HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

“Eru þetta mannafylgjur”

A Re-Examination of fylgjur *in Old Norse Literature*

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í íslenskri miðaldafræði

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Abstract

The presented thesis is a study of *fylgjur* in Old Norse literature. It seeks to re-examine and shed new light upon the topic in question, and forms a part of the research project "Encounters with the Paranormal," led by Ármann Jakobsson. As the paranormal is by its nature intangible and obscure, a careful and detailed analysis of primary sources using the word *fylgja* serves as the basis and starting point of the study. The evidence is contrasted with other textual passages, in order to gain a better understanding of the usage of the word, as well as of the characteristics of the beings referred to as such. The established scholarly opinion on two separate classes of *fylgjur* – animal and female – is drawn into question, offering a new reading of the female *fylgjur* as denoting a function rather than a distinct category of beings.

Keywords: *fylgja*, *fylgjur*, paranormal, supernatural, Old Norse literature, animals, soul perceptions.

Ágrip

Í þessari ritgerð er fjallað um fylgjur í íslenskum fornbókmenntum með því markmiði að rannsaka og varpa nýtt ljós á umfjöllunarefnið. Ritgerðin er hluti af rannskóknarverkefninu „Takast á við yfirnáttúruna á Íslandi á miðöldum" undir stjórn Ármanns Jakobssonar. Þar sem hið yfirnáttúrulega er í eðli sínu óáþreifanlegt og óljóst, byggir ritgerðin á nákvæmri greiningu frumheimilda sem nota orðið *fylgja*. Þessar eru bornar saman með öðrum textum til að betur skilja notkun orðsins, líka og einkenni veranna sem eru kallaðar fylgjur. Sú hugmynd að fylgjur skiptast í tvær aðgreindar tegundir – dýrafylgjur og kvennafylgjur – er dregin í efa, og lögð er fram ný túlkun á orðinu í sambandi við kvenverur, sem skilja má sem hlutverk frekar en sérstaka tegund af yfirnáttúrulegum verum.

Lykilorð: fylgja, fylgjur, yfirnáttúran, íslenskar fornbókmenntir, dýr, sálartrú.

Table of contents

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Introduction

The Old Norse literary corpus is remarkably rich in various paranormal beings, many of them appearing not only in the mythological and legendary texts, but also in the *Íslendingasögur*, which have long been considered more realistic in scholarship.[1] This also applies to the *fylgjur*, which feature in sagas of various genres. Although they often might not receive as prominent a role in the narrative as some of the other paranormal figures – sometimes even as little as a brief mention – they still constitute an interesting phenomenon worth a closer examination, as they are recurrent in the corpus. Despite this, *fylgjur* have been treated rather marginally in much of previous scholarship, often discussed alongside and in contrast with other – mostly female – supernatural and mythological beings such as the *dísir*, *nornir* or *valkyrjur*, rather than being analysed on their own account. To date, Else Mundal's *Fylgjemotiva i norrøn litteratur* (1974) remains the most extensive study devoted entirely to the subject of *fylgjur*. The aim of the present study is to re-examine the phenomenon of *fylgjur* in the Old Norse literary corpus and tradition.

The topic itself and the material available pose a range of problems. Like other paranormal beings, *fylgjur* spring from people's minds and although they might be the result of their experience of nature and life, they remain within the realm of the intangible. As Ármann Jakobsson notes in his article "The Taxonomy of the Non-Existent,"

> "unlike living creatures who may exist in the same way whether we refer to them as cats, dogs, seals or walruses, the non-existent creatures do not exist independently of human thought and consequently of human vocabulary, terminology and taxonomy. A living creature may not need a name or a word to ensure its existence but that does not apply to the non-existent creatures, and thus there is no paranormal being independent of our vocabulary for it. The paranormal is created in thought and in words and

[1] On a discussion of how the appearance of supernatural elements relates to the historicity and realism of the *Íslendingasögur* see Ármann Jakobsson 1998 and 2013a.

> thus the vocabulary used to encapsulate it is of paramount importance" (Ármann Jakobsson, 2013c:207).

Thus I believe that working out from the primary sources is of great importance, since *fylgjur* are a phenomenon falling into the realm of the paranormal. The material available to us for a study on *fylgjur* is limited to literary evidence, the majority of which is constituted by Icelandic sagas dating largely to the 13th-14th centuries. The question of the source value of sagas has been much debated in scholarship, with opinions ranging from seeing them as truthful representations of the Viking Age to a complete dismissal as works of fiction. Today, there is a general consensus that the truth lies somewhere in between; to some degree the material goes back to oral tradition, preserving instances of the past, but each text has also been shaped by the hand(s) of (a) literate Christian author(s), working with the material several centuries after the events they relate happened (cf. Lönnroth, 2008:305-6). Furthermore, the author's/authors' own perceptions, interpretations, agenda etc. also influenced the shaping of the texts into the form in which they have come down to us, and need to be borne in mind when working with them. As Lars Lönnroth points out, although the sagas have often been proven wrong about historical events, they can yield valuable information concerning "mentality, ideas, social structure, farmlife and everyday customs" (2008:309). All of these concerns are highly relevant to the present thesis, especially in light of the absence of other types of evidence, e.g. from the archaeological record, with which the material from the sagas could be contrasted.

The choice of material that will form the basis for the study has been limited to examples explicitly using the term *fylgja* (f. sg.) or *fylgjur* (f. pl.). These shall be contrasted with passages that show certain parallels or connections them, though using a different name or no name at all. Such an approach reduces the basic corpus considerably in comparison to Else Mundal's influential study, especially when it comes to her treatment of the "kvinnefylgjemotiva"[2] in chapter 4 (1974:63-128), which takes into account a range of protective supernatural beings and essentially treats them as different names for the same phenomenon.

[2] "female *fylgja* motifs"

As Ármann Jakobsson has illustrated in several articles (2008, 2011, 2013c, 2013d), medieval approaches to the paranormal differed considerably from modern perceptions. He points out that this distinction is "not entirely logical," since to those who believe in what we would call supernatural beings "they are essentially a part of nature and subservient to its laws" (1998:54-5). Furthermore, the need for creating a clear-cut taxonomy based on distinct categories and species of beings "is essentially a post-enlightenment notion" (2013c:205). To the medieval mind, the terms employed for paranormal figures encompass a far wider variety of meanings. These tend to be vague and obscure, thus mirroring and highlighting the core of such phenomena, which are by their very nature elusive. Instead of attempting to define a species, Ármann suggests to focus on the functions of these paranormal beings (ibid., p. 205-6).

This thesis is based on a close reading of the primary sources. These shall be presented in chapter 1. In order to gain a better grasp of the extensive source material, the examples will be grouped into four sub-chapters based on certain common features. I shall first examine cases of characters witnessing their own *fylgja* and then proceed to *fylgjur* featured in dreams, *fylgjur* experienced in a waking state, before I turn to *fylgjur* that are depicted as women. Unfortunately, the scope of the present work does not allow for an exhaustive account of all of the passages in question. Certain episodes shall thus be prioritised and recounted in greater detail. Chapter 2 shall start with a brief outline of major scholarship on the topic, before proceeding to a more thorough analysis of the material, focusing especially on the following issues: female *fylgjur* as a category of beings; the symbolism of animal *fylgjur*, their relation to *hugr* and pre-Christian soul perception; and finally, the perception and development of *fylgjur* in the 13th and 14th century. By employing recent scholarly approaches to the paranormal, this study will seeks to shed new light upon the phenomenon of *fylgjur*, their perception in medieval Iceland and their function in the extant source material.

Chapter 1: The Source Material

Mentions of *fylgjur* are to be found across the Old Norse literary corpus. Most commonly they appear in texts that are traditionally categorised into the genres of *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, but there are also instances of them in other texts, such as *konungasögur* – most notably in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* – the contemporary *Sturlunga saga*, in the two *riddarasögur Sigurðar saga þǫgla* and *Sagan af Nikulási konungi leikara*, as well as in *Orkneyinga saga* and *Breta sögur*. The material could be characterised both as rich and limited at the same time. On the one hand, we are given a considerable corpus to work with through the number of examples where *fylgjur* are mentioned explicitly, as well as a few other passages that, though not referring to them directly, very much resemble *fylgja*-scenes from other sagas. On the other hand, much like with many other aspects of the Old Norse world and worldview – and this is especially true in matters of belief and the paranormal – the source material shows a considerable amount of variation, yet in many scenes the *fylgjur* appear to be used as a standardised literary motif, making it rather difficult to make assessments about the subject in question. Extreme care and caution is necessary when analysing the material due to its specific characteristics, not only of the saga literature as such, but also bearing in mind the differences between its sub-genres.[3]

Looking only at explicit references to *fylgjur*, we find that they are mentioned 36 times in 23 different texts.[4] The passages in question are as follows (in alphabetical order):

Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa, ch. 25	*manna fylgjur*
Breta sögur, ch. 38	*fylgja*
Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu, ch. 2	*stórra manna fylgjur*

[3] The division of sagas into genres is usually based upon their subject-matter (such as the *Íslendingasögur* or the *konungasögur*), or their distance from the events they narrate (such as the *samtíðarsögur* or the *fornaldarsögur*), reflecting also the attitude towards their source value. However, the boundaries between them are not always clear-cut and one text may display characteristics typical for several genres (see Clunies Ross, 2010:27-36 and 95-123).

[4] These numbers are the result of my own examination of the Old Norse literary corpus for the occurrence of the noun *fylgja* in the sense of a paranormal entity, supported by the registries in Mundal, 1974:26-7 and 63-5, as well as results from the wordlist in "Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog" at http://onp.ku.dk/.

Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar	*fylgjur*
Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar, ch. 7	*manna fylgjur / konungs fylgja*
Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar, ch. 12	*fylgja*
Hrólfs saga kraka, ch. 2	*fylgjur*
Ljósvetninga saga, ch. 11	*mannafylgjur*
Ljósvetninga saga, ch. 16	*manna fylgjur*
Ljósvetninga saga, ch. 20	*fylgjur*
Njáls saga, ch. 12	*fylgjur*
Njáls saga, ch. 23	*fylgja*
Njáls saga, ch. 41	*fylgja*
Njáls saga, ch. 69	*fylgjur óvina*
Orkneyinga saga, ch. 6	*fylgjur*
Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta, ch. 64[5]	*fylgjur*
Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar (S-red.), ch. 3	*fylgjur*
Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar (S-red.), ch. 5	*fylgjur*
Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar (A-red.), ch. 8	*fylgjur*
Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar (S-red.), ch. 13[6]	*fylgjur*
Sagan af Nikulási konungi leikara, ch. 10	*fylgjur*
Sigurðar saga þǫgla, ch. 9	*kynfylgja*
Sigurðar saga þǫgla, ch. 35	*kynfylgja*
Sturlunga saga I, Íslendinga saga, ch. 70	*ófriðarfylgju*
Sturlunga saga II, *Þórðar saga kakala*, ch. 25	*óvina fylgjur*
Sverris saga, ch. 118	*fylgjur óvina*
Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum, ch. 2	*fylgjur*
Vatnsdœla saga, ch. 30	*fylgjur*
Vatnsdœla saga, ch. 42	*manns fylgja*
Völsunga saga, ch. 4	*kynfylgja*
Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls[7]	*fylgjur*
Þórðar saga hreðu, ch. 7	*ættarfylgjur*
Þórðar saga hreðu, ch. 7	*ófriðarfylgjur*

[5] Two different versions of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* contain mentions of *fylgjur*, namely the version attributed to the monk Oddr Snorrason and *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* found in *Flateyjarbók*. The former, preserved in three major manuscripts, the oldest dated to the end of the 13th/beginning of the 14th century, is an Icelandic translation based on Oddr's original, written in Latin in the second half of the 12th century. The latter is a compilation based on several different sources. The saga is thought to have been composed in the late 13th century, but the manuscript of *Flateyjarbók* has been dated to the end of the 14th century (see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2005 and Sigurður Nordal's introduction to the 1944 edition of *Flateyjarbók*). For the purposes of the presented study and due to the differences between the two texts, they are here treated as separate.

[6] Mentions of *fylgjur* are to be found in two redactions of Oddr's *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, the S-redaction and A-redaction. The passage from chapter 13 of the S-redaction is almost identical to chapter 17 in the A-redaction; these shall thus be treated as one example. All the other instances are only preserved in either of the two redactions, which is partially due to lacunae in the manuscripts.

[7] Though *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls* is incorporated in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* in *Flateyjarbók*, it shall also be regarded as a separate text, sinceit is somewhat set off from the main saga about King Ólafr Tryggvason and it has previously been published as such.

Þorskfirðinga saga, ch. 6	*fylgjur*
Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar, ch. 12	*fylgja*
Örvar-Odds saga, ch. 4	*fylgja*

Additionally, I shall consider the episode from chapter 11 of *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, in which a paranormal woman attending Hallfreðr is said to be his *fylgjukona*, as part of the corpus, although the term used is slightly different from the others. This example has been frequently quoted by scholars in their discussions of *fylgjur* and treated as an informative example of female *fylgjur* and is thus important in the context of scholarly debate. It is for this reason that I shall include it into the main corpus and treat it in greater detail.[8]

As the list indicates, the basic corpus includes instances of the noun *fylgja* in both its singular and plural form, as well as compounds such as *ófriðarfylgjur*, *ættarfylgjur*, *mannafylgjur* or *kynfylgja*. Interestingly, the word *fylgja* in any form seems to be absent from verse. The only instance of poetry featured in the corpus is that of *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* from the *Poetic Edda*. Characteristic of this poem is its specific prosimetric form, where most of the narrative is related in prose passages continuously inserted into the verse, whilst the stanzas capture mostly dialogue.[9] However, the *fylgjur*, which are of interest for us, are explicitly named only in the prose directly preceding stanza 36,[10] but not in the versed part of the poem.

1.1 Seeing one's own *fylgja*

As pointed out above, scenes featuring *fylgjur* can vary considerably. In *Njáls saga* they are explicitly mentioned four times, all in the first half of the saga, with each scene being different from the rest. The perhaps most famous scene unfolds in chapter 41, with Njáll and Þórðr sitting outside in the field, when Þórðr points out that

[8] Depending on our definition of what constitutes a *fylgja*, it is possible to incorporate several other passages where the word is not used into the count. However, as this is the research question on the present study, additional passages shall be considered and critically examined individually throughout the paper.

[9] Theodore M. Andersson has described the poem as „in effect, a prosimetric *fornaldarsaga*" (1985:52).

[10] In referring to the stanzas of poems, I follow the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition of *Eddukvæði* (2014). In other editions, the numbering may vary, the verse in question featuring as stanza 35.

something is very odd. When asked what this would be, he responds: "Mér þykkir hafrinn liggja hér í dœlinni ok er alblóðugr allr"[11] (ÍF XII, 1954:106). He refers to the goat that often roams the fields, but Njáll answers that there is no goat there, nor anything else: "'Þú munt vera maðr feigr,' segir Njáll, 'ok munt þú sét hafa fylgju[12] þína, ok ver þú var um þik'"[13] (*ibid.*, p. 107). Here the *fylgja*, which has the shape of a male goat, is only visible to the person it is attached to, and appears to him in a waking state. It is interpreted by Njáll as a death omen, a prediction that is fulfilled shortly thereafter, when Þórðr is indeed killed. However, the text itself is unclear about the exact reason why this is a death omen – whether it is the fact that Þórðr sees his own *fylgja*, that he sees it in a waking state, the condition it appears in, or a combination of these factors.

Related to this is chapter 42 of *Vatnsdœla saga*. There, Þorkell silfri has a dream the night before a meeting at which a new chieftain is meant to be chosen in Vatnsdalur,[14] he himself being one of the prospective candidates. He dreams about riding a red horse through Vatnsdalur, its hooves barely touching the ground. Þorkell understands the dream as a foreboding of the honour he will receive as the new *goði*. His wife, however, offers a different interpretation: "'[S]ýnisk mér þetta illr draumr,' – ok kvað hest mar heita, en marr er manns fylgja, ok kvað rauða sýnask, ef blóðug yrði, – 'og má vera, at þú sért veginn á fundinum, ef þú ætlar þér goðorðit'"[15] (ÍF VIII, 1939:111). It is not clearly stated that the horse Þorkell is riding in the dream is his own *fylgja*, but we can assume that this is the case, considering that the animal does not perform any action actively directed against him in a threatening way as appears to be the case when other people's *fylgjur* appear in someone's dream. Furthermore, it is the horse's appearance that has negative implications, its red colour symbolising upcoming bloodshed and Þorkell's death, thus strengthening the link between Þorkell himself and the animal. Comparing this scene to that in *Njáls saga*, chapter 41, one of the

[11] "I think I see the goat lying here in the hollow, and it is all covered in blood" (unless otherwise indicated, all English translations are by the author).
[12] Some manuscripts have *dauðafylgja* (see ÍF XII, 1954:107, fn. 1).
[13] "'You must be a doomed man,' said Njáll, 'and you will have seen your *fylgja*, so be on your guard.'"
[14] At the time, when the chieftain Ingólfr Þorsteinsson dies, his sons are by law too young to succeed him. Thus, a new chieftain has to be elected from among the assembly members (ÍF VIII, 1939:109).
[15] "'To me this seems to be a bad dream,' – and she said that the horse was called a night-mare and a night-mare is one's *fylgja*, and said that it appears red, when events are to turn bloody – 'and it is possible, that you shall be slain at the meeting, if you intend to gain the chieftaincy for yourself.'"

differences is seeing the *fylgja* in a dream rather than in waking state. In both cases, however, the outer appearance of the *fylgja* seems to be crucial for the ominous interpretation: Þórðr sees his goat covered in blood, and Þorkell's horse is symbolically bloody through its colour.

One aspect, in which *Vatnsdœla saga*, chapter 42, differs considerably from not only *Njáls saga*, but also the rest of the extant corpus, is that the subject and his *fylgja* interact with each other in the dream. This might be a variation of the motif, but it could also be argued that there is some sort of identification between the two. Þorkell is riding the horse, i.e. they are jointly performing the action in the dream, again reinforcing the connection between the man and the animal.

Else Mundal groups these two examples together, thus constituting group 1 of her animal *fylgja* motifs under the header "Dyrefylgjemotivet som dødsvarsel,"[16] followed by a larger group 2, where the *fylgja* represents a warning about a future event. She states that group 2 can also contain death warnings, the main difference between the two groups being, that "[i] gruppe 1 viser fylgja seg for den som skal døy, når motiva i gruppe 2 er dødsvarsel, er det ein annan som ser i draum at fylgjene døyr"[17] (Mundal, 1974:29). Whilst this is true about most of the examples she lists, there are two cases in group 2 that involve dreaming (also) about one's own *fylgja* followed by the dreamer's death, namely chapters 2 and 3 of *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum*.[18]

[16] "The animal *fylgja* motif as a death warning"

[17] "in group 1, the *fylgja* appears to the person that shall die, but when motifs in group 2 represent death warnings, it is someone else who sees the *fylgjur* dying in a dream"

[18] Additionally, *Breta sögur*, chapter 38, also features a scene in which King Arthur dreams about a flying bear fighting a dragon, the dream being interpreted as his *fylgja* fighting that of a giant. Contrary to the other examples, the outcome is positive for the king, prophesying him victory (*Breta sögur*, 1914:100). Thus the dream does not represent a warning, yet the relationship between the human and the dream animal is very similar to what we have seen in the other examples. *Breta sögur* is a translated work based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*. The dream episode is contained in the Latin original, relating the events in a very similar fashion. However, when interpreting the dream, the animals are not explicitly referred to as any specific beings. Instead, the text merely uses the word *significare*, to signify, when attributing the dragon to Arthur and the bear to a giant (Monmouth, 1999:172). Yet the Norse translator chose to interpret them as *fylgjur*, based on the close resemblance to scenes in Old Norse literature, thus appropriating the passage to his own cultural code (cf. Patzuk-Russell, 2012:36). This passage is important to note, as it indicates that *fylgjur* were such an active motif in Old Norse literature that they are even introduced as a new motif into a translated work, but the scene shall not be dealt with in greater detail, as it is ultimately not of Norse origin, and thus remains marginal for an analysis of the forms and functions of *fylgjur* in an Old Norse context.

In chapter 2 of *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum*, *fylgjur* are explicitly mentioned. King Hrærekr has a dream in which he stands at the edge of a forest and witnesses a stag killing a leopard with a golden mane. Then, a dragon flies in, rips the stag to pieces and then attempts to steal a bear cub, but the she-bear accompanying it manages to defend it (ÍF XXXV, 1982:50). The dream turns out to be a prophecy of upcoming events and a conflict between Hrærekr and his father-in-law, the stag being Hrærekr's *fylgja*. The complexity of the dream and its foreshadowing that Hrærekr will kill his brother (represented by the leopard in the dream) must have led Mundal to place it in her second group. Another difference to the examples from *Njáls saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga* is that the dream – assuming the stag indeed symbolises Hrærekr as it is suggested – essentially does not allow any other interpretation by the audience than his impending death, as the fate of the stag is explicitly stated in the dream, rather than being a matter of symbolic interpretation. However, the fact that here, as well as in the cases examined above, the events lead to Hrærekr's, i.e. the dreamer's, death, justify viewing this passage in connection with the previous ones.

In the light of the subsequent course of events, we can establish the dragon from Hrærekr's dream to be the *fylgja* of King Ívar, his father-in-law. The dragon returns to the story in the following chapter, this time in a dream of King Ívar himself, in which the dragon is swallowed by a great storm with flood rain and lightning. In this case, the dragon is not explicitly referred to as the king's *fylgja*,[19] but it is insinuated that the dream is a sign of the king's upcoming death, which follows shortly thereafter, as the king drowns in an attempt to kill his foster-father in rage. Again, the dream is highly elaborate and very symbolic, but its meaning is left to our interpretative skills. If we assume that the dragon in King Ívar's dream is identical to the one in King Hrærekr's dream and represents Ívar's *fylgja*, then we would gain yet another example where death follows soon after seeing one's own *fylgja*.[20] In addition, this would suggest that a person has a fixed animal *fylgja* that consistently remains the same if it

[19] The king asks his foster-father to interpret the dream, but he repeatedly refuses to do so and he merely suggests its negative implications. As such, the nature or significance of the dragon himself is not discussed, so it is not unreasonable to assume that it can be understood as King Ívar's *fylgja*, as it has already appeared in King Hrærekr's dream.

[20] The dragon being swallowed by stormy rain clouds might be understood as a symbolic representation of the king's upcoming death by drowning.

appears in various episodes. This points towards an intimate connection between the human and the animal representing him, which shall be explored below.

The presented examples vary considerably and it is possible to establish more differences than similarities: the *fylgja* now appears in waking life, now in a dream, on its own or as part of a rather intricate prophetic dream, foreshadowing events close at hand or considerably ahead in the future. In spite of these differences, the common denominator remains the fact that the subject in question somehow witnesses his own *fylgja*, which is subsequently followed by his death.[21] It is of course open to discussion whether the last two examples testify more to the perception of *fylgjur* or rather that of prophetic dreams, but the extant corpus does not contain any instance, where the appearance of a person's own *fylgja* is not followed by said person's death. Absence of evidence is, of course, not evidence of absence, but it is nevertheless important to consider the aforementioned examples in this light.

1.2 *Fylgjur* in prophetic dreams

In most of the examples outlined in the previous sub-chapter, *fylgjur* appear in dreams. This is a common motif, constituting altogether around one third of the corpus. Though there are certain common traits, these dreams are not identical and offer some variation.

In *Ljósvetninga saga*, chapter 11,[22] the upcoming death of the chieftain Guðmundr inn ríki is suggested to the audience by a *fylgja*-dream. However, contrary to the instances discussed above, the dreamer is not Guðmundr himself, but his brother Einarr:

> "Hann dreymdi þat, at oxi gengi upp eptir heraðinu, skrautligr ok hyrndr mjǫk, ok kom á Mǫðruvǫllu ok gekk til hvers húss, er var á bœnum, ok

[21] The only exception being *Breta sögur*, as noted above in fn. 18, where the prophetic dream is of non-Norse origin.
[22] The chapter number is referential to the ÍF edition of *Ljósvetninga saga*, which uses the A-redaction of the saga as the primary text. It corresponds to chapter 21 in the C-redaction (see ÍF X, 1940:lvii-lviii on the two redactions).

> síðast til ǫndvegis ok fell þar niðr dauðr. Síðan mælti Einarr: 'Slíkt mun fyrir miklum tíðendum, ok eru þetta mannafylgjur'"[23] (ÍF X, 1940:60).

Upon his arrival home, Guðmundr inspects all the buildings on his farm before sitting down onto his high-seat, exactly as the ox in Einarr's dream had done. The fact that the entire course of action corresponds between the dream and reality should not surprise us. As the saga states, "var þat siðr [Guðmunds] at koma til hvers húss er á var bœnum"[24] (ibid.). The high-seat would also naturally be occupied by the head of the farm, so it hardly requires a fortune-teller to guess that this is where Guðmundr will sit. Instead, the correlation helps us establish and strengthen a connection between the ox and Guðmundr,[25] as the function of the dream is to prepare the audience for Guðmundr's death.

Dreams play a significant role in this episode. Not only has Einarr foreseen his brother's death from the *fylgja*-dream, but it seems to also have been caused by another man's dream. A certain Þórhallr is visiting the farm and upon Guðmundr's return relates to him a dream he had had. Not long thereafter, when supper is served, "hneig hann [i.e. Guðmundr] á bak aptr ok var þegar andaðr,"[26] upon which Einarr comments: "Eigi hefir draumr þinn, Þórhallr, lítinn krapt. Ok þat hefir Finni[27] sét á þér, at sá væri feigr, er þú

[23] "He dreamt that an ox walked around the district, a splendid one with great horns, and arrived at Mǫðruvellir and went to all of the buildings that were on the farm, and then lastly to the high-seat, where he fell down dead. Einarr then said: 'Such must signify great tidings, these are people's *fylgjur.*'" Here, I do not understand the plural as referring to the ox in the dream, but rather to the phenomenon as such.

[24] "It was [Guðmundr's] habit to visit all the buildings on the farm."

[25] Similarly, in *Vápnfirðinga saga*, chapter 13, the death of Brodd-Helgi Þorgilsson is announced in a dream of his foster-mother. She sees a large white ox with splendid horns being attacked to death by a flock of other cattle led by a red-flecked ox. The animals are not explicitly referred to as *fylgjur*, but Helgi says upon hearing the dream: "'Þat muntu ætla ... at ek muna eiga inn bleika uxann, en Geitir rauðflekkóttan'" ["You surely think … that I must own the white ox, and Geitir the red-flecked one"] (ÍF XI, 1950:49), the verb *eiga* suggesting that these animals are to be understood as such (cf. the phrasing in chapter 2 of *Sǫgubrot*: "ok væri betr, et eigi ættir þú þann hjǫrtinn" ["and it would be better, if you did not own the stag"] ÍF XXXV, 1982:50). The description of the white ox is very much reminiscent of that of Guðmundr inn ríki's *fylgja* in *Ljósvetninga saga*. These two sagas contain the only instances of *fylgjur* being depicted as oxen, which might point to a possible connection between them. Fragments of both are preserved in the 15th century manuscript AM 162 C fol., although as far as I am aware, a link between the texts has not yet been established in scholarship.

[26] "he leaned back and was immediately dead."

[27] Finni, who is skilled in interpreting dreams and is thus also called Drauma-Finni, holds a grudge against Guðmundr because of the killing of his brother. Þórhallr first approaches Finni for an interpretation of his dream, but Finni chases him away with threats and sends him to tell the dream to Guðmundr (see ÍF X, 1940:60).

segðir drauminn, ok þess unni hann Guðmundi"[28] (ibid., p. 61). The dream itself is never revealed to the reader, perhaps due to its powerful and magical nature.

In this case, the dreamer, Einarr, is essentially uninvolved with the events, his dream completely relating to another person. However, much more frequent are prophetic dreams in which the dreamer himself is directly affected, such as in chapter 12 of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. Þorsteinn dreams that he and his brothers are attacked by thirty wolves, eight bears, one of them with a pink cheek, and two vixen. The wolves tear all but one of his brothers to pieces. Þorsteinn himself interprets the dream:

> "þat ætla ek … at rauðkinni sá inn stóri sé fylgja Jökuls, en birnirnir sé fylgjur bræðra hans, en vargarnir munu mér sýnzt hafa svá margir sem men munu vera með þeim, því at þeir munu hafa varga hug á oss, en þar at auk váru refkeilur tvær. Þekki ek ekki þá menn er þær fylgjur munu eiga"[29] (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* II, 1944:209).

Soon, they are indeed attacked by Jökull and his seven brothers, seeking to avenge the killing of their ninth brother, and their party of men, part of which are two brothers skilled in magic, who appeared in the dream as the two vixen.

A similar scene features in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, chapter 25, in which the eponymous hero of the saga dreams of being attacked by the *fylgjur* of his enemies. Despite having been warned against it, he decides to take the usual road, is ambushed and involved in a fight, although without fatal consequences for him. However, what is different, and in fact unusual, is that his attackers in the dream are six men and not, as one might perhaps expect, animals (ÍF III, 1938:177-8).[30]

As the last example suggests, such dreams do not always prophesy death, nor need they necessarily lead to an outright confrontation. In several cases, the threat is

[28] "Your dream, Þórhallr, does not lack in power. And Finni has seen on you that the one, whom you'd recount your dream to, would be doomed, and that is what he wished for Guðmundr."
[29] "I think … that the big one with the pink cheek is Jökull's *fylgja*, and the other bears the *fylgjur* of his brothers, and I will have seen as many wolves as there will be men with them, because they will have wolfish intentions towards us, but there were also two vixen. I do not know the men, who might own those *fylgjur*."
[30] For this reason, Mundal notes this as an aberrant motif for an animal *fylgja* (1974:26).

merely suggested but does not unfold, neither in the dream nor in the actual events. This is the case in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, which features two very similar dreams with *fylgjur*, both dreamt by the Swedish Queen Ingigerðr and foreboding the arrival of King Hrólfr Gautreksson. First, in chapter 7, she dreams of a big pack of wolves coming to Sweden, led by a great lion that is accompanied by a polar bear. Based on the direction they are coming from the queen deduces that the lion is the king's *fylgja*, the wolves the *fylgjur* of his men, and the polar bear, which is strong, represents a champion or a prince that accompanies Hrólfr. The animals all appear calm, so the queen concludes that "þeir fari með friði ok góðum hug til vár"[31] (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* III, 1944:63). Nevertheless, a potential threat seems to be insinuated by the queen throughout the episode: she points out that King Hrólfr is not coming in animosity "í þetta sinn"[32] (ibid.) and she urges King Eirekr to accept him well. Hrólfr presents his request for the hand of King Eirekr's daughter, but receives a negative response, which angers him greatly, though he tries to suppress his anger. Queen Ingigerðr warns Eirekr that opposing such a great king shall only bring them distress and urges him to reconsider his position, lest the kingdom may suffer considerably. The king takes her advice, but Hrólfr does not fare well with the king's daughter, a warrior princess ruling part of Sweden as a king. After a humiliating visit to her kingdom, he returns to King Eirekr, and his arrival is once again foreshadowed to the queen in a dream (chapter 12). It is very similar to the previous one, the king and his men represented by the same animals as before. This time, however, Hrólfr's lion is accompanied also by a boar, which is "ekki svá mikill sem hann var vígligr ... og fram horfði hvert hár á honum. Hann lét sem hann mundi á allt hlaupa ok bíta þat, er í náND var"[33] (ibid., p. 77). The boar is interpreted by the queen as the *fylgja* of Hrólfr's brother Ketill, who is described as "manna minnstr ok skjótligastr, fullr ákefðar ok ofbeldis, ok sé inn hvatasti til allrar framgöngu"[34] (ibid.), the appearance of the *fylgja* thus matching that of its human. Due to Hrólfr's unsuccessful courting trip, his second visit is expected to be less friendly, as his *fylgja* in the queen's dream was „miklu ófrýnligri en fyrr ok öll dýrin miklu

[31] "they come to us with peace and good intentions"
[32] "this time"
[33] "not as big as he was aggressive … and every hair on him was bristled. He looked like he was about to attack everything and bite what was at hand."
[34] "the smallest of men and the fastest, full of eagerness and violence, and the quickest to attack"

grimmligri“[35] (ibid.). However, no conflict arises between the two kings, as Eirekr expresses his full support of Hrólfr and advises him to conquer his daughter's fortress. The dreams thus serve to express the potential of danger, which increases before Hrólfr's second visit, as he has been given a reason for hostility. They increase the tension in the narrative, although the danger is both times averted by King Eirekr's welcoming attitude.

A similar scene, where the dream does not predict a specific outcome, but rather suggests a potential danger or threat while leaving the characters a possibility of decision, appears in *Örvar-Odds saga*, chapter 4. The young Oddr wants to leave his home island with his two relatives, who have their ships ready to leave abroad. They refuse to take him on board, but do not manage to set sail for two weeks. Then one night, Guðmundr, Oddr's brother, dreams about a menacingly looking polar bear that appears to be ready to jump onto their ships and sink them. The polar bear is the *fylgja* of Oddr, angry at his relatives for not wanting to take him with them. The threat is thus again clearly present, but as the dream does not reveal the course events shall take, the danger remains a potential. It does not necessarily have to come true and it is up to Guðmundr and Sigurðr to take action. They offer Oddr the command of one of their ships, which he accepts, and the threat is thus eliminated.

Another menacing *fylgja* dream with an uncertain outcome is presented slightly differently in *Ljósvetninga saga*, chapter 16. Eyjólfr, the son of Guðmundr inn ríki, relates his dream: "[e]k þóttumk ríða norðr [um] Háls, ok sá ek nautaflokk koma í móti mér. Þar var í oxi einn mikill, rauðr. Hann vildi illa við mik gera. Þar var og griðungr mannýgr og mart smáneyti"[36] (ÍF X, 1940:85). The animals in the dream are interpreted as "manna fylgjur, óvina þinna"[37] (ibid.), the two huge oxen belonging to Þorvarðr and Hallr, who are Eyjólfr's main adversaries in the ongoing feud. Similarly to the scenes discussed above, the dream does not yield any further information on the outcome of an encounter, in this case due to a thick fog that descends upon Eyjólfr, conceals the herd, and thus prevents the foreseeing of any future development. Else Mundal, whose study

[35] "frowning much more than before and all the animals were much more grim"
[36] "I thought I was riding north by Háls, and I saw a herd of cattle. In it was a big red ox. He wanted to do me ill. There was also a vicious bull and a lot of smaller cattle."
[37] "people's *fylgjur*, those of your enemies"

focuses to a great deal on the literary functions of the *fylgja* motifs in the text, has convincingly argued that the appearance of the animal *fylgja*, which foretells upcoming events, serves the purpose of preparing the audience for a climax in the narrative (1974:46). This episode from *Ljósvetninga saga* complies with the theory without following the pattern illustrated by Mundal. As opposed to the examples quoted by her, the outcome of the encounter between Eyjólfr and Þorvarðr is left unclear. The dream indeed creates tension and stimulates the audience's interest, but apart from suggesting a threat, it does not reveal how this threat will play itself out, and thus the audience does not know what is to be expected. However, as the events unfold, no dramatic climax or escalation ensues as is the case with the scenes Mundal names, e.g. that of Guðmundr inn ríki's death. A violent encounter is avoided on the way to the *þing*, where matters are settled, and although the outcome is not quite to Eyjólfr's satisfaction, it is not accompanied by any dramatic events. The misty ending of the dream thus symbolises perhaps exactly that – the conflict that is impending yet does not unfold in Eyjólfr and Þorvarðr's encounter, and the uncertainty and prospect of a continued feud resulting thereof. The dream does not reveal anything, because there is nothing to reveal, at least not in terms of a narrative climax. The difference to the scenes from *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* and *Örvar-Odds saga* lies perhaps therein that the avoidance of a conflict is not the result of a conscious decision on part of the character.[38]

Regardless of whether the course of action is prophesied by the dream or whether it only represents a potential threat that is not necessarily fulfilled, all of the above cases relate to impending events. There are, however, two exceptions to this, namely *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, chapter 2, and *Njáls saga*, chapter 23.

In *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, Þorsteinn Egilsson has a dream about a beautiful swan that comes and perches on his farmhouse. It is then joined by a mighty eagle with black eyes and iron claws, and then another big eagle arrives. The eagles start fighting each other and both die, which upsets the swan. Then a hawk sits by her and then they fly away together. A Norwegian interested in dreams interprets it for Þorsteinn, saying that the birds are "manna fylgjur" (ÍF III, 1938:55), and men shall

[38] Indeed, after the settlement, Eyjólfr changes his mind and plots an attack on Þorvarðr, but is deceived by a friend into thinking that Þorvarðr had already set sail from Iceland (chapter 18).

fight and die for the hand of his daughter that his wife is pregnant with. The prophecy comes true (as can be expected), but unlike the other examples of prophetic dreams with *fylgjur*, this time it arches the entire length of the saga, which centres around the conflict between Gunnlaugr and his adversary Hrafn, fuelled by their interest for Þorsteinn's daughter Helga. After the death of both men, the saga concludes with a short account of Helga's marriage to the third man and ends with her death. However, what makes this episode more unusual is the fact that the dream relates to a person not yet born at the time when it occurs.

The time frame is slightly aberrant also in an episode from chapter 23 of *Njáls saga*, which relates a dream of Hǫskuldr Dala-Kollsson: "ek þóttumk sjá bjarndýri mikit ganga út ór húsunum, ok visa ek, at eigi finnsk þessa dýrs maki, ok fylgðu því húnar tveir, ok vildu þeir vel dýrinu. Þat stefndi til Hrútsstaða ok gekk þar inn í húsin"[39] (ÍF XII, 1954:64). Hǫskuldr soon realises that the majestic bear he dreamt about was the *fylgja* of none other than Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi, who in a disguise visited Hrútsstaðir in order to summon Hrútr to court. As the texts suggests, the dream essentially occurs after Gunnarr had successfully deceived Hrútr, and it thus points backwards in time to events that had already happened, albeit shortly before, rather than foreshadowing the future. Hǫskuldr thus cannot prevent the events from happening, but the dream compels him to go to his brother and reveal to him the true identity of the visitor.

1.3 *Fylgjur* outside of the realm of dreams

As already seen in the example of Þórðr's vision, many of the *fylgjur* mentioned in the sources do not seem to be confined to the realm of dreams, but can be perceived by people in a waking state. Contrary to the elaborate prophetic dreams, however, the information we receive about these *fylgjur* is rather limited.

When a group of men is on their way to attack Gunnarr in chapter 69 of *Njáls saga*, they are suddenly overcome by a great tiredness that they cannot resist, so they

[39] "I thought I saw a huge bear go out of the building, and I knew that there was no match for this animal, and it was followed by two polar bear cubs that were friendly towards the animal. It went towards Hrútsstaðir and entered the house there."

put their weapons away and lie down to sleep. At the same time, Njáll, at the nearby farm of Þórólfsfell, is restless and cannot sleep. Being asked what the matter is, he responds: "'Margt berr nú fyrir augu,' sagði hann, 'ég sé margar fylgjur grimmligar óvina Gunnars, ok er þó nǫkkut undarliga: þær láta ólmliga ok fara þó ráðlausliga'"[40] (ÍF XII, 1954:170). Njáll can thus perceive the *fylgjur* whilst he is awake in what appears to be some sort of vision. This enables him to take action and prevent the attack. Similarly, in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, chapter 2, the arrival of King Fróði – who is chasing his two nephews that are in hiding on an island – and his party is signalled by the appearance of their *fylgjur*. The man hiding the boys, Vífill, wakes up one morning and proclaims that "margt er kynligt á ferð og flug, ok miklar fylgjur ok máttugar eru hingat komnar í eyna"[41] (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* II, 1944:5).[42] Both men, Njáll and Vífill, have abilities surpassing those of other people. Njáll is said to have foresight, to be *forspár*[43] (ÍF XII, 1954:57), and about Vífill it says that he "kunni margt í fornum fræðum"[44] (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* II, 1944:3), implying that he was well-versed in magic. These abilities are most likely what enables them to perceive the *fylgjur*, which otherwise appear to be invisible. Thus a dream can turn an average person into a prophet, whilst prophets have the ability to see things awake, that others can only become aware of asleep.[45]

In addition, there is a somewhat similar scene in *Sverris saga*, chapter 118. A plot is being devised against King Sverrir. After a conversation with one of the men involved, Ólafr, Sverrir asks him to be true to him, then making a thrust into the air with

[40] "'Much appears before my eyes,' he said, 'I see many grim *fylgjur* of Gunnarr's enemies, but something is strange: they seem furious but yet act confused.'"
[41] "Many strange things are up and about, and great and powerful *fylgjur* have come here to the islands."
[42] Likewise, in Oddr's *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, chapter 3, Ólafr's mother Ástríðr, hiding with her new born son from Queen Gunnhildr, manages to escape as her father warns her of the approaching of one of the queen's envoys after having noticed his *fylgjur* (ÍF XXV, 2006:131). Similarly, in *Sturlunga saga* I, Sturla Sighvatsson is warned not to leave home, as "ófriðarfylgjur váru komnar í heraðit" ["hostile *fylgjur* have come into the district"] (*Sturlunga saga* I, 1946:325).
[43] In certain aspects, the scene in chapter 69 is reminiscent about the one in chapter 23. In both cases, the person, to which the *fylgjur* appear, is not directly affected by them, as the threat they warn about is directed at another person, who is currently at another place. The different literary representation of the two scenes may be due to the different abilities of the characters; whilst Njáll, thanks to his foresight, is able to become aware of *fylgjur* in a waking state, to Hǫskuldr they appear in a dream.
[44] "knew much of ancient wisdom"
[45] However, it is interesting that the scenes involving Njáll and Vífill both relate to sleep – Njáll is kept awake by the visions and Vífill has just woken up, the phrasing of the text suggesting that the visions of *fylgjur* may have been a cause for it.

his knife proclaiming: "Fylgjur óvina várra sveima hér nú í nánd"[46] (ÍF XXX, 2007:179-80). Again it suggests a threat of an impending attack, and just like in the other two instances, the *fylgjur* seem to be moving or flying about. However, the scene appears odd for multiple reasons: Ólafr is himself part of the plot and thus one of Sverrir's enemies, yet the king does not seem to acknowledge this, instead reasserting Ólafr's loyalty. Furthermore, thrusting a knife at the *fylgjur* – which also here appear to be invisible and immaterial – seems to be superfluous. The way Sverrir acts may thus rather be indicative of his knowledge – or at least of his suspicion – of a plot against him.[47] The king cunningly pretends to have a vision, but in truth he is indirectly telling Ólafr that he suspects him, and thus giving him a chance to back out of treachery. Whatever the case, Sverrir is clearly referring to the belief in *fylgjur*, potentially using the tradition for his own purposes.

In these cases, the function of the *fylgjur* is somewhat similar to the ones appearing in dreams in that their presence gives warning about an approaching danger. But the sagas provide us also with examples, where they directly affect people, most notably by causing one to feel sleepy or wanting to yawn. In *Njáls saga*, there are several instances, where people are suddenly overcome by sleepiness (see e.g. the scene from chapter 69 above), but only once does the text directly attribute this to *fylgjur*. In chapter 12, Ósvífr and his men are pursuing Þjóstólfr for the killing of Þorvaldr Ósvífsson, Hallgerðr's first husband. Þjóstólfr takes refuge at Hallgerðr's maternal uncle Svanr's. As Ósvífr and his men approach Svanr's farm, "tók Svanr til orða ok geispaði mjǫk: 'Nú sœkja at fylgjur Ósvífrs'"[48] (ÍF XII, 1954:37). This brief statement suggests that the *fylgjur* are invisible, the only indication of their presence is Svanr's yawning. Again, they seem to only affect the person with magical skills, as neither Þjóstólfr nor anyone else is stated to yawn or feel drowsy. It is also interesting that a plural of *fylgjur* is attributed to one person. Although this may seem as though the person has several *fylgjur* accompanying him, it can also be argued that the plural refers to the collective of *fylgjur* comprising not only that of Ósvífr himself, but also those of

[46] "The *fylgjur* of our enemies are now stirring close-by."
[47] Suggested by W. A. Craigie in a review of the English translation of *The Saga of King Sverri of Norway* by J. Sephton (1900:196).
[48] "Svanr said and yawned widely: 'Ósvífr's *fylgjur* are now attacking.'"

the men riding with him (Heide, 2006a:150),[49] and thus maintaining the ratio of one *fylgja* for each person as was the case in previous examples.[50]

Very similar examples of such an *atsókn* are to be found in *Þórðar saga hreðu*[51] and *Sturlunga saga*,[52] where the attack is caused by *ófriðarfylgjur* and *óvina fylgjur* respectively. These are not explicitly connected to any specific people, but both scenes take place as part of an ongoing conflict, so by deduction it is possible to associate them with the adversaries. Just like in the case of Svanr, they also affect one person only, although here the focus is on the main character involved in the conflict. The possession of any kind of supernatural skills is not necessary in order to be affected by the enemies' *fylgjur*.

An interesting scene is featured in Oddr's *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, chapter 17, as the king approaches the home of a Finn. He is expecting Ólafr, but asks him not to enter his house, since he – as a pagan magician – cannot bear the presence of God. He informs the king that "mjǫk þungt hefir mér verit í dag síðan þú komt við land, ok eigi fara litlar fylgjur fyrir þér, ok optast hefi ek sofit"[53] (ÍF XXV, 2006:188). Just like with the other scenes featuring Ólafr's *fylgjur*,[54] a clearly Christian context is unmistakable. However, the fact that they have made the Finn feel uneasy and sleepy, since Ólafr has disembarked, suggests the same sort of *atsókn* (attack) by the *fylgjur*, though here as a

[49] A similar phrasing is used in *Ljósvetninga saga*, chapter 20: "þar myndir þú eigi hafa getat staðizk *fylgjur þeira Þorvarðs ok frænda hans*" ["you were not able to withstand the *fylgjur* of Þorvarðr and his kinsmen"] (ÍF X, 1940:101, italics added).

[50] However, as has been pointed out to me by Ármann Jakobsson in private communication, there is a possibility that Ósvífr might possess some sort of special skills. In *Laxdœla saga*, he is described as "spekingr mikill" (ÍF V, 1934:85), and his daughter Guðrún notes to Gestr Oddleifsson, a man known for his foresight and wisdom, after he has interpreted her dreams, that "þá Ósvífr mart spakligt tala mundu" ["they could share much wisdom"] (ibid., p. 91). Nevertheless, these indications are rather subtle, and do not prove that this was a generally understood characteristic of Ósvífr.

[51] "Þórðr kvað sér svefnhöfugt og kvað sækja at sér ófriðarfylgjur" [Þórðr said that he was feeling drowsy and that hostile *fylgjur* were attacking him"] (ÍF XIV, 1959:195).

[52] "Enn er hann var mettr, bað móðir konu hans hann verða í brottu, kvað þar fara óvina fylgjur. Hann kvað sik syfia mjök. Ok er hann vildi upp standa, fell hann af út sofinn." ["But when he was full, the mother of his wife asked him to leave, she said that enemy *fylgjur* were going about there. He said that he felt very sleepy. And as he wanted to stand up, he fell down fast asleep."] (*Sturlunga saga II*, 1946:287).

[53] "I have been feeling very bad today, since you came ashore, and the *fylgjur* going before you are not small, and mostly I have been sleeping."

[54] Chapters 5 and 8 in Oddr's version, as well as chapter 64 in the *Flateyjarbók* version, which all announce the king's arrival.

result of the confrontation between paganism and Christianity, rather than of personal animosity.

Although the *atsókn* in the form of tiredness and yawning is fairly common in the sources, there is only one instance of a character suffering a physical injury supposedly caused by *fylgjur*. In *Ljósvetninga saga*, chapter 20, Eyjólfr's horse trips so that he falls from its back and severely injures his foot. This is attributed to the *fylgjur* of his enemies: "Þat mynda ek ætla, at þar myndir þú eigi hafa getat staðizk fylgjur þeira Þorvarðs ok frænda hans, er fjándskap leggja á þik"[55] (ÍF X, 1940:100-1). As Eyjólfr does not seem to have noticed anything strange, the attack must have been aimed at the horse, causing it to stumble. Unfortunately, the text does not provide any further information, which would help us shed more light on the circumstances. It nevertheless needs to be pointed out that at the time of the incident Þorvarðr and his companions are in Rome. Judging by previous examples, the appearance or activity of *fylgjur* seems to mostly be closely connected to the people they belong to, both in time and space, thus their sudden appearance in Iceland in order to cause Eyjólfr an injury is somewhat unusual.[56] Perhaps this scene merely represents an instance of superstition, in which an accident that appears to have no apparent cause is attributed to the influence of paranormal figures. Using the motif of *fylgjur* could also serve as a moral commentary, as the incident occurs right after Eyjólfr has killed Þorvarðr's brother and whilst the men are discussing the killing. With this deed, Eyjólfr has broken the settlement reached at the *þing* in course of which Þorvarðr has been exiled. As Þorvarðr himself is abroad and cannot act himself, the invisible *fylgjur* take on the role of avengers, indicating the perpetuation of the feud.

[55] "I reckon that you were not able to withstand the *fylgjur* of Þorvarðr and his kinsmen which are hostile towards you."

[56] However, there might also be an underlying connection to *dísir*. As Dag Strömbäck has argued, several textual passages can be interpreted as suggesting that angered dísir cause a person or their horse to stumble and fall, often leading to death (Strömbäck, 1949:26-9). This is most notably the case with the death of King Aðils of Sweden as depicted in Ynglinga saga, chapter 29, when his horse stumbles as the king rides in the *dísarsalr* (hall of the *dís*) during a *dísablót* (sacrifice to the *dísir*). Similar passages are to be found in *Grímnismál*, stanza 53, and *Reginsmál*, stanza 24 (see Strömbäck 1949:26-7 and 31 for a more detailed analysis).

1.4 *Fylgjur* depicted as women

Traditionally, *fylgjur* are regarded as either zoomorphic or female beings. The sources provide us with at least 12 scenes[57] in which *fylgjur* appear in the shape of various animals. However, the number is much smaller when we attempt to pin down the female *fylgjur*. Most passages in the literature remain silent on the form of the *fylgjur* they mention. Instead, they focus on their activity, such as e.g. in *Njáls saga* chapters 12 and 69 as discussed above, or the power potential they have, such as in *Þorskfirðinga saga*, chapter 6, where a man named Steinólfr is warned not to go against Gull-Þórir, "þar sem þínar fylgjur mega ei standazt hans fylgjur"[58] (ÍF XIII, 1991:191).[59] All instances of this type have been classified by Else Mundal into the category of female *fylgja* (see her registry of the motifs in 1974:63-65), although the texts themselves do not yield any information on their outward form. Considering only those textual instances where the beings are explicitly referred to as *fylgjur*, those that lack information about their appearance represent almost two thirds.[60] Subsequently, as has already been argued by Clive Tolley (2009:229), there are only a couple of instances that feature an explicitly female *fylgja*.

Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls forms part of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* in *Flateyjarbók.* The narrative centres on the autumn feast at the farm of Síðu-Hallr. One of the guests, the foresighted Norwegian Þórhallr, predicts "at spámaður muni vera drepinn at þeirri veizlu"[61] (*Flateyjarbók* I, 1944:466) and warns everyone not to step outside during the night. The warning is not heeded by Þiðrandi, the son of Síðu Hallr, who decides to answer the knocking on the door, expecting it to be further guests. However, as he goes outside, he hears the sound of hooves and he "sá, at þar váru konur níu, ok váru allar í svörtum klæðum ok höfðu brugðin sverð í höndum. Hann heyrði ok,

[57] This number only includes passages in which the animals are explicitly referred to as *fylgjur*. It would be possible to add others by analogy.
[58] "as your *fylgjur* won't be able to withstand his *fylgjur*"
[59] Similar instances, which address the strength of people's *fylgjur*, are to be found in *Vatnsdœla saga*, chapter 30: "en þó hafa þeir brœðr rammar fylgjur" ["but the brothers have mightly *fylgjur*"] (ÍF VIII, 1939:83), in *Þórðar saga hreðu*, chapter 7: "ok er ekki mark at mínum ættarfylgjum, ef eigi týna nökkurir frændr Orms fyrir mér lífi, áðr [en] ek lýk nösum" [and my kin's fylgjur are insignificant, if I do not cause the death of some of Ormr's kinsmen, before I myself close my nostrils"] (ÍF XIV, 1959:194), as well as in *Ljósvetninga saga*, chapter 20: "Ætlar þú, at þeira fylgjur sé meiri fyrir sér en mínar og minna frænda?" ["Do you think that their fylgjur are mightier than mine and my kinsmen's?"] (ÍF X, 1940:101).
[60] Out of 36 examples, 21 are inconclusive as to the appearance of the *fylgja*.
[61] "that a prophet shall be killed at that feast"

at riðit var sunnan á völlinn. Þar váru ok níu konur, allar í ljósum klæðum ok á hvítum hestum"[62] (ibid., p. 467). The black women reach him first and Þiðrandi is killed in battle with them. The following morning, as his body is found, Þórhallr proclaims that:

> "geta má ek til, at þetta hafi engar konur verit aðrar en fylgjur yðrar frænda. Get ek, at hér komi siðaskipti, ok mun þessu næst koma siðr betri hingat til lands. Ætla ek þær dísir yðrar, er fylgt hafa þessum átrúnaði, nú hafa vitat fyrir siðaskipti ok þat, at þær munu verða afhendar þeim frændum. Nú munu þær eigi una því at hafa engan skatt af yðr, áðr þær skiljast við, ok munu þær hafa þetta í sinn hlut, en hinar betri dísir mundu vilja hjálpa honum ok kómust eigi við að svá búnu"[63] (ibid., p. 467-8).

It appears that both groups of women are associated with Síðu-Hallr's family, but representing a different religious orientation. As Þórhallr suggests, the black *fylgjur* or *dísir* shall be forsaken by the family with the arrival of Christianity, and their place will be taken by the "betri dísir" of the new faith.

The description of these figures is rather detailed – they are all women, in black and white robes respectively, riding on horses with drawn swords. What is striking, however, is the fact that they are referred to both as *fylgjur* and as *dísir*, which might suggest that – at least for the composer of the text – the two words were largely synonymous and thus interchangeable (cf. Strömbäck, 1949:23). The episode is set into the context of Iceland's conversion to Christianity and the division of the *fylgjur* or *dísir* into black and white is clearly influenced by "kristna föreställningar om mörkrets och ljusets änglaskaror, om kampen mellan det onda och det goda"[64] (ibid., p. 32). As Dag Strömbäck argues, the depiction of Þiðrandi's death is inspired by contemporary

[62] "and he saw that there were nine women, and all wore black clothes and had drawn swords in their hands. He also heard someone riding onto the field from the south. There were also nine women, all in lightly-coloured clothes and on white horses."
[63] "I would guess that these women were no others than the *fylgjur* of you and your kinsmen. I reckon that there will be a change of custom (i.e. faith), and soon a better custom shall come to this country. I think that the *dísir* of those of you, who have followed the current faith, have now predicted the change of custom and they shall get detached from the family. Now they will not like not to have had their toll from you, before they part ways, and they will have taken this as their share, and the better *dísir* did want to help him, but did not reach him just yet."
[64] "Christian perceptions about the angelic hosts of darkness and light, about the battle between the bad and the good."

visionary literature and the clashing of the two groups of women represents the battle for Þiðrandi's soul (ibid., pp. 32-38).[65]

Another supernatural female features in chapter 11 of *Hallfreðar saga*, when the eponymous hero of the saga suddenly falls ill aboard a ship. At this moment, a woman appears, walking behind the ship. The passage reads:

> "Hon var mikil ok í brynju; hon gekk á bylgjum sem á landi. Hallfreðr leit til ok sá, at þar var fylgjukona hans. Hallfreðr mælti: 'Í sundr segi ek ǫllu við þik.' Hon mælti: 'Villtu, Þorvaldr, taka við mér?' Hann kvazk eigi vilja. Þá mælti Hallfreðr ungi: 'Ek vil taka við þér'"[66] (ÍF VIII, 1939:198).[67]

The woman appears when Hallfreðr is lying on his deathbed, upon which he proclaims that he breaks all ties with her. This has been interpreted as Hallfreðr's definitive breach with paganism (Mundal, 1974:118-20, ÍF VIII, 1939:198 fn. 1), which the *fylgjukona* represents. However, as Clive Tolley has already noted (2009:227), the fact that Hallfreðr's son – who is himself a Christian – accepts the *fylgjukona*, seems to undermine such intent on the part of the composer. Perhaps the adopting of the *fylgjukona* symbolizes inheritance. Hallfreðr the younger not only carries his father's name, he also takes over his farm and receives the same nickname as him – *vandræðaskáld*. The saga ends at this point, not providing much more information on how Hallfreðr's life develops other than "[h]ann var mikilmenni og gæfumaður; er mart manna frá honum komit"[68] (ÍF VIII, 1939:200). Although Mundal argues that the *fylgjukona*, as a representation of paganism, is perceived "som ein vond arv i ætta"[69] (Mundal, 1974:119) and not, as Einar Ólafur Sveinsson suggested, the family's *hamingja*[70] (ÍF VIII, 1939:198 fn. 1) – which is supposed to bring good fortune – the

[65] Ármann Jakobsson sees Þiðrandi's death in terms of the sacrifice of an innocent and noble youth necessary to accept new ideologies, a theme recurrent in 14th century conversion narratives (2013b).
[66] "She was big and in armour; she walked upon the waves as if on land. Hallfreðr looked there and saw that it was his *fylgjukona*. Hallfreðr said: 'I dissolve all ties with you.' She said: 'Do you, Þorvaldr, want to take me on?' He said he did not want to. Then Hallfreðr the younger said: 'I want to take you on.'"
[67] This passage only appears in the M-redaction of the saga (*Mǫðruvallabók*), whereas the redaction found in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* offers a slightly different account of Hallfreðr's death. In the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition, however, the two versions have been conflated (see Bjarni Einarsson, 1981:219-220).
[68] "He was a great and lucky man; many people were descended from him."
[69] "as a bad inheritance in the family"
[70] *Hamingja* has traditionally been understood by scholars as referring to an abstract concept of luck similar to *gæfa* and *gipta*, or appearing in a concrete and personified sense in form of a protective

saga itself does not give us any reason to believe that this supposedly bad inheritance had a negative impact on Hallfreðr the younger's life.

Another example is often cited as an explicitly female representation of a *fylgja*, namely the episode in the Eddic poem *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* (cf. Rieger, 1898:281). Before Helgi goes into his final battle, we are informed in a prose passage that he suspects his upcoming death "ok þat at fylgjur hans hǫfðu vitjat Heðins, þá er hann sá konuna ríða varginum"[71] (*Eddukvæði* II, 2014:267) followed by stanza 36 of the poem, reading:

36. "Reið á vargi, hon vissi þat
er rekkvit var, at veginn myndi
fljóð eitt er hann Sigrlinnar sonr
fylgju beiddi; á Sigarsvǫllum" (ibid.).[72]

The woman referred to has been introduced in a previous scene, again in prose, in which Helgi's brother Heðinn, while returning home during a Yule evening, "fann trǫllkonu, sú reið vargi ok hafði orma at taumum ok bauð fylgð sína Heðni"[73] (ibid., p. 266). The woman, after offering him her following, which he, however, refuses, proclaims that Heðinn will come to regret this, a threat that can be interpreted as a curse (cf. ibid., p. 20). This episode poses certain problems, which shall be discussed in greater detail below.

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family spirit. See Blum, 1912:32-38; de Vries, 1956:174 and 220-4; Hallberg 1973:143-83 and Sejbjerg Sommer 2007:279-82 for further reference, as the scope of this thesis does not allow for a detailed analysis of the concept.

[71] "and that his *fylgjur* have come to Heðinn, when he saw the woman riding on a wolf"

[72] "She rode on a wolf, as it grew dark,
that lady who offered him company;
she knew that Sigrlinn's son
would be killed at Sigarsvellir" (transl. by Larrington, in *The Poetic Edda*, 2009:126).
Note, however, the alternate translation of "fljóð eitt er hann / fylgju beiddi" as "eine Frau, die ihn / zur Begleitung aufforderte" ["a woman that requested his following"] as suggested by Klaus von See *et al.* (2004:559; see discussion below on pp. 36).

[73] "found a troll woman, she rode on a wolf and had snakes for reigns and offered her following to Heðinn."

Chapter 2: Interpretative Possibilities

2.1 Previous scholarship

During the past century and a half there have been several distinctive approaches in scholarship to the problematic of *fylgjur*. Early studies in the second half of the 19th century have connected the belief in *fylgjur* with perceptions of the soul. Eugen Mogk, who wrote the part on mythology in the first volume of *Grundriss der Germanischen Philologie* (1891), dedicated an extensive chapter to a discussion on Germanic perceptions of the soul, the basis of which was an animistic viewpoint where the human soul is interconnected with nature and returns into it upon a person's death. The soul is like "ein zweites Ich," an alter-ego, which can leave the body, assume a familiar shape, and after death can even be reborn (1891:999). Although Mogk declares the belief in *fylgjur* to be the clearest manifestation of such a relation between body and soul (ibid.), he dedicates little attention to them specifically.

The connection of *fylgjur* to perceptions of the soul in pre-Christian times has been explored primarily by Dag Strömbäck. He has addressed the topic in his influential monograph entitled *Sejd*, originally published in 1935, and later in 1975 examined it in greater detail in the lecture *The Concept of the Soul in Nordic Tradition*, in both cases contrasting medieval textual evidence with more recent Scandinavian folklore.

The primary subject of *Sejd*, as the title suggests, is a detailed exploration of the Norse concept of *seiðr,* based on a critical analysis of prose and poetic textual evidence. Strömbäck argues that the perception of soul is most intimately connected to *seiðr*, as the belief that it can detach itself from its owner and then act independently from him on his behalf is of paramount importance for the practitioner of *seiðr* (2000:153). The person against which the *seiðr* is aimed can be physically or psychically affected, often by experiencing sudden sleepiness, and "[d]et är den sejdandes *hugr*, *vǫrðr* eller *fylgja*, som verkar på objektet"[74] (ibid.). Strömbäck does not delve into definitions of the individual words, with the exception of *vǫrðr* (especially

[74] "it is the *seiðr*-performer's *hugr, vǫrðr* or *fylgja* that affects the object"

pp. 124-6 and pp. 130-3), which he looks at within the context of the expression *varðlokkur* from *Eiríks saga rauða*, providing multiple parallels from Swedish folklore and dialectal expressions, arriving at the conclusion that it primarily refers to an '"andligt väsen, som utgår från (och följer) den levande människa','fylgja','frisjäl""[75] (ibid., p. 133). Rather, he operates with the concept of the free soul, which is capable of moving independently outside of the physical human body of the owner, and treats the various expressions for it used by the primary sources as parallel, or even synonymic. The *fylgjur* thus, for the most part, do not stand out in the study. An exception is the chapter on shape-shifting (pp. 160-90), where *fylgjur* are in the spotlight more than the any of the other expressions. Strömbäck differentiates and discusses two major kinds of shape-shifting: the ability to take on the form of virtually any animal on the one hand, and "å andra sidan förhamningen till ett sådant djur, som på ett eller annat sätt stod i förbindelse med hamnskiftets utövare, som var vederbörandes konkret uppfattade fylgja eller vård"[76] (ibid., p. 164), an example of the latter being the character of Bǫðvarr bjarki in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, who fights in the shape of a bear whilst his body lies asleep. The underlying idea is that a person's *fylgja* has the shape of a specific animal, which would lie closest at hand for a person who is *hamrammr* or *eigi einhamr*,[77] i.e. who possesses the ability to take on a different *hamr*, shape. The *fylgja* itself, as it appears in the sagas in animal form, Strömbäck sees as a materialisation of the person's free soul (2000:165, fn. 1).

Contrary to Strömbäck, who does not address the problematics of female *fylgjur*, Folke Ström has discussed the dichotomy in several of his works.[78] In his study on female supernatural beings entitled *Diser, nornor, valkyrjor* (1954), he argues that the idea of female *fylgjur* is "en sekundär sammanflytning av i grunden helt olikartade idéer"[79] (1954:98), namely that of the female *dísir* and of *fylgjur*. The latter were, according to him, originally thought of "såsom ett människan åtföljande djur, ett till den

[75] "'a spiritual being that emerges from (and follows) a living person', 'a *fylgja*', 'a free soul'"
[76] "on the other hand shape-shifting into an animal that was in one way or another connected to the shape-shifter, that was the person's concretely perceived *fylgja* or *vård*"
[77] See the registry of literature using the expressions in Strömbäck, 2000:162.
[78] Most significantly *Diser, nornor, valkyrjor: Fruktbarhetskult och sakralt kungadome i Norden* (1954), *Nordisk hedendom: Tro och sed i förkristen tid* (1961) and in his entry on *fylgjur* in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (1960).
[79] "a secondary merging of basically completely different ideas"

enskilda människan (ej till släkten) i djurgestalt knutet alter ego"[80] (ibid., p. 97). The idea of female *fylgjur* is thus a result of a later development, closely related to the *dísir*, as they are connected to the family rather than exclusively an individual and can be inherited (cf. Ström, 1961:134-5).

However, some scholars considered *fylgjur* to be originally thought of as female figures. In this line, Max Rieger (1898) sees them as protective ancestral spirits attending a family, although associated primarily with its head or outstanding members. He is critical towards the multiple concept of the soul and argues that the *fylgjur* in an animal form, which often suggest someone's coming, belong to the sphere of visionary symbolism, and were falsely associated with the concept of *fylgjur*. Similarly, Ida Blum (1912) argues that they constitute independent attendant spirits often connected to families, either without a defined shape or pictured as females. She defines these as mythological *fylgjur* (ger. *mythologische Fylgjen*) and contrasts them with dream *fylgjur* (ger. *Traumfylgjen*), arguing that it is not the actual *fylgja* that appears in animal shape, but rather the dream apparition is interpreted as such, resulting in a false perception of animal *fylgjur*. She sees these as a purely literary device, a tool of prophecy cast into a poetic form. The idea of ancestral spirits has also been developed by Heinrich Hempel (1966 [1939]), who understands *fylgjur* as the spirits of the family's deceased female ancestors.

As already mentioned above, Else Mundal's study, *Fylgjemotiva i norrøn litteratur* published in 1974, is the only extensive study devoted entirely to the examination of the *fylgjur*. Mundal starts off on the premise stated already by Folke Ström (1960:39), that "vi har å gjere med to innbyrdes heilt ulike motiv, dyrefylgjemotivet og kvinnefylgjemotivet. ... Desse to skapningane har, som det etter kvert vil vise seg, ikkje stort meir enn namnet sams"[81] (Mundal, 1974:11). The two different motifs are thus treated separately, both examined from a folkloristic and literary point of view.

[80] "as a person's attendant animal, as an alter ego connected to an individual (not a family) in animal form"

[81] "we are dealing with two completely different motifs, the animal *fylgja* motif and the female *fylgja* motif. … These two creatures have, as shall eventually become obvious, not much more than the name in common."

Mundal views the animal *fylgja* in terms of soul belief, as an "ytre sjel som mennesket har i tillegg til kroppsjela"[82] (1974:43), which constantly accompanies the person it belongs to. This, according to her, distinguishes it from the *hugr*, which normally resides within the human, but can be sent out from them. Although regarded as a being outside of the human, the *fylgja* is identical with them; it is born and dies with them (ibid., p. 39). As such, the animal associated with a person is a constant attribute, the form of which expresses the character of the owner (ibid., p. 38). As literary motifs, Mundal identifies three sub-categories of the animal *fylgjur*: the *fylgja* as a death warning (with only two examples in *Njáls saga*, ch. 41 and *Vatnsdœla saga*, ch. 42), a warning about future events, and a warning about the possibility of danger (again, with only two examples in *Njáls saga*, ch. 69 and *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 4). She argues that the primary function of the animal *fylgja* motif is to suggest the upcoming events and thus increase the audience's expectations and the level of suspense (Mundal, 1974:46). An exception is group 3, which does not indicate what will happen, but rather a potential, which, however, can be changed. It serves the opposite purpose to the first two groups and resolves tension in the text (ibid., p. 52-3).

In Mundal's understanding, a female *fylgja* is, contrary to the animal one, an independent being, connected to the human – or rather the family – in a looser way. It can help the human it is attending and interact with them, but it acts on its own accord and can also leave them (ibid., p. 96). She argues that the instances in which a *fylgja* is said to affect a person in an *atsókn*, e.g. in *Njáls saga*, ch. 12, or have attributes such as "máttugar" can only be understood as female *fylgjur*, though they may not be described as such in the sources, since the animal ones are merely a reflection of the human, cannot act independently from them and thus cannot cause any effect on others or provide protection (ibid., p. 95). Based on her definition quoted above, she identifies a range of female figures – referred to in the sources with various words such as *(spá)dís*, *hamingja* or *draumkona* – as belonging into her category of female *fylgjur* (cf. the registry provided on pp. 65-8), which consequently outnumbers the animal *fylgjur* considerably.

[82] "external soul that a person has additionally to his bodily soul"

2.2 Were *fylgjur* female?

While Else Mundal's study is undoubtedly valuable, the category of female *fylgjur* she presents may be questioned. A great proportion of the examples cited by her are identified by a different name in the sources, most commonly *dís*. Mundal argues that the category of *dísir* has in the Norse period developed a division into groups of specialised *dísir*, which have received specific names such as *valkyrjur* and *nornir*, one of them comprising protective female beings connected to an individual that has "i mangel av noko betre"[83] received the name *fylgja* (1974:83-4).[84]

However, it seems as if the division of the source material that actually uses the term *fylgja* into the two categories of female and animal *fylgjur* happens based on a pre-established definition of what both categories are, rather than on the grounds of the information from the sources themselves. The most obvious example is the treatment of episodes concerning *atsókn*. This feeling of sleepiness or drowsiness is in the sources attributed either to the influence of someone's *fylgja*[85] or *hugr*.[86] Mundal briefly goes in on the *hugr* in her discussion of soul belief, stating that it can be sent out from a person, but cannot do anything on their behalf, "[d]et einaste som skjer er at den hugen er retta mot, vert trøytt og gjerne sovnar"[87] (1974:42-3). This is the same effect the (supposedly female) *fylgjur* have during an *atsókn*, and Mundal notes that "[d]enne likskapen er uventa, ein skulle heller ha vente å finne samsvar mellom hugen og dyrefylgja, men

[83] "for lack of something better"

[84] Ström (1954) has argued that the *dísir* represent a distinct category of beings related to fertility and death, with clear connections to Óðinn. Blum (1912) perceives them as protective spirits, distinct from e.g. female *fylgjur*. However, other scholars tend to see the term as a collective name for various supernatural female beings (de Vries, 1957:297; Mundal, 1974:79-83; Ármann Jakobsson, 2013b:16). In either case, there is evidence suggesting that *dísir* have been recipients of a cult, which does not apply to *fylgjur* (Turville-Petre, 1964:224).

[85] *Njáls saga*, ch. 12, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, ch. 7, *Sturlunga saga II*, *Úr Þórðar sögu kakala í Króksfjarðarbók*, ch. 25 (1946:287) .

[86] *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts*, ch. 10 (ÍF XIII, 1991:361). Further passages in which a character suddenly gets sleepy, can be connected to this, albeit not explicitly naming the cause of the tiredness: *Finnboga saga*, ch. 39 and 40, in which Finnbogi declares: "svá syfjar mik hér, at ek má víst eigi upp standa; ok víst sækir at nökkut, ok skal sofa" ["I am so sleepy, that I cannot stand up; and surely something is attacking, and I must sleep"] (ÍF XIV, 1959:328-9); *Njáls saga*, ch. 62, in which Gunnarr suddenly falls asleep and then dreams that he is attacked by a pack of wolves, before an actual attack ensues (ÍF XII, 1954:155-6); *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ch. 82, in which Glaumr falls fast asleep for the entire day when he is supposed to guard the ladder leading onto Drangey, and does not wake up until he is attacked by their enemies (ÍF VII, 1936:258).

[87] "the only thing that happens is that the person, against whom the *hugr* is directed, gets tired and tends to fall asleep"

dyrefylgja kjem ikkje med *atsókn*"[88] (ibid., p. 99). Her attempt to explain this similarity by the ability of both the *hugr*, as a "personifisert fjernverknad av mennesket sin medvetne eller umedvetne vonde tanke"[89] (ibid.), and the female *fylgja*, as an independent being, to perform an action is rather unsatisfactory. Not only does it contradict her assessment of the nature of *hugr* as stated above, but this very same ability to assist a human by attacking an adversary is used as a defining criterion for categorising the *fylgjur* in question as female, and therefore unrelated to the animal ones. Thus it seems as if the group of female *fylgjur* had been created upon the basis of a pre-existing conception rather than the evidence of the source material.

As has already been argued in chapter 1.4, few of the sources actually describe the *fylgjur* as women. If we are explicitly informed about their appearance, it is mostly in the form of various animals. Other than that, their shape is mostly left unaddressed. Unless we incorporate other paranormally appearing women, in which case we, however, run the risk of judging the source material based on our preconceptions – which may prove to be an unfruitful approach for a study aimed at assessing a specific phenomenon – we are left with the three episodes presented above. However, these are not unproblematic and require further attention, to which I shall now turn.

Certain common traits can be established between the scenes. In both *Hallfreðar saga* and *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls*, the women display certain valkyric characteristics – armour, riding on horses and carrying weapons. They also appear to be physical as opposed to other examples of *fylgjur*. The woman walking after Hallfreðr's ship is visible not just to the person she belongs to, but to everyone around. It is difficult to ascertain whether the same applies to the *fylgjur* or *dísir* in *Þiðranda þáttr*, as Þiðrandi is the only one to witness them, but there is definitely a certain physicality to them: the sound of their horses' hooves can be heard on the ground and they are able to engage in a fight with Þiðrandi – as seems to be suggested by "hann varðist vel ok drengilega"[90] (*Flateyjarbók* I, 1944:467) – and kill him. This appears to apply also to the woman in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar*, as indicated by the usage of the verb *finna*

[88] "this similarity is unexpected, one would rather have expected to find correlation between the *hugr* and the animal *fylgja*, but the animal *fylgja* did not come with an *atsókn*"
[89] "personification of the influence of a person's conscious or unconscious ill thought"
[90] "he defended himself well and bravely"

"to meet, find." Contrary to any other of the numerous examples of *fylgjur*, these women all act as independent beings, unconnected to the person or family they are attached to, and they are capable of and willing to interact with people. They can decide to leave a person, offer their following to someone else, and even kill a member of the family. These seem to thus be the only ones that comply with the definition presented by Else Mundal.

It is also noteworthy that in all of these cases the naming slightly varies from the usual. In *Þiðranda þáttr*, it is the alternation between the words *fylgjur* and *dísir*, indicating that these words must have carried the same meaning, at least for the composer of this specific text. Perhaps even more unusual is the usage of the word *fylgjukona* in *Hallfreðar saga*. Contrary to the other examples, the main word in the compound is *kona* "woman" and not, as might be expected, *fylgja*, thus stressing the feminine aspect of this figure. The attribute *fylgju-* may merely express that she is following or attending Hallfreðr and, indeed, the family as a whole, as is suggested by the fact that she can be inherited by the descendants.

The *fylgjukona* in *Hallfreðar saga* is often paralleled with a scene from *Víga-Glúms saga*. One night, Glúm dreams of a woman, so huge that her shoulders touch the mountains, walking towards his farm. He concludes from the dream, that his maternal grandfather must have passed away, and the woman – his *hamingja* – came to attend him (ÍF IX, 1956:30-1). Similarly to *Hallfreðar saga*, the female attendant spirit is at the time of death passed down to an heir, symbolising inheritance and the continuity of the family and blood-line. The *hamingja* hereby also acts somewhat independently: she is the one who sets out on a journey from the grandfather to Glúm, approaches the farm and the saga explicitly states that Glúm invites her to him.[91]

In this context it is worth mentioning *Vatnsdœla saga*, chapter 36, relating how Þorsteinn, one of the main characters, has a dream three nights in a row in which a woman warns him from going to a feast. The woman is not specified in detail, and is only referred to as "kona sú, er fylgt hafði þeim frændum"[92] (ÍF VIII, 1939:95). This

[91] It is interesting to note that Jónas Kristjánsson, in a footnote explaining the term *hamingja*, references the episode in *Hallfreðar saga* (ÍF IX, 1956:31).
[92] "the woman that had followed the kinsmen"

suggests that she is directly connected to Þorsteinn and his brothers Jǫkull and Þórir. She clearly has a protective function, as her insistence prevents Þorsteinn from going to the feast, thus saving him from being killed in a landslide that buries the farm. The woman has often been identified as a female *fylgja* (Mundal, 1974:63). However, previously in chapter 30, we are informed that "hafa þeir brœðr rammar fylgjur"[93] (ÍF VIII, 1939:83). There is a clear discrepancy between these *fylgjur* – the plural suggesting that the brothers together have several of them, possibly each having his own one – and the woman appearing in Þorsteinn's dream, which seems to be common for all of them. Although the *fylgjur* are described as mighty, thus expressing a quality, this does not reliably state that they were thought of in the same manner as the women discussed above, i.e. as external beings capable of independent action. The dream woman, on the other hand, does indeed act on her own accord; she insistently reappears in Þorsteinn's dreams, changing the course of action by exercising her protective function. This seems to indicate that we have two different concepts at play, *fylgjur* as well as a protective female being attending the family.[94]

The scene from *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* is problematic in a similar manner. Although it appears that the word *fylgjur* is referring to the woman riding on a wolf, there is a discrepancy in the number – Helgi's *fylgjur* appear in plural, whilst the woman is only one. Rieger has suggested that with the fading of the mythological ideas, people stopped differentiating between singular and plural when imagining these beings. The usage of plural in *fylgjur* in the prose of *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* would thus be a conscious choice towards a more abstract way of expression (Rieger,

[93] "the brothers have mightly *fylgjur*"

[94] It has been noted that *Vatnsdœla saga* has an unusually high frequency of the term *hamingja* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ÍF VIII, 1939:xxviii-xxix; Hallberg, 1973:166-8). Peter Hallberg notes that although the term mostly appears in the sense of good fortune, as „an inherent quality, belonging to a family as well as to its individual members[, i]n one or two cases the *hamingja* seems to have a slight touch of personification" (1973:167). Another "fortune word", as Hallberg refers to them, is used in the episode with the dream woman cited above. Gróa, the woman who organised the feast Þorsteinn was supposed to attend and who – as the text indicates – brings about the landslide with magic, proclaims: "Erfitt mun verða at standa í mót giptu Ingimundarsona" ["It will be difficult to withstand the luck of the sons of Ingimundr"] (ÍF VIII, 1939:96). Although it would be a great leap to identify this "gipta" with the dream woman, there nevertheless seems to be a certain connection.

1898:281-3). However, even with a faded or changed sense of *fylgjur*, the discrepancy between the grammatical numbers seems rather odd.[95]

Furthermore, the woman is previously in the text referred to as a *trǫllkona*, thus we again have an alternation between various terms at play. Contrary to both the examples above and to the other instances of *fylgjur*, the word employed carries an inherently negative meaning, in Ármann Jakobsson's words: "A troll is always negative and it is always alien" (2013d:107).[96] This is further supported by the appearance of the woman – riding a wolf and having snakes for reins hardly suggests friendliness.[97] Indeed, as Heðinn refuses her following, her response is malevolent. With the words "[þ]ess skaltu gjalda at bragarfulli"[98] (*Eddukvæði* II, 2014:266), she curses him. If the troll woman was imagined as Helgi's *fylgja*, this scene would give us an unparalleled example of such a manifestation, both when compared to the bulk of other instances of *fylgjur*, as well as the paranormal women analysed in this chapter.

However, the connection between the *fylgjur* and the *trǫllkona* can be more complicated than that. It has been argued that the prose commentary that is interwoven with the poem is younger than the verses, though it is difficult to make conclusions about the transmission of the poem, as it is only preserved in the *Codex Regius* (*Eddukvæði* II, 2014:19). Terry Gunnell notes that the poem "give[s] a fragmentary impression, and [is] made up of short dialogues connected by brief prose accounts

[95] Several other theories regarding this discrepancy have been put forward by scholars. Else Mundal understands the troll woman as one of Helgi's multiple *fylgjur*, suggesting that the *fylgð* she offers to Heðinn in the prose passage refers to the other ones (1974:77). It has also been suggested that the plural refers to the woman and the wolf together, or that it represents a scribal error (see von See *et al*., 2004:560).

[96] See Ármann Jakobsson 2008 and 2013d for a more in-depth analysis of the usage of the word *troll* in Old Icelandic literature, illustrating its broad meaning.

[97] This representation is reminiscent of the giantess Hyrrokkin mentioned in *Gylfaginning*, chapter 49: "Þá var sent í Jǫtunheima eptir gýgi þeiri er Hyrrokkin hét. En er hún kom og reið vargi og hafði hǫggorm at taumum..." ["Then they sent to Jǫtunheimar for the giantess called Hyrrokkin. And when she came and rode a wolf and had poisonous snakes for reins…"] (*Edda*, 2005:46). Similar images are to be found in *Hyndluljóð*, where Hyndla also rides a wolf (*Eddukvæði* I, 2014:460), in a dream in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, chapter 81 (ÍF XXVIII, 1941:177), as well as on the Hunnestad rune stone. The connection of wolves to giantesses and witches is further strengthened by kennings referring to them amongst others as *kveldriðu hestar* (von See *et al.*, 2004:567; McKinnell, 2005:152 and 113-5).

[98] "You'll pay for this when it comes to drinking to pledges" (transl. by Larrington, 2009:125). At the Yule feast, Heðinn vows to get his brother Helgi's beloved, Sváva. As Heðinn himself suggests in stanza 35, this would give Helgi cause to kill him, which might have been the outcome the *trǫllkona* potentially intended (cf. *Eddukvæði* II, 2014:23).

which have conceivably replaced lost narrative strophes or unnecessary repetitions," showing evidence of more editorial activity than other Eddic poems (Gunnell, 2005:88). According to Henry Adams Bellows, "[w]hoever composed them [i.e. the prose notes] seems to have been consciously trying to bring his chaotic verse material into some semblance of unity" (*The Poetic Edda*, 1936:273). Based on a comparison with the prose in the other Helgi poems, Klaus von See *et al.* draw the conclusion that the prose passages in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* were composed by the redactor of the *Codex Regius* (von See *et al.*, 2004:401).

The poetic verse only mentions the woman riding on a wolf (stanza 36), whereas the *fylgjur* appear only in the prose commentary, and could thus be a later addition or interpretation of the composer. As Klaus von See *et al.* have argued, stanza 36 is inconclusive as to whom the woman on the wolf has met, since the masculine pronoun *hann* may as well refer to Helgi (2004:390 and 565).[99] Furthermore, they point out that the phrase used in the verse, *fylgju beiddi*, suggests that the woman requested *his* following, rather than offered *hers* (ibid., pp. 390, 567-8), which would challenge the idea of her being Helgi's *fylgja*. However, if Helgi was the one who met the troll woman, it would explain, why he would suspect his upcoming death in the duel with Álfr Hróðmarsson,[100] as she is said to know about the outcome of the fight (stanza 36). Klaus von See *et al.* have pointed out that all instances of troll women riding wolves are in some way related to death (2004:380, 567). Her appearance would thus directly herald his death, and perhaps it is in this light that we could interpret the verse *er hann fylgju beiddi* – as a sort of invitation into the afterlife.

How do the *fylgjur* from the prose commentary fit into this? As the extant verse merely mentions the woman on the wolf, which can hardly be interpreted as a *fylgja* – neither in the sense of a distinct class of beings, nor in a more general sense of a following spirit – it seems like the *fylgjur* are a result of the redactor's (mis)interpretation or an addition by him. However, as the poem in its only extant version contains contradictions, it is difficult to assess the redactor's motivations or

[99] According to von See *et al.*, the prose passage narrating Heðinn's encounter with the troll woman, which contradicts the verse, may have been an attempt to explain Heðinn's vow to claim Sváva, and by inserting a magical cause, to take the blame from him (2004:566).

[100] This is expressed not only in the prose passage preceding stanza 36, but also in Helgi's own words in stanza 34.

perceptions of these *fylgjur*. They appear to be rather abstract, and perhaps they are not much more than a literary trope inserted into the text to underline Helgi's fate, drawing on the underlying ideas of *fylgjur* predicting someone's death and of spiritual followers, which can transfer to the next of kin, symbolising inheritance.[101]

As the analysis of the source material shows, there are comparably few indications for specifically female *fylgjur*, and none of them has proven unproblematic. When giving the examples a closer look, certain characteristics emerge that connect them to other paranormal or otherworldly female beings. They overlap with female spiritual beings often attending families, which appear in the sources under various names, and there are notable links to the mythological *dísir* and *valkyrjur*. As Else Mundal has argued in her dissertation, these females indeed act as individual beings, independent from the people they attend. A certain protective function seems to be connected to them, though they can – out of their own free will – turn on the person they attend or abandon them. In these few cases, the term *fylgja* always appears in connection with other names, and probably reflects the aspect of following, inherent in the word itself, which perhaps most obviously comes into light with the *fylgjukona* in *Hallfreðar saga*. As such, it seems like in these cases, the term *fylgja* relates more to a function as a following spirit, rather than to a distinct category of beings. It is thus debatable whether this gives ground to creating and employing a specific category of "female *fylgjur*". The examples for this are far too few, and applying the term to a range of female beings referred to with numerous other names would essentially be counterproductive, as the evidence does not suggest that such a category existed in the Middle Ages.

2.3 *Fylgjur* as animals and their symbolism

A variety of animals is represented in the texts as *fylgjur*. Individuals most commonly have polar bears and oxen,[102] but other animals appear as well, such as a

[101] In this case, Heðinn "inherits" Helgi's beloved, Sváva, when Helgi himself asks her to take Heðinn after his death (stanza 42).
[102] Though it has to be noted that the oxen only appear in *Ljósvetninga saga* and *Vápnfirðinga saga*, whereas bears occur throughout the corpus.

goat, a horse, vixen, birds, a boar, a stag, a lion, a leopard and a dragon. Wolves are common as well, although rather than representing a single person, they appear as the *fylgjur* of a group of people. Thus, it is both animals that occurred in Iceland and wild animals not naturally inhabiting Iceland, as well as exotic or mythical creatures.[103]

The type of animal that appears as the *fylgja* of a person has most commonly been connected to the character of the person in question (Mundal, 1974:38; Hedeager, 2011:83). There is often a correlation between the appearance of a person and that of his *fylgja*. Thus, in *Njáls saga*, chapter 23, Gunnarr's *fylgja* is a huge bear, just like he himself is described as "mikill maðr vexti ok sterkr"[104] (ÍF XII, 1954:52-3). Likewise the appearance of the boar in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, chapter 12, matches the appearance of the man it belongs to – it is small, aggressive and menacing.[105] *Fylgjur* in the shape of vixen seem to be generally associated with magicians.[106]

However, in most cases it seems like the choice of animal is determined by the person's status rather than his personality traits (cf. Heijnen, 2003:97). The more important characters are portrayed by more impressive or sometimes more distinct animals than other men in their party. Thus the two men accompanying Gunnarr have bear cubs for *fylgjur*. This can hardly be a commentary on their character, of which we know very little, rather than a commentary on their social status as somewhat lower than that of Gunnarr.[107] Likewise in *Ljósvetninga saga*, chapter 16, Þorvarðr and Hallr have very distinctive oxen for *fylgjur*, whereas those of their men are described as small cattle, and in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, Jökull's *fylgja* is distinguished from those of

[103] The type of animals appearing in the text is not necessarily determined by the geographical location of the narrative, e.g. the animals appearing in sagas set in Iceland are not limited to native species. However, exotic animals or mythic creatures only appear in *fornaldarsögur*, which typically take place farther away, both in time and space.

[104] "a big man and strong"

[105] Apart from referring to the character of Hrólfr's brother, the boar also represents a connection to warrior culture (cf. Hedeager, 2011:82, 89).

[106] The female gender of the fox may be suggesting the perception of sexual perversity connected to the performance of magic, *seiðr* in particular, which the brothers Gautan and Ógautan in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* seem to be engaging in. In a later scene, as Þorsteinn sees a vixen sniffing around in the forest, he proclaims that he recognises her from his dream "ok er þat ætlan mín, at þetta sé bikkjustakkrinn Ógautan" ["and I think that this is that bitch-skin Ógautan"] (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* II, 1944:212). By calling him "bitch-skin", he not only refers to the magician's sexual perversity, but also to his ability to shape-shift and to take on a different skin.

[107] However, in different contexts, bear cubs can represent a young person of good birth (*Sǫgubrot*, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, chapter 3, as well as the episode in *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts*, in which a boy is said to trip over the polar bear that accompanies him (*fylgir*), walking in front of him (*Flateyjarbók* I, 1944:279).

his brothers by pink cheeks. Social status may also be the reason why Þórðr in *Njáls saga* has a goat for *fylgja*. Compared to the splendidly horned oxen or polar bears, a goat is a mundane domestic animal. Þórðr is described as "mikill ok sterkr" (ÍF XII, 1954:103), which cannot be said of his *fylgja*, so perhaps it is rather reflecting his lower status as the son of a freedman.

The theory that the animal represents a person's status rather than character may further be supported by the fact that the choice of animal mostly does not seem to be determined by the perception of the character by the audience. As Yoav Tirosh (2014) has argued, the text of *Ljósvetninga saga* shows a great deal of hostility towards the character of Guðmundr inn ríki, as if "every word a character utters, every action described and every narrative technique work together to defame Guðmundr" (2014:46). Yet the appearance of his *fylgja* is rather splendid with its great horns. Even if we were to understand this as yet another way to portray Guðmundr's immoderation, which, according to Tirosh, is "tied to 'unnatural' sexual behavior" (ibid., pp.46-7), contrasted with other *fylgjur* (e.g. Gunnarr's bear in *Njáls saga* or Brodd-Helgi's ox in *Vápnfirðinga saga*) it quickly becomes obvious that Guðmundr's ox is by no means unusual in its depiction.

The representation of animal *fylgjur* in the source material is thus symbolic and the motifs are highly literalized. With one exception in *Njáls saga*, the animals only ever appear in dreams. These are used as literary tools, serving specific functions in the text.[108] According to Adriënne Heijnen, the animal dreams are often characterised by multivocality. Often, several possible interpretations of a dream are offered, as the meaning is not conveyed by the symbols themselves, but they "receive a meaning in relation to other narrative elements" (2003:100). However, the text always provides clues as to which interpretation shall turn out as true. Although the dreams are, due to their function as narrative tools, often standardised, Heijnen argues that they rely on a "practice of dream sharing in society" (ibid.). The meaning of the dreams is thus not only negotiated within the text, but also with the audience.

[108] On dreams in Old Norse literature, their symbolism and functions see Henzen (1890), Kelchner (1935), Schach (1971), Turville-Petre (1972a).

The way animal *fylgjur* are referred to in the texts suggests an intimate connection between the subject and their *fylgja*. If a person's *fylgja* repeatedly appears in an account, it is always depicted as the same animal. The connection is, furthermore, expressed not only by the usage of possessive pronouns, but also through the verb *eiga* "to own," which is often used about animal *fylgjur*. Occasionally, the verb also appears in connection with dream animals that are not explicitly referred to as *fylgjur*, in which case it allows us to establish the animal as having a metonymical, rather than a metaphorical, relationship to the character (cf. Heijnen, 2003:108).[109]

The literary representation of the inherent relationship between a person and their animal *fylgja* relies upon a factual connection reaching back into pre-Christian times. The relationship between humans and animals is ancient, as animals have always been an important part of people's lives, wild as well as domesticated. They served multiple purposes such as providing food, raw materials, labour and transport, but have also been used in ritual contexts (Jennbert 2011). Animals are widely represented also in Iron Age art and personal names (Hedeager, 2011:61-80; Jennbert, 2011:184-187). As Lotte Hedeager notes, this "points towards the idea that animals and humans represent coordinating principles in pre-Christian cosmology" (2011:81), which is fundamentally different from the early Christian perception that "established a principle of qualitative difference between humans and animals" (Salisbury, 1994:4).

Such a world-view then facilitates various forms of human-animal relationships, including the possibility of crossing the boundary between them. Material expressions of this are widely attested in the archaeological record: graves, in which human body parts have been substituted by animal parts, horned figures and other decorations depicting people in horned helmets or animal costumes (Jennbert, 2011:190-2).

The idea that humans could take on animal skin is widely attested in Old Norse literature. However, whilst actual shape-shifting is mostly seen in connection with magic and its practitioners (Strömbäck, 2000:160-206, Dillmann 2006, esp. pp. 238-

[109] Adriënne Heijnen (2003) uses the terms to differentiate between the inherent link between human and animal as expressed in *fylgjur* (metonymical relationship) and the symbolic representation of a human by an animal (metaphorical relationship). She demonstrates that whilst both are represented in Old Norse literature, the metaphorical understanding took over in more recent material (2003:122).

268), the possession of a *fylgja* appears to be perceived as a general quality inherent in humans. Most of the *fylgjur* that we encounter in the sagas in fact belong to characters who do not display any sort of magical skills, powers or special characteristics. Likewise, they are not bound to heroes or strictly main characters (cf. Boyer, 1986:49).

This appears to be similar with the *hugr*, meaning literally "mind, thought", which shares some common ground with *fylgjur*. A person's *hugr* can attack an enemy in an *atsókn* (cf. pp. 31-2 above),[110] or manifest itself in dreams. Often it is packs of wolves, attacking the dreamer, that are referred to as *hugir* (*Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, chapter 20,[111] *Þórðar saga hreðu*, chapter 3, and *Harðar saga*, chapter 31[112]), although sometimes they are called *fylgjur* (*Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*), and in a number of cases we find very similar scenes in which the animals are not referred to by any specific name.[113] Just like with many examples of *fylgjur*, which represent an entire group of people, the leaders are distinguished from the other men by having different animals, a polar bear in *Harðar saga* and a vixen in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*. The symbolic depiction of enemy *hugir* as wolves is also reflected in the phrases "varga hugr" (*Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, ch. 12) or "úlfhugr"[114] (*Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 4), and in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, the *fylgjur* are said to have "illan hug"[115] (ÍF III, 1938:177) towards Bjǫrn.[116]

The manifestations of *hugr* seem to also be involuntary, as they are applied to entire groups of people. We only have one account, which portrays such an event from both sides. In *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, as Þorgrímr is approaching the farm of

[110] Eldar Heide (2006b) has proposed an understanding of *atsókn* as an attack by an enemy's forerunning spirits, penetrating the victim's body through their respiratory tract. Apart from *hugr*, his study encompasses a range of related concepts, contrasting medieval material with more recent folklore.

[111] Atli at the farm of Otradal dreams of them being attacked by eighteen wolves led by a vixen (ÍF VI, 1943:349).

[112] As Hǫrður is approaching the farm of Indriðastaðir, a woman on the farm dreams about eighty wolves approaching, with fire lashing from their mouths. Amongst them is also a polar bear. Upon hearing the dream, Indriði claims "þat vera hugi Hólmverja til sín" ["it being the intentions of the Hólmverjar against him"] (ÍF XIII, 1991:77).

[113] This is the case in *Njáls saga*, chapter 62, *Heiðarvíga saga*, chapter 26 (ÍF III, 1938:294), *Droplaugssona saga*, chapter 10 (ÍF XI, 1950:161) and *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, chapter 1 (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* III, 1944:324).

[114] "a wolf's mind" or "wolfish thoughts/intentions"

[115] "bad intentions"

[116] Similarly, in *Gísla saga*, chapter 33, Gísli's upcoming final batte is indicated to him by a dream, in which he is attacked by a party of men, their leader having a wolf's head in the dream (ÍF VI, 1943:105)

Otradalr, which he is planning to attack, he is suddenly overcome by great tiredness, so that he needs to get off his horse and sleep. At the same time on the farm, Atli is restless in sleep, and as he is woken up, he relates about having dreamt of eighteen wolves led by a vixen attacking them. As Þorgrímr wakes up, he says that "[h]eima hefi ek verit um hríð á bœnum, ok er svá villt fyrir mér, at ek veit eigi frá mér, en þó munum vér heim ganga at bœnum"[117] (ÍF VI, 1943:350). Although Þorgrímr is said to be "fjǫlkunnigastr"[118] (ibid.), it is not suggested that he sends his *hugr* out intentionally. Instead, he appears to have been subjected to an *atsókn* on the part of Atli's *hugr* or *fylgja*, in course of which Þorgrímr's *hugr* visits the farm.[119]

Both concepts thus seem to rely on the idea that a spiritual part of a human being can detach itself and act outside of the person's physical body. As Heijnen puts it, they "involve an almost fluid conceptualisation of the person as able to reach out in time and space" (2003:97). They belong into the immaterial world (Mundal, 1974:43), but can nevertheless have physical consequences for others, pointing towards an understanding of the spirit as displaying a certain degree of physicality (cf. von Sydow, 1935:100). Although the two concepts sometimes appear as almost interchangeable in the sources, certain differences can be discerned: *hugr* almost exclusively appears as a manifestation of hostile intentions, symbolically represented by the image of wolves, which is – contrary to *fylgjur* – metaphorical. The pre-Christian soul belief emerges from the sources as complex and manifold, *hugr* and *fylgja* reflecting only a part of it.[120] However, as these literary representations are our only source, it is difficult to gain a clear picture of pre-Christian beliefs, as it is difficult to discern later interpretations or possible features that have not been preserved.

[117] "I have been at home at the farm for a short time, but I am so bewildered that I am barely conscious, but we shall nevertheless go home to the farm"
[118] "most skilled in magic"
[119] cf. Dillmann, who argues that the reason for Þorgrímr's loss of orientation is the opposing spirit of Atli (2006:242-3).
[120] E.g. Boyer has suggested a threefold concept of the soul, consisting of *hugr*, *hamr* and *fylgja* (1986:29-54).

2.4 Abstractifying *fylgjur*

Evaluating the examples from the point of view of their function, we find that we can discern roughly three groups: *fylgjur* that appear as animals and indicate upcoming events, *fylgjur* of an unspecified appearance that announce someone's (often an enemy's) arrival, and *fylgjur* of an unspecified appearance that essentially have no effect on the narrative.[121] In this sub-chapter I shall turn to the latter two.

Instances of *fylgjur*, the form of which is not explicitly stated in the text, represent roughly two thirds of our corpus. Not only do we lack any information on how they look, but the scenes in which they appear tend to be much briefer than the often lavish scenes containing animal *fylgjur*. In some cases, these *fylgjur* directly affect a person, most notably by performing an attack, or *atsókn*, during which the opponent is suddenly overcome by great tiredness (cf. pp. 20-1 above). Such attacks, of course, herald the approaching of the enemy, which is a common function of *fylgjur* in the source material, both in terms of prophetic dreams featuring animals, as well as of *fylgjur* with an unspecified appearance.

Whilst they mostly appear as hostile, there are a few noteworthy exceptions in the two versions of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*. Oddr's version especially contains several instances relating about the *fylgjur* of King Ólafr, always in a very similar manner. He is born "með bjǫrtum fylgjum ok hamingjum"[122] (ÍF XXV, 2006:114) and seers prophecy his arrival to Garðaríki after they have seen his *fylgjur*, "alldri fyrr hǫfðu þeir sét né eins manns fylgjur bjartari né fegri"[123] (ibid., p. 150). The brightness is not only characteristic of the *fylgjur*, but also of the king himself, resounding through the entire saga. They are mentioned as heralding the king's arrival to Garðaríki also in the *Flateyjarbók* version of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, albeit portrayed slightly differently as "svá miklar ok haminjusamligar"[124] (*Flateyjarbók* I, 1944:94). The frequent mention of Ólafr's bright *fylgjur* in Oddr's version of the saga could be

[121] These are not thought of as definitive categories meant to comprise all the material. Many of the motifs are complex, displaying various characteristics, which prevents a neat categorisation. Neither is such a categorisation the aim of the present thesis. Instead, the grouping of the examples based on certain similarities shall serve as a tool to gain a better understanding of the material.
[122] "with bright *fylgjur* and *hamingjur*"
[123] "never before have they seen any man's *fylgjur* to be brighter and more beautiful"
[124] "so great and lucky"

explained by his agenda of portraying the king in a saintly light, stylising his narrative in the fashion of saints' *vitae* (cf. Ólafur Halldórsson, ÍF XXV, 2006:lxxx-lxxxii). Thus they serve as tools for highlighting the king's high status as God's envoy, whereas in *Flateyjarbók* they more generally illustrate his greatness.

Several other *fylgjur* serve a very similar function in the texts they appear in, namely highlighting a certain aspect of a character or underlining a statement, and thus providing the scene with more impact. Such is the case in *Vatnsdœla saga*, chapter 30. Likewise in *Þorskfirðinga saga*, chapter 6, the *fylgjur* never reappear in the narrative, but they certainly give Kjallakr's warning more seriousness. And when Þórðr hreða proclaims that "er ekki mark at mínum ættarfylgjum ef eigi týna nökkurir frændr Orms fyrir mér lífi, áðr [en] ek lýk nösum"[125] (ÍF XIV, 1959:194), he does not expect the aid of supernatural beings as much as he expresses his readiness to take revenge.

In an article, originally published in 1945, Gabriel Turville-Petre has argued that certain instances of *fylgjur* should be understood abstractly, rather than as personified attendant spirits. His argument is centred on the scene from *Orkneyinga saga*, chapter 6, in which Earl Rǫgnvaldr says to his son: "Eigi mun þér jarldóms audit, ok liggja fylgjur þínar til Íslands" (ÍF XXXIV, 1965:10). Turville-Petre has proposed to read this as "your destiny belongs to Iceland" or "your destiny lies in Iceland" (1972b:56). He mentions the passages in *Vatnsdœla saga*, chapter 30, and *Ljósvetninga saga*, chapter 20, as further examples of such an abstract use, and the list could be enhanced by the instances from *Þorskfirðinga saga* and *Þórðar saga hreðu*, chapter 7.

The examples featuring the term *kynfylgja* can be understood in a similar manner. Turville-Petre has only addressed *Völsunga saga*, chapter 4, in which Signý objects to marrying Siggeir, because "veit ek af framvísi minni ok af kynfylgju várri, at af þessu ráði stendr oss mikill ófagnaðr"[126] (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* I, 1943:8). Rather than perceiving the *kynfylgja* as the protective spirit of the family, he sides with the interpretation previously proposed by Ernst Wilken that the word means "inherited gifts" (Turville-Petre, 1972b:58), thus complying with the usual meaning of "family

[125] As translated by Katrina C. Attwood: "my family's luck will have let me down if I haven't caused some of Orm's relatives to lose their lives before I myself close my nostrils" (*The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders* III, 1997:378).
[126] "I know thanks to my foresight and our *kynfylgja* that this marriage shall bring us much sorrow"

characteristic, peculiarity" (Cleasby and Vigfússon, 1874:366). As Signý reveals in this very same sentence, she has the ability of foresight (*framvísi*) herself. The sinister prediction, therefore, does not have to be disclosed to her by a personified protective spirit. Even if this was the underlying thought that inspired the word choice, the function of the *fylgja* is heavily reduced to an abstract sense, merely emphasising Signý's words rather than having any influence within the text. The same applies to the two mentions of *kynfylgja* in *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*.

As pointed out above, many of the *fylgjur* mentioned in the source material are of an unspecified appearance, and it is only such *fylgjur* that are featured in sagas that could be referred to as contemporary or near-contemporary (*Sturlunga saga* and *Sverris saga*), and in the two versions of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* that, albeit not contemporary, are set in an unmistakably Christian context. The animal shape is confined to the realm of dreams, the only exception being Þórðr's goat from *Njáls saga*, and more associated with paganism. It is also noteworthy, that in all of the instances in which a person is unambiguously attributed a plural of *fylgjur* instead of only one, as well as the mentions of *kynfylgja* that have been understood by scholars as a family attendant spirit, a rather abstract way of usage can be discerned. This seems to suggest that by the 13th and 14th century, when the sagas were written down, the perception of *fylgjur* has undergone a change towards the abstract, which is reflected not only in their diminishing function, but perhaps also in the variance between a singular *fylgja* and multiple ones.

The concept of *fylgjur*, as it emerges from the source material, is manifold. But characteristics that dominate in the depiction of the further unspecified *fylgjur*, namely that they indicate someone's arrival and can have a certain effect upon a person, seems to have been alive in folk belief, as it has been preserved in both Icelandic and Scandinavian folklore well past the Middle Ages, albeit under varying names (Strömbäck, 2000:222-30; Lid, 1935:3-17; Alver, 1989:110-127; Jón Jónasson, 2010:224).

However, as Ármann Jakobsson has pointed out in his discussion on relationship between reality and the occult in *Egils saga* (2013a), the paranormal can represent a dialogue with the audience in which the text remains open to interpretative

possibilities, allowing for both a paranormal as well as a metaphorical interpretation. The same applies to *fylgjur*, especially the ones examined in this sub-chapter. The text only provides the audience with brief mentions, omitting any specifics and leaving their nature obscure. Although the abstract and metaphoric interpretation lies close at hand, those more inclined towards the paranormal have the option for a different interpretation.

Conclusion

The aim of the present thesis was to re-examine *fylgjur* in Old Norse literature, as the topic has received comparably little exclusive attention among scholars. The basis and starting point was a detailed analysis of the extant source material that explicitly uses the noun *fylgja* (f. sg.) or *fylgjur* (f. pl.) and derived compounds when referring to these beings, as presented in chapter 1. The most informative passages were given more attention to and recounted in greater detail. Subsequently, in chapter 2, I have focused on some possible interpretations of the material.

When evaluating the material, I have focused on the appearance of these figures, as far as it could be discerned from the information provided by the sources, and on the occasion of their presence. In the majority of cases their shape is not disclosed to the audience. However, the rest are almost exclusively portrayed as animals, appearing predominantly in dreams. They suggest upcoming events or danger, thus showing parallels with prophetic dreams in general. The outcome varies depending on the extent of the information revealed in the dream itself, but the sources seem to point towards the idea that the appearance of one's own *fylgja* is closely connected to the owner's impending death.

Those *fylgjur*, whose shape is not related by the text, appear outside of the dream context. These invisible figures are said to be able to physically influence an opponent in a so-called *atsókn*, although people with second sight or magical powers may perceive them without suffering such an attack, which is a common motif in the sagas enabling an escape or a reaction to an impending attack.

Contrary to other scholars, I have argued against the creation and employment of a distinct category of female *fylgjur*, as the sources do not seem to suggest that the term has been used in this sense. The evidence that the term denoted female beings is insufficient and in the few cases when it does appear, it is far from unambiguous. Rather than perceiving the *fylgja* in these instances as a specific type of being, I have argued that the term reflects more a function of following, which is inherent in the noun.

The animal *fylgjur* extant in the sources appear in largely standardised dream accounts, serving specific functions in the text, which may have pushed other aspects back. Although their relationship to their human is metonymical, i.e. standing for the human, the animals depicted seem to be reflecting more the status of a particular character rather than specifically personal characteristics or traits. However, despite the literary standardisation, the idea goes back to pre-Christian perceptions of a spiritual part of humans that could transcend the boundaries of the physical body. This becomes evident when contrasting *fylgjur* with scenes featuring *hugir*, which literally translate as minds or thoughts, as both concepts share some common ground. Although it is impossible to reconstruct pre-Christian ideas with any certainty based solely on much later literary accounts, the way these two terms appear in the sources suggests certain distinct accentuations: *hugr* as a materialisation of ill thoughts, suggesting certain temporariness, whilst *fylgjur* appear more as an inherent part of human beings.

Finally, I have argued that the sources indicate a development in the perception of *fylgjur* towards more abstract concepts by the time the sagas were confined to parchment, as in many instances the mentions of *fylgjur* are essentially reduced to brief statements, reinforcing a character's words, but without any significant role in the narrative. The text thus leaves it open to the interpretation of the audience, whether to understand it in a paranormal sense, or as a metaphor or figure of speech.

Fylgjur fall into the greater context of the perceptions of the paranormal. Similarly to other medieval concepts in this category, the picture that emerges from the sources is complex and far from unified. As Ármann Jakobsson has noted, "[p]aranormal experiences must essentially remain mysterious and occult" (2013c:212). Ultimately, a close reading of the sources with regards to the functions of the paranormal and its perceptions yields more information than attempts to fit the examples into neat categories.

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