Chapter 3: The Saami Motif-Cluster

3.1 Introduction

The qualities and attributes ascribed to Saami characters in medieval texts are remarkably consistent.¹ The stability of the textual tradition to purvey these stereotyped textual motifs is the most commonly recurring theme in the academic discussion of the role of the Saami in Norse society.² According to Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, the dominant scholarly tendency to focus on the patterned portrayals of the Saami in Norse narration concentrates on what sets them apart from the Norse, thereby enforcing their Otherness.³

The Saami, from the first classical sources to the later medieval texts, tend to be portrayed in manners associated with Othering, primarily through connotations of magic, forest animals such as bears and wolves, supernatural beings, and hunting and archery, in addition to references to winter weather and skiing. These associations form what I call the “Saami Motif-Cluster” and allude to the Saami in the texts. While I assert that it is imperative to look beyond the stereotyped textual motifs associated with the Saami in Norse narration in order to arrive at more deeper understandings of medieval Saami lifestyles, the Saami Motif-Cluster enables the identification of the Saami in the source material and is therefore invaluable to discussion. Although we need to be cautious not to reinforce stereotypes about the Saami, I nevertheless believe that identifying the Saami Motif-Cluster to “trace” Saami characters in the source material can allow for the deconstruction of these stereotypes. Here it should therefore also be emphasised that these attributes are not exclusive to the Saami only, and that other non-Saami characters can

be portrayed using images from the Saami Motif-Cluster. It is when several motifs from the Saami Motif-Cluster are employed to describe a given character, and when the overall context points in the direction of such a reading, that we can utilise them to identify characters with Saami affiliation in the texts. It should be noted that the usage of the term “textual” is not intended to exclude the strong likelihood that many of the same motifs were also current in oral tradition, even though we by definition can now only see them in textual sources. In the following sections I will discuss and analyse these motifs and how they specifically allude, directly or indirectly, to the Saami.

3.2 Saami Textual Images

3.2.1 Fjólkynni Finna

Magic is the predominant theme associated with the Saami in Norse texts, and is the theme most commonly discussed by scholars focusing on medieval portrayals of the Saami.⁴ Through depictions involving bewitching and spellbinding, supernatural beings, weather magic, divination, shapeshifting, and spirit journeys, ritual performance and healing, as well as the abilities to disappear, hide objects, and shoot targeted arrows, Saami characters materialise as magical experts in the texts.⁵ These aspects of portrayed “magical” expertise or performance are the abilities I refer to when employing the term “magic” in this work.⁶ Frequently, the Saami appear in the texts as teachers of magic or providers of magical expertise, and Norse actors often seek out the Saami for supernatural help, as discussed below. The association is well established in the saga genres, but it is difficult to confirm the textual origins of the trope. Adam of Bremen’s Gesta Hammaburgensis from the late 1060s asserts the paganism of the majority of the Saami, which becomes an important factor in later works portraying the Saami.⁷ However, given the authenticity of the source, the earliest connection between the Saami and magic may be found in stanza 16 of the court poet Sigvatr Þórðarson’s Erfríðræpa

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5 See for example: Ágr, 5–6; Hrólf, 48–50; Ket, 123; SprolaSt, 444–46; Stst, 613; Hkr 2, 11; Odds, 96, 187–90; Vatn, 30, 34–35; HN, 62–63; Saxo, 344.
7 Hammaburgensis, 172–73.
Óláfs helga, a memorial poem reportedly dedicated to King Óláfr Haraldsson following his death at the battle of Stiklastaðir in 1030:

Mildr fann gørst, hvé galdrar,
gramr sjalftr, meginrammir
fjólkunnigr Ífinna
fullstórum barg þóri,
þás byrsendir Hundr
húna golli búnu
— slætt réð sízt at bita —
sverdi laust af herðar

The gracious prince discovered most clearly himself how the mightily strong spells of the magic-skilled [Saami] saved the very powerful Þórir when the sender of the fire of the mast-tops [lit. “fire-sender of the mast-tops”] struck with the sword adorned with gold across the shoulders of Hundr (“Dog”); the blunt one succeeded least in biting.⁸

Presumably recited sometime after the canonisation of the king in 1031, the stanza relates the well-known story of the Hálogaland chieftain Þórir hundr’s reported magical protection by his Saami allies during the battle. In later accounts, the protection becomes a magical cloak fashioned by the Saami and is the key catalyst leading to the death of the king.⁹ It is difficult to establish whether the association between the Saami and their perceived magical skills became manifested in literary tradition following the poem’s composition, or whether it was re-introduced with the composition of the sagas and other texts. It is likely that this link between the Saami and magic became a conventional part of oral tradition concerning the Saami, and that this oral tradition stemmed from discussions about people living in close proximity to the Norse. As such, this tradition reflects constant and repeated cross-cultural interaction between Norse and Saami peoples throughout the medieval period. If the eastern Norwegian law codes prohibiting Christians from visiting the Saami and participating in Saami rituals were implemented prior to their earliest surviving thirteenth-century composition, they might have been relevant from the mid-twelfth century onwards.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the law codes are hard to date since they only survive in later compositions and there is no certain way of establishing whether they were archaic or included at the time of composition.

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⁹ Hkr 2, 344–45. Helgisaga, 70.
Nonetheless, the increasing focus on the paganism of the Saami and their magic coincides with the establishment of Christianity in the Nordic world. The anonymous cleric composing *Historia Norwegie*, for example, strongly opposes the magic performed by the Saami and juxtaposes it with Christianity:

> Horum itaque intollerabilis perfidia uix cuiquam credibilis uidebitur; quantumue diabolice supersicitonis in magica arte exerceant. Sunt namque quidam ex ipsis, qui quasi prophete a stolido uulgo uenerantur; quoniam per immundum spiritum, quem “gandum” uocitant, multis multa presagia, ut eueniunt, quandoque percunctati predicent. Et de longinquus prouinciis res concupiscibiles miro modo sibi alliciunt, nec non absconditos thesauros longe remoti mirifice produnt.¹¹

A person will scarcely believe their unendurable impiety and the extent to which they practise heathen devilry in their magic arts. There are some who are worshipped by the ignorant masses as though they were prophets, since, whenever questioned, they will give many predictions to many folk through the medium of a foul spirit which they call “gand,” and these auguries come true. Furthermore they attract themselves desirable objects from distant parts in an astounding fashion and miraculously reveal hidden treasures, even though they are situated a vast distance away.¹²

Lars Boje Mortensen argues, based on statements put forth in the text about Norwegian tax-land nationally and abroad, descriptions about ecclesiastical administration, mention of royals and other high-standing people, and of natural events in Iceland like earthquakes, that the text should be dated between 1165–70.¹³ As the text emphasises, the apparent “heathen devilry” practised by the Saami did not stop Norse actors from seeking it out. As established in chapter 2.6.2, a majority of the medieval texts directly involving Saami actors are founded on their magical expertise or aid to Norse actors.¹⁴ The stories relating the first meeting between Eiríkr blöðøx and Gunnhildr exemplify this, explaining Gunnhildr’s presence in Finnmǫrk as a result of her apprenticeship with Saami people to learn magic.¹⁵ *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* relates Ógmundr’s visit to his kin group in Finnmǫrk where he learns “allskyns galdra ok gjörninga” [all kinds of incantations and magical acts].¹⁶ Requesting the magical aid offered by Saami magical experts becomes a stable trope across the sources, and in the late twelfth/early thirteenth century,

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¹¹ *HN*, 60.
¹² *HN*, 61.
¹³ *HN*, 24, 11–24.
¹⁵ *Hkr* 1, 135. *Fsk*, 79. *Mesta* 1, 8–9. Gunnhildr is described as “fjölkunning mjökk” [knowledgeable in magic], but this ability is not associated with the Saami in *Eg*, 94, 113.
¹⁶ *Ǫrv*, 241.
Saxo relates that Óðinn required magical expertise only offered by the Saami.¹⁷ As discussed in chapter 2, the motif is appropriated twice in Vatnsdæla saga, first with the invitation of “Finna ein fjölkunnig” [a Saami woman knowledgeable in magic] to a feast where her prophesying skills are emphasised, followed by the calling for three Saami men offering their magical expertise to retrieve Ingimundr’s lost item in exchange for butter and tin.¹⁸ Despite an academic tradition of associating both King Óláfr Tryggvason and King Óláfr Haraldsson with derogatory views of the Saami,¹⁹ the two kings are also portrayed as seeking help from or depending on Saami actors. In the Icelandic monk Oddr Snorrason’s Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar from the 1190s, King Óláfr agrees to ask a Saami man dwelling in the mountains of Þjálfaheillir (somewhere in Agdenes) in Prøndaløg for help with troublesome Hálogalanders. Although the king is reluctant to meet “þesskyns men” [men of that kind], the Saami man has foreseen their arrival and advises the king on how to resolve the conflict, and “fór þetta allt eptir því sem Fiðrinn hafði sagt” [everything turned out as the Saami man had said].²⁰ The Saami man himself also addresses his Otherness by stating “í þinu foruneyti eru björt guð, en þeira samvistu má ek eigi bra, því at ek hefi annarskonar natúru” [accompanying you are bright spirits, and I cannot endure their presence because I am of a different nature].²¹ This expressed Othering is in my opinion likely referring to his paganism and the fact that the king appropriates it by taking his advice when dealing with a royal issue, rather than leaving it in the hands of God as in other stories. Since there are no instances in the extract where the negative expressions are directly connected to the man’s cultural affiliation, the negative Othering is likely connected to his lack of Christianity since that is the feature rejected by the king.²² The fact that the man is portrayed as Saami, however, does emphasise the pagan aspects of the situation. In Helgisaga Óláfs konungs Haraldssonar, preserved in a mid-thirteenth century manuscript (possibly based on a late twelfth century text), a Saami man in the saintly king’s retinue shares his prophetic vision with the king, with his story later proving true and concluding with victory in battle.²³

Prophetic abilities are associated with Saami actors on other occasions as well, and Saami prophesiers often form part of an elite or appear in relation to it, indi-
cating high status. For example, Ágríp relates the abilities of Røgnvaldr reykill, the reported son of the Saami “princess” Snæfríðr and King Haraldr hárfagri, including the ability to foretell the future.²⁴ In the scene including the Saami practitioner of magic in Vatnsdæla saga, she is portrayed as predicting the future, and Saxo relates that the Saami prophesier Rostiophus Phinnicus’s skills help the god Óðinn avenge his kin.²⁵ As already seen and will be furthered below, Historia Norwegiae also emphasises the abilities of some Saami to predict the future, in addition to retrieving lost items.²⁶ However, the latter ability is not mentioned (as far as I am aware), other than in the famous seusveinar incident, and in the stories relating Hálfdan svarti’s banquet when a Saami man is accused of stealing the banquet food and is then ordered to reconjure it,²⁷ which will be further discussed later.

The stigmatised magical abilities of the Saami related across Norse texts most often prove very useful for some of the Norse characters and work as catalysts in the narrative. In my opinion, this “usefulness” becomes particularly clear in the events revolving around the Hålogaland chieftains, especially Þórir hundr, whose storyline as an antagonist to the Norwegian king Óláfr Haraldsson is founded on his relationship with Saami groups, with one such perceived group granting him an impenetrable cloak, as related in Heimskringla’s Ölafs saga helga:

Þórir hundr hafði Finnferð haft þessa tvðav etr lengi á fjalli ok fengit óf fjár. Hann átti margs konar kaup við Finna. Hann lét þár gera sér tólf hreinbjálba með svá mikill fjölkynngi, at ekki vápn festi á ok síðr miklu en á hringabrynju.²⁸

Þórir hundr had been engaged in trading with the [Saami] for these two winters, and both winters he had spent a long time in the mountains and had made a lot of money. He did various kinds of trade with the [Saami]. He had prepared for himself there twelve reindeer-skin

²⁴ Ágr, 5. Also the case for Drauma-Finni in Finnboga saga ramma, 268. I sometimes refer to Snæfríðr as a Saami “princess” to emphasise her high status as the daughter of a Finnkonungr. This is also the case for other Saami characters that are described as the daughters of kings. In my opinion, her high status as the daughter of what the Norse referred to as Finnkonungr is often neglected by scholars discussing her portrayal, something that I wish to avoid since I believe it reinforces colonial notions of Saami subservience to the Norse (see section 6.2.1). However, I have kept the term emphasised with punctuation marks since Snæfríðr is never referred to as being a “princess” in any of the texts and refering to her as such is my invention.


²⁸ Hkr 2, 344–45. In Órv, 202, Oddr is given a magical cloak impenetrable to weapons, was fashioned by different people knowledgeable in magic, including the Saami.
coats, using such powerful magic that no weapon could penetrate them, and much less than a coat of mail.²⁹

As demonstrated by *Erfidrápa* 16 above, the cloak and its Saami connotations are key catalysts leading to the death of the Norwegian king at the battle of Stiklastaðir in 1030.³⁰ Similarly, in *Helgisaga Óláfs konungs Haraldssonar*, Þórir hundr flees to Finnmýrk after a disagreement with the king arising from a grain shortage in Hálögaland culminating in the several murders of members of both sides of the conflict, and “træystizc miöck fjölkynga Finna” [had much confidence in the magic of the Saami], staying with the group for two winters.³¹ Later, during the battle of Stiklarstaðir, the saga relates that when a soldier from the king's army attempts to stab Þórir, it is as if his sword is nothing but a stick, explained by the fact that Þórir and his entourage wear cloaks the Saami had made with “mikill fjölkyngi” [great magic].³²

In several sources dealing with King Óláfr Tryggvason, the motif of Saami magical aid is expanded to include help with the fertility of a childless Norse couple. The couple is depicted as struggling with childbearing and seek the magical assistance of a Saami group outside Niðarós (Nidaros), who call for a spirit eventually incarnated in the couple’s offspring, as related in Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga*:

Faðir minn ok móðir váur saman langa hríð með lóligum hjúskap ok áttu ekki barn. Ok er þau eldusk, þá hörnuðu þau þat mjöð ef þau döi erfingjalaus. Fóru þau siðan til Finna með miði fē ok báðu þá gefa sér nókkvorn erfingja af fjölkynngis íþrótt. Finnar kölluðu þá til hōñingja þeira anda er loftit byggja, fyrir því at jafnnullt er loftit af óhreinum ãndum sem jörðin. Ók sjá andi sendi einn óhreinan anda í þessa hina dakkur myrkvastofu er at sónnu má kallask minnar móður kvör. Ok sá hinn sami andi em ek, ok holðgōðum ek svá með þessum hætti, ok siðan sýndumd ek með mannligrí ásjá, ok var ek svá borinn í heim [...] ok fyrir því má ek eigi skírask at ek em eigi máðr.³³

My father and mother spent a long time together in lawful wedlock and had no children. When they grew old, they were much grieved that they might have to die with no heir. They then visited the [Saami] with a great deal of money and asked that they grant them an heir with the exercise of magic. The [Saami] then called on the chief of their spirits, who dwell in the sky, for the sky is as full of unclean spirits as the earth. This spirit sent an unclean spirit into the dark dungeon that in fact may be called my mother’s womb. That same spirit am I, and I was incarnated in this way and then appeared in human

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³¹ *Helgisaga*, 52.
³² *Helgisaga*, 69.
³³ Odds, 257. In *Hkr 1*, a later source, the story is shortened but follows the same pattern, 323.
form. That was the manner of my birth [...] I cannot be baptized for the reason that I am not a man.34

The couple’s offspring, Eyvindr kinnrifa, a friend of the Hálogalandier Hárekr ór Bjótta and a thorn in the king’s side, later explains why he must refuse baptism on the grounds that he is not even human (because of his reported magical origins), introducing the difficult conversion narrative of people from Hálogaland in the sagas. The story is echoed and further elaborated in the probably early fourteenth-century compilation Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta, where the Saami performers of magic reluctantly agree to help the struggling couple with their request only if they promise with an oath that “sá maðr skal alt til dauðadags þjóna þórr ok Óðni, ef vér megum öðlast þat barn er líf ok aldr háfi til” [the child shall serve Thor and Odin till the day of its death, and that we may have him when he is old enough].35 Whether or not the medieval audience understood the Saami character’s demand that Eyvindr should return to the group in adolescence as a common request, there is no doubt that the text stresses the importance felt by the Saami that he should stay devoted to the pre-Christian gods. The explicit emphasis on the Norse gods Þórr and Óðinn, instead of simply “heathen beliefs” or Saami deities, is interesting since it demonstrates the contrast between the Christian and the non-believer, rather than Saami beliefs specifically.

Sirpa Aalto asserts that a key feature of the European medieval tradition of historiography is based on the creation of contrast between the Christian and the non-Christian.36 In this case then, since the text does not elaborate on the condition of Eyvindr returning to Saami society, I argue that it is not the juxtaposition between the Norse-Saami that is important, but rather a lack of Christianity, presented for the audience as the Saami wish for Eyvindr to remain devoted to the pre-Christian Norse gods. Similarly, when unruly Háloganders associated with the Saami are demonised in the narrative, the problem posed is never the lines drawn between culturally or ethnically different social groups, but rather fundamental religious differences between the old beliefs and the new. I would also suggest that the emphasis on Eyvindr’s Saami “creators” as worshippers of the Norse gods help illuminate the possibilities of different medieval Saami and Norse societies for negotiating belonging and identity discussed in chapter 6.

A similar pattern of conversion is mirrored in the stories concerning the Hálogaland chieftain Rauðr inn rammi, whose large entourage of Saami people accen-

35 Mesta 2, 168.
tuates his paganism, differentiating him from the Christian population socioculturally and in turn enabling him to perform weather magic obstructing the king.³⁷ In Heimskringla’s Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, King Óláfr Tryggvason is portrayed as having to make several attempts to sail into the Sálpti fjord (Salten) where Rauðr kept his residence, only succeeding when the bishop and “guð sinn styrk” [the strength of his god] managed to quell the storms allegedly conjured by the farmer.³⁸ The description of the king’s difficulties in reaching the fjord is probably not completely fabricated, as Rauðr’s farm is located near Saltstraumen. The maelstrom, just south of Bodø, is located in a small strait with one of the strongest tidal currents in the world. Without any natural explanations at the time, the difficult waters were associated by those unfamiliar with the area with Rauðr’s paganism, which is reinforced here by his familiarity with Saami people. It is interesting, and important, to note that it is not necessarily the Saami that are Othered or demonised in the narrative, despite being the ones often ascribed with magical abilities, but rather, the Hålogalanders who associate themselves with and appropriate non-Christian magic.

Weather magic and the ability to manipulate the weather is sometimes associated with Saami actors.³⁹ As related in chapter 2.6, the magically skilled Steinfinnr carries out weather magic whilst in a near trance-like state in Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu, likely first written in the mid-thirteenth century. Described as sitting still and looking into the ground, he reportedly darkens the sky.⁴⁰ In Ketils saga hængs, Gríms saga loðinkinna, and Ærvar-Odds saga, Saami characters are associated with weather magic but are not directly portrayed as the actors behind it.⁴¹ Since the instances where the weather changes drastically as an antagonistic force in the narrative appears in contexts where the Saami function as antagonists, a connection is expressed by the presence of both. The connection is furthered later in Ærvar-Odds saga with a direct association between the foul weather and the Saami: “Nú mun ek gefa þeim byr bertu hēðan, jafnt slíkan sem Finnar gáfu þeim híngrat” [Now I will give them a favourable wind away

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³⁷ See section 6.2. “Hann var ríkr maðr. Fylgði honum mikill fjöldi Finna, þegar er kunnigr. Hann var vínr mikill ok mjök fjölkunnigr” [He was a rich man. A large number of (Saami people) attended him when he needed them. Rauðr was a great pagan and very skilled in magic], Hkr 1, 324; “Hkr 1,” 202.
³⁸ Hkr 1, 326.
⁴⁰ Reyk, 192–93.
⁴¹ Ket, ch. 3; GrL, ch. 1; Ærv, ch. 5.
from here, just like the one the Saami gave them to send them here]. Following the killing of the Saami men housing Gunnhildr in *Haralds saga hárfragra* in Heimskringla, a terrible thunderstorm hinders the departure of the Norse crew, insinuating that the death of the magically-skilled characters was the catalyst behind the bad weather. The association between the Saami and weather magic is clearest in the extracts portraying a harrying trip to Finnland in *Óláfs saga helga*, also from Heimskringla. Here, the young king encounters Saami weather magic in a valley called Herdalar:

During the night the [Saami] caused horrible weather and stormy seas by magic. But the king had the anchors weighed and the sails lifted and during the night they sailed along the coast. Then again, as on other occasions, the king's good fortune had more power than magic.

The magic conjured by the Saami is used as a contrasting force to the king's Christianity, emphasising the king's sanctity and the relative merit of Christianity. Although initially portrayed as good archers using the thick forest to their advantage, the Saami are ultimately defeated due to the power of Christianity. Such an opposition between the Saami and Christianity is also traceable in the stories relating the marriage between King Haraldr hárfagri and the Saami “princess” Snæfríðr, echoed in Heimskringla's *Haralds saga hárfragra* but first related in Ágrip. Here, allusions to the dangers of not conforming to Christianity are represented as foul odours, vermin, and unnatural decomposition following Snæfríðr's death:

**Jólaaptan, er Haraldr sat at mat, þá kom Svási fyrir dyrr ok sendi konungi boð, at hann skyldi út ganga til hans, en konung brásk reið við þeim sendiboðum, ok þar inn sami reiði hans út, er boð hans haföi borit inn. En hinn bað hann þá eigi fyrir því at síðr [í] annat sinni ok gaf hónum bjórskinn eitt til ok kvað sik vera þann Finnin, er hann haföi ját at setja famma sinn annan veg brekkunnar á Þoptyn, þar sem þá var konungrinn. En konungrinn gekk út ok varð hónum þess játsi, at hann gekk yfir í gamma hans með æggjan sumra sinna manna, þó at sumir letti. Stöð þar upp Snjófríðr(r), dóttir Svása, kvenna vænust, ok byrlæði ker mjöður fullt konunginum, ok hann tók allt saman ok hønd hennar. Ok þegar var sem eldshiti kømi í hørund hans, ok vildi þegar hafa hana á þeiri nótt. En Svási sagði at þat mundi eigi vera, nema hónum nauðfum, nema konungrinn festi hana og fengi at lögum. Ok hann festi ok fekk ok unni svá með [œrsulum], at ríki sitt ok allt þat, er hans tígn byrjaði, þá fyrhlét**

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42 Qrv, 184–85.  
43 *Hkr* 1, 136.  
44 *Hkr* 2, 11. See section 4.3.2.  
hann ok sat hjá henni nótt ok dag nálöga, meðan þau lifðu þæði, ok þr já vetr söðan hón var dauð. Sýrgöi hann hana dauða, en landslýðr allr sýrgöi hann villt lan [...] Ok þegar er hón var hérær, þá slöri á öþefjani ok ýðu ok hverskyns illum fýr af líkamanum. Var þá hvatat báli ok hón brennd; blánaði þó aðr allr líkaminn ok ulluó ro rmar ok eðlur, froskar ok þöddur ok allskyns illyrmi.

On the eve of Yule, as Haraldr sat at table, Svási came to the door and sent word in to the king that he should come out to him. This request angered the king, and the same man bore his anger out as had borne the message in. Svási asked him nevertheless a second time and also gave him a beaver skin and said that he was that [Saami] whom the king had allowed to set up his hut on the other side of the hill at Þoptyn, where the king then was. The king went out and he agreed to go to Svási’s hut, egged on by some of his men, though others tried to dissuade him. There Snjófríðr stood up, the most beautiful of women and offered the king a cup full of mead. He took it and with it her hand, and suddenly it was as if fiery heat entered into his flesh and he wished to have her that same night. But Svási said that this should not be so – except against his will – unless the king betrothed himself to her and then wedded her according to the law. And he betrothed himself to her and wedded her and loved her so witlessly that he neglected his kingdom and all that beseemed his kingly honour; and he stayed by her almost night and day while they both lived and for three years after she died. He mourned for her, dead, but the people all mourned for him, bewitched [...] And when she was moved there issued from the body a rank and fulsome stench and foul odours of every sort. A pyre was hastily prepared and she was burnt, but before that the body blackened and there bubbled out worms and vipers, frogs and toads and multitudes of vermin.

The context in which this account appears relates the many marriages and children of King Haraldr, and how these marriages offered him kinship relations which granted him control over vast areas of land, with his steadily growing kingdom symbolising his power. The account therefore exemplifies, or glorifies, a medieval attempt to unify the neighbouring groups through the establishment of kinship between Norwegian and Saami elites. Snæfríðr’s insinuated bewitchment of the king has led several scholars to interpret the episode as a Norse expression of hostility to, or derogation of, the Saami. However, her “spell” follows the exact same pattern as the conversion narrative of the farmers from Guðbrandsdali (Gudbrandsdalen) in Heimskringla’s Ólafs saga helga, where the saintly king destroys a pre-Christian idol leading to the outpouring of mice the size of cats, adders, toads, and snakes. The two instances mirror the Biblical account of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (2 Maccabees 9.8–9), whose death is portrayed using similar imagery of (bodily) worms, rotting flesh, and decay. I would therefore sug-

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46 Ágr, 5–6.
48 See section 6.2.1.
49 Hkr 2, 189.
gest that the authors of Ágrip and the stories about the Guðbrandsdalr-farmers used motifs known from the account of the “pagan” King Antiochus to reinforce the heathenism of these situations. This similarity strengthens the notion, in my opinion, that while Snaefríðr’s powers might have been perceived as more powerful because of her Saaminess, it is her paganism, via the implied magic, that poses a problem in the text, rather than her cultural affiliation. The Saami, who stereotypically did not convert to the new religion until the early modern period, bore stronger associations with the fears of the old religion(s) than the “forgiven” pagan King Haraldr. It should nevertheless be mentioned that there is evidence that several Saami peoples and groups converted to Christianity, probably as a combination of voluntary and forced conversion as the rest of the population, throughout the medieval period. For example, in King Hákon V’s 1313 law amendment for Hálogaland, Saami people converting to Christianity would be granted reduced fines for offences in the first twenty years following conversion.⁵⁰ The conversion of Hálogaland and the northern regions of Finnmørk is complicated and might have begun earlier than traditionally assumed.⁵¹ While the conversion of Saami peoples is a complicated issue, and while results from archaeological investigations such as at the Rounala churchyard in northern Sweden indicate the prevalence of medieval Christian burial customs in inland Sápmi, large-scale conversion of Saami peoples was instigated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with intensified missionary work.⁵²

In addition to the incidents described above, there are several other tropes associated with the magical abilities of the Saami. Enchantment of someone or something is a prevalent theme in connection with Saami magical actors.⁵³ Similar to Queen Hvít’s curse transforming her step-son into a bear in Hrólfs saga kraka as discussed previously and below, the Saami woman Grímhildr curses her step-daughter into becoming an ugly troll-woman in Gríms saga loðnkinna.⁵⁴ As previously mentioned, a Saami man is accused of enchanting away the food during a feast in Haðaland in Hálfdanar saga svarta (Heimskringla) and Hálfdanar þáttir

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⁵⁰ NGL 3, 107
⁵³ Saxo, 343.
⁵⁴ GrL, 151–52.
However, it is not necessarily always the Saami characters that do the enchanting, as demonstrated in Heimskringla’s Ynglinga saga, where the Saami woman Drífa hires the magical performer Hulð to bewitch Vanlandi. Hulð is never ascribed with any cultural affiliation in this passage, and is therefore not necessarily Saami. Despite this, it is Saami magic that is demonised in the text:

En er seiðr var framiðr; var Vanlandi at Uppșolum. þá gerði hann fúsan at fara til Finnland, en vinir hans ok råðamenn þönnuðu honum ok sögðu, at vera myndi fjölkynngi Finna í fýsi hans.

And when the spell was cast, Vanlandi was at Uppsali: Then he became eager to go to [Finland], but his friends and advisors forbade him and said that his enthusiasm must be caused by [Saami] magic.

As mentioned above, this demonisation of (perceived) Saami magic might be a manifestation of the European medieval tradition of historiography juxtaposing the Christian with the non-Christian. However, the instance from Ynglinga saga is curious: depicting the pre-Christian past, it narrates both Saami and, if Hulð was perceived as not Saami, Norse magic. Although the Saami woman Drífa hires what is possibly a Norse performer of magic, it is the Saami associations that are emphasised, contrasting with the extracts above where the problem is not necessarily the Saami affiliation of some practitioners of magic, but rather, the lack of Christianity. The portrayal of Saami magic, or lack of Christianity as something inherently Saami, is potentially only elsewhere found in Historia Norwegie, mentioned above. However, Historia Norwegie also portrays Norse actors actively seeking Saami expertise in magic, thereby demonstrating that while Saami magic was viewed as something O thered and dangerous, it was still a powerful tool for Norse characters. In section 6.2, I argue that seeking out Saami magic might have become more desirable for Norse actors following the conversion, since they in this way could participate in a previously important but now forbidden ritual.

Another common trope associated with the Saami is the ability to shapeshift. In Sturlaugss saga Starfsama, the Saami characters shapeshift into both eagles and

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hounds, and when Ketill hœrng meets his Saami father-in-law for the first time in *Ketils saga hœngs*, he is a whale. In *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, the Saami king Finnr shapeshifts into a whale, and the extract perfectly exemplifies the collective magical stereotypes attributed to the Saami in Norse narration, focusing on shapeshifting, the shooting of targeted arrows from one’s fingers and healing. In the late *Sǫrla saga sterka*, most likely first written in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, in addition to having the ability of magically vanishing (into the ground), the Saami characters are portrayed as able to shapeshift and shoot targeted arrows from their fingers and have healing abilities.

As emphasised by several scholars, Saami characters are sometimes associated with supernatural beings and otherworlds. Hermann Pálsson argued that certain unqualified mythical terms, such as those denoting giants, elves, dwarves, *troll*, and *þursar* were sometimes used for the Saami people. This connection has been suggested as being manifested in the different portrayals of Svási Finnakonungr; Snæfríðr’s father. In the introduction to the Snæfríðr-episode in *Ágrip*, commonly accepted as being composed in Norway around the 1190s, Svási is only described as “finnakonung.” In Heimskringla, assumed to have been compiled around 1230, he is called a *finnr* (Saami) and, according to Else Mundal and Miriam Horn, a “jǫtunn” [giant]. However, the *jǫtunn*-reference only appears in a chapter title, “Frá Svása jǫtni” [Of the *jǫtunn* Svási], and it is most likely a later addition as titles are often relatively modern. Svási’s description as a *jǫtunn* in the chapter title has nevertheless been treated as authentic by Mundal and Horn. In the later *Hauks þáttr hábrókar*, found in the late fourteenth-century manuscript Flateyjarbók, Svási is referred to as “dvergr” [dwarf], in addition to being a *finnr*. I would therefore argue that the motifs associated with the Saami evolved into incorporating super-

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60 Stst, 613.
62 HálfdEyst, 584–49.
63 SǫrlaSt, 444–46.
66 Ágr, 4.
68 HHábr; 207.
natural beings such as giants and dwarves later in the medieval period, and a character like Svási could then therefore be described as a supernatural being in addition to being a Saami. This interpretation aligns with Ralph O’Connor’s aforementioned statement that scholars today generally agree “that fictional tendencies become more frequent and sustained in later sagas as the genre developed.”

This development could just as likely also be suggestive of the fact that Saami and Norse cultures had become more estranged from each other, which I further elaborate on in chapters 4 and 5.

As he interpreted the nicknames hálfröll and hálfrögrísi as alluding to Saami parentage in *Egils saga Skálagrimssonar*, Hermann Pálsson claimed that the whole semantic range of *röll* must have included notions of the Saami. There is a twofold problem with this interpretation. Primarily, we cannot accept that the nicknames above undoubtedly refer to Saami descent, despite several scholars often assuming that they do. Neither Hallbjörn hálfröll nor Björgólfr hálfrögrísi are otherwise described using (other) images from the Saami-Motif-Cluster, and it should also be noted that *Egils saga* portrays the stated Saami characters (the *finnar* encountered during *finnkaup*) in normalised language and that these characters are not significantly Othered or called *röll* or *risar*. I would therefore argue that their nicknames should most likely not be understood as indicating Saami descent, and that new interpretations of these nicknames are called for in future research. Secondly, *röll* is also often associated with magic and mythical beings such as monsters and giants, and can therefore be ambiguous and is quite rarely connected to the Saami. In *Ketils saga hængs*, Hallbjörn (hálfröll) uses the term *röll* about his daughter-in-law Hrafnhildr. While this may seem like a direct reference to Hrafnhildr’s Saami descent through her father Brúni, especially as she is not portrayed as practising magic herself, the coinage is not as straightforward as

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72 *Eb*, 28–29. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, the magical performer Geirríðr is called a “röll,” and the coinage refers to her practise of magic.


74 *Ket*, 123.
first assumed. Hallbjǫrn’s disapproval of his daughter-in-law may lie in the fact that he suspects that Hrafnhildr had bewitched Ketill into falling in love with her, analogous to the suspicions of Vanlandi and Harald’s advisers in Heimskringla’s *Ynglinga saga* and *Haralds saga hárfagra*.⁷⁵ As such, Hallbjǫrn’s usage of the term strengthens the association between the Saami and magic in the source material, and demonstrates once again that the negative factor, if present, is never Saaminess but almost exclusively always the practise of something inherently non-Christian like magic (or bewitchment). The instance can also be read humorously, since Hallbjǫrn’s nickname does indeed contain the term. When associated with the Saami, regardless of its context, supernatural terms such as *þurs* and *trǫll* are not as straightforward as was suggested by Hermann Pálsson. I therefore disagree that the semantic range of *trǫll* unquestionably included Saami people, but rather, as Ármann Jakobsson argues, that it incorporated everyone perceived as having supernatural abilities,⁷⁶ as some Saami characters were. The articulation of association between the Saami and the supernatural should thus be read as a probable result of the suggested Otherness increasingly (with time) accompanying the Saami in Norse literature. As Ármann Jakobsson writes, regardless of what the ambivalent term *trǫll* referred to, it at least meant strange or Other.⁷⁷ Triin Laidoner follows the same logic when discussing the *jǫtnar* (giants), stating that it is:

impossible to overlook the fact that the Saami characterisation as “different” and “dangerous” is paralleled by that of another set of intimidating “others,” namely the *jǫtnar*, something which suggests a connection between the natures and roles of the two groups.⁷⁸

As Jurij Kusmenko has noticed, many common characteristics are shared between the giants and the Saami in Norse narration, such as magical abilities associated with the control of weather, healing, and shapeshifting.⁷⁹ Importantly, these are positive values, and giants also seem to embody attributes like attractiveness and fertility, but also the possession of desirable objects and knowledge.⁸⁰ While not exclusively associated with the Saami, otherworldly and supernatural terms, and portrayals such as *trǫll* and *jǫtnar* are associated with (meeting) the Other;

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⁷⁵ *Hkr* 1, 29, 126.
⁷⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, *Troll*, 58.
⁷⁸ Laidoner, “*Noaidi*,” 66.
⁸⁰ Mundal, “*Family*,” 30.
which in some contexts encompass the Saami.\textsuperscript{81} However, it is important to be constantly aware of the prejudices associated with supernatural connections, especially when they are expressed negatively. Assuming a simple equation between the Saami and, for example, trolls, without questioning the overall contextual framework the association appears in, risks perpetuating a colonial framework disregarding the Saami as people.\textsuperscript{82} In clarifying terms such as tröll and problematising the connection between the supernatural Others and the Saami, and demonstrating awareness of the contemporary situation, we avoid unconsciously supporting a colonial framework.

In sum, magic is undoubtedly the most common trope associated with the Saami in Norse narration. Involving an abundance of different aspects and abilities, the repeating themes include Saami actors as teachers of magic or as offering magical aid, shapeshifting, divination, and enchantment. While the paganism of the Saami has been discussed since the establishment of the authority of the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen over the Nordic countries from the 1060s onwards, the earliest source associating the Saami with magic might predate this by a few decades. In Sigvatr Póròason’s Erfrdráp Óláfs helga, performed sometime after the canonisation of King Óláfr Haraldsson following the battle of Stiklastaðir in 1030, the veneration of the king is associated with Saami magic, since it was the reported catalyst for his death. However, while Saami magic is portrayed with ambiguity, it is also necessary and works as a catalyst in different stories. Historia Norwegie accentuates this paradoxical view of Saami magic: although strongly opposing it and painting it in a demonic light, the text also normalises the motif of Norse, or more correctly, Christian peoples seeking out such magic. Simultaneously attractive and intimidating for the stereotyped skill, Saami characters with reported magical abilities are sought by other actors in the texts. The texts rarely problematise the cultural affiliation of the Saami, but rather, their “paganism” and lack of Christianity. This problematisation is reflected in King Hákon Hákonarsonar’s aforementioned “réttarbót” [amendment] of the law code relevant for Hálogaland in 1313, which intended to make life easier for newly converted Saami in the region.\textsuperscript{83} I therefore assert that it is not necessarily the juxtaposition between the Norse and the Saami that is relevant when discussing the portrayal of Saami

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\textsuperscript{81} John McKinnell, \textit{Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend} (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 2–6.

\textsuperscript{82} See section 1.1.2.

magic, but that these instances should rather be read as textual manifestations of the religious fears associated with non-Christian belief systems. I also find it necessary to stress that the magic associated with the Saami, such as shapeshifting, weather magic, and spirit journeys, also fall within the rules of Norse performances of magic. In turn then, when there is a problem with magic, it is not because of the cultural affiliation of the performer, but due to the practise of something essentially non-Christian. The texts nevertheless portray this magic as productive, and at times, necessary.

Saami Ritual Performance and the “Problem” with Shamanism

Shamanism as a concept is generally agreed to be a religious configuration involving a practitioner or social functionary reaching states of altered consciousness in order to communicate with the perceived supernatural world.⁸⁴ As part of a belief system, shamanism consists of an ideology and set of expectations concerning shamans.⁸⁵ A feature of shamanism is the all-encompassing view of one’s surroundings as animated, including both natural features and phenomena, as well as animals, people, the deceased, gods/goddesses, spirit beings, and various objects. By entering a trance through playing a ceremonial drum, singing chants, and sometimes consuming mind-altering substances, individuals granted special power could in this trance communicate with the animated world surrounding them.⁸⁶ In this state, the shamans could visit far-off places and find missing objects, animals, and people, communicate with the spirit world and sometimes raise the dead. Since Norse portrayals of and experiences with Saami ritual performance is so prevalent in the material mentioned above, it is reasonable to assume Norse knowledge of and familiarity with Saami ritual performance. Saami magic is actively sought out, and the Saami are appreciated and acknowledged for their magical skills and expertise, albeit ambiguously.

Until recently, the predominant focus regarding Saami medieval belief systems and shamanism has been on their connections to Óðinnic magic and seiðr.⁸⁷ Parallels

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⁸⁵ Pentikäinen, *Shamanism*, 12.
between seiðr and Saami ritual performance include spirit journeys and trance-like séances sometimes involving shapeshifting, magically skilled travellers offering their services, World Tree ideologies, and animistic features. Although interesting, the parallels between seiðr and Saami ritual performance have traditionally been discussed in manners where the focus lies on the process of cultural borrowings, resulting in the Saami predominantly becoming the borrowers.

When discussing the portrayal of Saami ritual performance in medieval texts, the focus tends to be on its shamanistic features, with John Lindow concluding that “most Norwegians would have known the rules for a Saami shamanic performance.” In Norse narration, the most famous example of a so-called shamanic performance is related in Historia Norwegie, depicting the ritual performance of Saami “magicians”:

Quadam uero uice dum christiani causa commecii apud Finnos ad mensam sedissent, illorum hospita subito inclinata expirauit. Vnde christianis multum | dolentibus non mortuam, sed a gandis emulorum esse depredatam, sese illum cito adepturos ipsi Finni nichil contristati respondent. Tunc quidam magis extenso panno, sub quo se ad profanes ueneficas incantaciones prepararet, quoddam uasulum ad modum taratantarorum sursum erectis minibus extulit, certinis atque ceruinias formulis cum Iorons et ondriolias nauicula eciam cum remis occupatun, quiibus uehiculis per alta niium et deuexa moncium uel profunda stagnorum ille diabolicus gandus uteretur: Cunque ditiissime incantando tali apparatu ibi saltasset, humo tandem prostratus totus niger ut ethiops, spumans ora ut puta frenetics, preruptus uentrem uiat Claudando cum maximo {fremore} emisit spiritum. Tum alterum in magica arte peritissimum consularunt, quid de utrisque actum sit. Qui simili modo, sed non eodem euentu suum implens officium – namque hospita sana surrexit – et defunctum magum tali euentu interisse eis intimauit: Gandum uidelicii eius in cetenam effigiem inmaginatum ostico gando in praecutas suedes transformato, dum per quoddam stagnum uelocissime prosiliret, malo omne obuissasse, quia in stagni eiusdem profundo suedes latitantes exactu uentrem perfrabat. Quod et in mago domi mortuo apparuit.

Once, when Christians who had come to trade had sat down at table with some [Saami], their hostess fell forward all of a sudden and expired. While the Christians felt serious grief at this calamity, the [Saami] were not in the least saddened, but told them that the woman was not dead, merely pillaged by the gands of her adversaries, and that they could quickly restore her:

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88 Laidoner, “Noaidi,” 68.
Then a magician, spreading out a cloth under which he might prepare himself for intoning unholy sorcerer’s spells, raised aloft in his outstretched hands a small vessel similar to a [sieve], decorated with tiny figures of whales, harnessed reindeer, skis, and even a miniature boat with oars; using these means of transport the demonic spirit was able to travel across tall snowdrifts, mountain-sides and deep lakes. After chanting incantations for a very long time and leaping about there with this paraphernalia, he finally threw himself to the ground, black all over [...] and foaming at the mouth as if he were mad; ripped across his stomach, with a mighty roar he eventually relinquished his life. Next they consulted another specialist in the magic arts as to what had happened in each case. This individual went through all his practises in similar fashion, though with a different outcome: the hostess arose in sound health and then he revealed to them that the sorcerer had died in the following way: his gand, having taken on the likeness of a whale, was shooting rapidly through a lake when it had the misfortune to encounter a hostile gand, which had transformed itself into sharply pointed stakes; these stakes, hidden in the depths of the lake, penetrated the repulsed creature’s belly, and this was also manifested by the death of the magician in the house.⁹¹

The extract is the most detailed medieval source depicting Saami ritual performance. Mirrored by the semsveinar-episode in Vatnsdæla saga, which also sees a similar “spirit journey” being undertaken through a trance,⁹² the extract depicts the séance undertaken by two Saami ritual performers. Several aspects of the performance have been connected to shamanism, particularly the gandus of the bereaved woman and the performers, the cloth placed under the initial performer, the chanting, and the usage of the riddle/bowl (drum?) decorated with figures enabling the trance.⁹³ “Gand” is a Norse term connected to the Saami from the Historia Norwegie instance onwards, and is adopted in the Saami languages in the same period, being the mid-to-late twelfth century.⁹⁴ In this context, the term denotes a sort of soul or helping spirit sent out by a ritual performer during a trance, and represents the embodiment of the spirit journey, both as a part of and external to the performer.⁹⁵

However, the trend of associating Saami ritual performance exclusively with shamanism has been challenged in recent scholarship, with some scholars doubting whether shamanism is the right term to describe the belief system of the Saami

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⁹¹ HN, 62–63.
⁹² Vatn, 34–35. The Saami men lie down for three days in a shed without moving or eating, inducing a trance that enables their mind-journey to Iceland.
⁹³ Hansen and Olsen, Hunters, 345.
⁹⁵ Heide, Gand, 5.
in the medieval period. This follows the wave of postcolonial scholarship emphasising the heterogeneity and regional variation of what has previously often been viewed as the traditional and static Saami lifestyle. The recent trend challenging the assumption associated with (medieval) Saami ritual performance and shamanism is founded in the opposition of the static portrayal of “Saami shamanism” as something “naïve” and undeveloped. The view of “Saami shamanism” as primitive and unevolved is also endorsed by some scholars discussing shamanistic features in the pre-Christian Norse belief systems, who tend to claim that the shamanistic features of seiðr should not be confused with “classic shamanism” or the “tundra shamanism of the Saami.” The diversity and sophistication of the Norse belief-system(s) are emphasised at the expense of a diverse and multifaceted discussion of early Saami belief systems, which then, unconsciously but efficiently, fall into a primitive and static category devoid of inner developments and variations. It should nevertheless be mentioned that scholars like Neil Price and Lotte Hedeager emphasise the complexity of what they refer to as Saami (or circumpolar) “shamanism,” as judged by early modern and modern sources, and rather push towards Norse belief systems (specifically seiðr) having been just as complex.

I suggest that the discussion of Saami shamanism in Norse studies needs to be problematised since it, more often than not, validates a system of progression and juxtaposes the social advancement of the Norse and the Saami, without discussing Saami factors. Instead, we could emphasise that certain features of Saami (medieval) ritual performance were shamanistic in nature and consistent with the shamanism found in circumpolar areas in the modern period, while avoiding the definition of this performance as shamanism (and shamanism alone), due to the limitations and contemporary associations it carries. In its place, it has been suggested to use the Saami terms noaidi (ritual performer; sometimes compared to a shaman) and noaidevuohta (the conceptualisation of the noaidi’s function as com-
communicator with the supernatural world).¹⁰¹ These terms were first documented later in the early modern period and I am therefore reluctant to use them as descriptors for the ritual performance described in medieval texts.¹⁰² Rather than using specific terms such as “shaman” or “noaidi” I have therefore decided to use general designations such as “ritual performer” or “performer/agent of magic,” in order to avoid the problematic connotations of the former terms.

As seen above, Saami ritual performance is evident throughout Norse narration and the sagas offer fragmented glimpses of Saami belief systems, sometimes portraying what can generally be associated with shamanic practices. When discussing these glimpses, it is important to emphasise and acknowledge the heterogeneity and regional variation involved in the belief systems of the Saami, features that have been increasingly emphasised regarding the Norse belief systems.¹⁰³ I therefore suggest that the starting point for discussion should always be the internalisation of the concept that the Saami historic belief systems and ritual practices were not static entities, but instead exhibited substantial spatial and chronological variation. Marte Spangen for example, has noted that the many variants of Saami religion were observed by scholars from the seventeenth century onwards, but has later been downplayed to more systematic and static images of Saami beliefs.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, there are certain features associated with Saami ritual performance (as perceived/assumed by the Norse) that recur in the saga material, including, as discussed above, trance-induced spirit journeys, the ability to manipulate the weather, and natural phenomena, magical clothing, and weapons, enchantment and, potentially, the bear hunt.¹⁰⁵ These mostly fall within the overview of elements of the Saami belief systems that Neil Price considers to go back to “at least as far as the Viking Age,” including a) the existence of a thought-world of spirits and natural powers, b) the bear hunt and its ritual foundations, and c) noaidevuohta [sic] and the social role of the noaidi [sic].¹⁰⁶ However, we need to be careful in linking ethnographic sources (from the seventeenth century at the earliest) with written sources (from the twelfth century at the earliest) depicting the pre-

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¹⁰³ Stefan Brink, “How Uniform was the Old Norse Religion?,” in Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 105–36.
¹⁰⁴ Spangen, Circling Concepts, 70.
¹⁰⁵ See sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.3.
¹⁰⁶ Price, Viking Way, 198.
ceding centuries. I do nevertheless agree that by comparing the written sources from both the early modern and medieval periods with the archaeological material, certain continuities and overarching features can be traced. These features generally indicate that the medieval Saami worldview was animistic, regionally varied, and included ritual performance.\(^\text{107}\)

As already mentioned, the *Eiðsivaþingslǫg* might help illuminate Saami ritual practice, at least in eastern Norway. The law code, possibly in use from the mid-twelfth century, states that no person should seek out or believe in the power and magic of the Saami, their drum, “root,” or sacrifice.\(^\text{108}\) The drum mentioned in the *Eiðsivaþingslǫg* is comparable to the decorated object described in the mid-to-late twelfth-century text *Historia Norwegie*, and the drum seems to have been used for ritual practices.\(^\text{109}\) The ceremonial drum could be used as a tool to enter a trance and for divinatory purposes by interpreting the movement of an item placed on the surface in relation to the symbols painted on it.\(^\text{110}\) Unfortunately, during the 1600–1700s and later, many drums were collected and destroyed by missionaries representing the Nordic nation states’ ambitions to convert the Saami to Christianity and root out their “devilry.”\(^\text{111}\) The law code also prohibits the belief in “blót” [sacrifice] and “rót” [root of a tree]. The “rót” may refer to a holy place dedicated to sacrifice in Saami tradition, a so-called *sieidi*, typically an unusually shaped or anthropomorphic rock, but sometimes also a manipulated wooden figure or a tree, in accordance with later historical and ethnographic sources. While the law code is the only written source directly associating the Saami with this type of *sieidi*, a potential link can be found in the conversion narrative of the Guðbrandsdalr farmers in Heimskringla’s *Ólafs saga helga* mentioned above.\(^\text{112}\) The Guðbrandsdalr area falls under the southern region associated with the Saami in the Norse sources and the similarities to *sieidi* worship is therefore noteworthy. In addition, the conversion narrative directly mirrors that of Snæfríðr’s corpse discussed above, relating the destruction of a wooden effigy idolised by the farmers which leads to the outpouring of different unwanted animals.\(^\text{113}\) As
has become increasingly visible in recent scholarship, the Norse (in this instance Norwegians) and the Saami lived in close contact, and it is not unlikely that Saami cult or ritual performance spread amongst or influenced the Norse. Potentially, a shared belief system might have come about in some areas, based on the fluidity and closeness of the cultures and similarities in worldviews.

Sociology theorises that people come to think alike when they find themselves in comparable situations, allowing the possibility of a blending of “religious” fields following meetings of cultures. Symbols do not necessarily represent the same meaning in different cultures or even in parts of the same culture, indicating that while an influence is evident, it forms part of a new contextual framework. Nevertheless, the fact that this “blending” of different ritual aspects may be evident in these texts indicates close contact, specifically through the portrayal of Norse people seeking out Saami “magic.” The fact that the Saami reportedly allow visits from the Norse to their ceremonial places or homes, is in my opinion indicative of established bonds of trust. Norse actors repeatedly seek out the Saami, and were presumably welcomed by the Saami ritual performers, meaning that there were expectations associated with these visits. These expectations carry with them both cultural knowledge and stereotypes, which were founded on rumours, observations of, and participation in Saami ritual performances, particularly evident in the *semsveinar*-episode of *Vatnsdæla saga* and the *gandus*-episode in *Historia Norwegie*. Saami ritual practice is expected and well known across the medieval texts, with some archaeological material as well as historical and ethnographic sources from later in the early modern period backing up the texts. This once again points to less rigid sociocultural boundaries between the Norse and the Saami and reflects close connections between the cultures in certain areas. While the source material follows traditional stereotypes associated with the ritual performance of Saami characters, I would also like to emphasise the regional variation that will have been evident and that the above examples are based on the perceptions of the contributors to these texts.

### 3.2.2 *Finnr skríðr*: Winter Weather and Skiing Deities

Saami expertise in skiing and associations with winter weather appear as general tendencies across Norse texts. According to Hansen and Olsen, these associations

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are “element[s] in Norse people’s ethnic stereotyping of the Saami.”¹¹⁷ This stereotyping is particularly clear in the aforementioned Icelandic oath *trygðamál*, which states the expected and normal in Norse society, including the motif “fiðr scríðr” [the Saami skis].¹¹⁸ This motif appears to have become widespread from the sixth century onwards, with the addition of the precursor “skiing” to the exonym associated with the Saami by European writers.¹¹⁹ *Historia Norwegie* clarifies the association between the group and skiing, stating that the Saami travelled:

\[
\text{inponentes leuigatis asseribus pedibus subfixis, quot instrumentum “ondros” appellant, et per condensa niulium ac deuexa moncium agitantibus ceruis cum coniugibus et parulis aueuelo\textsuperscript{c}ius trasferuntur:}
\]

\[
\text{with smooth planks fastened beneath their feet, implements which they call “ondrar,” swifter than birds they are conveyed with their wives and little ones, swept forward by their reindeer across the packed snow and down the mountain slopes.}
\]

The usage of the word “ondrar” is peculiar, as it is originally a Norse word for a particular type of ski, a word most often associated with the areas of Østerdalen, Trøndelag, and the neighbouring Swedish districts.¹²¹ The apparent Saami usage of the Norse word for a particular type of skiing is noteworthy and indicates that Saami people, at least in the eyes of the learned elite, had adopted Norse words for an activity most commonly associated with themselves, minimally indicating some sort of linguistic contact as well as probabilities of bilingualism. The word is repeated in the description of the *ǫndurdís Skaði*, whose skiing abilities accentuate her “Saami-ness.”¹²² When Eiríkr blóðøx encounters Gunnhildr in Finnmǫrk, as related in Heimskringla, she explains that the Saami men she stayed with were so able on skis that neither animals nor humans could escape them.¹²³

Adam of Bremen even claims that Saami livelihoods depended on the winter since they could outrun wild animals in the snow and thereby provide sustenance

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¹¹⁸ Vilhjálmur Finsen, ed., *Grágás 1852: Konungsbók* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1974), 206–7. The oath is also found in *Grettis saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga*. See section 2.4.2.
¹¹⁹ Procopius (550: *skrithifinnoi*), Jordanes (555: *scretefennae*), Ravennese cleric (700s: *skridefenni*), Paulus Diaconus (780: *scritobiinii*), Alfred (890: *scridefinne*), Adam of Bremen (1060s: *scritefini*), Saxo (1200s: *Skritfinni*). See section 2.2. Norse sources maintain the *finn*-tradition throughout.
¹²⁰ *HN*, 58–59. Saxo writes that the *skritfinni* travelled on curved boards that they used to race across the snowfields between mountains, 343.
¹²² *Hkr* 1, 22.
¹²³ *Hkr* 1, 135.
The association is furthered by Saxo who relates the defeat of the legendary Swedish-Danish King Ragnarr løbrók due to the skiing abilities of a Saami group. As mentioned in chapter 2, a man discussing border politics in Gautelfr expresses “Snæliga snuggir, sveinar”, kvæðu Finnar” [“There’s a whiff of snow,” said the Saami], maintaining the importance of the snow motif when referring to the Saami. Eyvindr skáldaspillir’s lausavisur 12, reportedly recited in the tenth century, enhances the motif by connecting it to the severe famine in Hálogaland which saw its inhabitants keeping their goats inside during the summer due to unpredictable snow, as the Saami did.

References to the Saami in connection with snow and winter weather can be found in the descriptions of semi-mythological characters portrayed as Saami royalty. These characters have names associated with snow such as Snær [snow], Mjoll [fine, powdery snow], Drífa [snowdrift], Frosti [frost], and Porri [dry frost], and appear across the saga genres. In Heimskringla’s Ynglinga saga, the Uppsalian king Vanlandi travels north to the country of the Saami, to marry Drífa, the daughter of Snjár hinum gamli. In Sturlaugss saga Starfsama, King Snær is portrayed as the father of Mjoll and the characters are directly described as Saami. The association between the Saami and winter weather is particularly clear in the portrayal of the Saami “princess” Snæfríðr, whose name literally means “beautiful snow.” In Hrólf’s saga kraka, the Saami queen Hvít [“white”] calls forth similar associations.

While some scholars emphasise the associations between dwellers of cold, snowy, and barren areas with forces of destruction and chaos connected to the dangers of wintertime, Norse descriptions of the Saami rarely portray such a
connection as negative. In fact, the associations between the Saami and winter weather are most often positive. Able to traverse snowy mountainsides and manoeuvre packed snow and steep slopes, the Saami are portrayed as particularly good skiers and masters of the cold weather. As will be discussed in chapter 5, the portrayal of the trade with the Saami most often takes place in the winter season, meaning that direct interactions and/or observations between the Norse and the Saami, at least in certain areas, occurred during the cold season. The motif occurs across the genres and survives from the sixth century onwards, demonstrating a manifested association between the group and winter, and everything it brought with it.

3.2.3 Finns rauð gjold: Archery and Hunting

The Saami are repeatedly associated with hunting and archery from the classical sources onwards, with both men and women portrayed as hunting with bone-tipped arrows. An extract from Historia Norwegie demonstrates that this perception survived into the late twelfth century: “Sunt equidem uenatores peritissimi, soliuagi et instabiles” [They are truly the most skilful of huntsmen, patrolling alone and always on the move]. Likewise, when Eiríkr blóðøx meets Gunnhildr in Finnmork, she explains that the Saami men she was staying with to learn magic were away hunting with their bows.

Archery is the sole hunting technique associated with the Saami in Norse narration, with several texts stressing the expertise of Saami archers. In Ketils saga hœngs, Ketil overwinters with his Saami family somewhere in Finnmœrk and takes the opportunity to hunt with and learn archery from his Saami father-in-law. In Qrvar-Odds saga, the archery motif is further enhanced by Oddr’s nickname “Qrvar,” meaning arrows, from the magical Saami arrows he inherited from his father. The association between the Saami and archery was so predominant it manifested in the Norse name “Finnbogi” [Finnr (Saami) + bogi (bow)]. In the

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133 See section 2.2.
134 HN, 58–59.
135 Hkr 1, 135.
136 Ket, 118. This skill comes in handy later, when his wife’s uncle Gusir challenge him to an archery duel.
137 Qrv, 173. The archery motif is continued in the nicknaming of Oddr’s son, An, called “bogsveigs” [bow-bender].
138 See for example Finnboga saga ramma. Juoksa is the Saami equivalent of the name, meaning “bow.”
skaldic poetry mentioned in section 2.7.2, textual motifs directly associated with the Saami are utilised by the skalds to create kennings for arrows.\textsuperscript{139} Similarly, the Saami portrayal of the skiing deity Skaði is enhanced by, among other abilities and features, her archery skills. Characters with implicit Saami descent sometimes “inherit” skills in archery,\textsuperscript{140} but most clearly, Saami characters in the texts are portrayed as being skilful archers. \textit{Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar} portrays the Saami king Flóki as extremely capable with a bow and arrow, shooting three arrows at once, each killing a man.\textsuperscript{141} Several portrayals of the “stereotypical” Saami character Finnr litli describes him as skilled in the mixing of potions, quick on his feet, a good skier; but mostly, an excellent archer.\textsuperscript{142} Furthermore, when we meet the aforementioned Saami man Fedming in northern Hálogaland, he is lying in a birch forest in a trance-like state, with his bow by his side.\textsuperscript{143} In the stories relating the possible Saami huntsman Átti inn dølski from Vermalandi (Värmland), he is described as an expert huntsman, aided by his skis and his skills in archery.\textsuperscript{144}

A story narrated in Heimskringla’s \textit{Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar} relating the reported battle of Svölðr (somewhere in the Baltic Sea, circa 999/1000) uses the textual motif of Saami skills in archery as one of the catalysts behind King Óláfr’s downfall. An archer called Finnr, of whom “sumir segja at hann væri finnskr – sá var inn mesti bogmaðr” [some say he was Saami, he was the greatest archer], shoots an arrow that breaks the bow of the king’s own archer.\textsuperscript{145} The king asks what the sound made from the bow was, and his own archer replies “Nóregr ór hendi þér, konungr” [Norway snapping out of your hands, King].\textsuperscript{146} The king is then defeated. In the aforementioned episode in Heimskringla when King Óláfr Haraldsson goes on a harrying trip to Finnland, \textit{Óláfs saga helga} explains that he was met by hostile Saami people in the forests using weather magic and archery to hinder the advances of the king and his crew.\textsuperscript{147} Similarly, in \textit{Landnámabók}, Gunnsteinn is reportedly shot by a Saami arrow.\textsuperscript{148}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{139} See section 2.7.2.  \\
\textsuperscript{140} See for example \textit{Orms þáttur Stórólfssonar}.  \\
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Hálfd}Eyst, 541.  \\
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Hkr} 2, 120.  \\
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{IA}, 286–7.  \\
\textsuperscript{144} See section 7.4.3.  \\
\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Hkr} 1, 362.  \\
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Hkr} 1, 363. See also \textit{Mesta} 2, 168, elaborated in section 7.4.1.  \\
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Hkr} 2, 11. Finnland will be further discussed in section 4.3.2.  \\
\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Ldn}, 366.  \\
\end{flushleft}
Sometimes, the texts manipulate the Saami archery trope by associating it with the ability to magically shoot arrows from one’s fingers, as related in *Språk saga sterka*: “en svá þìttí mònnum, sem ör flýgi af hverjum þeirra fingri, ok fyrir hverri ör maðr til dauða kjörinn” [it appeared to men as if an arrow flew from each of their fingers, and a man was marked for death from each arrow].¹⁴⁹ The local Hålogaland deity Þorgerðr Hòlgabrúðr, alongside her sister, is also portrayed as exercising this skill, depicted as appearing on the deck of Hákon Hlaðajarl during the reported battle of Hjörungavágr [Hjørungavåg, late tenth century].¹⁵⁰ The ability to shoot arrows from one’s fingers might be a textual motif connected to the Norse perception of northeastern peoples, since it is also the case in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, which sees the king and priestess of Bjálkaland (literally “Fur land”), as well as the mysterious king of Novgorod, shooting arrows from each finger.¹⁵¹ However, in *Hrólf’s saga kraka*, the motif is transferred to a wild boar, shooting arrows from each bristle.¹⁵²

In Norse texts, Saami expertise in archery is connected to hunting, warfare, and magic. Archery as a textual motif associated with the Saami is most likely based on observations of Saami culture and lifestyles, reflecting the importance of hunting to medieval Saami societies. Archaeological material suggests that hunting was the most important subsistence strategy among early medieval Saami groups.¹⁵³ The deposition of arrowheads, primarily of bone (circa AD 0–600), in Saami burial contexts terminates prior to the early medieval period, with the tradition of deposition moving to sacrificial sites early in the medieval period (600–1050).¹⁵⁴ Audhild Schanche and Inga Malene Bruun interpret the change of tradition as an archaeological expression of the separation of burial rites and the hunting cult as a result of changing cultural factors.¹⁵⁵ Initially being a crucial important subsistence strategy, Saami hunting skills and expertise grew into a large-scale economic industry connected to the Norse demand for fur and participation in the eastern trading network. I would suggest that the change from subsistence strategy

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¹⁴⁹ *SpråkSt*, 444.
¹⁵² *Hrólf*, 87–88.
to economic venture is crucial in the association between the Saami and archery, since archery is connected to hunting, and hunting to the Saami trade.

In the late ninth-century account, Othère observes that the Saami were engaged in hunting during the winter season and fished by the sea during the summers. His statement is supported by the several saga texts relating trade journeys into Finnmörk during the winter season, in addition to accounts stressing potentially shared fishing industries, presumably taking place in the summer. Throughout the account, the Saami are described as hunters, fishers, whalers, and fowlers, potentially herding reindeer and hunting wild animals for their fur and skins. The text claims that the Saami paid Othère and others like him with bird feathers, whale bones, walrus, and seal hide, as well as reindeer, marten, and bear skins. *Historia Norwegie* further elaborates on the animals hunted by the Saami and lists bear, wolf, lynx, fox, sable, otter, badger, beaver, squirrel, and ermine, while also stressing the importance of reindeer. This is reflected in the textual material, which particularly favours reindeer, wolves, and bears.

The Saami are possibly associated with the keeping or herding of reindeer from Paulus Diaconus’s late eighth-century text, but at least from the late ninth-century account of Othère and onwards. Othère’s account also adds that the Saami kept with them so-called stæl-reindeer, extremely valued by the group who used them to catch wild reindeer. In *Ketils saga hængs*, the Finnakonunga Gúsir is introduced in the narrative engulfed in wind-driven snow, riding a wagon drawn by two reindeer, maintaining the motif from *Historia Norwegie*. A story relating possible Saami ties describes how the mysterious mountain dweller Úlfur rescues the protagonists during a winter storm, attired in a reindeer cloak and carrying a reindeer on his back. The clearest association between the Saami and reindeer in the saga material is narrated in the stories revolving around the Hálogaland chieftain Þórir hundr: Þórir’s storyline as an antagonist to the Norwegian King Óláfr Haraldsson is founded on his relationships with different Saami groups, with one such perceived group granting him an impenetrable reindeer cloak as related in Heimskringla’s *Óláfs saga helga*. As already mentioned in sec-

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156 See for example *Eg*, 27, and for fishing, see sections 2.3.3 and 3.2.4.
158 *HN*, 59–61.
160 *OEH*, 39–41.
162 *Fær*, 23. See section 7.4.1.
163 *Hkr* 2, 344–5.
tion 2.7.2, the association between the Saami and reindeer, specifically the chronology for the Saami domestication of reindeer, is still a hot topic in contemporary scholarship. Recent archaeological interpretations of medieval Saami dwelling sites in northern Finland suggests the presence of working reindeer in Saami contexts from as early as the fourteenth century onwards.\textsuperscript{164} This is the earliest direct evidence for draught reindeer use by the Saami in the archaeological record, as far as I am aware, but it should be noted that the late ninth-century account of Öthere may point to earlier use of draught reindeer. It should also be noted that the development of reindeer herding was a gradual and regional varied process and may have roots in the period prior to the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{165} Jostein Bergstøl, amongst others, argues that adaptation to reindeer herding among Saami groups was a response to the intensification of contact between Norse and Saami peoples prior to, and early in, the medieval period, due to increased trading (which was focused on Saami fur specialisation).\textsuperscript{166} Recent research has also highlighted the presence of early medieval reindeer trapping systems in Hedmark in southern Norway, of which possible Saami origins have been suggested.\textsuperscript{167} The cultural affiliation of these trapping systems are nonetheless difficult to determine, and the authors state the importance of further discussion on the relationship of Saami and Norse cultures in the south and the extent to which the groups may have cooperated in hunting activities.\textsuperscript{168} The possibility of this cooperation is significant, especially considering the factors that will be discussed in chapter 7.

Although following the same pattern of events as Heimskringla, \textit{Helgisaga} states that the Saami cloaks granted king Óláfr were made from wolfskin, not reindeer skin.\textsuperscript{169} In the late fourteenth-century \textit{Hauks þáttr hábrókar}, the Hálogalandier Vígharðr is introduced as he elegantly skis down a steep mountainside dressed

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{165}] Salmi et al., “Domesticated Reindeer,” 13.
\item[\textsuperscript{168}] Amundsen and Os, “Trapping Systems,” 30.
\item[\textsuperscript{169}] \textit{Helgisaga}, 69–70.
\end{itemize}
in wolfskin, and in *Hrólfss saga kraka*, the Saami queen Hvít wears wolfskin gloves when she strikes her stepson and thereby curses him to become a bear.\(^{170}\)

An animal often associated with the Saami in the textual material is the bear. Lyonel Perabo notes that the animal is nearly exclusively associated with the far north and a Saami context in saga literature, particularly if the ursine interaction forms part of a supernatural motif.\(^{171}\) Rarely, the bear is portrayed as a source of meat, and if it is, its consumers are predominantly Saami.\(^{172}\) In *Völundarkviða*, one of the mythological poems found in the *Poetic Edda*, Völundr returns from hunting (with a bow) with a bear and prepares the meat, consuming it while lying on the animal’s fur.\(^{173}\) As discussed earlier, Völundr is sometimes interpreted as a Saami character; the hunt and following consumption of the meat accentuates such an association. In my opinion, the clearest connection between the ursine species and the Saami can be found in *Hrólfss saga kraka*. As mentioned previously, the *fornaldarsaga* relates the curse put on Björn by his Saami stepmother Hvít, turning him into a bear. After some time as a bear, Björn is encircled by hunters and killed on the orders of his stepmother, who holds a celebratory bear feast where the meat is served.\(^{174}\) Björn’s pregnant lover, Bera, is forced by the queen to eat the meat, resulting in her three sons having supernatural features and abilities.\(^{175}\) Due to this, Bera and Björn’s son Bödvarr later reportedly shapeshifts into a bear during the battle of Hleiðargarðr.\(^{176}\)

In recent years, multiple scholars have emphasised the similarities between the bear hunt and bear-shapeshifting episodes in *Hrólfss saga* with the central place of the bear in early modern and medieval Saami mythology and world-views.\(^{177}\) Based on the archaeological material discussed below, Hansen and Olsen state that “the bear was sacred to the Saami, and the hunt, the subsequent bear feast, and the burial of its bones were all associated with various rituals.”\(^{178}\)

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\(^{171}\) Perabo, *Heathens*, 168.

\(^{172}\) *Hrólfss saga Gautrekssonar* is an exception.


\(^{174}\) *Hrólf*, 52–54. The pun on the name “Björn” [bear] is also utilised in *Helgisaga*. As Þórir hundr attacks one of King Óláfr’s men, Björn, during the battle of Stiklastaðir, he exclaims: “sva bæitum ver biarnuna a morkenne norðr” [this is how we hunt bears in Finnmörk], 70.

\(^{175}\) One half-elk, one with feet like a dog, and one with an ursine nature.

\(^{176}\) These names all mean bear; emphasising the ursine theme.


\(^{178}\) Hansen and Olsen, *Hunters*, 120.
Already introduced in the third and fourth century as interpreted by archaeologists, a special ritual practice associated with the bear hunt and bear burials becomes particularly visible and widespread across Saami areas early in the medieval period. Particularly evident in archaeologically expressed border zones between Norse and Saami settlements in northern Norway, the ceremonial burial of bears is believed to represent the symbiotic relationship shared with the species in Saami mythology, where the ultimate goal was the resurrection of the animal and its communication with other members of its species of its well treatment by humans. This was facilitated through a carefully executed hunt, strict performance following the slaying and flaying of the animal, the preparation of the meat, and the subsequent bear feast, before its bones were buried anatomically correctly.

Only documented in written sources from the early seventeenth century onwards, descriptions of the Saami bear hunt are remarkably similar to the bear hunt incident in *Hrólf’s saga*. In short, the saga relates that before Björn is encircled by the hunters, he places a ring under his left arm in order to be identified after his death to expose Hvít’s wickedness. Following his death, Bera retrieves the ring before the animal is carefully flayed by the hunters, bringing the meat to Hvít who holds a celebratory bear feast culminating in the consumption of the meat. In the 1755 work *Kort berättelse om Lapparnas björne-fänge* [A short account of the bear hunt of the Saami], Pehr Fjellström relates the aetiological legend of Saami bear rites, based on first hand experience and relations with Saami people in northern Sweden. Here, Fjellström narrates a story where a bear asks his human wife to fasten a piece of brass on his brow in order to distinguish himself from other bears and so that his human son would not kill him during the hunt. During the hunt his wife is unable to watch as her husband is killed but catches a glimpse during the flaying of the animal. Fjellström uses this as an explanation for the restrictions associated with women and the ritual, only allowed to view the bear or its hunters through a brass ring or with their faces hidden. I remain cautious of comparing early modern sources with medieval sources but agree that the...
similarities between the incident in *Hrólfs saga* and Fjellström’s eighteenth-century description of Saami bear rites are striking.

As expressed literarily and archaeologically, the bear occupied an important role in medieval Saami societies and there were strictly regulated rituals connected to the bear hunt and the succeeding treatment of the bear. Given the close and sometimes intimate relations between different Norse and Saami groups in certain areas, I would argue that it is not unlikely that some or several Norse actors were at least familiar with the ceremonial practice. After time, this might have developed into a textual motif associating the Saami with the bear. In *Finnboga saga ramma*, the protagonist Finnbogi sets off to kill a particularly bothersome bear in Halogaland. Perabo has emphasised the nearly ceremonial and complex deference directed at the hunting of the bear.¹⁸⁵ As Finnbogi approaches the animal’s cave, he carefully walks backwards while talking to the bear, before throwing away his weapons and fighting barehanded, breaking the animal’s back on a boulder.¹⁸⁶ Arriving in town with the body of the bear, Finnbogi refuses to relate how he went about the hunt and the killing, leaving the villagers to flay the bear.¹⁸⁷ The motif is extended further in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, when Oddr kills a bear in Finnmork, flaying it, and raising the skin on a pole.¹⁸⁸ Later, Oddr uses the raised bearskin to scare off a female troll, by putting burning coals in its mouth and hiding beneath it, before shooting the troll three times with his magical Saami arrows.¹⁸⁹ Considering the recurring textual motif associating the Saami with the bear, this instance, while differing from the other bear hunt episodes, may purvey Norse observations and perceptions of the Saami bear cult.

Following magic, archery is probably the textual motif repeated most often in the narration of the Saami in Norse sources. The repetition allows for the motif to evolve, starting with depictions of adept archers, to magically skilled archers able to hunt big beasts, project arrows from their fingertips, and shoot several arrows at once, each hitting its target. Norse observation of, or participation in, Saami lifestyles reveals that hunting must have been particularly significant to Saami societies in the medieval period. The textual portrayal, with early sources such as *Germania* narrating adept hunting societies to “later” sources such as Ohthere’s account and *Historia Norwegie* focusing on the large-scale hunting of big game, coincide with the archaeological material which suggests a change of tradition occur-

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¹⁸⁶ Finnb, 274–75.
¹⁸⁷ Finnb, 275.
¹⁸⁸ Ǫrv, 181.
¹⁸⁹ Ǫrv, 181, 306.
ring from the 700s onwards.¹⁹⁰ Hunting, initially primarily expressed as a subsistence strategy, grows into a large-scale industrial organisation connected to the Norse demand for fur and participation in the eastern trading network.¹⁹¹ The Norse textual tradition particularly emphasises the hunting by the Saami of reindeer (also herding), wolves, and bears, with a certain focus on the bear in association with Saami portrayals. Clive Tolley, amongst others, suggests that this association derives from the Norse knowledge or observation of Saami ceremonial activities connected to the bear hunt in medieval and early modern societies.¹⁹² Potential Saami influence is visible, I would argue, with some caution, in the fornaldarsaga relating the legend of King Hrólfr kraki, since the compiler(s) of the text has made the instigator of both the bear hunt and bear-shapeshifting episodes the Saami Hvít. Either rooted in Saami tradition or of the Norse knowledge of or perception of such a tradition, the connection between the Saami and the bear hunt, in addition to other cultural activities such as reindeer herding, fur preparation, and archery, should in my opinion be read as indicative of close social bonds between the groups.

3.2.4 Sinbundit skip: Saami Boatbuilding and Fishing Economies

Already from the mid-sixth century with Procopius’s De Bello Gothico, the Saami are associated with the binding of boats with animal sinew. This image is enhanced in Heimskringla’s Haraldssona saga, Morkinskinna, and Fagrskinna, all first compiled in the early thirteenth century. Here, the Norwegian pretender to the throne and alleged son of King Magnús berföttr, Sigurðr Slembidjákn, seeks Saami boatbuilding expertise in northern Norway, as related in Haraldssona saga:

Þann vetr, er sagt, at Sigurðr léti Finna gera sér skútur tvær inn í fjörðum ok váru sini bundnar ok engi saumr í, en viðjar fyrir kné, ok róru tólf menn á borð hvárrí. Sigurðr var með Finnum, þá er þeir gerðu skúturnar, ok þófðu Finnat þar mungát ok gerðu honum þar veižlu.¹⁹³

That winter, it is said, Sigurðr had the [Saami] build him two light ships deep in the fjord and they were fastened together with sinews and there were no nails in them, and withies instead of knees [under the beams], and they had twelve rowers on each side. Sigurðr stayed with the

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¹⁹³ Hkr 3, 311.
[Saami] while they were building the ships, and the [Saami] had beer there and put on a banquet there for him.¹⁹⁴

The extract emphasises the recognition of Saami boatbuilders in medieval society, perhaps due to the different technique using organic materials such as withies and sinew rather than metal.¹⁹⁵ Sigurðr allegedly composed a poem about the light going “sinbundit skip” [sinew-bound ship], praising its exceptionality.¹⁹⁶ In the archaeological material, sinew-bound (sewn) boats are mostly associated with the Saami, although the construction technique is hard to tie to any specific ethnic group.¹⁹⁷ It should be mentioned that although sewn boats cannot be said to be exclusively Saami, Saami boats are traditionally sewn, not riveted (which is associated with Norse shipbuilding). In some cases, sinew-bound boats found in northern Norway and Sweden have been found to show affiliation to both Saami and Norse cultures, and may be read as expressing culturally fluid identities.¹⁹⁸ The textual tradition, however, seems to exclusively associate sinew-bound boats with the Saami.

Saami fishing economies are also highlighted, first mentioned by Óthhere at the court of King Alfred at the end of the ninth century, stating that the Finnas fished during the summer.¹⁹⁹ The section of Historia Norwegie concerning “De Finnis” [the Saami] from the mid-to-late twelfth-century, furthers the textual motif associating the Saami with fishing by accentuating nearly magical expertise and shared fishing economies with the Norse:

 Item dum Finni unacum christianis gregem squamigeram hamo carpere attemptassent, quos in casis fidelium pagani perspexerant, sacculis fere plenis unco suo de abysso attractis scapham cum piscibus impleuerunt.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁴ “Hkr 3,” 191.
¹⁹⁵ On the archaeology of sewn boats associated with the Saami, see Gunilla Larsson, Ship and Society: Maritime Ideology in Late Iron Age Sweden, AUN 67 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2007), 121–25.
¹⁹⁶ Mork 2, 194.
¹⁹⁹ Hansen and Olsen, Hunters, 55.
²⁰⁰ HN, 62.
Again, when the [Saami], together with the Christians, had gone about catching by hook a flock of fish such as these heathens had seen in Christian dwellings, they drew almost full traps out of the deeps with their wand, and so loaded the boats to capacity.²⁰¹

Shared fishing economies are also hinted at in the mid-to-late twelfth-century Passio Olavi mentioned in chapter 2.3.3, which sees the contrast between the success of Christian Norwegian fishermen with that of the heathen Saami.²⁰² Fishing, both in coastal areas and in lakes and watercourses of the interior, must have been an important sustenance activity for medieval Saami groups. Fishing in coastal fjords, as expressed by Ohthere, could have featured prominently in seasonal migratory patterns and formed part of the summer activities.²⁰³ Later in the medieval period and onwards, different Saami groups living along the northern Norwegian coastal zone became increasingly involved with the large-scale Bergen industry and traded both dried and salted fish.²⁰⁴ It has also been suggested that Saami people living along the coast of what is today northern Norway functioned as the primary suppliers of whale oil and walrus ropes from before the medieval period and onwards.²⁰⁵

Norse accounts exclusively associate sinew-bound boats with the Saami. Fishing, on the other hand, is not primarily associated with either the Norse or the Saami. However, the accounts ranging from the late ninth century to later in the medieval period describing fishing as both a subsistence activity and large-scale economy among coastal Saami groups should, according to my way of thinking, be understood as based on real life observations of Saami lifestyles. The portrayal of shared fishing economies between the Norse and the Saami in northern Norway, found in two late twelfth century texts, further this claim and demonstrate close connections between the Christian Norse population and different coastal Saami groups. Overall, these accounts can help illuminate or emphasise the long history of different Sea Saami communities, touched upon in footnote 54 (chapter 1).

²⁰¹ HN, 63.
²⁰⁴ Hansen and Olsen, Hunters, 154, 174.
3.2.5 Appearance and Accommodation

There are few defining physical characteristics associated with Saami characters across the textual material. In the following section, I aim to account for these characteristics and the context in which they appear, in addition to discussing the dwelling spaces associated with the Saami across the source material.

*Ketils saga hængs* states that Brúni’s Saami visitors were “eigi mjóleitir” [not narrow faced] and Hrafnhildr is described as having an “álnarbreitt andlit” [face as broad as an ell].\(^{206}\) *Ketils saga* is the only medieval source, as far as I am aware, that describe the Saami in this manner, and it should be noted that these descriptions are most likely tied to a Norse need expressed later in the medieval period to Other Saami characters or characters from the far north. With that in mind, it should be mentioned that being broad or wide in general seems to be a common stereotype associated with far northern or otherwise supernatural characters in the *fornaldarsögur*,\(^{207}\) and so the above description may be a result of this association given the genre of *Ketils saga*. Nevertheless, the connection between Saami characters and broad faces specifically should be treated with caution, especially since such a connection was used in the harmful and racist colonial race-biological research on Saami people up until the twentieth century.\(^{208}\) It should therefore be repeated that there is no expected or recurrent association between, or any medieval stereotype connected to, the Saami and broad faces in the medieval source material, and that *Ketils saga* is an anomaly. I would therefore argue that the descriptions associated with the Saami visitors and Hrafnhildr; occurring somewhere in Finnmørk, should be read as representative of tendencies associated with the *fornaldarsögur* to describe far northern characters as having broad or wide appearances.

In *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, the presence of Saami characters during the conception of Grímr apparently leads to a change in his own facial features: he is born with a hairy birthmark on his cheek (that no iron could bite), which grants him the nickname *lóðinkinna* [hairy cheek].\(^{209}\) However, the Saami connection only appears in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, and the other texts relating Grímr and his birthmark simply mention he has one.\(^{210}\)

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\(^{207}\) See for example the descriptions of the supernatural creatures in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* and *Hjálmbés saga ok Ólvis*, in Carl Christian Rafn, ed. *Fornaldar sögur nordrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Ennu Popsku, 1829–30), 372–73, 471–73.

\(^{208}\) See section 1.1.2.

\(^{209}\) *Ǫrv*, 161.

\(^{210}\) *Ket*, 123. *GrL*, 143.
Saami characters are described as both short and tall.²¹¹ In other words, there is no consensus in the textual tradition regarding the heights of Saami characters. Else Mundal nevertheless writes that the Saami “were shorter than their Nordic neighbours,” without backing up this statement in any way, and it is unclear whether she refers to descriptions in the texts themselves or assumptions about the actual heights of medieval people.²¹² More worryingly, Hilda Radzin compares the portrayal of thralls in the Eddic poem *Rígsþula* to that of (her perceived) physical traits of Saami people:

The Skald describes the thralls as having black hair; and an unsightly countenance, thick ankles, coarse fingers, and as being of a low and deformed stature; these are physiological traits characteristic of the [Saami], who were probably reduced to a state of vassalage by their Scandinavian conquerors.²¹³

Radzin’s claim that the Saami are of “deformed stature” is clearly problematic and very vividly reflects common colonial and racist assumptions about the Saami, particularly prior to the postcolonial “reform” in the 1980s. While these assumptions have been largely debunked and are unacceptable in scholarship today, an inherent problem lies in the fact that research concerning the Saami within Norse or Medieval Studies is a small field and that harmful ideas about the Saami may be repeated through uncritical referencing of earlier scholarship.²¹⁴

As discussed in the introduction, racial discrimination against the Saami was based on an amalgamation of nationalism and colonialism backed up by scientific theories like Social Darwinism which had grown in popularity in the late nineteenth century. Together, these views supported the notions of the “Nordic race” as superior and as the evolutionary “peak” in Fennoscandia, whereas the Saami were viewed as inferior and nonevolving.²¹⁵ Measurements of the length and width of human skulls was seen as one of the most efficient ways of asserting racial belonging, with “langskaller” [long narrow craniums] equating to Nordic supe-

²¹¹ See for example *Hkr* 2, 120 (Finnr litli) and *Ket*, 118 (Hrafnhildr).
²¹⁴ See sections 1.1.2 and 1.2.
riority and the “kortskaller” [short broad craniums] equating to Saami inferiority.²¹⁶ Through the identification and categorisation of “typical” Saami and Nordic characteristics, prevalent until the Second World War, the mistreatment of and discrimination against the Saami was grounded in ideas of the superiority of the “Nordic race.” Since the skull measurements and racial discrimination against the Saami people is still a sensitive and relevant topic in contemporary society,²¹⁷ scholars cannot simply let descriptions such as the ones conferred upon Hrafnhildr and Brúni’s visitors stand unproblematised. A careless focus on the Saami as looking a certain way, regarding height, skin colour, and facial features is unhelpful and endorses colonial and ethnographic approaches supporting the previously strong standing notion of the Saami people as static and inferior. It is particularly important that we actively reject these colonial approaches, since the majority of Saami people today have experienced discrimination based on ideas such as the ones mentioned above.²¹⁸ Rather, as scholars, we need to repeatedly emphasise, as I have done here, that there are no clear patterns associated with Saami physical appearance in either the classical or medieval sources. As a matter of fact, the most common descriptive marker associated with Saami characters in terms of physical appearance is beauty, a result of the abundance of incidents involving Saami women, often marrying Norse men.²¹⁹

The clothing of Saami characters is rarely mentioned, and not more than that of “Norse” characters. When it is emphasised, such as for the woman knowledgeable in magic in Vatnsdæla saga, it is usually to accentuate grandeur and high status.²²⁰ However, a few common denominators appear. Already from Tacitus’s Germania from the end of the first century, the Saami are portrayed as dressing in animal skins, something which is reiterated in 780 by Paulus Diaconus.²²¹ The saga texts sometimes associate the Saami with clothing made from reindeer- or wolfskin.²²² Hermann Pálsson assumes that the nickname and garment skinnkyrtill [skin-tunic] is an indication that the person associated with it is portrayed as

²¹⁶ Schanche, “Knoklenes verdi,” 104.
²²⁰ Vatn, 30.
²²² Mesta 2, 98.
These instances never occur when a character is explicitly portrayed as Saami, but during meetings with the “extreme Other” in the far north, often with so-called “trolls.” One should therefore be careful with a simple assumption associating skinnyrtill-wearers with the Saami, since they are never exclusively mentioned together. Cloaks, however, are regularly associated with the Saami in Norse texts. The name of the Finnakonung Mottul literally means cloak in Old Norse, and Saami characters sometimes fashion magical cloaks impenetrable to weapons. The connection between the cloak and the Saami might lie in the mystery surrounding the “cloaked figure,” indicating something hidden and secret: the unknown. Lyonel Perabo has investigated the association between Saami ritual behaviour and the covering of the ritual performer with a cloak or a garment, claiming that “cloak rituals” in Norse society were direct borrowings from participation in, observation or knowledge of, Saami ritual performances. In Historia Norwegie, for example, the Saami ritual performer spreads out a cloak before initiating the ritual.

Regarding Saami dwelling spaces, the sagas predominantly portray the gammi [tent/(turf)-hut(s)]. The term itself is exclusively associated with the Saami in Norse narration, with one exception that I am aware of, being the chivalric Ædreks saga af Bern where the traditional Saami dwelling space houses a dwarf. Upon meeting King Haraldr in Ágrip and Haralds saga hárfagra, S vási introduces himself as “þann Finninn er hann hafði ját at setja gammar annan veg brekkunnar á Þoptyn, þar sem þá var konungrinn” [that Saami whom the king had allowed to set up his hut on the other side of the hill at Þoptyn, where the king then was]. The king later visits the gammi, where he
meets his future wife Snæfríðr. Similarly, when Eiríkr blóðøx first meets Gunnhildr, she is staying with her Saami mentors in a *gammi*. Staying at an anchorage somewhere on the northern coast of Finnmørk, Ærvar-Oddr and his crew observe Saami people in an abundance of “gamma á landi uppi” [huts on land]. In Oddr’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, the Saami man visited by the king is portrayed as living in a *gammi* in the mountains of Agdenes in Pröndalög. The most elaborate portrayal of life in the Saami dwelling spaces is related in the aforementioned accounts about Sigurðr slembidjákn and his stay with Saami people, here from Morkinskinna:

Gótt vas í gamma
þars vèr glaðir drukkum,
ok glaðr grams sonr
gekk meðal bekkja.
Vasa þar gamans vant
at gamansdrykkju;
þegn glætti þegn
þar lands sem var.

It was pleasant in the turf-hut where gladly we drank, and the glad-hearted son of the prince passed between the benches; there was no lack of cheer at the cheerful drinking, retainer delighted retainer, there as everywhere.

Allegedly composed in the early twelfth century by Sigurðr himself, the poem does not emphasise any “us” versus “them” differentiation between the Norse protagonist and the Saami actors, indicating close personal relations.

Although the term *gammi* is associated with the Saami in Norse narration, it is problematic to assume that this was the only dwelling structure appropriate and available for Saami actors in the medieval period. This assumption is prevalent in the contemporary majority culture’s view of and communication of traditional Saami lifestyles and is connected to majority cultural stereotypes about the “right” way to be Saami. It is therefore crucial to note that there are also exceptions in the saga material, portraying the Saami as living on farms. In *Ketils saga hœngs*,

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232 *Hkr* 1, 135–36.
233 *Ǫrv*, 174.
234 *Odds*, 187.
235 *Mork* 2, 193.
Ketill first meets his Saami father-in-law after finding his farm, somewhere in Finnmørk: “fann bæ; þar stóð maðr fyri dyrum ok klauf skíða, hann hét Brúni” [he found a farm and a man stood outside in front of the doors, chopping wood. His name was Brúni]. The fact that Saami groups sometimes preferred other dwelling spaces than the *gammi* is also insinuated in Gull-Ásu-bóðar þáttr; here from the version found in Morkinskinna, narrating the hostility between a Saami group and the Bjarkarey (Bjarkøy) chieftain Viðkunnr Jónsson: “Farið nú ok hittið Sigurð Hranason ok biðið hann hér koma, ok ef hann hefir nøkkura undansførslu þá minnið hann á þat hverr honum dugði best þá er Finnar tóku bú hans” [Go now and find Sigurðr Hranason, and tell him to come here. If he makes some pretext, remind him who helped him when the [Saami] seized his farm]. Naturally, there might have been other motivations behind the Saami group’s appropriation of Sigurðr’s farm than wanting to live on it, but it is important to emphasise nonetheless since it challenges the assumption of the *gammi* as the only acceptable Saami dwelling space in the medieval period.

An interesting term appears in the Flateyarbók version of Sneglu-Halla þáttur (its version in Morkinskinna is summarised in section 5.3.2). The Flateyarbók manuscript is an Icelandic manuscript compiled in the late fourteenth century. Here, the term “Bufinna” is used in a context relating the Saami trade, by Einarr fluga, son of the Hálogaland chieftain Hárekr ór Þjóttta. Einarr reportedly relates to King Haraldr harbráði that the trading he had done with “Bufinna edr fiskimenn” [settled Saami or fishermen] had been peaceful. The term búmaðr, discussed in more detail in section 4.2.1, is generally agreed to mean settled farmers, and as such, the term “bufinna” could therefore denote Saami people that settled as farmers. Knut Bergsland has identified two initial instances of the term in late fifteenth century legal texts (notably, from the West of Norway), in contexts clearly referring to farms settled by Saami people. Both Bergsland and Else Mundal therefore argue that the term as it appears in Sneglu-Halla þáttur should be understood in conjunction with the early modern designation búfinnar, which is com-

239 Ket, 117.

240 Mork 2, 111. “Mork,” 332. Sigurðr also appears in a Saami context in Æinga saga, see section 5.2.2.


242 Guðbrandr Vigfusson and Carl Richard Unger, eds., Flateyarbok: En samling af Norske Kongesagaer med indskude mindre Fortællinger om Begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler, vol. 3 (Christiania: PT. Mallings Forlagsboghandler, 1868), 422. See NGL 2, 491, for a possible legal description from the mid-to-late thirteenth century about a Saami farmer.

monly understood as Saami people that had settled in one place, as freeholders and fishermen.²⁴⁴ It is therefore likely that the appearance of the term in Flateyjarbók reflects the normality of Saami people having settled as farmers and/or being freeholders.

We should also not neglect the nature of cross-cultural societies and possibilities of cross-cultural relations. Marriages, fostering arrangements, and neighbourly visits occur across the saga material, and given the likelihood that these were reflections of the physical society at the time of composition, and cohabitation, whether on the stereotypical “Norse farm” or in a “Saami gammi,” or in a mix of both, is possible. I therefore argue that it would be a major simplification of medieval Fennoscandian society to maintain a dichotomy where Norse = the farm,²⁴⁵ and Saami = the gammi. Nevertheless, the gammi is a recurring textual motif associated with Saami dwelling spaces in Norse texts, and this repetition is most likely a reflection of Norse observations of Saami societies.

The gammi may also be mirrored in the archaeological material, which sees the emergence and manifestation of so-called “hearth row sites” in connection with material expressions of Saami identity from circa 800.²⁴⁶ Sven-Donald Hedman, Bjørnar Olsen, and Maria Vretemark define hearth row sites as “a set of three or more equally oriented and regularly interspaced hearths organized in a linear pattern.”²⁴⁷ The sites become numerous and widespread early in the medieval period, but discontinue abruptly around 1300. Their highly interregional appearance suggest that shared practices and common material features spread rapidly over a vast territory, appearing in northern Norway, Finland, and most likely the Kola peninsula, but are also found as far south as Aursjøen, close to Dovre.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Hansen and Olsen, Hunters, 31, 82. In the centuries just before the medieval period (c. 700–800), archaeologists have witnessed a change in settlement patterns and the arrival of material forms of expressions later interpreted as central to Saami culture, 90. See also Sven-Donald Hedman, Boplatser och offerplatser: Ekonominstrategi och boplatsmönster bland skogssamer 700–1600 AD, Studia Archaeologica Universitatis Umensis 17 (Umeå: University of Umeå, 2003).
²⁴⁸ Hedman et al., 3. Jostein Bergstøl, Samer i Østerdalen? En studie av etnisitet i jernalderen og middelalderen i det nordøstre Hedmark, Acta Humaniora 325 (Oslo: Unipub, 2008), 141–42. Hege Skalleberg Gjerde has even suggested that the hearth row sites can be found as far south as Hallingdal; “Samiske tufer i Hallingdal?”, in Viking, ed. Ellen Høigård Hofseth and Egil Mikkelsen, Norsk arkeologisk årbok, vol. 42 (Oslo: Norsk arkeologiske selskap, 2009), 207. For a general overview of hearth-row sites, see Petri Halinen and Bjørnar Olsen, eds., In Search of Hearths: A
This distribution is mirrored in the saga material, which portrays Saami *gammi* in Bjarmaland (most likely the Kola peninsula, see discussion in chapter 4), Finnmörk, Hålogaland, and in Dofri. Usually rectangular and consisting of 3–8 hearths, the sites were solidly built by large frame stones and compact stone packing “within” the space, and show traces of intense firing which indicate they were most probably used as dwelling spaces. As there are no evident traces of possible superstructures like post holes and walls, evidence such as the spatial pattern, distribution of finds, cultural layers, and soil chemicals suggest the hearths formed parts of circular dwelling structures, most likely tents. While earlier dwelling sites are usually found along the shores of lakes and larger rivers, the hearth row sites normally appear in forest areas away from or not in relation to large bodies of water, “situated in dry moraine outcrops in marsh areas, on forested terraces or next to small creeks and tarns often surrounded by heathland rich in reindeer lichen.” The appearance of the sites is sometimes linked to possible changes in reindeer economy from hunting to herding due to its ideal location for winter pastures, although a blend of strategies has been proposed and seems more likely, particularly when keeping the saga material in mind.

There are no clear patterns associated with Saami physical appearance, with the exception of beauty, in the source material I have analysed. Saami characters are described in various ways, and according to my way of thinking, these diverse descriptions accentuate the normalised presence of Saami people in Norse society. The clothing of Saami characters is also diverse, with cloaks and clothes made from reindeer- and wolfskin being repeatedly emphasised. The *gammi* is the predominant dwelling site associated with the Saami in Norse texts, although there are ex-

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249 Bos, 210; Hkr 1, 135–36; Mork 2, 193; Ágr; 4–5.

250 Hedman et al., 3.

251 Hedman et al., 3.

252 Hedman et al., 3.

253 Inger Storli, “Sami Viking Age Pastoralism: Or the Fur Trade Paradigm Reconsidered,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 26, no. 1 (1993): 1–20. This is also stirred by the appearance of so-called Stallo-sites which are similar spatially organised sites coming into use at the same time in the northern Norwegian and northern Swedish mountain region.

254 Hedman et al. suggest the possibility of the inhabitants of the hearth row sites as being both hunters and herders of reindeer, mixing different strategies, also incorporating farm animals such as sheep, 2–3. In Eyvindr Finnsson’s *lausavísa* 12, it is insinuated that the Saami sometimes kept sheep (or goat).
amples of Saami living on farms. Overall, the portrayal of the appearance and accommodation of Saami character is multifaceted across Norse texts.

3.3 Conclusion

The Saami Motif-Cluster is formed by associations grounded in real life interactions, experiences, observations, perceptions, expectations, and stereotypes, utilised in the textual tradition to portray the Saami. These allude to the Saami by Oth-er-ing through connotations with magic, supernatural beings, the winter season, hunting and archery, and forest animals such as bears and wolves. The narrative is consistent across the saga genres and in other medieval texts. I therefore suggest that when overlapping in the right contextual situations, the Saami Motif-Cluster welcomes Saami allusions and therefore sometimes enables the identification of the Saami in the source material. As will be discussed in the following chapters, this can also include the portrayal of characters that are never explicitly described as Saami. While these textual tropes allow the identification of Saami characters in the texts, it is also crucial to emphasise their nature as stereotypes based on perceptions with varying degrees of distance to actual interaction and experiences with Saami peoples. The sources on the Saami are written by others than themselves for others than themselves and depending on the source and the ideology behind it, are sometimes subject to over-exaggeration and fantastical invention, as well as Christian ideals and implicit Othering. Nevertheless, I would also like to highlight that very often, the Saami Motif-Cluster is connected to positive, albeit sometimes ambiguous, associations. The abilities ascribed to Saami characters in the textual tradition such as being knowledgeable in magic, archery, and hunting, boatbuilding, and skiing are often overtly favourable and frequently work as useful catalysts for the protagonists. Even the sometimes negatively charged magical skills of the Saami are valued in the texts and function as a productive tool even for canonised kings. Characters with cross-cultural backgrounds are nick-named accordingly and given specific characteristics and abilities following a pattern associated with magic, shapeshifting, winter weather, archery, and hunting. Finally though, it should be mentioned that while these textual motifs are common, they are never exclusive and Saami characters are portrayed in diverse ways.

255 Ket, 117. Mork 2, 111.
256 Odds, 187–90. Helgisaga, 16.