.

This image of the Norse as intelligent and rational is further accentuated in how we have seen the Skraelingar to be depicted as downright stupid, best epitomized in the previously discussed axe-episode. As stated, being unfamiliar with an axe, an object common to virtually anyone in any agricultural society, must have been read as quite extreme. Given the great distance between the Norse and their Skraeling-Other, this ignorance contrasts the Norse as smart. The same can be said about the much seen Skraelingar cowardice. This behavior, directed towards the Norse, presents the Norse as terrifying enough to scare off the malicious looking strangers, an impressive image in itself, but also adds the absence of fear to how the Norse are seen as behaving. Where the Skraelingar with their superior numbers run away cowardly, screaming, the Norse (mostly) stand their ground, brave and strong, leaving piles of slain enemies in their wake.

Where we previously saw the Norse as looking superior, we now also identify them as behaving as superiors, in outsmarting, outmaneuvering, and otherwise dominating their respective Others. By this the sagas can be said to portray the Norse “us” as a generally superior group, when compared to our discussed Others. In this broad valuation of the Norse, the Finnar also stand as an inferior counterpart, although in a less dramatic sense than the Skraelingar. As the Skraelingar seem physically and psychologically weaker, a similar weakness is also seen in how the Norse are shown to dominate the Finnar. In the consistent depictions of Norse raiding, political control, and commercial exploitation of the Finnar, the Norse are not only portrayed as a stronger group, but also as more intelligent in how several of these instances exhibit more advanced strategies and better administrative understanding. In this, the Norse domination of both the Skraelingar and

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162 See page 36.
*Finnar* can be seen as natural in how it is the result of traits inherent to the Norse people and their culture. The sagas depiction of these two Others thus reflect the Norse group as simply being better than these Others that are positioned outside of this identity.

The fact that both our Others are connected with sorcery and nomadism as core characteristics also serves to reflect the importance of a system of agricultural and abstinence from sorcery to the Norse self-identity. As the alien Other is depicted as uncivilized, roaming the wild and trifling with the dark arts, this reflects the Norse as sophisticated and proper, another valuation of the Norse identity as being one of superiority. Both these concepts are thoroughly discussed in the two coming chapters looking into what sorcery and nomadism as characteristics, essential in the portraits of both the *Skrælingar* and *Finnar*, imply in the historical context of the Norse medieval society.

**Flexible Others, Flexible Reflections: An Unstable Group Identity**

Although we are investigating the Norse group identity as a gathered and somewhat coherent image, the *Skrælingar* and *Finnar* reflect this identity in different ways, as they themselves differ. Facing these differences, we are presented with the *Finnar* as far more assimilated to the Norse. The *Finnar* are understood more, scrutinized less and are generally seen as a people somewhat integrated into the Norse society, through marriage, trade, and military alliances. It is important to note how these institutions portray the *Finnar* as less dramatically different to the Norse than the *Skrælingar*. The closer an Otherness is to a given group, the less it stands as a counterpart for the “us” to reflect contrasting characteristics against. This can also explain why the *Skrælingar* are allowed to be demonized to the extent that they are, given that if the *Finnar* were depicted as dramatically ugly and stupid, while also being integrated into the Norse society, this would reflect badly upon the Norse standing as not so different.

By Aalto’s mentioned understanding of the degrees of Otherness as fluctuating, the two social categories are both firmly placed as extreme Others, but a significant distinction between the two lies in the extent to which they are this. The *Finnar* and *Skrælingar* are both far removed from the Norse “us,” e.g. by being heathen, but the *Skrælingar* are signaled to be further distanced from the Norse sociocultural sphere than the *Finnar*, making their respective placement in the Norse social world view a difference in itself when comparing the two literary portraits. Summarizing their overall role, the *Skrælingar* are a nuisance to be rid of, whereas the *Finnar* are seen as a useful

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163 Thomas Hylland Eriksen presents a practical methodological division of “analogue” and “digital” Otherness, wherein the former is the Other understood as somewhat similar to the “us,” and the latter completely distanced from the “us”: Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London, 2002), 66; Applying this model with caution is Aalto, who finds the distinction of these two degrees of Others practical but also problematic as she holds social categories to be fundamentally unstable, occasionally escaping the borders of Eriksen’s toolset: Aalto, *Categorizing Otherness*, 27-28.
neighbor, as an ally or a people to exploit. Yet, even in the dramatic alienation that occurs in the sagas’ depiction of the \textit{Skraelingar}, we occasionally see “holes in the wall of binary opposition.”\textsuperscript{164}

Further, as we see \textit{Skraelingar} and \textit{Finnar} depicted in ways opposing their otherwise stereotypical image, such instances reveal the respective categories as flexible in that its members do not necessarily act or appear in line with the category’s tendencies. The \textit{Skraelingar}-chieftain being recognized as beautiful, or a \textit{Finna} residing at a Norse king’s court are examples of the Other suddenly appearing as something much less like “them” and more like the “us,” that we have seen partially demarcated and defined by its contrast to this very same Other. In this, when an Other is not so distanced from the Norse “us” after all, the Norse are brought closer to this, and with it, its belonging stereotypical characteristics. Consequently, as the \textit{Skraelingar}-chieftain is beautiful, he as a \textit{Skraeling} either resemble the beautiful Norse, opposing the \textit{Skraelingar} as inherently ugly, or this beauty as a trait loses its significance as an element within the Norse identity.

The theoretical point to take from this lies in how every characteristic reflected upon the Norse by the Others is insecure when it either applies to more than the Norse, deflating its initial significance, or worse when said characteristic is replaced by the counterpart that reflected it in the first place. In this the Norse group identity as a category is fundamentally insecure, or in more neutral words: dynamically subject to change, both in terms of social demarcation and self-image, as both those who demarcate and the traits that characterize said category are unstable. Stating this is not meant to deconstruct the group identities and categories argued for and maintained throughout this thesis, but rather to remind the reader how such collectively held entities in its social constitution stand as complex and dynamic concepts, constructed and maintained by a plethora of changeable factors.

The differing distances that are seen between the Norse and our discussed Others respectively can also be seen as analogous to how \textit{Finnmork} and \textit{Vinland} are two peripheries with very different proximities. Where the \textit{Skraelingar} are situated very far away, the \textit{Finnar} are a regional neighbor. As such their geographical placement becomes another distinction in itself, even though both places represent a clear periphery in the Norse outlook. Belonging to a periphery is a quality often central in identifying someone as an Otherness, as in this case it shows the Other distanced from the Norse “here.”\textsuperscript{165} Beyond this, the sagas depiction of a periphery, always seen and experienced with an offset from the Norse society, paints an image of the Norse as positioned in the center of the world. Not only are saga narratives enforcing such a center, but are also depicting peripheries as strange and often dangerous, much in line with the cosmology of Old Norse

\textsuperscript{164} Williamson, “Boundaries of Difference,” 471.
\textsuperscript{165} Hastrup, \textit{Culture and History in Medieval Iceland}, 143.
The originating categories and qualities are recognized historically shocking, socially to Skrælingar and projected characteristics of Skrælingar identity, as seen in the saga “us” as superior.

**The Essential Similarities of the Others: A Relating or Correlating Image?**

In this chapter we have seen how the two depicted Others reflect and demarcate a Norse group identity, by presenting the saga-“us” as the superior counterpart to demonized Others. Where the Skrælingar and Finnar are depicted as ugly, weak, unsophisticated, and irrational to varying degrees, the Norse are indirectly presented as beautiful, strong, sophisticated, and intelligent. If the characteristics of the Norse are not seen as the favored counterparts to those discussed as part of the projected Others, then the Norse “us” at least represents a preferred and familiar normality.

Further we have seen how the two Others are different and play different roles in the sagas, and how this most importantly positions the Finnar as more similar to the Norse than the Skrælingar. As well as nuancing the initially binary concept of “us-them” as something understood to carry varying degrees, this also reveals how the Norse group identity is a dynamic and flexible social category, where the general notion of who and how the Norse “us” are is occasionally challenged. Finding substantial differences between the Skrælingar and Finnar should not be very shocking, as they are based on two very different actual groups of people, with very different historical circumstances. What is less obvious is how the two carry essential similarities that can be recognized as particularly dominant in the Finnar-portrait, namely their sorcery and heathenism, and their pastoral lifestyle.

In the subsequent chapters we question whether these characteristics constitute a direct structural relation between the two literary portraits. Doing this we first need to determine if these qualities are to be regarded as the same, contextually, and whether they are fixed to the respective categories in similar ways. Further, these shared characteristics must be shown as not only originating from the actual people that the categories were based on, in order to prove a relation in the very construction of the literary categories representing the Finnar and the Skrælingar. Are the

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166 Ibid., 147.
167 See chapter 7.
characteristics in question based on actual historical circumstances alone, or should they be seen as social constructs?

The actual Inuit-people that the Skraelingar are meant to be denoting were no doubt heathen, and they were no doubt hunter-gatherers, so why point out and question the origin of these shared qualities? Because they can be identified as at least partially constructed, because the specific manner in which the Finnar and Skraelingar are depicted as e.g. heathen, and the following implications of a trait as this, may be equivalent where they could easily have been otherwise. Looking at the shared characteristics of the depicted Finnar and Skraelingar, and finding these to be constructed by the saga authors rather than being descriptive traits belonging to the represented people, opens up the possibility of examining the categories as made, and, more importantly, questioning how they are made. Doing this, the shared characteristics can be seen as constituting the portraits as being essentially alike, potentially revealing the Finnar and Skraelingar as carrying an equivalent essence in the Norse socio-cultural sphere. Further, any such essential similarity must be scrutinized contextually in order to reveal if we are dealing with the characteristics of the Finnar and Skraelingar, or the characteristics of the non-Norse in general. Is there a structural relation between the two given portraits, and if so, is this relation particular to these two instances of Otherness, or should it be seen as applying to the Norse Otherness in a more general sense?
5. The Sorcery of the Other: The Role of the Supernatural

In discussing the sagas depiction of the *Finnar*, scholars generally agree on sorcery being their most outstanding and defining characteristic. As I have argued, this characteristic is also central to the *Skrælingar*, who trifle with the supernatural. Where the *Finnar* are thoroughly fixed as sorcerers, the *Skrælingar* are less explicitly so. Still, the *Skrælingar* exist alongside the supernatural as an established part of their stereotype, as the only two sagas in which they appear show *Skrælingar*-sorcery or behavior that is read as supernatural or otherwise paranormal in the saga context. As I compare the magic of these two distinctly different people, I aim first to question the modern perception of medieval “magic” and how the supernatural was understood by the readers and writers of sagas. Should the magic of the *Finnar* and the *Skrælingar* be regarded as the same characteristic, leaving the two as similar in a very essential regard?

**Good and Bad Magic: Sorcery Defined by its Relation to the Church**

The sagas contain a vast array of different supernatural elements and practices discernible both to us and to the Norse saga writers. This is apparent not only in the different terms used to denote magic, most commonly “seiðr” and “trolldom,” but also in the different practices, their outcomes and how they can be seen as performed by members of different social groups.

In *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle-Ages*, Stephen A. Mitchell problematizes the modern use of the term magic when looking at older sources, as our understanding of the supernatural is strongly influenced by modern critical conceptions of the natural world. In short, our modern categorization of the supernatural rests on notions of the natural and physically possible that differs entirely from those held in medieval Europe. Even though many elements are rightfully identified as fantastic or unnatural on both ends, on account of direct denotation or the sheer dramatic magnitude of some events, we are in a large part left blind when attempting to sort between what the Norse regarded as unnatural, or even strange, in terms of human capabilities. This is not made easier with the saga language being typically conservative, rarely offering detailed accounts of the meaning and implications of actions and events. Taking a stand premised on the Norse conception of the natural as understood, we may, as Valerie Flint does in *The rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, have magic defined as “the exercise of a preternatural control over nature by human beings, with the assistance of forces more powerful than they.”

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170 We may take the several accounts of *Finnar* shapeshifting into various animals as examples of this. Charlotte F. Otten (ed.), *A Lycanthropy Reader: Werewolves in Western Culture* (New York, 1986), 156.

Allowing the use of the term *magic* justified by a critical awareness of its potential misuse, distinguishing between different *types* of magic also poses the same problem of applying anachronistic grids to old dynamic world views. Remembering the *Finnar* as primarily practicing sleep- and mind control, weather-manipulation, and prophesizing,172 Mitchell ads “love-magic,” healing, runic magic, and ethereal-travel to the range of typical magical activities appearing in the sagas.173 Whether these different types were grouped up and understood as parts of the same general category labeled “magic” is unclear, but within this bracket we can be sure by placing some important demarcations in a traditional opposition to black and white magic.

In line with a general tendency across European medieval sources, magic can be identified as either good or bad depending on whether it is condoned by the church or not—whether it is Christian or not—a distinction Mitchell argues the Christian Scandinavians to have been well aware of.174 While many practices of magic were explicitly deemed illegal in Norse law books,175 Mitchell points to the use of charm magic and incantations as examples of protection magic, that was common and accepted practice in the Christianized Norse society.176 Thus we have an understanding of black magic as something unchristian and pagan, and white as something legal. Pointing to the definition by Flint, Mitchell marks the difference between the supernatural being commanded by the agent in question, as opposed to having the supernatural happen to you, supposedly in a favorable sense, as a receiver of the magic.177 To Flint this implies the concept of sorcery understood as not including events where the supernatural force is recognized as entirely delivered. Following this, Christian white magic is prayed for, not called upon, as the power and will to intervene rests with God alone. White magic is thus seen as a passive kind, performed by a third party and suitably referred to as miracles, leaving sorcery, in Flint’s respect, as denoting paganism by definition.

Although this may be imperative to the Christian categorization of the supernatural, and thus apply as a rule within the Christian practice, the “commanding versus imploring” model should not be used as a categorizing tool within the supernatural behavior recognized as non-Christian (e.g. by occurring in pagan circumstances). This is evinced by the several instances in which pagan sorcerers are identified in the same respect, as aided by external forces instead of commanders of their own, examples of which are discussed soon. Following this, all Christian magic may be regarded as implored for and given by God, but in contrast, not all pagan magic is seen as actively

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174 Ibid., 45.
177 Ibid., 11.
controlled by those recognized as practitioners. Thus, I argue Flint’s distinction of “imploring and commanding” to be one that describes a general trend, but little beyond that.

Regardless of this, we should still adhere to Flint’s definition of sorcery as inherently pagan. This is partially due to how rare the occurrence of Christian magic is and how in these cases it is directly tied as Christianity, and partially due to how the general saga-sorcery is so explicitly tied to the pagan Norse, when not seen in the hands of Finnar, Skraeling, giants and other inherently non-Norse beings.178 Following this, we can regard sorcery as the supernatural performances practiced by, or being similar to those practiced by non-Christians, and understand Christian magic as something far removed from this. We see white, legal magic as a definite category within what we today understand as supernatural circumstances within Norse medieval narratives, but despite this, argue that sorcery is inherently pagan in the sagas, when it is not explicitly shown as a Christian practice. By this, we understand the supernatural events discussed in this thesis as non-Christian sorcery, regardless of whether it is commanded or implored for, as long as it is not placed in direct relation to Christian practice. When not stated otherwise, magic is unchristian.

Sorcery as an Explicit Signal of Otherness

In line with what is discussed above, sorcerers generally play the role of adversaries to the hero or protagonist faction, and we see the saga writers primarily ascribing magic to bygone pre-Christian eras, as seen with the supernatural world of the fornaldarsögur.179 Mitchell argues for how Odin is introduced as the “chief of magicians” while also representing the pagan antithesis to the Christian God, from whom the growing Christian world is increasingly distancing itself. As Mitchell states, “Once magical power is introduced among the Ynglings, it haunts them.”180 Further, this black magic is an essential marker of the “pagan past” as not only malicious and chaotic, but also as inherently deviant and strange.

In those sagas treating the ancient pagan period, magic, witchcraft, and sorcery are critically important concepts, in that their association with paganism is employed by saga writers as the key defining characteristic of that rough-hewn heathen word, not merely a widely practiced pre-Christian form or religion, but rather a way of presenting and referring to an entirely different manner of thinking.181

178 See the episode from Eiríks saga rauða on the following page.
179 We recall how the narratives of the fornaldarsögur is temporally placed before the events of the Islendinga- and konungasögur, with two distinctly different worlds, as discussed on page 25-26; Mitchell, Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages, 103.
180 Ibid., 78-86, quote at 86.
181 Ibid., 92.
In line with how we primarily define Otherness as a category based on the experience of something and someone as different, sorcery in the sagas is increasingly signaled as non-Norse behavior belonging to a non-Norse past. An additional and related aspect regarding gender is seen in how it is more accepted for Norse women to practice magic, which Sverre Bagge highlights in how the Heimskringla depicts it as shameful for men specifically, to do the same. This exemplifies one of the many ways in which the ideal Norse is centered on the male. In a warrior culture, with an emphasized value on physical strength, and with patriarchal social and political structures, the fact that it is less problematic for women to practice magic, which is so distinctly signaled as non-Norse, conveys a notion of women as inherently less Norse than men, or alternatively as a social category less affected by its overarching group identity.

A ruling tendency is then that magic stands as a clear and “convenient tag for Otherness, for the practices of cultures that were alien.” Looking at the Finnar and the Skraelingar, their strong position as Others bound with the maliciousness and antagonist role they are seen as given in the sagas, magic represents a vital part of these figures. Thus, by this association, those who practice magic are in part practicing not only paganism, improper in itself, but also “practicing Otherness,” by acting in ways inherently deviant to the Norse.

A clear example of how this is signaled exists in Eiríks saga rauda, when a prophetess (“volva”) is called to court by the Norse, and employed to practice sorcery and foretell the future. As the volva arrives, she is offered luxurious foods and welcomed by most, but Torkel and others are explicitly stated to leave and avoid the farm as long as she is there, as her practice is pagan and nothing the Christian Torkel wants a hand in. As prophesizing is a practice frequently exhibited by the Finnar, this instance of sorcery easily mirrors that of the Finnar, while also serving to show how such practice was both pagan and unwanted to the extent that Torkel removes himself from the settlement. By having the Norse avoiding and distancing themselves from magic, considered shameful and improper, the Norse are demarcating their collective social sphere, demarcating their “us,” as well as pointing to how the “us” are, by negating who and how the Others are. As magic is distinctly associated with shameful paganism, maliciousness, and general deviant behavior, the abstaining Norse are in their removal identified as honorable Christians, good and proper. If magic belongs to the unchristian past, its practice should be regarded as associated with what Mitchell calls “a world consisting entirely of soulless mechanistic appeals to demons,” without the

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184 Mitchell, Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages, 106.
185 “Soga om Eirik Raude,” 307-309.
benevolent God as creator. As a distance from magic is, plainly speaking, a distance from the wrong, the Norse “us” is in their collectivity reflected as removed from the wrong as well, moreover leaving the “us” as “right” in contrast to the Other’s “wrong.”

**Skrælingar Sorcery: Is it Different?**

Looking at the Skrælingar as practitioners of magic, we have seen the Vinland-sagas depict them (or their surroundings) as able to induce sleep, conjure specters, and disappear into the earth. In addition we note the mysterious noisy weapon in Eiríks saga rauða as carrying potential connotations to the supernatural, similar to the several enchanted items of the Finnar. Apart from constituting the general deviancy associated with magic, should these instances of the supernatural be regarded as unique in any way? Looking back at the Finnars’ supernatural powers, we recall several incidents connecting the Finnar sorcery with unnatural sleep, making for a direct similarity to the Norse’ sudden and heavy sleep seemingly induced by the Skrælingar. The spectral woman conjured by the Skrælingar can also be seen as having its counterpart in the Norse Óyvind, whom we recall was “brought to life” by the Finnar. The spectral woman is no doubt read as something quite different than the “real” Óyvind, who in no way is read as ethereal, but her Norse appearance and name, suggests that she is a mirror image of Gudrid and reveals a magic quite similar to that of the Finnar. In the given context, the spectral woman may be regarded as something conceptually between Óyvind, the Norse conjured in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, and the Mara conjured by Huld in the Ynglingasaga, in terms of how dramatic these creatures appear and behave as supernatural.

The Skrælingar that are seen to disappear into the earth in Eiríks saga rauða can be seen similarly to the many instances in which the Finnar exercise elemental magic, manipulating weather or other surrounding elements. A fitting example of this is the two Finnar in Haralds saga hins hárfaegra said to be able to willfully have “the earth turn,” an instance of the earth itself being the subject in their sorcery. We also note the instances in which the Finnar are shown to perform what seems like ethereal travel, connecting the use of supernatural abilities to travel and, in the case of the Skrælingar in question, escape. Where one could otherwise see the Skrælingar-sorcery as more or less identical to that practiced by the Finnar, a potentially substantial difference is in whether the magic is depicted as controlled; as performed directly or not. A common factor of the Skrælingar-magic lies in how it can be seen as happening passively, as how Flint discusses

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188 See page 34.
189 See page 18.
190 Snorre Sturluson, *Norges Kongesagaer*, 76.
Christian magic, and in that way appears less active than most of the supernatural behavior of the *Finnar*. Neither the spectral woman nor the sudden slumber of the Norse are shown to be directly performed by the *Skraelingar*, and while I along with other scholars do assume this connection second hand,\(^{192}\) a few alternative readings should be considered as it may affect the way in which the *Skraelingar* were written and regarded as sorcerers.

If the magic is not performed by the *Skraelingar*, then who or what is responsible? As with the Christian magic, which is more defined by God’s willful intervention, several of the supernatural events on *Vinland* can be interpreted as controlled by a third party, that is, by one or more local gods or demons. Exploring this idea further we can also recall the mysterious voice waking the Norse from the sudden slumber that follows their attack on the several sleeping *Skraelingar*, in *Grænlendinga saga*. Not only is this depicted as paranormal through its mysteriousness and unknown origins, but it is in all regards seen to aid the Norse, as it gives the Norse time to defend themselves from the imminent attack by the *Skraelingar*.\(^{193}\) Is this strange behavior derived from the same source as the *Skraelingar*-magic, revealing the aid as arbitrarily given? Or is there perhaps a power in conflict with the interest of the *Skraelingar*, such as God granting a miracle?

Although quite hypothetical, these readings should be kept in mind, as the magic of the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* are otherwise cut from the same cloth, making use of sleep, summoned specters, and elemental control in both saga-portraits. While the *Skraelingar*-sorcery tends towards more passive uses, the conjured army of illusion-*Skraelingar*, which causes the Norse to flee the concluding battle in *Eiríks saga rauða*, certainly presents a powerful display of magic performed directly by the *Skraelingar*.

In general, the *Skraelingar* magic is more passive, suggesting a difference in the nature of it and the *Finnar* magic, although this passivity also matches several supernatural occurrences ascribed to the *Finnar*. Conversely, *Finnar*-sorcery is mostly depicted as being directly performed, but occasionally it is of a more passive kind. An example of this is found in the incidents of weather-manipulation that are not explicitly stated as performed by the *Finnar*, but which nonetheless are explicitly supernatural and in direct aid of the *Finnar*.\(^{194}\) Thus, as the supernatural instances initially ascribed as *Skraelingar*-magic only happen in circumstances related to the *Skraelingar*, as well as being in line with their interests, it is read as *Skraelingar*-sorcery, in the way similar activity is ascribed as *Finnar*-sorcery.

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\(^{193}\) See page 31.

\(^{194}\) We may recall the stormy seas that King Olav and his army find themselves in after having plundered *Finland* in *Óláfs saga Helga*.  

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Based on the observations discussed above, we may regard the magic of the Skraelingar as similar to that of the Finnar, but with a notable difference in how one is more often performed directly where the other tends towards a more passive magic that is “received.” The Skraelingar-magic seems to fit within the category of magic of which the Finnar are practitioners. Finding this, how remarkable is this similarity? Is it common practice of magic particular to them both or should it be taken as instances of a broader saga magic?

**Is All Saga-Sorcery the Same?**

As the Finnar show a very wide array of different supernatural abilities, and are “especially well-endowed magically,” it is easy to see them as the sagas’ typical practitioners of magic. This notion is enforced historically by Margaret Clunies Ross, on behalf of several scholars, in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, in which discussions of magic in the Icelandic sagas features centrally:

> Several of these authors stress the importance of Sami people, as a known group within Scandinavia but outside Christendom, as both historical prototypes of sorcerers and shamans and as cultural scapegoats onto whom representations of erstwhile Scandinavian paganism could be projected.

With this standing, the Finnar behavior represents a general saga magic, and as such the discussed similarities in the Skraelingar are not necessarily something directly related to the social category that is the Finnar per se, as they can then both be seen as associated with a general saga-magic, rather than a specific Finnar-magic. This dismisses the likelihood of both their shared magical properties being evidence of a specific link. Instead, it strengthens the notion of a possible direct structural relation based on the Finnar representing a proxy for typical Saga-magic.

Besides the Finnar, common practitioners of the supernatural in the sagas are seen in witches, prophetesses, and old gods (most prominently in Heimskringla’s Æsir and Vanir), in addition to supernatural beings like trolls or giants that almost exclusively appear in the fornaldarsögur. Of these, witches and prophetesses are positioned as Others to the Norse “us” by their sorcery alone, but are otherwise established as Norse-like in a way the Skraelingar and Finnar are not. This is perhaps most apparent in how they seem to reside exclusively in or near the Norse community, as is the case with the prophetess in *Eiríks saga rauða*. In addition, these only appear as individuals, and are thus less categorized as social collectives or factions, making their part in the

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196 Margaret Clunies Ross, “Introduction.” In *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* (Odense, 2003), 7-18, at 12.
mental world view of the Norse much smaller, if the individual witches and prophetesses are regarded as related beyond the category of their name and use of magic at all.

The point of a general likeness to the Norse also applies to the pagan magic-practicing Æsir and Vanir, as they constitute an Otherness very different from those placed outside of the Norse group identity. If we take Odin in the Ynglingasaga, made mortal by Snorri, we see him depicted as the supreme magician, initially signaling an Otherness commensurate with his supernatural powers. Yet we must also take into account his role as a central Norse ancestor and cultural character. Although conflicted by his and his kind’s very strong association to magic, he clearly stands belonging to the Norse society and tradition in a significant sense.

Turning to the trolls and giants of the fornaldursögur, these represent a clear category of Otherness that is thoroughly related to magic and supernatural circumstances. The fact that these are supernatural beings, depicted as beings that could not have existed or be based on any plausible people, does not necessarily make them fundamentally different from the sagas’ other more “realistic” social categories. As the case is with the supernatural in general, the way in which something or someone is experienced as real is entirely dictated by the world view at hand. If the writers and readers of the sagas believed in the existence of certain elements contemporarily recognized as supernatural, it was a part of their mental world view, and should definitely be seen as an expression of how the Norse defined themselves and the world around them.

As such, when comparing trolls and Giants with the Finnar as typical sorcerers, the intuitive argument in separating the “unreal” from the “more real,” as affecting the fundamental existential status of trolls and giants, only holds in modern readings. To make things worse, several sources seems to use the term “Finnar” and “troll” interchangeably. Following this we see how trolls and giants as sorcerers might stand in the way for the idea that the sorcery of the Finnar and Skraelingar should be seen as similar within the saga-context. If the trolls, giants, and other beings also perform a similar magic, while existing outside the Norse group identity, the supernatural as a structural link between our two Others is at risk.

Although this does disrupt a thematic connection I consider significant when arguing for a fundamental similarity in our two portraits, distinguishing between the prehistoric saga-world and the new might situate the two as alone after all. Trolls and giants are easily recognized as being of the old, prehistoric world. This is apparent by how they make frequent appearances in the fornaldursögur, while being very rarely seen in the kings- and family sagas. Conversely, the Finnar feature frequently in the fornaldursögur, as well as persisting through saga-time by maintaining a significant role in the sagas set later, where giants and trolls disappear. In this later saga-era we see

a world with fewer dramatic racial distinctions and with more elegant social and political boundaries between the Norse and the non-Norse. Within this world, the Finnar stand alone as the only collective people heavily associated with sorcery while still firmly placed as pagan Others to the Norse “us,” apart from the Skraelingar of the Vinland-sagas.199

To summarize, in this chapter I have argued for how sorcery should be generally defined as inherently pagan, given how the Christian supernatural elements are read and thus were likely categorized as something very different. Following this we have seen how sorcery in general is a distinct signal of Otherness, though how it connotes paganism and moreover an inherent deviancy to Norse normality. Although we have defined the connection between the Skraelingar and their sorcery as more passive than that of the Finnar, the sorcery in both saga-portraits is clearly similar and also essential to the depiction of both. Examining whether this similarity is specific in the sagas, we find that trolls, giants, and gods are identified as supernatural in much the same way. These however, are all placed in the distant past of the fornaldarsögur and the gods are distinctly tied to the Norse culture as ancestors. In the sense of being social categories of the later, less fantastic era, the Finnar and Skraelingar stand alone as sorcerers outside of the Norse “us.”

Besides marking a border between the “proper Norse” and those placed outside of this group, sorcery can in its absence be seen as projecting substantial qualities on the Norse identity. By connoting a deviancy of paganism and maliciousness, I have argued that sorcery also belongs to a chaotic and “pre-Norse” past, a lesser and evil world replaced by the new and sophisticated. As the central and dominating leaders of this new age, the Norse “us” thus stand as an enlightened, modern, and more developed people in contrast to what the supernatural represents. In the next chapter, the Norse self-image is further augmented in similarly favorable manner as I investigate the significance and implications of settled agriculture in the medieval Norse society.

199 Aalto, Categorizing Otherness, 203-204.
6. What Does it Mean to Be Nomadic? The Cultural Significance of Material Objects

...as heaven turns, as wind howls, as waters run to the sea, as men sow grain.
- Tryggðamál 200

In investigating the portraits of the Finnar and Skraelingar I have argued for how nomadism and pastoralism represent essential characteristics in both depictions. In this chapter I explore how this constitutes a deep and significant distance to the Norse, primarily by implying an absence of agriculture, and I question how this reflects upon the Norse group identity. First, the nomadism of our Others is shown through particular connections to practices and behavior that is associated with a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, namely the extensive use of pelts, skins, bow and arrow as a primary weapon, and tents and other objects connoting a nomadic mobility. Of these, both peoples’ image as dressed in pelts is especially significant in that they strongly establish a connection with hunting as well as constituting an appearance that is quite distinguished from the Norse, mainly dressed in wool garments.201

Facing the projection of Otherness in the saga literature, scholars generally restrict themselves to discussing the explicit depiction of behavior and treatment of these as characters, with Norse norms and sociopolitical circumstances as the sole interpretational backdrop. As I argue, several material elements are prominent and impactful in the portrayal of the Skraelingar and Finnar; those seen as specifically tied to these Others as well as those exclusively situated in the Norse society. Beyond that which is read explicitly from the sagas, the material elements of the cultural context of saga-production should be taken into higher regard, as these too are immediate ways of social categorization.

The Rootless Other on the Move: Farmhouse vs. Tents

In its immateriality, the practices and skill-sets of the nomadic Finnar and Skraelingar are not necessarily something read as constituting a distance to the Norse. Although highlighted in our two portraits, the qualities of the mobile hunter are both common elements in the Norse everyday life, as well as being a skillset easily read as favorable in Norse eyes. The Norse may be said to more rarely hunt game, ski, or even use bow and arrows in battle, but excelling at these skills would be seen favorably by any Norse. As such, these traits, emphasized in the portraits of both our Others, should not be seen as connoting a particular deviancy to the Norse. At first glance, the same could apply to the Skraelingar and Finnar, as always being on the move is evinced in both peoples’ commonly

200 Translated by John Lindow: Lindow, “Cultures in Contact,” 91.
201 As Orning states, several instances wherein skin is mentioned, the presence or association with Finnar is likely implied as a direct reference. Orning, Reality of the Fantastic, 108.
depicted mobile tents (“gamme”). If read practically, the sagas’ typical Norse protagonist is also recognized as on the move, perhaps more often than not. Whether on a plundering raid in the konungasögur, colonizing Greenland in the family sagas or going on epic solo adventures in the fornlaldarsögur, the Norse is in many respects shown to be fundamentally mobile, a mobility often essential to the saga narrative.

In other words, when noting the nomadic lifestyle of Finnar and Skraelingar as particular to their given portrait, we are disrupted by the fact that the Norse also hunt and travel to the degree that it exists as a staple part of their orientation in the world. It is somewhat crucial to highlight that this Norse mobility be read as fundamentally different from that of our Others, as it strengthens the idea of these nomadic elements as shared by the Finnar and Skraelingar while still distanced from the Norse.

When investigating the travelling Norse as given in the sagas, we note that they themselves never set up tents (or sleep under their leather boats as the Skraelingar) and that they always return to or end up at Norse settlements, if not build entirely new ones, as seen in Eiríks saga rauða. This entails a mode of mobility that revolves around the concept of settlements as a distinct central hub of activity, a bond the Norse never sever. In this we should also include the prominent Viking activity and the many instances where the Norse travel to and often settle in lands far removed from anything considered Norse. In a sense, this leaves the Finnar and Skraelingar more locally settled than the Norse, despite their constant mobility. What then remains as an essential contrast to the situation of our nomadic Others, is the material fact that these stations, be they in Northern Europe or foreign realms, are stationary settlements.

We may of course expect the Sami, Finns, Inuit, and Indians behind the portrayed Finnar and Skraelingar to be well-versed in local geographies, and so to have similar stationary settlements that are frequented as hubs and permanent camps, but this is not seen in the sagas, where Norse settlements are both abundant and distinctly signaled as the civilized center of society. In comparison, the Finnar and Skraelingar have Finland, the North, and Vinland, respectively, in a more undefined and general sense. Where the Norse move from collective settlement to collective settlement, hosted by chieftains and kings, the peripheral Others roam their lands as a whole.

Perhaps the most apparent point to be taken from this contrariety is the fact that the Norse are seen as living indoors, in houses, where the Skraelingar and Finnar are not. The example of the Skraelingar sleeping outside depicts them as people constantly on the move, rootless, and disconnected from an organized, social center. Beyond this, Hastrup states how someone sleeping outdoors is easily suggested as being utlegr (“lawless”), implying a banishment from society.\(^{203}\)

\(^{202}\) Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Skandinavia i vikingtiden, 16-17.

\(^{203}\) Hastrup, Culture and History in Medieval Iceland, 142.
This alone may be quite heavily laden with implications, but the stationary house no doubt also lends itself to a notion of Norse superiority when compared to a tent or a sleeping bag. The objective difference between a Norse building and a skin-made tent is clear, but how would these material elements have been experienced as constituting fundamental differences between the Norse and their projected Others?

Assuming a Norse perspective, the longhouse is mightier in how its lasting structure fends off the outside elements, and its rock and timber are much grander than simple tents and huts of skin. Certainly the Norse culture is one developed with a clear relation to a spatial “inside” as distinct contrast to the “outside.” Besides the obvious human comforts experienced in a warmer, isolated, and ordered indoor-environment, the building should also be regarded as an arena crucial to social practices never enacted outdoors or in other much smaller nomadic housing-structures. The very act of literary production, be it legal, poetic, or historical, which is no doubt of paramount importance to the Norse culture conveyed in the sagas, is a perfect example of this, as no sagas were written in tents. By this, when compared to its nomadic counterpart, the building can be seen as representing a clear technological advance, and a material signal of how the Norse were superior to houseless nomads without the skills or means to achieve what the Norse were achieving. Who wouldn’t live in a house if they had the possibility?

Adding to this notion, another important role of the building is in how it constitutes the medieval farm, a symbol of agricultural civilization. Where cities and villages were common in the more southern parts of Europe, these were extremely rare in the Norse world. Instead, the dominating format was the farmstead as a more limited concentration of houses, functioning as a demarcated social and economic unit. Accordingly, the terms “settlement” and “farmstead” are understood as such. As was the case all over the densely populated world, agriculture allowed for and was central to the organized format of Norse society. Primary to his role as a warrior, fisherman, lawman or merchant, the quintessential Norse man was a farmer, and as such the culture constituted and produced by him was intertwined with the idea of an agricultural life. As we shall see in the next chapter, the farm was also vital to how the Norse experienced a dichotomy of center and periphery, wherein the center was in a way represented by the farm and its fenced boarders. The stationary farm therefore can be identified as the root of Norse activity and culture, an element played out in the discussed mobility of the Norse, as moving from settlement to settlement generally meant moving from farm to farm.

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204 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Skandinavia i vikingtiden*, 141.
205 Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*, 141-143.
The Absence of Settled Agriculture: Cheese, Iron, and the Loom as Technological Advances

As mentioned in the investigation of the Finnar portrait, we may take the nomadic role of these Others as constituting its greatest effect in how it distinctly signals the absence of agriculture and any permanent settlement. Following this, the nomadic role which we have pointed out as an essential feature of the Otherness recognized in both the Finnar and Skrælingar, is perhaps most crucial in what it rules out and how this involves the negation of something placed at the very center of Norse society and culture. The lack of agricultural settlements and all its argued societal differences must not only have been largely important, but also easily recognizable to the Norse when perceiving the social category of the Finnar and Skrælingar.

These circumstances are e.g. indicated in episodes where Finnar and Skrælingar show particular interest in Norse dairy. While conceiving of this common Norse product as something exotic projects the Others as ignorant, we could argue this to have been a conscious literary device on the authors’ behalf, as a people unfamiliar with dairy would hardly enjoy this sour substance first time around. Although it would be interesting if it were a conscious literary motif, whether the actual Skrælingar and Finnar enjoyed Norse cheese or not is beside the point. The significant thing we may take from this is how this common Norse product signals the Others as abnormal and, perhaps more importantly, as desiring of a Norse normality. The fact that the Finnar and Skrælingar in their nomadism also were unable to produce this (cow-) product further accentuates the idea of the Others as unable to do as the Norse do, placing something as arbitrary as cheese as a symbol of Norse superiority.

Continuing, we recall the Skrælingar’s unfamiliarity with iron as a signal of their stupidity, but beyond this we may also take this as a reference to the Other lacking the technology to extract iron, made more possible through an organized permanent settlement. For one, this signals a distinct inferiority in that the Norse have and know something that the Skrælingar do not, but furthermore the Skrælingar are read as exceptionally alien for not being familiar with this metal. This is apparent in how extremely integrated iron was in the Norse society, commonly used in all kinds of weapons, tools, and ornamentation. Still, iron was by no means something the Norse would have experienced as simply growing on trees, as the extraction and production was a demanding and

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206 DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 271. For examples on the Skrælingar see “Soga om grønlendingane,” 299. For the Finnar, see “Ketils saga höngs.” Chapter 3;
207 Phil Cardew, ““Mannfögnuour er Oss at Smjöri tessu’: Representation of the Finns Within the Icelandic Sagas.” In Text and Nation: Essays on Post-Colonial Cultural Politics, eds. Andrew Blake and Jopi Nyman (Joensuu, 2001), 146-158, at 151-152.
complicated process. Thus, being able to produce iron, and good quality iron at that (as opposed to weaker bog iron), was a justifiable matter for the Norse to feel and communicate cultural pride about. Given how abundant iron was, a people completely unfamiliar with the very substance must have been regarded as very strange, as well as technologically inferior.

This is one of several examples where the Skraelingar are portrayed as a more estranged and extreme Otherness than the Finnar, who in no explicit respect are shown as unfamiliar with or unaccustomed to iron products. On the other hand, the Finnar are rarely, if at all, depicted with other weaponry than the bow and arrow, which is one of very few weapons in the Norse society not necessarily constructed with metal components. This can be taken indirectly to associate the Finnar with not being users of iron, which is consistent with the actual nomadic people who did not produce iron themselves. While this is a somewhat farfetched point, a potential absence of iron in the Norse-perceived social category of the Finnar could also have been generally assumed as a part of their nomadic circumstances in general. Despite the lack of any emphasis on this in the sagas, the absence of iron could easily have been a common argument for the Finnar as inferior to the Norse, historically speaking. Regardless of whether this should be viewed as an attribute shared by the two nomadic people or not, it is something more projected and emphasized in the Skraelingar-portrait.

Another technological shortcoming is seen in how our Others are dressed in animal pelts and skins, and therefore, not in textile garments. The Norse mainly wore wool and linen, which is easily contrasted with skin and fur in every way. Historically the Norse-favored fabric was a more technically versatile material, which could be composed and adapted in endless ways, whereas animal pelts were given in a rather set format, more limited to sewing. Besides the practical advantages this involved in the Northern climate, the fabric also allowed for the embroidery of patterns and dyeing of strong, bright colors, making for cosmetically impressive appearances. Along with jewelry, such garments were important in signaling social standing within the Norse society, particularly in the upper classes. This shows how the typical Norse garments played important roles in the Norse society, which animal skins as a material were unable to.

The Norse appearance clearly holds an initial significance in its role distinguishing the visual normality of the “us,” particularly when it is so easily distinguished from its counterpart, but was also likely regarded as technically superior in the respects discussed above. Hence, what the Norse typically wore was likely taken as both more practical and pretty than that worn by the Skraelingar and Finnar. This notion is further strengthened as the Norse had the option to also use

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210 This directly relates to the discussed axe-episode of the Vinland-sagas, and signals the Skraelingar as inferior in similar terms.
211 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Skandinavia i vikingtiden, 14, 86-87.
skins, which they regularly did,\textsuperscript{212} although mainly as a supplement to a wool dominated outfit.\textsuperscript{213} With the Norse having access to both, the Finnar and, in particular the Skraelingar, are read as being constrained to skins and fur, a comparison favoring the versatile Norse.

This attribute of appearance is connected to the notion of the nomadic by how the Norse’s wool garments were a product of keeping livestock and the loom. Although distinctly pastoral in name, the use of sheep for producing wool was a result of organized permanent settlements, made possible by agriculture. By this, the Finnar and Skraelingar as nomadic hunter-gatherers were unable to produce clothing similar to that worn by the Norse, and that absence of wool could be associated with the absence of the societal organization that is agriculture. Thus, the loom and its techniques should be considered a technological advance similar to the extraction of iron (or making of cheese). When presented with a skin clad Other, the absence of the loom glimmered most salient to the Norse – as did the agriculture which so defined the everyday life of the Norse.

As I maintain throughout this thesis, physical appearances are universally important and often play imperative roles in instances of social categorization. In line with this, and independent of any other behavior, being dressed in animal skins as opposed to textile garments could easily have been a distinct marker to the Norse, being the first thing to signal someone as non-agricultural, as wild, unsophisticated, and underdeveloped, leaving the Norse identified in opposite terms.

Hastrup also discuss how animal furs were central in the image of the elite and famously crazed warriors known as \textit{ber-serkir}.	extsuperscript{214} These savage and supposedly uncontrollable fighters are typically depicted as wearing animal furs, a possible translation of \textit{ber-serkr} being “bear-shirt,” and could hint to how the exclusive wearing of furs was primarily done by the wild and savage.\textsuperscript{215} In other words, the reader of the saga could very well have had a fundamental set of stereotypical traits to attach to a skin-clad people strongly associated with the non-agricultural, such as both the Finnar and Skraelingar.

Besides the examples discussed above, the non-agricultural situation is perhaps most clear in how the Skraelingar do not make use of the favorable conditions seen in \textit{Vinland}, where grain grows freely. Here, arguably the most important factor to Norse who are looking for new lands to settle is found to be plentiful, and moreover seen as completely unexploited by the native Skraelingar.

Besides all the previously mentioned stupidity and inferiority this might imply, this simply constitutes a great deviance between the Norse and the Skraelingar, as the Skraelingar are

\textsuperscript{212} Belts, shoes, and other accessories were after all often solely made of leather. The reindeer-tunic given to Thorir Hund is a saga-example of this.

\textsuperscript{213} In excavations of Norse grave-sites we see a clear dominance of clothing made from wool and linen: T. Douglas Price, \textit{Ancient Scandinavia: An Archaeological History from the First Humans to the Vikings} (Oxford, 2015), 233, 252, 262.

\textsuperscript{214} Hastrup, \textit{Culture and History in Medieval Iceland}, 153.

\textsuperscript{215} Angus A. Somerville and Russel Andrew McDonald (eds.), \textit{The Viking Age: A Reader} (Toronto, 2010), 162-165.
disregarding a core aspect of Norse colonization. How inherently alien the Skraelingar must have been perceived as when ignoring ideal conditions for the Norse way of life.

In the sections above we have seen how the Skraelingar and Finnar are portrayed as lacking the means to attain iron, fabric, cheese, houses, and agriculture, all common or central elements in Norse society.216 As discussed we may take this as a testament to technological and cultural inferiority, when viewed by the Norse. Besides being constituent parts in creating the distance that we consistently identify between the Norse and the Skraelingar and Finnar, this leaves the nomadic Other as stereotypically primitive in comparison to the sophisticated, organized and culturally superior Norse.

**Hunting, Fishing and Herding as Common to All?**

Where the non-nomadic agricultural situation of the Norse is clearly posited as a distinct contrast to the Others in question, the herder and hunter as an equally present facet of the projected nomadic stereotype, are less easily distanced from what we recognize as the Norse group identity. The Skraelingar and Finnar as fishermen, hunters, and herders involve characteristics likely favored by the Norse, as well as practices thoroughly established as integrated parts of the Norse way of life. Partially subsisting in similar ways, on similar terms, could be taken as somewhat assimilating the perceived lifestyles of the Norse and its projected Others, potentially narrowing the significant cultural gap manifested in agriculture.

As previously mentioned, an immediate example of this lies in the peoples’ common role as hunters, a practice all too present in the skinning and archery of the Skraelingar and Finnar, and to the Norse, a known supplement to farming, fishing, and herding. As this is discussed and fairly unproblematic, we may leave this point by concluding that hunting in itself was something practiced by the Norse and their Others and by that could have signaled a common ground, outside their focus on the absence of agriculture. Hunting in itself was not deviant to the Norse, and being efficient hunters was certainly a characteristic the Norse would value highly themselves as well.

Another matter to discuss is how both the Finnar and the Norse are known and depicted as keeping and herding livestock, and whether this is a practice that potentially blurs the saga-image of the two. From one of the earliest written sources on the relationship between the Norse and Sami, we know that the Sami by the late 9th century were a people established as reindeer-herders.217 This

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216 Having proven the point, we may also note how the horse and beer (or mead) could be equally good examples of culturally central elements, central to the Norse and absent to the Others.

notion is maintained and reflected in the sagas with several episodes depicting and associating the *Finnar* with reindeer, such as with Thorir Hund’s reindeer-tunics in *Óláfs saga Helga*.

Conversely, we know the Norse to have kept pigs, sheep, and cattle as roaming and housed livestock throughout the Middle Ages, and in this we have the Norse and *Finnar* as both herding and keeping livestock. Should this be regarded as a similar practice to the degree that it partially blurs the line between Norse and *Finnar* livelihood? Can this common denominator in keeping and living off domesticated animals be plausibly constituted in the minds of the sagas’ readers and writers?

While, in our modern eyes, this points to an essential likeness on a fundamental level, the idea of herding and keeping animals as an inherently similar practice could be criticized as an anachronistic thought operating with broader categories of subsistence strategies than those recognized in the Norse Middle Ages. For one, the animals kept and herded by the two people are distinctly different, the reindeer being the wilder and more free-roaming than the others. The reindeer is after all a deer-animal, and was likely associated by the Norse with its other Scandinavian relatives, and so exclusively hunted. In relation to this, the way in which the reindeers were herded is also something that differs from the Norse practice. While sheep and goats grazed sizeable pastures, cattle and pig were in the later stages of the Middle Ages kept close and indoors, in order to produce manure. Contrastingly, reindeer were roaming much more freely across larger terrain, as was necessary given the sparse vegetation of reindeer-habitat. Following this, the herding of reindeers was likely experienced as more distancing than narrowing between the two cultures, leaving the Norse to perceive the *Finnar* as strange for herding reindeer, rather than similar for keeping what we today regard as domesticated animals.

Whether reindeer herding had a substantial impact on the *Finnar*-image or not, the *Skraelingar* should be noted as different by not being depicted as herders or domesticators, as we recall the *Skraelingar* reaction when fleeing and screaming from the Norse bull. In this comic episode we may assert two interpretations: either the bull is frightening as a completely foreign massive beast, or it is recognized as the likes of the admittedly dangerous American buffalo or muskox. Either way, there are no indicators of the *Skraelingar* being herders of any kind in the sagas, nor in other archeological findings.

Where the *Finnar* and Norse are common in herding, the *Skraelingar* may be seen as sharing common ground with the Norse as whalers and fisherman. In the sagas the *Skraelingar* are thoroughly situated as land-hunters by wearing fur and using bow and arrow, but they are also read

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218 In dictionaries we are told that livestock by definition occur in an agricultural setting – when discussing the non-agricultural *Finnar*, the term is not understood in this limited sense.

219 The reindeer is only found in the Holarctic region.
as whalers, seal-hunters, and fishermen. That the arctic Inuit of the Americas primarily lived off the sea is well-known and archaeologically proven, but the ways in which this lifestyle is projected onto the Skraelingar in the sagas, though present, is less apparent. In both Vinland-sagas the Skraelingar are firmly associated with the coast and the sea, as they arrive exclusively by boat, and in all senses this points to a fishing people. As the boats are said to be small and made of skin, we also take these vessels in their technical mobility as necessarily used in whaling and sea-hunting, where bigger and more slowly navigable ships are impractical. Further, the much discussed Skraelingar-fur could just as easily have been read as being of seal-fur, an interpretation in line with the historical reality as the Beothuk- and Thule-Indians mostly wore seal and caribou skin. By this we have the saga portraying the Skraelingar as whalers and fishermen, broadly living of the sea, in addition to their general status as hunters.

As with hunting, this represents an aspect within the livelihood of the Norse that is similar to that of the Skraelingar, offering a common ground where agriculture is recognized as quite dramatically distinguishing. This is particularly the case for the Norse people situated on the western isles of Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Here the Norse primarily relied on herding and fishing, as the conditions for farming were far worse than on the southern Scandinavian mainland.

### The Organized Norse and the Wild Other: The Prevailing Cultural Gap

In the instance above we see how the island-based Norse stand, in some ways, with livelihoods more similar to that of the Finnar and Skraelingar, than to the farmers of the Scandinavian mainland – an exception, as throughout this thesis we see the Others as effectively demarcating the social category we label “Norse.” What does this imply for our discussion of Agriculture? As the saga literature of our source material is Icelandic, we could expect the Icelandic Norse to be particularly representative of what the sagas constitute as significant characteristics to the Norse “us.” In this sense, the Icelandic Norse being less sustained by farming, and more so by fishing, hunting, and herding, could pose a liability to how we have argued settled agriculture to manifest a fundamental difference between the Norse and our saga-Others. Emphasizing a societal difference between the Norse and the Others makes less sense if this difference only applies to mainland-Norse, with saga-Iceland excluded.

Although the whaling- and hunting-lifestyles certainly should be taken as playing dominant roles in certain areas of the Norse culture, it should not be taken to replace or negate the

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significance of settled agriculture in the general Norse society as a whole. This is shown in how the social and material circumstances born of agriculture persist without the ongoing presence of agriculture per se. The many cultural elements, some of which are discussed in this chapter, constitute an agricultural state, even without agriculture. I would argue that among such elements, a primary one is the building and, moreover, the settlement, which has its provenance in agriculture, but can continue to exist without it. Representing a key organizational aspect in Norse society, the settled farmstead housed both the Norse and their social identity, regardless of whether the Norse plowed fields, shot arrows, or threw fishing nets.

As such the saga readers might have recognized hunting and fishing as common to themselves and the respective Others, but not in a way that overshadowed or opposed the agricultural settlement as a defining and common denominator to the Norse. In addition to the part that agriculture played in the Norse culture’s originating seat of Scandinavia, which continually functioned as a social, economic, and cultural center, farming was still maintained on both Greenland and Iceland.

To conclude, we have seen how both fishing and hunting as subsistence strategies present a common ground to the Norse, Skraelingar, and Finnar, where agriculture does not. As a result of the central role agricultural settlement plays to the Norse economy and social life, agriculture is shown to represent an enormous cultural gap between the Norse “us” and the nomadic Other. This is primarily argued as manifested materially in the settlement, representing a stark contrast to the Others’ mobile way of life. Moreover, dairy, clothing, and metalwork are also recognized as examples of a material production of a Norse culture, very easily noticed as absent in the portrait of the non-agricultural Other.

When looking into written portrayals of the Other, scholars too often confine themselves to the written source material, where a broader inclusion of historical circumstances, such as archeological findings, is both fruitful and safe. By further taking into account that which we know surrounded the production and influence of the source material at hand, we may venture better interpretations of how said texts were written and understood, by investigating the cultural significance and implications of certain elements. In this way, we gain a larger context of interpretation, along with a potential offering of a more certain ground when positing social boundaries, as culture and cultural differences are often clearest when they are materially manifested.

As previously seen, the Norse are reflected as sophisticated and technologically advanced in their relation to the Skraelingar and Finnar as counterparts. However, where the tendency has been to present the Norse as inherently superior by appearance, behavior, and skill, they are now also seen as materially and culturally superior, especially because of what we may regard as a
technological arsenal central to the Norse society, and absent in the Others. One overarching quality portrayed in the Norse as a social collective lies in how they are signaled as organized. With the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* belonging to and acting out a wildness in the sagas, the Norse “us” is presented in contrast as an inherently cooperative and organized society. This dichotomy of the ordered versus the wild is fundamental in the following chapter’s investigation of the spatial differences between the Norse and their Others.
7. Peripheries and the Impact of Spatial Elements

When man moves in space, he creates meaning.

- Kirsten Hastrup

When studying a group’s egocentric worldview, one inevitably encounters the spatial aspects of a physical center. As the very idea of Otherness, a “them” differing from an “us,” presupposes fundamental distinctions, these necessarily take form as distinctions of place. As a literary genre where the typical narrative is structured around travel, the sagas show an abundance of emphasized geographical boarders. This involves a structuring of spaces as different, as E. A. Williamsen states that “all travel narratives are inherently narratives of difference, in that the destination described is not received as identical to the homeland—if it were, it would not be a destination.”

Here, Williamsen not only points to the distinction of different spaces as crucial to the saga genre, but also to how these are typically structured on a “homeland” as a center and an origin of departure. The second the saga-narrative presents its first border, spatial differences emerge. Following from that, whenever a journey is present, so is the idea of distinct places, as Williamsen states that “without crossing boundaries, the traveler cannot arrive at his destination.” It is this placement of borders to “other places” that allows for the creation of a “homeland,” serving as the center experienced and constructed by the “us” in question.

As the group identity of the “us” is demarcated by pointing towards those who do not belong, so is “home” defined by negation, by what it is not. In more theoretical terms we are dealing with a dichotomy of a center and its periphery.

Socially Understood Space: Constructing the Border

Taking this scope to the context of a Norse worldview, Kirsten Hastrup places such a center on the Norse farmstead, and the periphery then consequently outside of this. According to Hastrup, “the borderline between the farmstead as center and the world outside as periphery was drawn along the fence that surrounded the farm.” For Hastrup, this is read from the sagas treatment of the farm, and more explicitly seen in the frequent use of the terms innangardr (“inside the farm”) and utangardr (“outside the farm”).

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222 Hastrup, Culture and History in Medieval Iceland, 223.
224 Ibid.
225 Orning, Reality of the Fantastic, 132.
226 Aalto, Categorising Otherness, 53.
227 Hastrup, Culture and History in Medieval Iceland, 60.
228 Ibid., 141.
While this works as an excellent representation of distinct borders between a Norse center and a non-Norse periphery, using the farmstead fence as the demarcation as Hastrup does, is too local when speaking of a larger Norse (or even just Icelandic) collective group. In the Nordic Middle Ages, the typical farm and settlement were small in that they seldom housed more than a couple of extended families. Instead of large concentrated villages and towns, smaller settlements existed alongside each other as distinct, neighboring entities. With such small groups actually residing inside “the fence,” and such groups generally existing close by and all over, moving between settlements was hardly experienced or regarded as moving outside of the Norse society and social space.

I see this as valid in Norway, but as much more apparent when applied to the Icelandic society, as the whole island and the space between its settlements should be considered as Norse space. Moving across borders internally to Iceland no doubt posed certain dangers, particularly in times of feuds, but these dangers were found in encountering hostile Norse, and thus were not dangers inherent to any non-Norse periphery. Consequently, Hastrup’s bordering fence more likely functioned as symbolically bordering families, settlements, or other more intimate in-Norse groups, and not the Norse in a sense of the much larger group.

Backed by the old gods, our broader geographical positioning of the ego in a more collected center is an image precisely mirrored in the cosmology of the pre-Christian Old Norse mythology. Here the world center of Miðgarðr was the place of men and gods, and the surrounding periphery, Útgarðar, was inhabited by giants, trolls, and other mythological beings. In this distinction of spaces, whether physically present or socially constructed, difference is key.

Alternative to the overly local fence, what separates the Norse center from its surrounding periphery? Immediately, the spatial should be seen as somewhat physically defined by its topographical elements. In this way, a region or a distinct geographical location was categorized by its natural distinguishing properties as well as how it stood as spatially distanced from other places. Mountains, rivers, seas, woods (and the absence of these) were typical natural borders that the Norse (and most people) used as tools of spatial categorization. As such, a mountain range was a mountain range in the Norse world view. Beyond this, however, as Hastrup states;

[These same] properties and distances carried significant meanings as they [were] structured and categorised partially on a foundation of culture. The spatial borders we set, and the meaning we interpret these borders as containing, distinguishing and signifying, are in part a product of the culture in which it is defined.

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230 Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*, 147.
231 Ibid., 50.
This is perhaps most easily exemplified by how, as mentioned, spatial categories are seen as
experienced by their distance in relation to other regions, most importantly “home” as the world-
center. This does not constitute distance in a strictly physical sense, as given through absolute
measures, but rather in that, and how, these distances were travelled by the Norse. According
to this, the Norse experience of a place was substantially affected by how long it would take to travel
there, and whether by ship, horse, or foot, as well as if it were regarded as a difficult or dangerous
journey. Here, we see an immediate instance of the cultural role in the experience and
categorization of a place, as both the means of travel, and the center as the origin of departure, are
recognized as both constituting and manifested in the Norse culture.

In line with the angle maintained throughout this thesis, what is interesting to us is how the
culturally structured elements of these spatial categories may reflect Norse mentalities, what these
categories may tell us beyond their relation to a world unfiltered through human experience:

Space provides the physical co-ordinates of society, but it is of interest here mainly because
of its conceptual aspects. [...] space is conceptually transformed into a set of social
categories, the meaning of which is influenced by other aspects of the social order. Space
thus takes on particular meanings which must be understood by reference to particular social
categories, rather than by reference to purely physical properties.

Through this, we are left with the experience of spaces as largely dictated by its societal relation to
the categorizing force at hand. As Hastrup formulates, “once the physical features of a particular
landscape are seen as the environment of social action, they are defined by man’s relationship to
that environment.” Where the travelling of spaces leaves us with a rather general reflection of
regions defined by their accessibility, a more specific example of socially defined landscapes is
presented in how the Icelandic fjord, Vopnafjörður (“Weapon-fjord”), points to a historical event
beyond its mere topography, a denotation “conceptually structured by a wide range of social and
political institutions.”

In such an understanding of places experienced by their relation to the social, the social may
be equally defined by its relation to the spatial. Following this, the Norse experience of a people
like the Finnar or the Skraelingar was at least partially affected by the geographical spaces that were
associated with these. Thus, we may investigate how the belonging space could have been
manifested in and have influenced the portrait of the Other. The “belonging space” is in this way
almost exclusively aimed at a people’s dwelling place, meaning where they were primarily seen as

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232 Ibid., 58.
233 See the paragraph “Social Aspects” in Edda R.H. Waage, “Landscape in the sagas of Icelanders: The concepts of
234 Hastrup, Culture and History in Medieval Iceland, 50.
235 Both quotes found at Ibid., 51.
living and originating from. In this sense the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* should be seen as partially defined by the North and *Vinland*, respectively. As Bjørnar Olsen notes, “where you lived had implications for who you were.”

As with the demarcation of the “us” and the “others,” the borders of the center and periphery are not necessarily clear cut and should be read as somewhat ambiguous, as opposed to Hastrup’s farmstead fence, which functions as a very distinct boundary. However, as we have seen the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* as both signaling extreme instances of Otherness, so are the dwelling-places of these undoubtedly read as distanced far from the Norse center, both physically and conceptually. By this, the *Finnar’s* North and the *Skraelingar’s Vinland*, though situated dramatically far from each other, are definite places within the Norse-projected periphery.

When facing the Norse non-center, some general qualities and attitudes typically apply that are often given primacy over, and that dictate the circumstances of, the specific location placed internally within the broad and vast periphery. What is meant by this is how some tendencies are found in the periphery as a whole, across regions and borders of evident difference, on the simple account of it not being the Norse center. Before a place is given its characteristics, it is already heavily laden with the connotations of the periphery. Looking to Hastrup, one such central connotation lies in how the periphery is an inherently anti-social space, contrasting the socially ordered society of the center. In this way we may understand the periphery as the antithesis of civilization, wild and dangerous to a safe and ordered center.

With the presence of inhabitants, this implies a chaotic social condition lacking organization, law, and the safeguard of the Norse settlement. This suggests a general juxtaposition of the inhabitants of the center and its periphery ultimately setting the stage for “a more or less permanent battle between the inhabitants of the distinct spaces.” Now, several regions geographically distanced far from Norse homelands, such as England, are not depicted as the antithesis of civilized society, and as such are recognized as close to the Norse center, conceptually speaking. By this, the sagas show several instances overriding the periphery as inherently void of societal order. Knowing this, we are left with the notion that, until proven otherwise, the world outside the Norse society is wild and unhospitable.

To Hastrup, the ultimate consequence of such a dramatically contrasting periphery lies in how the belonging inhabitants were defined by these hostile environments. If a place is experienced in clear negative terms, its belonging people would also take on a similar suit, as “residences seem

237 Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*, 143.
238 Ibid., 152.
239 Orning, *Reality of the Fantastic*, 51: “The opposite — the periphery — was characterised by wilderness, and was a highly dangerous place.”
inseparable from their dwellers.” In the following investigation of the respective landscapes of the Finnar and the Skraelingar, I will apply Hastrup’s notion, and argue for how the Skraelingar are read as disconnected from Vinland, where the Finnar stand in complete accord with their North. A people is perhaps always associated with a geographical region, but this does not automatically make them contingent with it. Even when taking broadly connected categories, such as a “region” and its “inhabitants,” these must still be held as separate classes. Following this, a people’s explicitly belonging location does not necessarily have to carry a substantial significance in the structuring of a portrayed social category.

The North: A Malicious Periphery

In the discussion of “Finnar” as a term, we recall the ambiguity of whether the Finnar lived in Finnmork, Finland, or both, and noted Finnmork as the dominating designator, but that they both were likely experienced and positioned as a cohesive “Norse North,” in which the Finnar lived. We then take this Finnar-North as mainly represented in Aalto’s geographical designation of Finnmork:

Finnmork covered the whole area where the Finnar lived: it stretched from central Scandinavia up to the north, and this area did not, of course, have exactly defined boundaries. After all, the meaning was to express that it was the area where the Finnar lived.

The sagas’ purely physical rendition of this general region placed it as north and east of Hålogaland, and, as seen in Egilssoga, it is described as an exceptionally vast and mountainous region. In line with this, we read it as more “barren and frozen” than the southern regions of Scandinavia, and in that way, quite impractical for the agricultural Norse.

In regards to physical distance, the Finnar region is one neighboring mainland-Norway. Although the mountainous tundra should be noted as hindering horse-travel, Finnmork was accessible by both land and sea, and as such, is physically a neighboring region, where other conceptually closer ones were situated further away and less accessible (many requiring ships). The fornaldarsögur depict the North as the by far most frequent peripheral location, and so the North could have been read as extremely distant, in a context with few other comparable distances. This

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240 Hastrup, Culture and History in Medieval Iceland, 59.
241 With a naturally wide arrange of roles, playing different parts, judged and valued differently, we hardly expect individual characters to be principally read as harmonizing with its spatial surroundings.
242 See page 13-14.
243 Aalto, Categorizing Otherness, 124.
notion is strengthened by how the protagonists’ journey to the North was synonymous with danger in the fornaldrarsögur. In this temporal context, Hans Jacob Orning says that Finnmark represents the fornaldrarsögur’s “ultimate periphery.”\(^{246}\)

As the fornaldrarsögur were written after the konungasögur, and with the known world expanding to both Asia and Africa, the North is hardly pinned at a dramatic physical distance to the Norse south. Instead, what may have been physically distancing is how the North topographically consisted of an environment that was easily contrasted with a South-Scandinavian landscape. By many measures, it was analogous to those seen extending broadly southwards, throughout Europe, with the North’s sparsity of pastures, forests, and coastlines existing as a salient feature.

Beyond the physical, how is Finnmark understood and what does it conceptually signify? Answering this, scholars largely agree on the general connotation, both in regards to the Scandinavian North as described in the sagas, as well as northerliness in a more general European medieval sense. As DeAngelo states, North itself had “a special sinister significance in the saga literature,” with villains, often crown- and church-contesters, usually being from the North.\(^{247}\)

Christian Icelandic writing often depicts the North as that of hell or hellish,\(^{248}\) and adding to its contrast to the south, John Lindow notes how Nordic pilgrimage manuals describe sinners as coming from the North and returning redeemed from the South.\(^{249}\) Adding to the sinister association is the Finnar-North that is continually seen as the origin and habitat of trolls, giants, and general alien mysticism – manifested in the Finnar themselves with their supernatural abilities and “sub-human nature.”\(^{250}\)

When looking into how the North affects the sagas’ portrayal of the Finnar, DeAngelo is firm in how “the northernness of the Finnar signified far more to the writers of the sagas than a mere geographical position, and the associations Icelanders held in regard to the North affected their depiction of the Finnar.”\(^{251}\) In alignment with this, the Finnar can in a large part be seen as the land they inhabit. With our investigated Finnar-portrait in mind, we may easily denote the typical Finnar as a sinister, pagan villain, matching the general tendency of characters associated with the North. Further, they are as primitive as the North is uncultivated and incompatible with sustainable living, something DeAngelo regards as “key to the malice associated with the Finnar when one

\(^{246}\) This danger is largely due to the many trolls, giants and other supernatural and hostile beings that are a prominent part of the legendary Finnmark-fauna: Orning, Reality of the Fantastic, 96.

\(^{247}\) DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 260.

\(^{248}\) Ibid., 273.


\(^{250}\) DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 281.

\(^{251}\) Ibid., 258.
persists with the assumption that the quality of a land affects the character of its people.”

Considering how the Norse themselves would stand placed as “the most northern,” were it not for the Finnar, the border is perhaps even more conceptually emphasized in order to save the Norse themselves from the taint of the North, further strengthening the notion of the Finnar portrait as linked to its associated space.

As several others have, we recognize how the Finnar and the North both stand heavily laden with unfavorable associations in the sagas. The Finnar are, simply put, malicious, as is the land they come from, something DeAngelo argues to be a structural contingency: “The Finnar of the sagas are the primary victims of a subtle but longstanding prejudice—one that can be attested to throughout Europe—against those who live in the North.”

Vinland: A Settlers Eldorado

In our investigation of the Skraelingar, the Vinland-natives are left as the successful defenders of their habitat. Yet, calling the Skraelingar “winners” is hardly something read from the sagas’ surface, as the Norse departure is quick and said to be due to the certainty of violence continuing were they to remain. In this sense, the Norse are simply leaving and the Skraelingar may well be considered the inferior Others that made Vinland unattractive, a case which would involve negative an attitude towards the Skraelingar as possible. By this, the victory does not have to be regarded as something portraying the Skraelingar positively. However, viewing the expeditions in context of how Vinland is presented, the land may ultimately stand as a liability to the Norse superiority that is otherwise reflected in the sagas.

Vinland “the Good” is as we have seen explicitly described as resourceful and wealthy in many ways. In both Vinland-sagas, the rivers are full of big fish and the wheat is growing on its own, implying a very fertile and easily cultivated soil. Further, the land is rich with good timber from forests full of animals to be hunted. In addition, the wine stocks are repeatedly mentioned and collected as a resource, but also seems to serve as a testament to the foreign land’s wealth, if “Vin” can be stated as connoting good soil to the Norse. As well as representing a wealthy land, Vinland is also a destination visited again and again, and is therefore a place the Norse were willing to repeatedly attempt to reach despite experiencing hardship and failure. In this way, Vinland is

252 Ibid., 270. See also Phil Cardew on the environment of the North promoting the Finnar as primitive: Cardew, “Representation of the Finns.”
Within the Icelandic Sagas,” 151-152.
254 See page 30-32.
described and implied in the sagas to be a rather ideal place to settle down; a big prize for which they were willing to risk and sacrifice a great deal.

Pursuing Hastrup’s notion of how a people is partially defined by the land they are seen as belonging to, we are faced with a savage, demonized people, found in a settlers Eldorado, ideal for the civilized and agricultural Norse. Here, I would either argue the Skrælingar-portrait as standing unaffected by Vinland, and/or that the Skrælingar are taken as belonging to somewhere else, for example Greenland, as there is little pointing to a conceptual connection between Vinland and the Skrælingar. Opposing this, DeAngelo and Williamsen argue for how Vinland should be seen as matching the Skrælingar in their danger and malevolency, analogous to how the North is recognized manifested in the Finnar. In the following section, I argue how DeAngelo and Williamsen’s claim does not hold ground, partially as it is based on a blunt misreading of the sagas at hand.

A People Out of Place: The Skrælingar as Dissociated from Vinland

One of DeAngelo’s points in presenting Vinland as sinister lies in how it is “depicted as being unhealthful for the Christian constitution.” In this rather cursory examination, DeAngelo speaks of the sagas in plural while referring to a single episode in Eirik Saga Raude, naming it as an example where “some settlers revert to paganism.” In the mentioned episode, the Norse are experiencing a long and hard winter and are running low on food, despite prayers to Christ. Thorhallr, one of the Norse men, then disappears for several days, and when found, reveals that he has been praying to Thor. Shortly after a whale carcass is found, and Thorhallr gives Thor credit for providing them with food, stating the Norse god to be stronger than the Christian one. When eating the whale, everyone (except Thorhallr, presumably) gets sick and prays to Christ for forgiveness whereupon the weather mildens and the Norse quickly fish and hunt successfully.

While these curious events may be interpreted differently, it is hardly an example of Vinland rejecting Christianity, as DeAngelo reads it. For one, we are only presented with a single Norse, not several, signaled as distanced from the Christian faith. Secondly, Thorhallr, this one man, is introduced in the saga as opposing the Christian faith to begin with, while also depicted as “big, dark, looking like a troll.” We are only dealing with one man which, instead of reverting, maintains a religious standing which is first presented on Greenland and which in no way stands

257 A proto-inuitic people, similar to the Beothuk and Thule-Indians, also existed on Greenland and were also called Skrælingar by the Norse.
258 DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 272.
259 Ibid.
261 Ibid., 315.
262 Ibid., 313.
particularly related to *Vinland*. At the surface level, DeAngelo could be suspected of simply having misread the relevant saga-pages. Adding to the confusion of DeAngelo’s argument is how Thorhallr, as one of the very few pagan characters of the Norse expedition, is the only one disappointed with the new land, showing the only explicit contempt of *Vinland* as coming from a pagan minority amongst the Norse.

Leaving aside DeAngelo’s Christian angle, Williamsen goes broader in claiming that *Vinland* contains a malicious essence in his article *Boundaries of Difference*. Here, *Vinland* as sinister is a central premise in Williamsen’s investigation of the malevolent Otherness of the Skraelingar, clearly expressed in that he sees the Norse as ultimately leaving the new land, as both its “natives and its bounties are dangerous.”\(^{263}\) In this, Williamsen not only sees the Skraelingar as a threat, but also *Vinland* itself, which he recognizes as inherently deceptive. This intrinsic danger and deception of *Vinland* is inferred from how all of its plentiful material sources remain largely untapped. When not embodied in the Skraelingar, the sole example of this disappointment is found in the long and hard winter. To Williamsen, the fact that the Norse are shown as “forgetting” to properly prepare for winter, and that the promising whale carcass turns out to be useless, is the work of the land itself and is read as the volatile trap of *Vinland*’s initial allure.\(^{264}\)

If this hard and disappointing winter were to epitomize the Norse’s experience of the land, this could have been a valid point to how *Vinland* is dangerous independent of its inhabitants, but it is not. Compared to the numerous contrasting circumstances, the winter is surprising, but also atypical in the small scope given in the two sagas. Apart from this one winter, *Vinland* is, as we have seen, presented as extremely rich in all kinds of material opportunities, opportunities that the Norse are seen exploiting successfully on several occasions, such as immediately after the discussed whale-episode.

Williamsen also states how the last *Vinland*-expedition ends in bloodshed. Here Williamsen refers to an expedition lead by Freydis, and the brothers Helge and Finnboge, at the very end of *Grønlendinga saga* (no similar event occurs in *Eiríks saga rauða*).\(^{265}\) Upon arriving, Freydis uses deception to cause internal feuds within the divided Norse group. After Freydis lies about being attacked by the two brothers, she threatens to leave her husband unless avenged. Freydis’ half of the expedition surprise the other half at night, killing everyone. As no one wants to kill the women, Freydis does this herself, something she is said explicitly not to be bothered about.\(^{266}\) The remaining Norse then proceed to gather any valuable resources from *Vinland* before leaving for Greenland, the whole scene taking place entirely absent of any Skraelingar.

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\(^{264}\) Ibid., 473.
\(^{265}\) Ibid., 475.
\(^{266}\) “Soga om grønlendingane,” 301.
As there are no *Skraelingar* in this episode, and the violence is the work of the Norse Freydis, this is taken as an example of *Vínlund*-maliciousness independent of the *Skraelingar*. Williamsen argues that this signifies *Vínlund* as fostering evil in the otherwise peaceful Norse, but when we consider the mischievous and goading Norse woman as a common saga-motif, the episode is hardly read as atypical for Norse behavior, and should therefore not connote any circumstance specific to *Vínlund*, as similar Norse behavior is seen throughout the *Íslendingasögur*. Additionally, none of the other *Vínlund*-expeditions show any particularly hostile relation between the Norse, where Williamsen seems to imply *Vínlund* as having provoked this in the expedition lead by Freydis.

Another more substantial aspect, in which *Vínlund* itself can be recognized as hostile, lies in how it can be read as aiding the *Skraelingar* and adapting itself to their will. We have seen how the *Skraelingar* magic is partially based on elemental control and we recall the *Skraelingar* disappearing into the ground, suggesting an essential relationship between the land and its people. These episodes can be read explicitly as attributing a hostile agency to *Vínlund* when facing the Norse, but as with Williamsen’s and DeAngelo’s other arguments, we are yet again faced with qualities contingent with the *Skraelingar* as participants. In this, *Vínlund* might be read as hostile, but again never by itself, and not in ways that could not also be read as the sole work of the *Skraelingar*.

Building further on his idea of a deceptive *Vínlund*, Williamsen argues that the *Skraelingar* stand parallel to *Vínlund* in that both are seen as acting out an initial peacefulness that turns into hostility. Even if we were to weigh the long winter as heavily as Williamsen does, we are still presented with a land that opens as idyllic, hardly analogous to how the *Skraelingar* are introduced, peaceful but moreover alien and denigrated (as they are immediately established as ugly and stupid). As I have rejected the concluding character of the land and its inhabitants as similar, and the winter is also not placed in any final phase, I also reject the initial presentation of the two as sharing conceptual ground. Where *Vínlund* is introduced in extremely favorable terms, the *Skraelingar* are introduced as somewhat peaceful but yet strange and foreign. Where *Vínlund*, in some specific regard, can be read as slightly deceptive, the *Skraelingar* are revealed much more dramatically as wild and mysterious enemies.

Referring to Williamsen, DeAngelo states that the maliciousness of *Vínlund* is embodied in its inhabitants, but Williamsen himself seems unable to present the sinister traits of this land without first establishing a primary connection to the *Skraelingar* themselves. All in all, the

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268 The perhaps best and most well-known example of this is Halgjerđ and Bergtora in *Njáls saga*.
269 See page 32.
deception of Vinland can only be regarded as such when the Skraelingar are part of the play. Thus, it is the presence of the Skraelingar that are responsible for the rejection of the concrete promises of Vinland, which on that larger scale can indeed be seen as a grand deception. With few exceptions, Vinland is dangerous and hostile solely on account of the people encountered there, and not based on attributes inherent to the land itself. In this way, Vinland is left as benevolent when on its own, and is portrayed this way in the absence of the Skraelingar.

Williamsen states “the natives and their land are part of one another,” and while Vinland and the Skraelingar might be inextricably tied to each other, the two are far from being the same thing, neither practically nor conceptually. Consequently, DeAngelo and Williamsen’s stance in that “largely, the dangers of the land are embodied in the characters of the Skraelingar,”271 is falsely premised on the land being dangerous. Ultimately, the Norse are “forced to conclude that the land is dangerous,”272 yes, but not on account of its conditions, but rather its inhabitants. Thus, where DeAngelo argues for the gruesome North being manifested in the Finnar, the same is said about the Skraelingar of Vinland. As they have argued it, this makes little sense, and any admitted hostile element inherent to Vinland that could be compared to the wild and inhospitable attributes of the North, must be regarded as an oversight of the obvious good that Vinland signifies.

Leaving the Wild: The Implications of a Center Defined by Different Peripheries

If we look to how the saga-projected world center, he Norse homeland, is defined and demarcated, our two different peripheries pose an interesting comparison. On one hand, the Finnar-North, seen to be well aligned with the Finnar, reflects the Norse center as an ordered and hospitable counterpart. On the other hand, Vinland presents an example of something depicted as superior to the general Norse center, in terms of topography and resources. As such, the general alignment of the deviant and non-Norse as reflecting everything familiar and Norse-like as superior, is here recognized as somewhat disrupted on a spatial level. Vinland is by all means foreign and distant to the Norse, while also clearly better than the Norse center and denied to the Norse when they try to attain it. In this, although Vinland indeed represents a very miniscule part of the saga literature as well as the Norse geographical world, a slight aberration to the typical valuation of the Norse “us” is identified, as “home” is usually seen as superior to “away.”

While emphasizing the pleasant face value of Vinland, we should in no way neglect its firm placement in the outmost periphery, as it is situated on the very brink of the known Norse world. In line with this, and despite its ideal conditions to the colonizing Norse, Vinland is distinctly in contrast to the Norse homelands, particularly Greenland and Iceland which have somewhat harsh

272 Ibid., 472.
climate and sparsity of timber. Additionally, as it is not populated by a sophisticated people like the Norse, it also connotes a certain wilderness that is separate to the Skraelingar. In this way, Vinland represents a deviancy that compliments the Otherness of the Skraelingar, on the simple account of both land and inhabitants being encountered as foreign and different. However, following Hastrup’s idea that regions partially define their inhabitants, we have seen how the Skraelingar, in a structural sense, can be read as not belonging to Vinland in the manner the Finnar are identified as belonging to the North. Explaining the similar Otherness of the two social categories of the Finnar and Skraelingar cannot therefore be explained by their respective regions of origin or belonging, as Vinland and the North stand as opposites.

To conclude, both peripheries reinforce the Norse center of the world by being distinctly signaled as situated outside of the Norse center. Beyond the simple demarcations created by these negations of the Norse space, the North is by contrast shown to reflect the Norse center as ordered and hospitable, identical to how the Finnar reflect the Norse “us” in generally favorable terms. Although also clearly functioning as a periphery to our center, Vinland is much less dramatic in posing as an antithesis to the Norse civilization, as it actually stands superior to the Norse center in many respects when void of the Skraelingar. In the sagas, the North is malicious in its inhospitable nature, chaotic and the wild domain of monsters, while Vinland is only corrupt by its inhabitants.

Where the Finnar are taken as directly analogous to their belonging space, the Skraelingar, more dramatically demonized than the Finnar, are not. Following Hastrup’s claim that a people is generally defined by the qualities of its belonging space, my conclusive point is that the Skraelingar are conceptually detached from their land. The Skraelingar are as such interpreted as misplaced, and if anything, are experienced as placed on Vinland from somewhere else, as they are not, amongst other things, utilizing the fruitful agricultural conditions that Vinland has to offer. As I shall discuss in the concluding chapter, the Skraelingar are, as a category, constructed and portrayed based on other circumstances than the space they are seen to belong to. Consequently, their essential similarity to the Finnar and their North is explained by means of other structural relations.

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8. The Structural Relation Between Two Others

Archetype: the original pattern or model from which all things of the same kind are copied or on which they are based; a model or first form; prototype.

- Dictionary.com

Despite the clear distance between the actual people behind our two Others, what we have seen more than anything thus far are the many ways in which the sagas’ portrayal of the Finnar and the Skraelingar can be identified as similar, and how these similarities can be recognized as the most essential characteristics of these social categories, individually. With these shared stereotypical traits all being what I deem essential, in that they stand as the most prominent and defining characteristics, the two depicted social categories are similar to the extent that it is suspicious, begging for further explanations why. A central aim of this thesis is to question why the two exist as so similar, and its ultimate claim is that the Skraelingar, as a literary construction, should be seen as modelled on the Finnar.

This presupposes the notion that the Norse perception of the Finnar was one thoroughly established prior to the construction of the Skraelingar as a social category. We may consider ourselves safe in this regard as the Finnar were known and interacted with long before the Skraelingar as a people were encountered at all by the Norse. In addition, this order of appearance is also reflected in the saga’s historical narratives, where the Finnar are represented in the Ynglingasaga that is set several hundred years before the Americas and its inhabitants are mentioned in the family sagas. In relation to this, our hypothesis also relies on the Finnar portrait being culturally and literarily established to the degree of it being a plausible archetype for later literary constructions. In relation to this, the following discussion is intended to enforce our claim in that the Finnar, with a somewhat less than common appearance in the sagas as a whole, stand as something upon which other social categories are to be modeled.

The Finnar as a Saga Archetype

In his essay Cultures in Contact, John Lindow argues that Odin, as presented in Heimskringla, should be seen as modelled on the stereotypical Finnar sorcerer.274 In essence, this is derived from what Lindow recognizes as striking similarities between the two literary portraits. Odin’s shapeshifting and other supernatural capabilities corresponding with the image of Finnar-sorcery, and the fact that these abilities are presented as something that can be taught, are all characteristics consistently found in the sagas’ portrayal of the Finnar. As Odin, in large part, is presented as doing

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what the Finnar do typically, which is uncommon behavior in the representation of other social categories, Lindow places the stereotypical Finnar as a defining foundation onto which the literary portrait of Odin is constructed.\textsuperscript{275}

Looking at Lindow’s essay we can easily see that it mirrors our own thesis, although in a more compressed form, when looking at two key elements. First, the theoretical approach he applies when investigating a peoples’ experience and projection of one social category, recognized as strongly dependent on the experience of an antecedent category, is central in the underlying approach of my own thesis. Lindow’s idea that the saga writers could very well have (consciously or subconsciously) used one developed category in the construction of another one, distinctly aligns itself with the theoretical premise of our own discussion on whether the portrait of the Finnar and the Skraelingar were structurally related or not. Secondly, Lindow specifically treats the Finnar as an archetypal model in the saga literature, as potential fundamental building blocks in the construction of ensuing literary categories.

Although an analogous theoretical approach does serve to exemplify an indirect esteemed support of the plausibility of any claimed structural relation, as Lindow is working with a slightly different source material, his similar approach should not be seen as necessarily relevant to our specific case. The key element of the Finnar functioning as a literary model, on the other hand, is easily seen as relevant to our case as it enforces a premise crucial to our questioning of whether the Skraelingar should be seen as modelled on the Finnar or not. For the Skraelingar to be modelled on the Finnar, the Finnar-portrait must be identified as being in a cultural position in the saga-writers’ milieu, allowing for this fundamental role. In this, Lindow’s findings supports our treatment of the Finnar as an archetype.

In line with this, and beyond what I myself have stated about the prominence of the Finnar in the sagas\textsuperscript{276} which contain several unique characteristics that constitute the consistent Finnar-portrait, several other scholars present the Finnar as a literary archetype.\textsuperscript{277} As well as being referred to by Lindow as “the known pagan of the medieval west Scandinavian world,”\textsuperscript{278} the Finnar are repeatedly recognized by other scholars as the primary holders of several types of deviant characteristics (primarily sorcery and paganism), strengthening the notion of the Finnar as a staple Otherness. This is apparent in how Margaret Clunies Ross as mentioned points to the Finnar as “historical prototypes of sorcerers and shamans and as cultural scapegoats onto whom

\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 104-106.
\textsuperscript{276} See discussion on Finnar appearances on page 44-45.
\textsuperscript{277} McKinnell, “Encounters with Völur,” 116.
\textsuperscript{278} Lindow, “Cultures in Contact,” 91.
representations of erstwhile Scandinavian paganism could be projected,“279 as well as in DeAngelo’s regard of the Finnar “as the primary origin of the image of the hostile sorcerer.”280

Consequently, we are dealing with the Finnar recognized and positioned as an archetypal social category within the Norse social world view, that is, as archetype-sorcerers or archetype-pagans. In this way, the Norse could have had their image of the Finnar in mind subconsciously when conceiving non-Finnar sorcerers or pagans, and through this take those as being essentially like the Finnar, regardless of any actual similarity.

In a more universal sense, we may look at how the Other can be regarded as a deeper, more Jungian archetype,281 common to all collective world views, in which specific social groups are categorically placed. Every culture carry an Otherness, an Otherness that in the case of the Norse was taken to comprise the Finnar in many cases, which in alienation were emphasized as sorcerers or pagans. Following this notion we see how certain categories of Otherness could have functioned as categories primary to other perceived Others, in such a sense that a social category was structured on a given, more established category, adopting generalized characteristics from the one established as a model.

With the Finnar as a social category that is claimed to function as a model, and by that asserting the Finnar as an archetype and a type of Otherness that other categories may be understood in terms of, we may ask ourselves whether the Skraelingar as a category were constructed on the base of how the Finnar were perceived. Are the similarities in our two investigated portraits, which we have seen to be essential and numerous, a result of structural relations, or are they merely coincidental in that they should be individually seen as based on the peoples’ actual historical characteristics and circumstances, respectively? Although our two portraits can be regarded as suspiciously similar, they are after all both based on nomadic, hunter-gathering, and pagan people.

**Alternative Explanations to a Distinct Similarity**

Countering our own hypothesis, one could suggest that the two images are so similar, not because of direct structural relations, but because they should be regarded independently as products of actual traits found in the historical people, respectively. In this sense, the two images are bound in similarity by being based on people with the same key attributes. Following this, instead of the Skraelingar being modelled on the Finnar, they are generalized on account of being skin-clad or non-agricultural, for example. Thus, as an alternative to the Finnar standing as the model is that the

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280 DeAngelo, “The North and the Depiction of the “Finnar,”” 277.
attributes themselves promote certain images that both the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* are projected in line with. Instead of the *Skraelingar* being placed as following the *Finnar* in standing as oppositional pagan sorcerers, the *Skraelingar* are here given their image independent of the *Finnar*, as a result of key characteristics provoking a certain image.

Taking first their shared non-agricultural way of life, we might question whether the Norse carried attitudes towards nomadic people in general that would cause these to be characterized as sorcerers and inferior people in opposition to the Norse.\(^{282}\) We have seen how important the agricultural condition was to the Norse, and thus how its absence signaled an essential inferiority, one seemingly emphasized in the discussed sagas’ projection of the people in question. Based on this, one might assume that being non-agricultural implied also carrying the general characteristics shared by our Others. If this attribute is to be considered impactful, it is also in pretty clear conflict with the many Norse that practice hunting and fishing as a primary livelihood. I have previously argued that agriculture and the farmstead was central to the Norse society, even those not practicing farming, but this cultural significance should not be taken to completely disregard the Norse as also being typical hunters. Also remembering how the pastoral *Finnar*’s herding of reindeer more resembled the Icelanders’ way of life, dominated by shepherding more than agriculture, confuses the idea that agriculture is a deciding factor to the construction of the different portraits at hand. No matter the many nuances to the Norse experience involving agriculture, hunter-gathering, and herding as ways of life, these different elements are well integrated parts of the Norse society, making it unlikely that the singular absence of agriculture, central in the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* way of life, is a dramatically defining factor in the creation of their respective literary projections.

The same can be said for the shared nomadic role of the Other, a characteristic both highlighted in the sagas and historically apparent in the actual peoples’ circumstances. Again, a substantial group of the Norse should be seen as “nomad-like” in being constant travelers, be it as Vikings, travelling merchants, or hunters. Although we maintain a clear distinction between the nomadic *Finnar, Skraelingar*, and the travelling Norse that nonetheless less were regarded as belonging to settlements, this somewhat challenges the idea of the nomadic attribute being the deciding factor. This point is more suited as our devil’s advocate—we may point to the Norse as constantly travelling, but not as signaled to belong outside of the farmstead, a distinction we have seen to carry a crucial significance. Belonging to the world outside the settlement is at the very least the mark of an outsider, and in this a potential myriad of alienating characteristics may follow. Emphasizing this point is also how most other Norse-encountered cultures (excluding supernatural creatures), be they east or south, were likely recognized as similar to the Norse in being societies of

\(^{282}\) Despite archeological evidence suggesting as much peaceful interaction as hostile, particularly when looking at the *Finnar*, both portraits are signaled as generally being in opposition.
settled agriculture. In this way, we find the nomadic condition of the people upon which the portraits of the *Finnar* and *Skrælingar* are based, to be both significant and somewhat exclusive to these two.

In danger of undermining the cultural importance of settled agriculture that is strongly emphasized in this thesis, we remain clear that the farmstead fence represents a strong cultural difference. Yet, it is unlikely to stand alone as a trait that decides the eventual projection of the *Finnar* and *Skrælingar*, as being both nomadic and not involved with farming was also a consistent reality for many people identified as Norse. Being singled out by the Norse as someone who did not belong to either the culturally central farming life, or the physical farmstead itself, likely allowed for strong alienation, but entailing any such social category to be portrayed as hostile sorcerers seems overly dramatic.

Moving on, we ask the very same question to the trait of being pagan; whether paganism is the attribute inherent to the two peoples that led to their given portraits in the manner we have seen. As discussed, being pagan is in many cases seen to connote a significant contrast to the Norse normality of proper Christianity represented in the sagas. Although a general tendency throughout the sagas, Christianity can be regarded as particularly influential in our selected source material, with the sagas either consisting of explicit Christian promotion or being written by Snorri Sturluson, a known Christian. As highlighted, magic is signaled as a distinctly pagan quality, and we may roughly state all magicians as being pagan, as Christians are more or less not involved in it by law. Therefore, we might expect the *Skrælingar* and *Finnar* to be portrayed as triflers of the supernatural on account of their obvious paganism. With magic being one of the most prominent and deviant traits in both portraits, particularly noticeable as a constructed quality, this could be defining. The *Skrælingar* and *Finnar* were both clear pagans, and this could have been a key reason for them to be independently projected as sorcerers, which arguably stands as the most defining characteristic of the two.

Again, what opposes this understanding is the sagas’ broader context, wherein people clearly signaled as pagans are, although perhaps not commonly, at least a category including far more than just *Skrælingar* and *Finnar*. Apart from the many pagans firmly situated as Norse, these include *Blámenn* and *Wends*, both of which are explicitly signaled as non-Christian without being particularly associated with the supernatural. They are neither necessarily associated with supernatural elements, nor can they be seen as particularly resembling the sagas’ portrayal of the *Finnar* and *Skrælingar*. By this, paganism hardly stands as the sole defining historical characteristic.

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we are looking for. It is somewhat fair to say that all sorcerers are pagan, but that far from all pagans are sorcerers.285

Lastly, we take the two portraits’ respective belonging spaces, and their distinct peripheral placement, as belonging to a given periphery is something often stressed as a crucial element, to define the degree and type of projected Otherness. An example of this lies in how we have seen the North to be imperative in signifying certain characteristics, shared by the Finnar and other humanoids belonging to the same area. If we were to discuss whether this status as peripheral should be seen to promote a similar portrayal of our two Others, we are quickly halted by the dramatic differences between the two belonging spaces. In this, the Finnar and the Skraelingar are left with nothing more than both being distanced far from the Norse world center, two distances we have seen to also be of dramatically different kinds, one being relatively close on the Scandinavian mainland, and the other at the end of the known world, exclusively (and barely) reachable by ship.

Further, although clearly signaling Otherness as a result, a people’s placement as peripheral does not alone entail a derogatory attitude in the sagas. As Aalto remarks there is little in the konungasögur implying that the Norse had a principally hostile disposition towards foreigners, even though their status as foreign is something often highlighted in the sagas.286 Following this, the two peoples’ respective belonging spaces, and how they stand as distinctly placed outside the Norse society, cannot be seen as a trait independently promoting the particular portrayal of the two social categories.

**Traits and Characteristics as Manifested in Archetypes**

In what we have argued to be otherwise similar portraits, it is ultimately their respective belonging spaces that set the individual portraits so apart. Thematically speaking, this lies in one being of the new Vinland and the other of the old and known North. Moreover it is these spatial circumstances that allow for the Finnar to be more assimilated to the Norse, as their partial integration into the Norse society must be seen as a direct result of their geographical proximity. These circumstances, indeed manifesting a substantial difference between the Finnar and Skraelingar, could be used to argue for how the two should not be regarded as essentially similar. This would, however, require us to fully subscribe to the notion that a belonging location necessarily defines a people as a social category, that a people cannot be seen as separated from their given spatial environment.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Finnar are seen as portrayed much in line with their belonging space, while the Skraelingar are not, and that this is not so much a difference in character as it is a difference in surrounding circumstances, and moreover a difference in how one

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285 Ibid.
286 See the chapter “Scattered Information About Foreigners” in Aalto, Categorizing Otherness, 142-146.
of these people is standing in structural connection with their given belonging space, and the other is not. Following this stance, we state that a belonging location typically signals and influences the character as an Otherness, by the two elements being, for example, in thematic accord, but not exclusively so. The *Skraelingar* are not a product of *Vínland*, as the *Finnar* are a product of the North.

When investigating why the two social categories are given such similar portraits, we may find it unreasonable to expect a single isolated trait to stand as a defining one, as one provoking the essential combination of characteristics constituting the two similar images independently. I have argued for how none of the discussed essential traits can stand alone, but perhaps two of these traits together may stand as causing said image? Or further, why not a combination of all the characteristics that both people are seen as historically possessing, having these multiple circumstances lead to a similar portrayal? As stated, the people that the given portraits are based on did share several characteristics that are pointed out as uncommon to the Norse “us.”

Answering the question above, I completely expect the similar portrayals to be the result of a shared combination of characteristics. In this sense we may regard the two literary portraits as carrying a common stereotypical schema, a collection of specific attributes constituting a given image. I do not however, find it likely that these two categories are depicted in accordance with such a schema, independent of each other, as dialectically asserted above. Although plausible, is it not more likely that such a collectively projected schema of characteristics is embodied in a given archetypal social category, as the *Finnar* have seen to be established as, instead of said schema being held as an abstract combination of traits in itself?

Given how the *Finnar* were in fact a people in a very lasting direct contact with the Norse, and how they are seen as prominent in the sagas literature, standing as the sole typical carrier of several stereotypical characteristics, they are seen as an archetype. Following this, they can arguably be seen as the likely embodiment of this mentioned schema. This is further supported by finding the *Skraelingar* to be characteristically misplaced when considering their idyllic habitat. As stated, the *Skraelingar* can be read as placed on *Vínland*, taken from somewhere else. Following this thesis, as they are argued to be literally modelled on the *Finnar*, the *Skraelingar* can be identified as essentially belonging to the North, structurally speaking. By this, the *Skraelingar* can after all be seen as a product of a belonging space, in line with the discussed theories of Hastrup, if they are recognized as belonging to the North.

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287 Here one may argue that the role of the *Skraelingar* are exactly meant to be de vile defenders of paradise, and that they in this way is defined by *Vínland*, but this is beside the point as we in this aspect simply regard whether a people is seen as being “off the land,” in the sense discussed by myself and Hastrup.
Thus, I regard the people on which the saga-portrait of the Skraelingar are based, as sharing several actual characteristics with the Finnar, but beyond this that the Skraelingar-portrait is modeled on the Finnar as a literary construction. The Skraelingar as a literary construction are based on the Finnar, rather than being based on an image led from an inherently abstract combination of characteristics, ultimately adopting essential stereotypical traits of the Finnar portrait. Underlining this stance I state that, were it not for how the sagas portray the Finnar, the Skraelingar would have been depicted in a completely different manner. It is not the case that those who are nomadic pagans dressed in skin and fur are portrayed as supernatural and lesser Others in opposition to the Norse, but rather that those who are taken to be similar to the Finnar are portrayed as the Finnar.

Making Sense of the Unknown through the Known
Amongst many things, our discussed findings stand as an example of how certain old and known categories are predecessors to new ones, constructed and structured in relation to the former as defining bases. In this sense, we take the Finnar as a people in their own right, but also as a people whose characteristics are taken and adopted onto other completely non-Finnar aspects in the Norse world view. By this we see how a mental worldview, in this case one of social categories, is founded on certain stable pillars that have significant impact far outreaching the confinements of their initial role. Overall, the Finnar are a marginal part of the Sagas, and while they glimmer with their dramatic difference to the Norse “us” when they are present, this presence should not be exaggerated. In this, and in how we have seen the Finnar to be clearly marked as Finnar whenever present, they play a very limited and defined role. However, beneath the surface of the saga, this role is shown to be impactful beyond this initial categorical limitation.

As the Norse encounter and write about the Skraelingar as a foreign and unknown people, they are quickly understood in terms of how the Finnar are understood, based on how they are identified as similar. In this, the Finnar and their qualities not only exist where the Finnar are portrayed, but also exist in the Skraelingar partially constituted by what the Finnar are.

Instead of, somewhat scientifically, facing and understanding new phenomena as matters independent of our subjective understanding of other things, we make sense of entirely new phenomena using the tools we already have to fit these into the world we already know. From an epistemological viewpoint, this no doubt binds us to our given tradition, partially hindering fundamentally new ways to experience the world, but nonetheless allowing us to experience this new world in a pragmatic and immediate way, as opposed to opening your eyes for the first time, every time.
9. Conclusion: The “Us” in the “Others”

In our study of the sagas’ portrayal of the Finnar and Skraelingar we have seen how the former is given a remarkably consistent image. The Finnar are primarily characterized as nomadic sorcerers, strongly associated with hunting and the North as their belonging space. As a faction they are devious and stand in general opposition to the Norse, most specifically as enemies to the Christian faith, to which they are irreconcilable, and the Crown, dominating and exploiting the Finnar through taxation and political control. Investigating the portrayal of the Skraelingar revealed them to be more demonized as ugly, stupid, and weak, situating them as a more dramatic Otherness, more dramatically placed as distinctly not like the Norse “us.” Beyond this, they are also depicted as pagan, nomadic sorcerers, and as inherent enemies to the Norse. Looking at the most prominent and essential characteristics of the Finnar, these are recognized as also being present in the portrait of the Skraelingar, leaving the two with very similar qualities that at the same time appear as essential to the respective portraits.

In their Otherness these two people effectively demarcate a Norse “us” by representing the counterpart, the non-Norse. Further, the traits applied to these non-Norse portraits are also seen to reflect certain qualities onto the Norse group identity. Where they stand as different, the Skraelingar most clearly reflect the Norse as beautiful and clever in their juxtaposed naiveté and ugliness, qualities less emphasized with the Finnar. In their similarity, their sorcery, nomadism, and paganism, the two reflect the Norse as generally superior. Distanced from illegal and improper magic, the Norse are seen as proper and natural when faced with our two mystical and chaotic sorcerers, existing in what I have argued as bygone eras. As inherently pagan practices, sorcery underlines the abstaining Norse as Christian, rational, and proper.

I have argued for how nomadism and being non-agricultural are especially defining for the two Others and their relation to the Norse. Through how central the settled farm is to the Norse society, by lacking this, the Finnar and Skraelingar represent an uncivilized and wild people, which in turn leaves the Norse as sophisticated, advanced, and superior in their social organization. This is partially affected through investigating several material objects, which are culturally significant to the Norse, who possess something our Others do not. Not only do the Skraelingar and Finnar reflect the Norse as superior through appearance and behavior, but also through material possessions, something often overlooked in studies on the Norse group identity.

We have seen the respective peripheries of the North and Vinland as emphasizing the egocentric world view of the Norse, wherein the Norse farmstead is the cultural and geographical center of the world. Distinctly signaled as being outside the “Norse space,” both the North and Vinland constitute such a “Norse space” by negation. Beyond this, the North is depicted as the wild and uncivilized counterpart to the Norse home, but looking at Vinland, concentrated as a paradise,
we see that not all peripheries play this contrasting role, even when its inhabitants are portrayed as dramatically strange and inferior.

Where the *Finnar* are depicted in conceptual accordance with the North, the *Skraelingar* are themselves contrasting the pleasant harmony of their land. The latter is an example of how a people are not necessarily defined by their explicit habitat, as Hastrup and others hold to be generally the case. If we apply this notion of contingency between people and habitat, the *Skraelingar* are quickly seen as misplaced, as conceptually taken from somewhere else. Given their resemblance to the *Finnar*, the *Skraelingar*-portrait seems to stand analogous to the *Finnar*-north more than any other place.

In addition to the otherwise general similarity seen between the two portraits, this misplacement is taken to hint at a structural relation in the literary depiction of the two. Using Lindow, I showed how the *Finnar* in several respects must be understood as an archetype in the saga-universe, one upon which the *Skraelingar* may very well have been structured and modeled. Taking the essential characteristics shared by the two portraits, I argue that the traits of nomadism, sorcery, and malicious opposition to the Norse are traits that are more likely held as the stereotypical attributes of the *Finnar*, rather than traits that in an abstract state coincidentally apply to how both the *Finnar* and *Skraelingar* are regarded historically by the Norse. As such, I conclude that one social category is structurally based on the other, directly, in its manifestation in the saga literature.

As a final note I would like to emphasize the various occasions in which the categories discussed are depicted counter to the general tendency, through which we are reminded how these categories are fundamentally dynamic, and never completely rigid. Following this we see the one portrait’s impact on the other, as one organic concept modelled on another, and recognize the myriad of moving parts within these moving images. Within this given frame that is the social category of the *Skraelingar*, the *Finnar* influence a substantial portion, but not at all every single element, as the *Skraelingar*, on the other hand, are also defined by their position as “people” and “non-Norse” in a general sense that overarches more than the qualities of the *Finnar* alone. As the Norse themselves delimit and denote their own social group identity by contrast to the many categories of the “non-Norse,” categories dynamic and changing, we see how the Norse perception of themselves is also dynamic and changing. If you define yourself based on how you stand related to external categories, recognized as constantly fluctuating and developing, your own identity thus stands in constant flux and development.
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