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Abnormal representations of legs and feet in the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the Icelandic sagas, the role of legs and feet has always been significant, most often with regards to their injury or removal. Despite numerous examples of leg removal or deformity within *Íslendingasögur* or *biskupa sögur*, there is no real rhyme, reason, or theme to their inclusion. However, a pattern emerges within the *fornaldarsögur* corpus where the qualities of many characters' legs and feet do indeed hold a unique place in the forefront of these characters' identities and abilities. More specifically, abnormalities in a character's legs are indicative of a greater ability in their person as a whole. The three sagas that best exemplify this pattern are *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. In each, the relevant characters' legs are congenitally abnormal or become abnormal, and these abnormalities come to represent idealized or almost supernatural abilities and traits in the characters in question, serving as a marker of their mental ability, physical prowess, or masculine achievement. Thought is also given to the liminality of abnormality and how, when placed in a fanciful setting, abnormal characters can serve as vehicles of social exploration.

ÁGRIP

Í Íslendingasögunum hafa fótleggir og fætur iðulega haft verulegt hlutverk, oftast tengt meiðslum eða aflimun. Þrátt fyrir fjölmörg dæmi um aflimun eða bæklun fóta í Íslendingasögum og biskupasögum, þá er erfitt að sjá skýrar ástæður fyrir því hvers vegna frá þessu er greint. Hins vegar má sjá mynstur í fornaldarsögum þar sem fótleggir og fætur margra persónanna eru í forgrunni og skipta sköpum fyrir sjálfsmynd og getu þeirra persóna. Nánar tiltekið segir afbrigðileiki í fótum til um frekari hæfni persónunnar í heild sinni. Þær þrjár Íslendingasögur sem sýna þetta mynstur best eru *Ragnars saga loðbrókar, Hrólfs saga kráka*, og *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. Í hverri þeirra eru persónur með óeðlilega fætur eða fótleggi, hvort heldur vegna meðfæddra galla eða áunninna. Þessir gallar koma til með að einkenna afburða og jafnvel yfirnáttúrulega hæfileika og eiginleika þeirrar sögupersónu sem þá hefur. Slík frávik geta sagt til um andlega getu, líkamlegt hreysti eða karlmannleg afrek sögupersónu. Einnig er rætt um stöðu þeirra utangarðs og hvernig óvenjulegar sögupersónur í ævintýralegum aðstæðum endurspegla samfélagsaðstæður.

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Table of Contents

1. TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE: INTRODUCTION

"Take away the support of the feet from the strongest body, and it cannot move forward by its own power, but must creep painfully and shamefully on its hands, or else be moved by means of brute animals."[1]

Throughout the Icelandic saga corpus, the role of legs and feet has always been significant, most often with regards to their injury or removal. For instance, the *Íslendingasögur* (Icelandic family sagas) have many examples where legs and feet play an important role in the identity, development, or personality of an individual. One needs only to look to *Eiríks saga rauða,*[2] *Eyrbyggja sa*ga,[3] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*,[4] *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*,[5] or *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*,[6] to name a select few, to find such examples. Even *biskupa sögur* (sagas of bishops) have episodes in which feet and legs play a significant role in the development of the individual; *Guðmundar saga biskups*,[7] for example. Yet while the lower extremities may have personal significance in the examples mentioned above, there is no noticeable thematic consistency in their inclusion. However, a curious pattern emerges when a gaze is cast downward to representations of the lower limbs in *fornaldarsögur*.[8]

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[1] John of Salisbury. *The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury: Being the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books, and Selections from the Seventh and Eighth Books, of the* Policraticus. Translated by John Dickenson. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963. Accessed April 16, 2016. http://www.constitution.org/salisbury/policrat456.htm. Book 5, ch 2.

[2] Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., "Eiríks saga rauða," in *Íslenzk fornrit*. Vol. IV (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 1985), 231. ch 12.

[3] Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., "Eyrbyggja saga," in *Íslenzk fornrit*, Vol. IV (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 1985.), 127-130, 132. ch 45, 46. Especially Þórólfr *bægifót* pg 14, 81-92. ch 8, 30-33.

[4] Guðni Jónsson, ed., "Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar," in *Íslenzk fornrit*, Vol. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 2001), 6. ch 2.

[5] Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., "Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu," in *Íslenzk fornrit*, Vol. III (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 1972), 68-69, 86-87. ch 6, 10.

[6] Jón Jóhannesson, ed., "Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða," in *Íslenzk fornrit*. Vol. XI (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 1950), 121. ch 5.

[7] Stefán Karlsson, ed., *Guðmundar sögur biskups I*, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ. Series B, vol. 6, (Kaupmannahöfn: C.A. Reitzel, 1983), 43-44. ch 14). *Guðmundars saga A*.

[8] While the genre debate in the study of medieval Icelandic literature is by no means cut-and-dry, for the sake of ease of argument, the commonly-used generic categories for the saga corpus will be used throughout this discussion. A more explanatory discussion of the classification of *fornaldarsögur* will be treated in section 1.1.

Legs and feet hold a unique place within the *fornaldarsögur* corpus. Indeed, the qualities of many characters' legs are in the forefront of their identity and abilities rather than occupying merely a supporting role. More specifically, abnormalities in a character's legs are indicative of a greater ability in their person as a whole. The three sagas, and their applicable supporting texts, that best exemplify this pattern are *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. This analysis will focus on specific characters from each saga that exemplify this observable pattern: Ívarr *hinn beinlausi*, Elg-Fróði, and Göngu-Hrólfr. In their respective narratives, the relevant characters' legs are abnormal from birth by nature of their impairment or un/super-natural nature, or become abnormal through their removal. These abnormalities come to represent idealized or almost supernatural abilities and traits of the characters in question, serving as a marker of their mental ability, physical prowess, masculine achievement, or combination thereof.

The aim of this textual analysis is not a pseudo-medical crypto-diagnosis of the physical impairments, deformities, or injuries exhibited by the characters of focus in these sagas.[9] Rather, the focus is on the symbolic nature of abnormalities in the lower extremities and how these abnormalities lead to the development of proficiency in other aspects of character in the figures examined. It is through these three sagas that the following analysis will show that in the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*, representations of abnormal legs and feet serve to mark these characters as possessing greater abilities or catalyzing the masculine development of a character through the emergence of these abilities.

1.1 The Matter of Genre

The term *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* was coined in 1829 by Carl Christian Rafn, the first editor of this particular group of texts.[10] The current research project being carried out by København Universitet's Nordisk Forskningsinstitut,

[9] For contrast, Cf: Jesse Byock, "The Skull and Bones in Egils saga: A Viking, A Grave, and Paget's Disease," *Viator* 24 (1993): 23-50.

[10] Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, trans. Randi C. Eldevik (Odense: Odense University Press, 2002), 18. Rafn's editions of the sagas are the ones cited throughout this discussion.

"Stories for all time: The Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*," includes Rafn's original thirty-one sagas and *þættir* as well as five other medieval Icelandic texts that modern scholarship concedes to being accurately aligned with Rafn's categorical criteria.[11] By its strictest definition, *fornaldarsögur* are defined as taking place temporally in "ancient times," i.e. before the settlement of Iceland in the ninth century, and geographically in the "Northlands," i.e. Scandinavia, exclusive of Iceland.[12]

The *fornaldarsögur* arose out of a fusion between the poetic and historical literary traditions, emerging at some point in the early thirteenth century, but possibly as early as the late twelfth.[13] The inclusion of *fornyrðislag* metrical verses in a number of *fornaldarsögur* indicate a relationship between the *fornaldarsögur* and the Eddic texts, in much a similar matter as connection can be drawn between skaldic poetry and *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur* (kings' sagas).[14]

The debate is ongoing as to whether or not the *fornaldarsögur* corpus can definitively be classified as a genre. Certain stylistic properties, in addition to essentially common temporal and geographical settings, seem to hint at this interpretation. Further, as the prominent scholar Torfi H. Tulinius has argued, the similar manner across the texts, in which the way the world the *fornaldarsögur* inhabit is described, serve to classify this body of work as a genre.[15] But as this debate is not essential to the nature of this analysis, the group of texts classified as *fornaldarsögur* shall be referred to as a literary corpus in the sense that they have been examined and published together for almost two hundred years of academia. The term *fornaldarsögur*, therefore, will be used for the sake of convenience.

The general consensus in saga scholarship is that the *fornaldarsögur* are not given the same scholarly attention as the more popular *Íslendingasögur* or *konungasögur*, possibly due to their overtly fictitious nature, stylistic similarities to

[11] M. J. Driscoll and Silvia Hufnagel, "Stories for All Time: The Icelandic fornaldarsögur," *Nordisk Forskningsinstitut*, accessed March 15, 2016, http://www.fasnl.ku.dk/bibl.aspx.
[12] Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 18.
[13] Ibid., 63.
[14] Torfi H. Tulinius, "Sagas of Icelandic Prehistory (fornaldarsögur)," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed, Rory McTurk (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 448.
[15] Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 18-184.

medieval Western-European romance fiction, and the fact that they were likely composed for entertainment purposes.[16] However, the popularity of these sagas is beyond question. The medieval Icelandic exploration of its pagan past is unprecedented in contemporaneous western European literature, and the desire to reconcile its pagan past emerged simultaneously with the genesis of its literary development.[17] This historical fascination likely stems from a multitude of contributing factors including clerical encouragement, the influence of Classical writings, and economic and political bonds between prominent Icelandic families and the aristocracy of Scandinavia.[18]

With regards to veracity, the *fornaldarsögur* are generally believed to not have been accepted literally by medieval Icelanders.[19] Nevertheless, the *fornaldarsögur* reflect an interpretation of the legendary past on the part of the medieval Icelanders as both how they saw themselves and how they wished to be.[20] Examining the historical context of a saga is no mean feat. It is very rarely clear whether the characters and symbolism in a saga reflect the time and place of authorship, the time and place of setting, or the time and place of setting as imagined by the time and place of authorship.[21] But in the case of the *fornaldarsögur*, these sagas can be seen as an idealized representation of pre-conversion Scandinavia to medieval Icelanders.[22] Their indirect relation to reality provides them with the unique position to engage and express the social ideology contemporaneous to their composition.[23] Herein lies their value to the following analysis.

[16] Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 11.
[17] Ibid., 66.
[18] Ibid., 68.
[19] Ibid., 65.
[20] Ibid., 13.
[21] Carl Phelpstead, "The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*" *Scandinavian Studies* 75, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 17.
[22] Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 41.
[23] Ibid., 42.

1.2 THE MATERIAL EXAMINED

The three *fornaldarsögur* examined in this analysis are *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* due to their not-insignificant featuring of characters possessing some form of podiatric abnormality.

Ragnars saga loðbrókar has an extensive manuscript tradition. With over fifty known manuscripts ranging in date from the late fourteenth century (NKS 1824b 4to) to the twentieth century (Lbs 1491 4to),[24] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* has proven to be extremely popular in the Western imagination continually since its composition. The saga is often paired with mythological texts and other *fornaldarsögur*, most commonly *Völsunga saga* as the first few chapters of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* frame it as a sequel to the former. The majority of the manuscripts date from the seventeenth century but the saga, as it survives today, cannot be dated earlier than the fourteenth century.[25] The saga is often considered to be an exemplary model of the *fornaldarsögur* corpus.[26] In *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, the character of focus is Ívarr *hinn beinlausi* who, as the name implies, was born without bones. Ívarr, the eldest son of Ragnarr Loðbrók by his second[27] wife Áslaug, is arguably the most well-known and prominent character in the *fornaldarsögur* corpus to display some form of impairment. Neither *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* nor *Ragnarssona þáttr*[28] explicitly state that Ívarr's impairment was endemic to his legs; rather, he is simply born with cartilage instead of bones.[29] The first, and seemingly most prominent, limit to his physical ability is that he cannot walk, and must be carried around on staves[30] or upon a shield.[31] Even in the

[24] M. J. Driscoll and Silvia Hufnagel, "Stories for All Time: The Icelandic fornaldarsögur," *Nordisk Forskningsinstitut*, accessed March 15, 2016, http://www.fasnl.ku.dk/browse-manuscripts.aspx
[25] Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 137.
[26] Ibid., 20.
[27] In both *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr*, Ragnarr only marries twice: once to Þóra Borgarhjörtr and then to Áslaug. Ragnarr's other wife, Lagertha (Lathgertha/Hlaðgerðr), is only mentioned in *Gesta Danorum* book nine.
[28] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Ragnarssona þáttr* are most likely both based on an older version of the saga dating from the thirteenth century (Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 135-137.).
[29] C. C. Rafn, ed., "Saga af Ragnari konúngi Lodbrók ok sonum hans," in *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda: Eptir Gömlum Handritum*, Vol. 1 (Kaupmannahöfn: Hja Hardvig Fridrek Popp., 1829), 251. Ch 6.
[30] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 251. ch 6.
[31] Ibid., 253. ch 7.

present day, being born without the use of one's legs has the potential to make everyday life a challenge, never mind the additional task of attaining the status of a legendary hero. Nevertheless, Ívarr manages to complete acts of not only physical prowess, but also, and most significantly, of great mental aptitude. Ívarr's lack of body is what signifies his abundance of mind.

Hrólfs saga kraka, has an even greater provenance with over sixty known manuscripts dating from the early seventeenth century (AM 165 g fol, AM 11 fol) up to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Lbs 1508 4to).[32] *Hrólfs saga kraka* arguably features the most unique representations of the lower extremities of the three sagas in question. Primarily, it is the legs and feet of the three sons of the were-bear Björn, Elg-Fróði, Þórir *hundsfótr*, and Böðvarr bjarki, in which a supernatural quality to legs is depicted. Rather than being born without fully-functioning legs, these brothers are born with the lower extremities of animals, both wild and domestic. What is most evident about the brothers, especially Elg-Fróði, is that they possess superhuman strength and physical ability. Elements of wisdom and insight are also demonstrated although not to the extent as seen with Ívarr *hinn beinlausi*. The level of deformity decreases in severity with the age of the brothers: Elg-Fróði is an elk[33] from the waist down, Þórir has a dog's feet from the instep down, and Böðvarr is born seemingly normal,[34] which is due to a cunning trick played by Björn's evil stepmother on the boys' mother Bera by forcing her to ingest a portion of the slain Björn's body in bear form.[35] In addition to being superhumanly strong, the brothers also possess the ability to increase the physical strength of others. In this sense, the abnormalities of the brothers are indicative of their proficiencies.

[32] Driscoll and Hufnagel, "Stories for All Time: The Icelandic fornaldarsögur," http://www.fasnl.ku.dk/browse-manuscripts.aspx.
[33] This animal is most likely more recognizable as a moose (genus: *Alces*) to the North American reader.
[34] Interestingly, Byock mentions that the now-lost *Bjarkamál* (which Byock calls *Bjarkarímur*) identifies Böðvarr as having the claws of a bear on his feet (Jesse L. Byock, *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 83.).
[35] C. C. Rafn, ed., "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," in *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda: Eptir Gömlum Handritum*, Vol. 1 (Kaupmannahöfn: Hja Hardvig Fridrek Popp., 1829), 54-55. ch 27.

Göngu-Hrólfs saga is the most prolific of the three sagas analysed herein. Appearing in over seventy manuscripts, the oldest fragment dates from the latter half of the fourteenth century (AM 567 XI α 4to), the majority come from the seventeenth century, and the most recent come from the late nineteenth up until the mid-twentieth century (Lbs 5154 4to, Lbs 4460 8vo).[36] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, at first glance, may appear to be the outlier in this grouping of sagas, but an abnormal representation of legs is not only present, but key to the entire plot of the saga. Indeed, the title attributed to the saga takes on an ironic light when the titular Hrólfr's legs are cut off by his master-*cum*-servant Vilhjálmr. This dramatic moment serves as the turning point in the saga for Hrólfr who, upon the reattachment of his legs by the dwarf Möndull, is finally able to achieve his full masculine identity through feats of mental shrewdness and physical might. The first two sagas examined here primarily reflect how an impairment or abnormality of the lower extremities creates a proficiency in areas of the mind, as is the case with Ívarr, and body, as is the case with Elg-Fróði. *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* demonstrates how not only does a combination of mental and physical ability result in the creation of a masculine identity, but also how that masculine identity is manifested in the titular character of Hrólfr after the amputation of his legs. This saga furthers the hypothesis that there exists a correlation between representations of abnormality in the legs and some form of betterment to the individual(s) in question within the three examples from the *fornaldarsögur* corpus discussed. The fulfilment of Hrólfr's masculine potential is significant, as it has been challenged from the saga's outset. The loss and subsequent reattachment of Hrólfr's legs is a truly abnormal occurrence, especially to the contemporaneous mind, and it is by means of this loss of body that Hrólfr finds revelation and ability.

It is through these three sagas that the following analysis will demonstrate that in the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*, representations of abnormal legs and feet serve to mark these characters as possessing greater abilities or catalysing the masculine development of a character through the emergence of these abilities.

[36] Driscoll and Hufnagel, "Stories for All Time: The Icelandic fornaldarsögur," http://www.fasnl.ku.dk/browse-manuscripts.aspx.

2. She's Got Legs, She Knows How to Use Them: Methodology

Despite the common theme of abnormal and damaged legs in the three sagas here examined, the significance of the extremities varies considerably for each character concerned, although not without a degree of thematic overlap. As outlined above, each saga has a primary focus that stems from the nature of the legs concerned, however, overarching ideologies do, indeed, apply.

Understanding how the body was conceptualized in medieval Iceland is key to discerning the symbolic meanings behind the inclusion of abnormal legs in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar, Hrólfs saga kraka,* and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. How was the medieval Icelandic body understood? Was there any special significance attributed to specific parts of the body? What did it mean when parts of the body were absent, damaged, or deformed? As Eichhorn-Mulligan writes regarding medieval Icelandic society, "a great deal of confidence was placed upon the flesh as an accurate indicator of an individual's character and humanity."[37] It is therefore reasonable to draw correlations between the nature of a saga character's body and what that character is capable of.

Firstly, the influence of religion on popular conceptions of the body cannot be overlooked. While the majority of the medieval source material regarding impairment in a medical context comes from learned institutions, one had to have taken holy orders in order to attend such places of higher learning.[38] Indeed, medieval concepts of medicine were strongly linked to religion,[39] and thus a measure of ink shall be spilled outlining how the two intersected with relevance to this analysis.

Due to the varied representations of legs in the sagas discussed here, input from multiple disciplines, apart from the broad field of medieval Norse studies, is

[37] Amy C. Eichhorn-Mulligan, "Contextualizing Old Norse/Icelandic Bodies," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of The Thirteenth International saga Conference Durham and York. 6-12 August, 2006*, Vol. 1, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Durham University, 2006), 199.
[38] Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, C. 1100-1400* (London: Routledge, 2006), 68.
[39] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 67.

required to examine the information provided. Foremost, extensive use is made of the sub-field of disability studies, especially at its point of intersection with commentary on medieval Europe. The study of gender and sexuality also plays a significant role in the following analysis. Lastly, varied input from law codes, saga analysis, and extrapolated commentary regarding bodily significance and meaning all contribute to understanding the pattern identified above, namely, that an abnormality in the legs results in a proficiency in some other area of the character in question. It is also worth noting that the application of these academic sub-fields, especially disability studies, has not been applied to the *fornaldarsögur* corpus in any significant manner. As a result, some comparative examples will be drawn from non- *fornaldarsögur* texts when relevant.

2.1 Bodily Symbolism

It is impossible to definitively know what effect a correlation between bodily abnormalities and superhuman abilities meant for the physically impaired in medieval Icelandic society.[40] This is especially true for discussions of thematic elements in *fornaldarsögur* as their more fantastic and supernatural nature places them even further from historical truth than many other forms of medieval Icelandic literature. That being said, it is important to keep in mind at least a general understanding of the place of the physically-impaired and their bodies in the medieval Icelandic consciousness in order to extrapolate the literary significance of such individuals.

The loss or absence of a body part is evidently connected to the gain or enhancement of another quality in the individual. This concept is most prominently seen in the mythological literature surrounding Óðinn in the sacrifice of his eye for knowledge**.** Whether or not the bodily faculty is sacrificed to gain superhuman ability or if ability is generated from the loss of normality is irrelevant; rather, the importance lies in the existence of the correlation between

[40] Lois Bragg, "From the Mute God to the Lesser God: Disability in Medieval Celtic and Old Norse Literature," *Disability & Society* 12, no. 2 (1997): 172.

abnormality and super-ability.[41] Outside of the Eddaic sources, themes of bodily exchange are also evident in other forms of medieval Icelandic literature.[42]

The Eddaic poem *Rígsþula*[43] can been seen, for the purpose of this analysis, as "a key to the aesthetics of the body"[44] for medieval Icelanders, propagating the notion that one's destiny is connected to one's anatomy.[45] Indeed, the poem serves to provide a juxtaposition between an individual's corporality and "his or her access to social, economic, and political power."[46] The legs are the prime descriptive feature of Þræll, the metaphorical representation of the lowest class, and his family; a corporeal feature which is lacking from descriptions of the middle and upper classes, who lack much physical description at all.[47] Indeed, Þræll´s wife Þír "*örr vas á iljum*,"[48] and of the names of his children, fourteen out of twenty-one refer to deformities, often of the legs.[49] The slave character Þræll´s body is deformed at the core, not just aesthetically.[50] His body is *hörundsvartan*[51] and his deformities are linked to bones and bone diseases.[52] It is curious that the class of society most valued for their body is described most extensively through deformities of that body, usually the legs. In contrast, corporeal features play almost no part in the names of the upper and middle class children.[53] Indeed, it would appear that the higher one's rank, the less physical and more idealized the

[41] Bragg, "From the Mute God to the Lesser God,"171.
[42] *Brennu-Njáls saga*'s titular character is beardless yet arguably the wisest individual.
[43] Existing solely in *Codex Wormianus*, and debatably dated to some point between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, *Rígsþula* explains how the god Heimdallr, in the guise of Rígr, travels the countryside fathering the different classes of humans: Þræll (slave), Karl (freeman), and Jarl (Earl) (Frederic Amory, "The Historical Worth of Rígsþula," *Alvíssmál* 10 (2001): 16-17.
[44] Eichhorn-Mulligan, "Contextualizing Old Norse-Icelandic Bodies," 200.
[45] Ibid., 199.
[46] Ibid., 200.
[47] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Olason, eds., "Rígsþula," in Eddukvæði Vol. 1: Goðakvæði, in *Íslenzk fornrit* (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 2014), 450, 452, 454-455. Compare stanzas 6-7 with stanzas 17-18, 27-31, 33-34.
[48] Ibid., 450, stanza 7.
[49] Ibid., 450-451, stanzas 9-10.
[50] Eichhorn-Mulligan, "Contextualizing Old Norse-Icelandic Bodies," 201.
[51] For a more detailed examination of colour, see section 5.2 below.
[52] Eichhorn-Mulligan, "Contextualizing Old Norse-Icelandic Bodies," 201.
[53] Ibid., 204.

body becomes; biology is replaced by the supernatural and the body possesses supernatural powers.[54]

How then, within this matrix of corporality and social hierarchy, are the characters of Ívarr, Elg-Fróði, and Hrólfr to be explained? Ívarr was born into nobility and Elg-Fróði is the grandson of a king who forges his own power base. The real connection lies with Hrólfr. While born the son of a farmer, Hrólfr enters a slave-like position in the service of Vilhjálmr. While no explicit mention is made describing his body in the terms used in *Rígsþula*, he must undergo a physical transformation in order to transcend social classes. First, Hrólfr must have his legs, the most prominent feature in the description of slaves, removed. He is then healed (of his slave-like nature as well as his wounds) and rebuilt, thus enabling him to change his social position. Indeed, by the saga's end, Hrólfr has become the king of Russia.

Literally, *Rígsþula* describes the lowest order of humanity in terms of deformity and incompleteness. Legally, the *Gulaþing Law* outlines mutilation for crimes, and most relevant to the purposes of this analysis, describes the progressive amputation of the ears and nose for female slaves found guilty of theft.[55] Similarly, the *Sjælland Law* outlines the compensation standards for a man who has had his nose slit because it is the mark of a slave.[56] As well, insults calling a freeman a slave were considered slanderous and could warrant legal

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[54] Eichhorn-Mulligan, "Contextualizing Old Norse-Icelandic Bodies," 204.

[55] Rudolph Keyser and Peter Andreas Munch, eds., "Den ældre Gulathings-Lov," in *Norges Gamle Love Indtil 1387: Norges Love ældre end Kong Magnus Haakonssöns Regjerings-Tiltrædelse I 1263*, Vol. 1 (Christiania: Gröndahl, 1846), accessed April 19, 2016, http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Gulaþingslög_(Gulatingsloven). Section 259.

> *En ef drottenn vill synia firi þau. þa scal hann synia með lyritar eiði. En ef sa eiðr fellr. þa scal beria huð af þeim oc giallda aftr stuld. allt þat er uspillt er. en hálft þat er spillt er. oc sva firi umaga at somu. En ef stelr leysingia mannz. æða ambott her alen. þa scal skera af henne annat eyra. En ef hon stelr annat sinn. þa scal skera af henne annat eyra. En ef hon stelr hit þriðia sinn. þa scal skera af henne nef. þa heiter hon stuva oc nuva. oc stele æ sem hon vill.*

[56] P. G Thorsen, ed., "Valdemars Sællandske Lov," in *Nordiske Oldskrifter: Valdemars sællandske Lov og Absolons sællandske Kirkelov*, Vol. XIII (Kjøbenhavn: Det Nordiske Literatur-Samfund, 1852), 27-28. Ch 28.

> *Vvarthær manz næsæ af hoggæn ællær scoræn ær tho slaghæn, tha ær thæræ oc fullæ manbøtær foræ, Æn of thet kummær swa at nokær takær frælsman oc ristær han i annær nós tha bøtæ han thæræ foræ fyarthing af manbøtær, Æn of han ristær man a bathæ nosæ, tha bøtæ han thæræ for half manbøtær, for thet at thet ær thræls maarc oc ey frælsmanz,*

retaliation.[57] It is thus clearly evident from contemporaneous legal texts that there was a strong link between physical deformity and lower social status. Indeed, Eichhorn-Mulligan takes this a step further and states that "slaves, and their bodies, were often figured as undesirably human, unnatural, and 'Other'."[58] This associates deformity with slavery while also conceptualizing these groups of people as subhuman or even animalistic; a key point when the nature of Elg-Fróði is considered. Likewise, Eichhorn-Mulligan also states that:

> According to the various Norwegian laws, the humanity of a newborn child was based on physical criteria, some of which resonate with the dehumanizing depictions of slaves. Without the body that could be read as humanly formed, the child could be abandoned and denied participation in the human community, in this life and the afterlife…[59]

Thus, an un-human physical nature could deny a medieval Icelander both social and spiritual participation.[60]

The influence of Christian belief and practices cannot be overlooked. Various biblical passages pertain to impairment as it relates to sin including Deuteronomy 28, 1 Kings 13, 2 Chronicles 16, and John 9. Generally, the Old Testament connects sinfulness with some sort of impairment or disfigurement while the New Testament does not. [61] However, sickness or impairment could sometimes equate holiness, as in the example of the venerated Alpaïs of Cudot who was immobile in bed for a year where she had religious visions.[62]

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[57] Ruth Mazo Karras, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 66.
[58] Eichhorn-Mulligan, "Contextualizing Old Norse-Icelandic Bodies," 199.
[59] Ibid., 199.
[60] The correlation between monstrosity and the lower limbs is discussed in section 2.4.
[61] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 42.
[62] Patricia Skinner and Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, *Medieval Writings on Secular Women*, (London: Penguin, 2011), 54-57. A similar episode is seen in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* when Ívarr and his brothers lay siege to the town of Vífilsborg. The taunting of the townsfolk prompts Ívarr to fall into a bed-rideen sickness that is only undone once the town in taken, a feat which is carried out when Ívarr summons his brothers and the wisest men in their host and tells them of his plan to burn a hole in the walls of the town. Even when he is completely physically incapacitated, Ívarr is still the one the others turn to for guidance: "*Er nú sem optar, at þinna ráða mun njóta verða" (Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans*," 274-275. ch 12.).

Learned Classical influence must also be taken into account. The Classical concept of physiognomy was very popular in medieval Europe, especially towards the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries[63] but possibly as early as the thirteenth century.[64] Based on *Physiognomics* (incorrectly[65]) attributed to Aristotle, the concept of physiognomy utilizes zoological analogy, ethnological analogy, and pathognomonic analogy (visual aspects of the body and their similarity to external points of reference) to determine the nature of that individual.[66] The concept was revived in the thirteenth century by Arab scholars and re-entered Europe through the Latin works of Albertus Magnus, specifically, his *Liber de Animalibus*.[67] Such physiognomic treatises were being written in Icelandic by at least the turn of the sixteenth century[68] with its Latin counterpart likely existing much earlier.[69]

2.2 IMPAIRMENT

It is important at the outset to establish the terminology that will be utilized in this analysis. Recent scholarship suggests that it is more accurate to speak of impairment rather than disability when dealing with historical sources. Impairment is a physical state of being whereas disability is a social construction of the former based on the attitudes and reactions of non-disabled people.[70] The modern notion of a disabled identity did not exist in the medieval period.[71] While medieval Europe recognized a number of physical impairments (e.g. crippled, mute, deaf, blind, epileptics, birth defects), no specific terminology existed at the time to create a societal niche for these individuals.[72] It would be more accurate to

[63] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 54.
[64] Tarrin Wills, "Physiology and Behaviour in the sagas," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 8 (2012): 280.
[65] Ibid., 280.
[66] Domenico Laurenza, "Physiognomy," trans. by Patrick Baker, in *The Classical Tradition*, eds. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 725.
[67] Ibid., 725.
[68] Kristian Kålund, ed., *Alfræði Íslenzk. Islandsk Encyklopædisk Litteratur III. Landalýsingar M.fl. Udgivet for Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur* (København: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1917-1918), xii-xvii, 91-105. Cf. AM 434 a 12mo and AM 435 12mo.
[69] Wills, "Physiology and Behaviour in the sagas," 280.
[70] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 2-3, 7.
[71] Ibid., 62.
[72] Ibid., 4.

describe the impaired in the Middle Ages as conceptualized as individually unfortunate, but not segregated from able-bodied society.[73]

Despite how impairment or deformity may have been perceived, the role these individuals historically played in society is far from clear. The traditional scholarly consensus is a theory of a practice of general maltreatment of those not born able-bodied or unblemished. A need for exclusively productive members of society is often cited, along with mentions of early practices of infant exposure and the latter development of using monasteries as dumping grounds for the infirm, as evidence of the undesirable place impaired or disfigured individuals held in medieval Icelandic society.[74] Of course, the former practice is only applicable to those suffering from congenital disorders and not those who become impaired later in life.[75] Keeping with the criteria of usefulness, it has been proposed that impaired individuals were ideally suited to serving as society's cultural databanks, preserving society's mythology, religion, history, and literature.[76] Suitability for social positions such as priests and singers were also possible since the impaired were unable to contribute to society as warriors or labourers. [77] However, other scholarship argues that flexible work hours meant that medieval impaired individuals could contribute to labour, thus making impairment a non-issue with regards to productivity.[78]

It should be noted that, to the medieval mind, the criteria which classified an individual as impaired could also include advanced age.[79] When the body began to fail, so too did that individual's ability to take action. For a male member of society, this meant that age could rob a man of his ability to seize distinction, enact

[73] Michael Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach* (London: Macmillan Education, 1990), 27.
[74] Bragg, "From the Mute God to the Lesser God," 175-176.
[75] Ibid., 175.
[76] Ibid., 165.
[77] Ibid., 165-166.
[78] Brendan James Gleeson, "Second Nature?: The Socio-spatial Production of Disability" (Unpublished PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 1993). Quoted in Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 25.
[79] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval* Europe, 6.

revenge, or defend his honour. Thus impairment can diminish one's masculine identity.[80]

Classical works proposed a number of theories as to how and why congenital deformities occurred. The writings of Galen, one of the most prolific writers of Classical medicine, were well-known in medieval Europe.[81] While Galen's work on foetal development is extensive, a great majority of it was based on Soranus,[82] possibly the foremost Classical mind regarding all matters gynaecological. Soranus identifies improper care during pregnancy with regards to drink, activity, food, and medical complications, as well as lack of proper postpartum swaddling, massage, and stretching as potential causes for deformity in a newborn.[83]

Impairments can be congenital, the result of disease, or the result of trauma.[84] But what role does the supernatural play in physical deformities to the medieval Icelandic mind? In *Chirurgie*, Henri de Mondeville wrote that popular belief regarding diseases encompassed the notion that congenital illnesses resulted intrinsically and acquired illnesses resulted extrinsically.[85] Thus, only the latter could be treated by physicians since the former was caused by God or magic.[86] Elg-Fróði and his brothers are born with their deformities as the result of a curse being

[80] For comparison, Cf. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* in the mocking of Egil for his stumbling and blindness (**S**igurður Nordal, ed., *Egils Saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, in *Íslenzk fornrit*. Vol. II (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka fornritafélag, 1933), 294. ch 85.), and *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* in the mocking of Hrafnkel by the washer-woman and the infamous line "*Satt er flest það, er fornkveðið er, að svo ergist hver sem eldist*" (Jón Jóhannesson, ed., "Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða," 126. ch 8.).
[81] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 72.2
[82] John G. Raffensperger, *Children's Surgery: A Worldwide* History (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2012), 42-44.
[83] Soranus, *Gynecology*, trans. Owsei Temkin (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 37, 48, 50, 80, 85-87, 105-106.
[84] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 71.
[85] Henri de Mondeville, *Chirurgie de Matire de Henri de Mondeville: chirurgien de Philippe de Bel, Roi de France, composée de 1306 a 1320*, trans. E. Nicaise (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer Bailliere et Cie, 1897), 101.
[86] Ibid., 101.

placed on their father. In addition, while Hrólfr was not impaired by magic, he was healed by magical medicine.[87]

An alternative line of medieval medical thinking that did not directly involve the supernatural can also explain congenital impairments and abnormalities, such as those apparent in Ívarr and Elg-Fróði. Besides historical (Biblical) prohibitions,[88] in the medieval period, conception during the time of a woman's menstruation was thought to have detrimental effects on the child.[89] Whether or not this is, at least partly, the reason why Kráka/Áslaug wanted to delay intercourse with Ragnarr[90] is impossible to say, but it seems unlikely that the notion would not have at least occurred to the medieval mind. As well, variation of standard intercourse (i.e. missionary position) could result in an impaired child.[91] Thus, if medieval European medical logic is applied to the birth of Ívarr, it is plausible that his congenital impairment resulted from his father's sin at not abiding Biblical moral law, Áslaug menstruating, liberal sexual positioning, or a combination thereof.

Also relevant to this analysis is the belief that if the woman's mind or eyes wandered during intercourse, then her child might resemble what she thought of or saw.[92] While the text clearly states that Elg-Fróði's unusual appearance was the result of his mother being forced to eat the bear flesh of Björn, one cannot help but notice a connection.

2.3 The Body and Masculinity

Since it has been established that the medieval body carried symbolic meaning, it is important to identify what forms of specific meaning it was and can be attributed. How masculinity could be established or lost, and the significance of

[87] C. C. Rafn, ed., "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," in *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda: Eptir Gömlum Handritum*, Vol. 3 (Kaupmannahöfn: Poprsku Prentsmidju, 1830), 309. ch 25.
[88] Cf. Leviticus 15:19-24.
[89] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 86.
[90] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 250. ch 5.
[91] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 88.
[92] Soranus, *Gynecology*, 37-38.

masculinity and gender with relation to the body, is particularly relevant to this analysis.

In the Icelandic literary corpus, most challenges to masculinity were achieved through insults.[93] These insults are generally broadly categorized in law codes under the term *níð.* As Clover states:

> …the insulter impugns his antagonist's appearance; reminds him of heroic failure; accuses him of cowardice, of trivial or irresponsible behaviour, or of failings of honour; declares him a breaker of alimentary taboos; and/or charges him with sexual irregularity.[94]

Present in the law codes is the term *blauðr*, which could be used to describe both a female and a coward.[95] The implication is clear: to be accused of inaction or cowardly behaviour was unmanly as it was associated with the feminine. In medieval Iceland, there existed a social binary between able-bodied men and the rest of society.[96] What present scholars would call "gender" had little basis in biology but rather a system based on attainable and losable attributes.[97] According to Clover, in male Norse society, "distinction had to be acquired, and constantly reacquired, by wresting it away from others."[98] Dominance and acquisition were key components to the masculine identity. Cowardice was equated with effeminacy and the sagas show that the greatest attack on a man's identity was to imply that he was not a man at all.[99]

Various medieval Scandinavian law codes contain prohibitions against comparing a man to an animal or a woman. Indeed, an apparent special-social division exists between the masculine and human from the female and animal.[100] According to the *Gulaþing Law*, *fullréttisorð* (full financial compensation) is to be

[93] Carol J. Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," *Speculum* 68, no. 2 (April 1993): 372.
[94] Ibid., 373.
[95] Ibid., 364.
[96] Ibid., 380.
[97] Ibid., 379.
[98] Ibid., 380.
[99] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, T*he Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. Joan Turville-Petre (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983), 11.
[100] Ibid., 16.

paid for comparing a man to a female of any animal, to say he has given birth, or that he has been used sexually by another man.[101] Compare this to *Frostaþing Law* where the comparison of a man to a male animal only results in *hálfréttisorð*[102] (half financial compensation). The inclusion of the female element was evidently taken as the greater affront.

In essence, *níð* could function as a verbal attack on the humanity and/or masculinity of an individual. Examples from the *Gulaþing Law* demonstrate that it was a punishable offence to slander someone by making feminine claims against them falsely. But in reality, it was not so much an accusation of femininity that was insulting, but rather the loss of power implicitly implied by such an accusation.[103] This is due to the fact that "male" was the only sex and "masculine" was the only gender in the medieval North; all insults revolve around failures to meet these standards.[104]

Masculinity is also attached to appearance, whether it be physical size, build, facial features, hair, etc.[105] Indeed, there does seem to be an observable

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[101] Keyser and Munch, "Den ældre Gulathings-Lov," Section 196.

> *Orð ero þau er fullrettis orð heita. þat er eitt ef maðr kveðr at karlmanne oðrom. at hann have barn boret. þat er annat. ef maðr kveðr hann væra sannsorðenn.þat er hit þriðia. ef hann iamnar hanom við meri. æða kallar hann grey. æða portkono. æða iamnar hanom við berende eitthvert. þa scal hann böta hanom fullum rette firi. þar ma han oc viga um. at utlogum þeim manne i gegn þeim orðom er nu hevi ec talt. ef hann skirskotar undir vatta. Iðrazt megu menn orða sinna oc aptr taca ef vilia. kveðazt eigi vita verra hanom a hendr en goðom manne. þat er oc fullrettes orð ef maðr þrælar karlmann frialsan. æða kallar hann troll. æða fordæðo. þat er oc fullrettes orð kono ef maðr vener hana hore. oc kallar hana horo. þar er hon velldr eigi.*

[102] Rudolph Keyser and Peter Andreas Munch, eds., "Den ældre Frostathings-Lov," in *Norges Gamle Love Indtil 1387: Norges Love ældre end Kong Magnus Haakonssöns Regjerings-Tiltrædelse I 1263*, Vol. 1 (Christiania: Gröndahl, 1846), accessed April 19, 2016, http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Frosta%C3%BEingsl%C3%B6g_(Frostatingsloven). Ch 10, section 35.

> *Ef maðr iamnar manni við berendi. hver sem hon er. þá er þat fullréttisorð ef hann scírscotar. En ef hann mælir við haulldmann. gialldi .iij. mercr. árbornum manni .ij. mercr. recsþegni .xij. aura. leysingia (syni) mörc. ocsvá hinn .iij. taca mörc. Silfrmetit scal fullrétti hvers manns. Nema þyrmslamanna. En .xxx. peninga scal í eyri hvern hvárt sem gengr vegit eða talt. Leysingi .vj. aura ef frelsisöl hans er gört. en ef eigi er gört. þá er hálf mörc. En ef maðr kallar mann sannsorðinn. þá scal hann böta honum fullrétti. En ef maðr iamnar manni við oxa eða við hest eða við eitthvert cvicindi þesskyns. þá scal hálfrétti uppi. En ef menn mælaz illa við oc oæfarz þeir þá scal orð orðs hemna.*

[103] Clover, "Regardless of Sex," 379.

[104] Ibid., 379.

[105] Wills, "Physiology and Behaviour in the sagas," 285-292. However, what role, if any, testosterone plays in the literary representations of fornaldarsögur characters remains to be proven valid.

degree of correlation between traditionally masculine depictions of saga characters and traditionally masculine behaviour, not dissimilar to the role of dreams and omens, or identifications of possessing luck, may play in predicting the future actions of certain saga characters.[106] This connection is, however, reciprocal, and deviation from socially-determined masculine aesthetics, in matters such as dress, for example, can result in challenges to masculinity.[107]

2.4 MONSTROSITY

In addition to outlining required compensation for verbal attacks on masculinity, the *Gulaþing Law* also makes mention of the term *gylfin* that can be used when committing *níð*.[108] The term is somewhat problematic to translate but it can be reasonably hypothesized to mean something akin to "werewolf" or "unnatural monster."[109] Legal matters aside, this term's existence in the legal corpus makes an interesting comparison to the bestial characters of the Björnssons.

Attention should also be paid to another two sets of medieval Norwegian laws: those of the *Ældre Eidsivaþing* and those of the *Ældre Borgarþing*. Both sets of records pertain to legal precedents in the event of the birth of a malformed child. The *Ældre Eidsivaþing* states that if a child is born with back-to-front legs or eyes, but has human head and voice, then it should be baptized, and then a bishop consulted.[110] The humanity or monstrosity of the child is determined by the

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[106] Wills, "Physiology and Behaviour in the sagas," 292-293.

[107] Ármann Jakobsson, "Masculinity and Politics in Njáls saga," *Viator* 38, no. 1 (2007): 191. This matter is discussed further below in section 5.2.

[108] Keyser and Munch, "Den ældre Gulathings-Lov," Section 138.

> *Engi maðr scal gera tungu nið um annan. ne trenið. En ef hann verðr at þvi kunnr oc sannr. at hann gerir þat. þa liggr hanom utlegð við. syni með settar eiði. fellr til utlegðar ef fellr. Engi scal gera yki um annan. æda fiolmæle. þat heiter yki ef maðr mælir um annan þat er eigi ma væra. ne verða oc eigi hever verit. kveðr hann væra kono niundu nott hveria. oc hever barn boret. oc kallar gylvin. þa er hann utlagr. ef hann verðr at þvi sannr. syni með settar eiði. fellr til utlegðar ef fellr.*

[109] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 15-16.

[110] Rudolph Keyser and Peter Andreas Munch, eds., "Den ældre Eidsivathings-Christenret," in *Norges Gamle Love Indtil 1387: Norges Love ældre end Kong Magnus Haakonssöns Regjerings-Tiltrædelse I 1263*, Vol. 1 (Christiania: Gröndahl, 1846), accessed April 19, 2016, http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Ei%C3%B0siva%C3%BEingsl%C3%B6g_(Efter_Cod._A._M._No._68_qv.). Section 5-6. Based on AM 68 4to.

presence of human head, even though the state of the extremities is often mentioned.[111] Related, but much more pessimistic, the *Ældre Borgarþing* states that any human-animal hybridization is to be deemed monstrous or demonic. Specific mention is made of the presence of seal's flippers, a dog's head, or the appearance of the face where the torso should be, [112] which is naturally reminiscent of the *blemmyes* from Classical travel literature.[113] The presence of specific laws and terminology reflecting monstrous impairments reveal that there was at least a basic conception of viewing those with bodily deformities as some form of 'Other.'

The animalistic served, in the medieval Icelandic consciousness, as the antithesis of the civilized and human. Wolves, in particular, were seen to represent a "savage and amoral world in opposition to the social culture of men," and this

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En ef sua bers at. at barn er mæð orkymblum alet. ero kaluar a bæinum framan. eða augu i nacka aftan. oc afgu liki alen. oc hafa þau mannz houuð oc manns raust. þau skal ala oc til kirkiu föra. oc skira. oc föða siðan. oc föra a funnd biscups. oc syna honum barnet. oc gera siðan sem hann læggr rað til.

En ef þat barn uærðr alet er hærliki er a. hefer æigi mannz hofuð oc æigi mannz raust. þa ma föra til kirkiu. ef syniz. oc lata prest skira. ef hann uil. oc grafa grof i kirkiu garðe. oc læggia þar barnet i. oc læggia þar iuir hællu. sem bazst. sua at huarke nae hunndar ne rafnar. oc lata þo æi iorð a falla. fyr en daut er oc lata lifa sua længi sem ma.

[111] Eichhorn-Mulligan, "Contextualizing Old Norse-Icelandic Bodies," 205.

[112] Rudolph Keyser and Peter Andreas Munch, eds., "Den ældre Borgarthings- eller Vikens Christenret," in *Norges Gamle Love Indtil 1387: Norges Love ældre end Kong Magnus Haakonssöns Regjerings-Tiltrædelse I 1263*, Vol. 1 (Christiania: Gröndahl, 1846), accessed April 19, 2016, http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Borgar%C3%BEingsl%C3%B6g_(Efter_Cod._A._M._No._78_qv.). Section 1. Based on AM 78 4to.

Þet er uphaf lagha uarra. at austr skulum luta oc gevaz kristi rökia kirkiur oc kenne menn. Föða skall barn huært er boret uærðr i þenna hæim. kristna oc till kirkiu bera nema þæt æina er með orkumblum er alet. þau skulu mykil a þæim manne er æighi ma moðer matt gewa. hælar horfa i ta stað. en tær i hælstað. haka meðal hærða. nakke a brioste framme. kalfvar a bæinum framan. augu aftan i nakka. hæfir sæls væifar oc hundz hafuð. þæt skal a forve föra oc röyra þær er huarke gengr ifir men ne fenaðr þæt er forue hins illa. Nu er þæt barn annat er uærðer bælgh boret. er bæigr þær er anlitz skop skuldi. þæt er ollum monnum synt at sa maðr ma ser æigi matar afla þo at uagsen uærði. þæt skal taka oc till kirkiu bera. lata primsigna. læggia firer kirkiu dyr. gæte hin nanaste niðr till þæss er ond er or. þæt skal grava i kirkiu garðe oc biðia firer sol þæss sem bæzt kan. lata uerða at þæirri uon er guð uil.

[113] Eichhorn-Mulligan, "Contextualizing Old Norse-Icelandic Bodies," 205. This last mention is intriguing since, depending on one's interpretation of the text, Elg-Froði closely resembles either a faun or a centaur also hailing from classical writings. As well, *Eiríks saga rauða* features what could be considered another creature from Classical myth: the *skiapode* refered to as *einfœtingr* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, "Eiríks saga rauða," 231. ch 12.).

may be due to the many references to wolves in mythological accounts.[114] The emphasis on wolves in *níð* episodes[115] carries specific implications for this analysis as Elg-Fróði's brother, Þórir *hundsfótr*, who has the feet of a dog. Whether or not this association carries eschatological implications is uncertain. There also existed an association of the non-human world with the slanderous term *ergi*.[116] *Ergi* implied sexual depravity, usually the passive or feminine role is sexual relations for men, and nymphomania for women.[117] Thus, sexual misconduct aligned with animalistic qualities, which are in turn framed as the antithesis of civilized humanity, and by extension, power and masculinity.

2.5 Conclusion

There is an undeniable significance attached to the body in medieval Icelandic and European writings, both literary and legal. Drawing on influence from Biblical, Classical, and contemporaneous thought, various visual aspects of the human form contributed to the formation of social, gender, spiritual, and human identities at this time. The importance of these identities is emphasized by the contemporaneous legal corpus, which outlines prohibitions on certain challenges that can be made against them. At the same time, these prohibitions highlight the precarious nature of these identities implicitly revealing the instability of the free medieval Icelandic human male existence.

Furthermore, a brief summary of how impairments and abnormalities were perceived in the medieval period was discussed. What is revealed is that, in many ways, a disabled identity did not exist in a way that a modern reader would be familiar with. There was, however, a fair amount of stigma and 'othering'

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[114] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 53.

[115] For example:

> *Níu áttu vit*
> *á nesi Ságu*
> *ulfa alna,*
> *ek var einn faðir þeira.*

(Gísli Sigurðsson, ed., "Helgakviða hundingsbana I," in *Eddukvæði*, (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1998), 172. Stanza 39.)

[116] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 53.

[117] Ibid., 18.

attributed to those who were impaired, especially congenitally, or those who were deformed.

Now that the above correlations have been established, it is possible to proceed with an exploration of how features of wisdom, strength, and masculinity were endemically reflected in the legs of the three *fornaldarögur* characters in question.

3. WALKING THROUGH MY MIND: LEGS AND MENTAL PROWESS

Since Óðinn's swap of specific bodily function for wisdom is the most well-known example of this sort of exchange in medieval Icelandic literature, it seems most appropriate to begin the examination of the selected sagas with an eye turned to the correlation between abnormal legs and mental prowess. Arguably, the wisest of the three characters discussed is Ívarr *hinn beinlausi* and thus he shall be examined first.

3.1 ÍVARR *HINN BEINLAUSI*

Despite his physical limitations, or maybe because of them, Ívarr excels in mental abilities such as foresight and wisdom. The depth of Ívarr's wisdom and the degree to which it is respected and admired by other characters is most obvious in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* but is also present in *Ragnarssona þáttr*. This admiration is actualized through passive, wisdom-based comparisons of Ívarr to other characters in the narrative. Primarily, the characters of contrast are Ívarr's brothers, but also his mother Áslaug, and King Ella in Northumbria.[118]

Ragnars saga loðbrókar, upon introducing Ívarr, notes both his strength and his wisdom and how none were his equal in either.[119] It is also quickly noted that Ívarr's younger brothers perpetually defer to his advice.[120] The saga continually reinforces this hierarchy among the younger sons of Ragnarr by referring to Ívarr first, or often having him being the only named son.[121] Ívarr is obviously looked to as the leader of the sons of Áslaug as is evident from his instigation and organization of their raids and adventures. Likewise, in *Ragnarssona þáttr,* the

[118] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* only states that Ragnarr intended to sail for England (pg 27. ch 14.) while *Ragnarsson þáttr* explicitly names Northumbria as the seat of King Ella (C. C. Rafn, ed., "Þáttr af Ragnars sonum," in *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda: Eptir Gömlum Handritum*, Vol. 1 (Kaupmannahöfn: Hja Hardvig Fridrek Popp., 1829), 352. ch 3.). This is not surprising as the þáttr has a much more positive view of the English than of the Danes, making sure to note that Ívarr founded York, not London, with his ox-hide trick, and that he was responsible for the death of Edmund the Martyr (Rafn, "Þáttr af Ragnars sonum," 354. ch 3.).

[119] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 251. ch 6.

[120] Ibid., 251. ch 6.

[121] The sons from Ragnarr's first marriage, Eiríkr and Agnar, are never depicted as raiding, or interacting much for that fact, with the sons of Áslaug. This is presumably because they are significantly older and/or possibly resentful at the favour their younger half-siblings seem to enjoy.

hierarchy of command is reflective of the ages of Ragnarr's sons but a special note is made regarding Ívarr's mental prowess.[122] This may reflect a justification of authority in light of his impairment, which may be perceived as a weakness or marking him as unfit to lead or rule. However, Ívarr's lack of bones is not mentioned prior to this. While the epithet *beinlausi* is used by the author,[123] it is only Ívarr himself who mentions his impairment.[124]

Before any expedition, Ívarr is almost supernaturally-aware of what dangers lie ahead. Ívarr who knows not only of the sizeable military force at Hvítabær where Ragnar was defeated,[125] but also the pagan magic that is used to defend the kingdom in the form of two troll-like steers.[126] Similarly, Ívarr has knowledge about the supernatural cow Síbilja used in battle and worshiped by King Eysteinn in Svíþjóð.[127] In the former example, Ívarr's wisdom is contrasted with the foolishness of his younger brother Rögnvald who, against the specific instructions of his brothers, decides to enter the battle and is promptly killed.[128] Conversely, Ívarr's wisdom and ability were what won the battle in the end. In the latter example, Ívarr's success is strongly contrasted with the failure of his elder brothers Eiríkr and Agnar. The older brothers are unaware of both the supernatural cow and the trap King Eysteinn has set for them[129] whereas Ívarr not only possesses this knowledge but actively plans to overcome the challenges. The real instance of contrasting wisdom is demonstrated by Eiríkr when, even after defeat, King Eysteinn offers Eiríkr his daughter in marriage to seal peace, which

[122] Rafn, "Þáttr af Ragnars sonum," 346-347. ch 2.
[123] Ibid., 347. ch 2.
[124] Ibid., 350. ch 2.
[125] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 252. ch 6. Ívarr states that he wishes to test their might against the pagan magic at Hvítabær but the implication is that he obviously wishes to see if he is able to succeed where his father has failed. This competition between father and son is readdressed when Ragnarr attempts to conquer England with only two ships (pg 278. ch 14.). Ívarr again proves his superiority ability over Ragnarr when he is able to conquer King Ella's kingdom using deception instead of physical might (pg 291-292. ch 18.).
[126] Ibid., 253. ch 7.
[127] Ibid., 266. ch 9.
[128] Ibid., 253. ch 7. Rögnvald's death was easily preventable as it was only his own foolish ambition which led to his demise.
[129] Ibid., 260. ch 9.

Eiríkr refuses instead choosing to die, lifted over his defeated host on spears.[130] Even King Eystein remarks that Eiríkr's decision is the worst one for the both of them.[131] With such a spectacular failure and showing of poor judgement on the part of his elder brothers, Ívarr's actions against King Eysteinn are painted in an all the more admirable light. Not only does his reluctance for battle demonstrate a value placed on security and stability over revenge,[132] but his judicious planning and eventual heroic actions show Ívarr's almost superhuman ability over the other characters in the saga.

The wisdom of Ívarr is also contrasted against the emotional reactions of his mother and brothers. Ívarr speaks for all of his brothers when Áslaug attempts to goad them into avenging the deaths of their half-brothers Eiríkr and Agnar, but her goading is ineffective.[133] After his brothers pledge to seek vengeance for the deaths of Eiríkr and Agnar, Ívarr reluctantly agrees to help them, declaring the importance developing a sound plan of attack.[134] Ívarr's patience and planning is contrasted with both Áslaug's and his brothers' desire for speedy vengeance. Similarly, the impetus for the revenge campaign comes from an emotional verse recited by three-year-old Sigurðr *ormr í auga* promising to seek vengeance if

[130] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 262-263. ch 9. Eiríkr's death is strangely similar to how Ívarr is carried around on staves, perhaps as a way to highlight to corporal impairment of Ívarr by paralleling it with his brother's death.
[131] Ibid., 262. ch 9.
[132] Ívarr's brothers more heavily criticize his lack of desire to seek revenge after the death of Ragnarr where they call into question his masculinity. This episode is examined further in section 5.
[133] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 265-267. ch 9. The motif of the goading woman is prominent in medieval Icelandic literature. Usually, the goading questions the manliness of the one being challenged, is linked to violent action, and it is almost always effective. A prime example of this comes in the first chapter of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* where Gríma goads her husband Áki to kill the noble-looking Heimir in order to obtain his wealth (while this episode is sometimes considered the first chapter of Ragnars saga loðbrókar, in Rafn's edition, this chapter is included as the final chapter of *Völsunga saga* and will be cited as such here). Gríma questions Áki's masculinity first by calling him a "little man" ("*Því muntu lengi lítill fyrir þér, at þér vex allt í augu*") and then by threatening to marry Heimir instead (C. C. Rafn, ed., "Völsúnga saga," in *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda: Eptir Gömlum Handritum*, Vol. 1 (Kaupmannahöfn: Hja Hardvig Fridrek Popp., 1829), 231-232. ch 43.). It is therefore a significant event here that Ívarr is so unfazed by the urges of Áslaug to seek out vengeance and a testament to his controlled, rational, and wise bearing: "'*Eigi er víst,' segir Ívarr, 'hvárt þat stoðar nakkvat, þótt þú kveðir aðra vísu at annarri, eða hvé gerla veistu, hverr fastgarðr þar er fyrir*?'" (Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans,"266. ch 9.).
[134] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 269. ch 9.

Áslaug grieves.[135] These emotional responses have no place in the mind of Ívarr; he makes his decisions based on reason and his own wisdom. The expressive plea of Áslaug and the emotional verse of a child thus form a polarizing contrast to what Ívarr has already decided. In the actual planning of the revenge assault, it is obvious that Ívarr excludes Áslaug from the planning as she expresses her displeasure at not being informed about the terrestrial contingent,[136] thus further showing the character's disdain for the emotional and preference for the logical.

3.1.1 Ívarr and Ella: A Battle of Wits

Ívarr's wisdom is best demonstrated in his interactions with King Ella both before and after his brothers' failed invasion of England. Ella is a wise and shrewd king; he orders his troops to avoid killing Ragnarr for fear of provoking a mission of revenge from his sons.[137] Even though Ragnarr's attack was unprovoked, and the English forces are stronger, King Ella still wishes to maintain peaceful relations with his Danish neighbours to avoid useless bloodshed; much like Ívarr and his reluctance to avenge Eiríkr and Agnar. Even after Ragnarr is accidentally killed, King Ella still muses upon what he knows and what he desires to know about: "*en Ella konúngr þikkist vita, at Ragnar hefir líf sitt látit. Nú hyggr hann fyrir sèr, hve hann skyldi þess verða varr, eða með fara, at hann mætti halda ríki sínu, eða vita, hve þeim brygði við sonum Ragnars, er þeir spyrja*."[138]

[135] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 267. ch 9.
[136] Ibid., 269. ch 10. The relationship between Ívarr and Áslaug is a complex one. It is obvious that Ívarr has inherited his wisdom from his mother, as it is Áslaug who advises Ragnarr against his bravado-induced attempt at an invasion on England (pg 278. ch 1.). Áslaug also demonstrates an ability to communicate with birds (pg 256-257. ch 8.), which may be included to reflect her genetic connection to Sigurðr but nevertheless demonstrates a form of secret wisdom. This ability also serves to establish that wisdom can be inherited thus strengthening the connection between mother and son. Áslaug's most significant acts of wisdom and foresight are where she fulfils Ragnarr's seemingly paradoxical requests (pg 245. ch 4.), and when she correctly predicts that Ragnarr's lust will result in the deformity of their first-born son: Ívarr (pg 250. ch 5.). It is possible that Ívarr resents both of his parents for not taking measures to prevent his deformity which would explain both his competition with Ragnarr as well as his disregard for Áslaug's wishes and excluding her from his plans. However, it could very well be Ívarr's impairment that is responsible for his great wisdom in an Óðinn-esque exchange of body for mind.
[137] Ibid., 280. ch 15. *Ragnarssona þáttr* differs slightly from the saga in that it makes no mention of King Ella's shrewdness.
[138] Ibid., 283. ch 15.

Then, presumably in an attempt to mitigate retaliation, Ella sends "*vitr ok harðfengr*" men to bring news of Ragnarr's death to Ívarr and his brothers.[139] Both the reflection and careful planning mark King Ella as a man of wisdom and thought, not reaction. While other antagonists thus far in the saga have carried out scheming to an extent,[140] or presented difficult problems for Ívarr to solve,[141] none have been explicitly shown as thinking about their actions as carefully as Ívarr himself. This places King Ella in a position of direct opposition to Ívarr, not in a battle of strength, but in a battle of wisdom and counter-wisdom or deception.

Ívarr demonstrates superiority and authority over his brothers once again by his sitting in Ragnarr's high seat when King Ella's messengers arrive to bring news of Ragnarr's death.[142] All of the brothers are shocked by this news except Ívarr who simply asks how Ragnarr died.[143] This may indicate that Ívarr was able to predict a fatal outcome to Ragnarr's expedition much in the same way Áslaug/Randalín was.[144] Furthermore, the destructive, versus aesthetic, reactions of the sons of Ragnarr reflect their respective responses to problematic situations. The younger sons automatically seek a destructive approach: the invasion of England by force – a sentiment reflected in Hvítserkr's wish to kill King Ella's messengers immediately.[145] Conversely, Ívarr's visual change, lacking bodily destruction,[146] reflects his own deceptive an cunning approach to both succeed where Ragnarr failed, and to extract his revenge by, to modify the colloquialism, hiding his true colours from the enemy. The significance of Ívarr's reaction does not go unnoticed by King Ella. Indeed, when King Ella hears of the sons' reactions he states that "*þess er von, at annathvârt munu vèr Ívar þurfa at óttast, eða engan ella*."[147]

[139] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans,"283. ch 15.
[140] Cf. King Eysteinn's trap for Eiríkr and Agnar (Ibid., 260. ch 9.)
[141] Cf. the siege of Vífilsborg (Ibid., 273-274. ch 12.)
[142] Ibid., 284. ch 16.
[143] Ibid., 285. ch 16.
[144] Ibid., 278. ch 14.
[145] Ibid., 286. ch 16.
[146] Bodily destruction is discussed further in section 5.2.
[147] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 286. ch 16.

The surviving sons of Ragnarr all wish to seek revenge except Ívarr, who states that:

> *engan lut man ek í eiga, ok eigi fá lið til, þvíat Ragnar fór sem mik varði; hann bjó illa sína sök til í upphafi, hann átti engar sakir við Ellu konúng, ok hefir þat opt orðit, ef maðr ætlar ofrkapp fyrir sèr með rángendum, at hann hefir því úvirðuligar niðr komit; ok vil ek þiggja fèbætr af Ella konúngi, ef hann vill til leggja við mik.*[148]

Naturally, this statement draws criticism of Ívarr's courage from his brothers.[149] However, the statement shows that Ívarr foresaw these events, or could at least guess the outcomes of his father's actions. It also bears witness to his sense of justice and propriety as Ragnarr launched the attack simply in an attempt to not have his own glory overshadowed by that of his sons.[150]

What makes Ívarr's orchestration of King Ella's defeat so much more dramatically tense than his previous victories is that it is largely a victory won by mental cunning and manipulation. Firstly, Ívarr purposefully does not participate in the battle with King Ella, although he does accompany his brothers.[151] This serves as a two-fold benefit for Ívarr: not only does it publically show his unwillingness to fight King Ella, but it also means that there will be a significant fighting force remaining in Denmark to launch the second, successful attack since many men refused to join the invasion when it became known that Ívarr would not fight.[152]

Ívarr's next level of deception comes when he meets with King Ella after the battle. Ívarr acknowledges King Ella's superiority and claims that he only wishes for financial compensation for the death of his father.[153] King Ella is obviously aware of Ívarr's reputation for craftiness as he responds to this offer with doubt and questioning: "*þat kalla sumir menn, at eigi sè hægt at trúa þèr, ok þú mælir þá*

[148] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 286-287. ch 17.
[149] Ibid., 287. ch 17. Ívarr's masculine courage and revenge is examined more closely in section 5.
[150] Ibid., 277. ch 14.
[151] Ibid., 287. ch 17.
[152] Ibid., 287. ch 17.
[153] Ibid., 288. ch 17.

opt fagrt."[154] Ívarr dismisses the notion and reiterates that he will never be against King Ella and specifically requests deceptively-small compensation: "*attú gefir mèr þat af landi þínu, er uxahúð tekr yfir*."[155] King Ella reluctantly agrees thinking that if he has appeased Ívarr, he has no reason to fear the other sons of Ragnarr.[156] Predictably, Ívarr has a clever scheme in mind and manages to take enough land to found a city all while reaffirming that he will not raise arms or conspire against King Ella.[157]

Once his foothold is established, Ívarr truly begins his wisdom-based revenge on King Ella. Keeping true to his promise of not raising arms against the king, Ívarr begins to seduce away Ella's supporters and military force with both costly gifts and wise advice: "*ok þótti svâ mikit um speki hans, at allir sóttu hann at sínum ráðum ok vandamálum; ok svâ skipaði hann öllum málum, sem hverjum þótti sèr bezt gegna, ok gerist hann vinsæll, svâ at hann á undir hverjum manni vin*."[158] This serves not only to weaken the King's power, but also saves lives at the final battle. The men he employed to aid him in this errand, through procuring money from his brothers in Denmark, were as unaware of Ívarr's deception as anyone else: "*þvíat menn þóttust þat eigi vita, yfir hverjum brögðum hann bjó*."[159] Ívarr completely undermines the power of King Ella all without the use of violence or, indeed, any physical force whatsoever. After this is accomplished, Ívarr corresponds with his brothers, telling them to amass a fighting force, and it is only after this blunt order that the other sons of Ragnarr realize just how cunning Ívarr has been.[160] The third Danish invasion is successful and Ívarr tortures King Ella to death, mirroring the death of Ragnarr, thus securing for himself control of England.[161]

3.2 ELG-FRÓÐI

[154] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 288. ch 17.
[155] Ibid., 288. ch 17.
[156] Ibid., 289. ch 17.
[157] Ibid., 289. ch 17-18.
[158] Ibid., 289-290. ch 18.
[159] Ibid., 290. ch 18.
[160] Ibid., 290-291. ch 18.
[161] Ibid., 292. ch 18.

In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Elg-Fróði is more renowned for his strength, ferocity, and temper than for his wisdom, but the character also exhibits remarkable foresight to an almost supernatural level. First, he offers very shrewd advice to Þórir, which ultimately culminates in Þórir's acquisition of a kingdom.[162] Elg-Fróði also advises Böðvarr to seek service in King Hrólfr's court[163] where he later becomes a famous champion. While these instances no doubt demonstrate wisdom, it is in Elg-Fróði's parting with Böðvarr where the true extent of his mental ability lies:

> *Eptir þetta stè Fróði í bergit, er var hjá honum, allt til lagklaufa. Þá mælti Fróði: til þessa spors mun ek koma hvern dag, ok vita, hvat í sporinu er; mold mun verða, ef þú verðr sóttdauðr, vatn, ef þú verðr sjódauðr, blóð, ef þú verðr vopndauðr, ok mun ek þá hefna þín, því ek ann þér mest allra minna*.[164]

Here, Elg-Fróði is not only demonstrating his loyalty, honour, and brotherly affinity, but also a supernatural level of wisdom: he is able to determine details of events that will occur elsewhere in the world. Whether this applies exclusively to Böðvarr is questionable; it is possibly based on kinship ties or the fact that Böðvarr drank some of Elg-Fróði's blood to gain his strength,[165] thus physically linking the brothers by bonds other than kinship. These powers are prophetic only to a degree as Elg-Fróði is not able to predict anything regarding Böðvarr's death besides limiting it to three options. This may thus be a case of Elg-Fróði's abnormal legs reflecting a supernatural wisdom or magical ability, the former of which parallels interestingly with Ívarr's impressive shrewdness.

3.3 GÖNGU-HRÓLFR

Out of the three saga characters in question, Hrólfr is obviously the least wise. Along with his masculinity, his intelligence is questioned upon his

[162] Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 57-58. ch 29.
[163] Ibid., 62. ch 31.
[164] Ibid., 63. ch 31.
[165] This episode will be discussed more thoroughly in section 4.

introduction in the saga, for as soon as he leaves home against the counsel of his father, Hrólfr becomes lost, as he does not know any of the paths or trails.[166]

Throughout the saga, Hrólfr is continually pitted against opponents that are more cunning than he is; primarily, Vilhjálmr tricks Hrólfr into being his servant.[167] However, Hrólfr demonstrates considerable insight when the brothers Hrafn and Krákr visit Jarl Þorgný's court. It is not revealed until near the saga's very end that the brothers are actually English princes,[168] yet Hrólfr makes every effort to see that they are honoured and treated with respect after a particularly violent game at Jarl Þorgný's court.[169] Another of Hrólfr's insightful moments is during the quest to King Hreggviðr's mound. When passing through the physical ordeals of blizzard and stench, Hrólfr discerns that they must be magical in origin.[170] This level of wisdom is unprecedented in Hrólfr and seems to hint at either a slowly-growing passive wisdom, or a wisdom Hrólfr has been keeping hidden. However, the latter option seems much less likely as, for the majority of the saga Hrólfr is being manipulated by Vilhjálmr, trusting him on multiple occasions when he has proven to be cunning and deceitful.

3.3.1 HRÓLFR AND VILHJÁLMR

Hrólfr's interactions with Vilhjálmr are best described as *naïve*. From their meeting, it is clear that Hrólfr mistrusts Vilhjálmr but takes him at his word nevertheless.[171] Throughout the main body of the saga, it is Vilhjálmr who schemes and deceives. First, he orchestrates an elaborate lie in order to gain favour with King Eirekr,[172] forcing Hrólfr to carry out all the tasks,[173] and secondly, he deceives Hrólfr yet again, betraying him, and going on to deceive the court of Jarl Þorgný. [174]

[166] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 252. ch 6.
[167] Ibid., 270-271. ch 13.
[168] Ibid., 349-350. ch 35.
[169] Ibid., 265-266. ch 9.
[170] Ibid., 279. ch 16.
[171] Ibid., 269. ch 12.
[172] Ibid., 272. ch 14.
[173] Ibid., 273-290. ch 15-18.
[174] Ibid., 303-305. ch 24.

In many ways, Vilhjálmr is Hrólfr's true opposite. Vilhjálmr is aggressive[175] and boastful[176] whereas Hrólfr actively downplays his abilities such as when he informs Princess Ingigerðr that he is unable to ride[177] when the contrary has been demonstrated.[178] Vilhjálmr actively lies to King Eirekr, but when confronted, Hrólfr can only give half-truths.[179] While Hrólfr keeps his oaths to Vilhjálmr, Vilhjálmr breaks his to Hrólfr twice.[180] Overall, in every way that Vilhjálmr is treacherous, Hrólfr is chivalrous.

It is only when Hrólfr has his legs removed that he sheds his *naïveté* and formulates his own scheme to foil Vilhjálmr. Firstly, although a degree of intimidation is involved, Hrólfr overcomes the dwarf Möndull, a skilled magician and physician, who has been deceiving the entire court of Jarl Þorgný, and forces him to heal Hrólfr's severed feet.[181] Next, Hrólfr orchestrates his friend Björn's return to favour, dismissing the legal case against him while simultaneously ousting Vilhjálmr.[182] Until this point, this level of legal and political cunning has been practically non-existent in Hrólfr. Furthermore, Hrólfr is then tasked with leading Jarl Þorgný's forces into Russia to reclaim Princess Ingigerðr's kingdom,[183] a position of great responsibility and requiring of wisdom. Like most wise men, Hrólfr knows when to listen and follows the advice of Möndull, which leads to the successful avoidance of Grímr *ægir*'s antagonizing magic.[184] Thus, there is a clear correlation between an increase in the wisdom exhibited by Hrólfr and the removal of his legs.

[175] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 268-269. ch 12.
[176] Ibid., 272, 288. ch 14, 18.
[177] Ibid., 293. ch 20.
[178] Ibid., 287. ch 18.
[179] Ibid., 278, 283, 289. ch 15, 16, 18.
[180] Ibid., 270-271, 303. ch 13, 24.
[181] Ibid., 308-309. ch 25.
[182] Ibid., 311-312, 313-314. ch 26, 27.
[183] Ibid., 314-315. ch 27.
[184] Ibid., 317-318. ch 28. Möndull counters the magic of Grímr *ægir* when Hrólfr's army is *en route*, not insignificantly, by walking around the troops. As well, Möndull prevents Grímr *ægir* from raising the dead by walking around the battlefield in a counter-clockwise direction (pg 337. ch 32.).

3.4 Conclusion

In the three *fornaldarsögur* examined, wisdom is demonstrated in two ways: either in comparison to other characters' abundance or lack of wisdom, or through supernatural prophecy. Ívarr *hinn beinlausi* and Göngu-Hrólfr belong to this first category. While Ívarr demonstrates wisdom in contrast to his brothers' and mother's lack of the same, Hrólfr's pre-amputation lack of wisdom is contrasted to Vilhjálmr's cunning. However, both characters experience comparative wisdom challenges at the sagas' climaxes: Ívarr's deception of King Ella and Hrólfr's escape from Vilhjálmr's influence. Elg-Fróði, on the other hand, displays his abilities of foresight in comparison or contrast to no one.

All three characters exhibit wisdom, to a lesser or greater extent, that somehow hinges upon the state of their legs. With Elg-Fróði, the connection is obvious: the prophetic pool he creates is a hoof print made by his abnormal legs. With Hrólfr, he is at his wisest only after the damage to his legs. However, Ívarr, objectively the wisest of the three, is consistently cunning throughout the saga. The connection of Ívarr's wisdom to his legs lies in how he is identified. Namely, Ívarr is perpetually described as wise, a claim the veracity of which he continually reinforces with his words and actions, all while nominally being identified as *beinlausi*. The two aspects of his identity are intrinsically linked, especially in the saga, and thus impairment and intelligence are equal in their definition of the character of Ívarr.

4. Death on Two Legs: Legs and Physical Might

Thus far, the correlation between characters with abnormal legs and features of high mental ability has been examined. Now, similar comparisons will be drawn between the appearance of abnormal legs and superhuman physical strength. As Ívarr was the most prominent character pertaining to mental ability, similarly, Elg-Fróði is the prime example through which to explore physical traits *vis-à-vis* his abnormality.

4.1 Elg-Fróði

Of his brothers, Elg-Fróði is objectively the most visibly deformed, as his entire lower half is a beast, but he is also the strongest and most violent. Indeed, by age twelve, Elg-Fróði has killed a number of men and decides to leave home; citing a lack of desire to be among humans as well as due to some significant implications on the part of by his mother, Bera.[185] This violence and strength is readdressed in each of the encounters between Elg-Fróði and his younger[186] brothers. In both instances, Elg-Fróði becomes aggressive and threatening, nearly killing each brother with his short-sword.[187] Likewise, Elg-Fróði's greater strength is demonstrated when he first meets and wrestles with Böðvarr, easily pinning him.[188] The superiority of Elg-Fróði's strength over his less-deformed brothers indicates a strong correlation between the level of deformity and the level of ability; although the lack of a strength competition between Elg-Fróði and Þórir makes this impossible to confirm. However, Elg-Fróði's easy victory over Böðvarr may imply that Böðvarr is less masculine and must become more deformed in order to achieve masculine strength. For Göngu-Hrólfr, this is achieved through the loss of his legs, for Böðvarr, it is through the drinking of blood from Elg-Fróði's leg.[189] Either way, the amount of strength each brother possesses appears to derive

[185] Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 55-56. ch 28.
[186] While the Björnssons are triplets, Elg-Froði is the firstborn. Likewise, Ívarr is the firstborn of the sons of Áslaug.
[187] Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 57, 61-62. ch 29, 31.
[188] Ibid., 62. ch 31.
[189] Ibid., 62-63. ch 31.

from their level of deformity as well as being inversely related to their civility, although not necessarily their wisdom.

The fact that Elg-Fróði can instil superhuman strength in others via his legs is of significant import. In fact, it is testament to the supernatural nature of his deformity, as if his animalistic appearance did not already speak to this this. The transfer or imbuing with superhuman strength is mirrored later in the saga when Böðvarr makes Höttr drink the blood of a flying *dýr*, prompting his transformation into the hero Hjalti.[190] The Höttr-to-Hjalti transformation is physical not only in terms of strength, but also in appearance as the titular King Hrólf notes that much has changed with Höttr and the newly-forged hero uses a sword that can only be wielded by those "*sem bæði er góðr drengr ok hraustr*."[191] Elg-Fróði makes a similar observation of Böðvarr when he acquired his supernatural strength: "*ok þú munt verða fyrirmaðr flestra um afl ok hreysti ok, um alla harðfengi ok drengskap*."[192]

The uses of these descriptions in both instances of strength acquisition in the saga imply a connection between the body and personal conduct and/or outlook. While this noble conduct at first seems absent in Elg-Fróði, what with his violent outbursts, disrespect to his mother, and displeasure with his inheritance,[193] it nevertheless emerges when Böðvarr confronts about his life as a highwayman: Elg-Fróði explains that he gives many small or weak people mercy.[194] He also offers each of his brothers half of everything he owns when he meets them.[195] Elg-Fróði reveals his nobility in these instances, thus intensifying the connection between strength of body and strength of character.

[190] Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 70. ch 35. There is also the obvious parallel to *Völsunga saga* and Sigurðr's tasting the blood of Fafnir's heart. However, this episode correlates the consumption of a non-human with wisdom rather than strength as Sigurðr becomes able to understand the language of birds (Rafn, "Völsúnga saga," 163-164. ch 19.).
[191] Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 71-72. ch 36.
[192] Ibid., 63. ch 31.
[193] Ibid., 55-56. ch 28.
[194] Ibid., 62. ch 31.
[195] Ibid., 57, 62. ch 29, 31.

4.1.1 ELG-FRÓÐI AND BÖÐVARR

In comparing Elg-Fróði to his brother Böðvarr, it is hard to say which brother has the greatest abnormality or the most power.[196] With Böðvarr's ability to transform, in some form or another, into a bear, coupled with the much greater emphasis placed on him in the saga as well as other texts,[197] its seems that Böðvarr might indeed be the greater of the two. However, it must not be forgotten that the legendary strength of Böðvarr came from Elg-Fróði. As well, while Böðvarr simply inherited his kingdom,[198] Elg-Fróði seemingly constructs his seat of power based on his might alone: when he first leaves home, Elg-Fróði is said to live in a hut he builds,[199] but when he is visited by Böðvarr, he now resides in a more impressive structure.[200] Elg-Fróði has essentially become the master of his own fate, building a life for himself with presumably nothing but his own physical abilities. Despite this, Elg-Fróði still believes that everything is "*illa gefnir*" to him,[201] including the lesser share of Björn's inheritance.[202] The world has not been kind to Elg-Fróði, no doubt on account of his appearance, but he as overcome this with strength of body,

[196] In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Böðvarr is said to be the only brother to be born without a visible abnormality (pg 54-55. ch 27.). As well, the narrator explicitly states twice that Böðvarr is the most loved out of the brothers and is also the one that seems best to Bera (pg 55, 58. ch 27, 30). It is not made clear whether or not Böðvarr physically transforms into the bear, like his father before him, or whether the bear is some sort of spiritual and/or astral projection that takes a tangible form on the battlefield, since Böðvarr and the bear – much like Bruce Wayne and Batman – are never seen together. Some scholars seem to side with the latter idea since Böðvarr is found sitting idle by Hjalti within the hall while the battle rages outside (pg 103. ch 50.) and that this idleness is some form of shamanistic trance (Cf. Byock, *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*, 85.). Putting aside the *minutiae* of how one becomes a bear, it is evident that the bear possesses magical or supernatural qualities since its presence hampers Skuld's abilities to wield magic against King Hrólf's forces (pg 105. ch 51.). While Böðvarr may lack an obvious physical deformity, he still has access to an animalistic strength. Indeed, for the final battle against Skuld and Hjörvarðr, Böðvarr cannot be found on the battlefield and a giant bear fights in his place (pg 105. ch 51.). The bear is said to be better than any five of the other champions as well as impervious to harm, crushing men with its mass, with teeth that could tear through anything (pg 102-103. ch 50.). There are obvious parallels here between the unstoppable war-force that is the bear and Göngu-Hrólfr: Hrólfr is immense in size, is invulnerable due to his magic armour and cloak, and also possesses a sword that can cut through anything.

[197] C.f. *Gesta Danorum* and *Snorra Edda* as the basis for the reconstruction of the now-lost *Bjarkamál*. However, *Hrólfs saka kraka* mentions the existence of *Froða þætti* which presumably chronicle Elg-Fröði's life outside his brief appearance in the saga (Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 109. ch 52.).

[198] Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 60. ch 30.

[199] Ibid., 56. ch 28.

[200] Ibid., 61. ch 31. Literally "*skála*" versus "*skála miklum*."

[201] Ibid., 62. ch 31.

[202] Ibid., 56. ch 28.

of character, and to a lesser extent, of mind; it his Elg-Fróði's reputation that is monstrous, not the man himself.

4.2 ÍVARR *HINN BEINLAUSI*

Despite being the character with the most obvious impairment, Ívarr proves to be capable of remarkable feats of physical prowess. At the episode at Hvítabær, specifically the killing of the two troll-steers, the polarity of Ívarr's physical abilities is highlighted: he is both unable to walk yet able to kill two supernatural beasts in as many arrows. As well, in the battle against the cow Síbilja, Ívarr has a giant bow constructed which no other man is able to draw.[203]

Curiously, *Ragnarssona þáttr* makes no mention of Ívarr's legs or inability to walk, but rather refers to the boneless nature of his hands and their lack of strength:

> *Hafið ofrhuga ærinn*
> *ok áræði bæði!*
> *þess mundi þá þurfa,*
> *at þrá mikit fylgdi;*
> *bera mun mik fyr bragna*
> *beinlausan fram verða,*
> *þó gatk hönd til hefnda,*
> *at ek hvâriga nýta.*[204]

This contrasts sharply with Ívarr's physical strength as depicted in the *saga*. Nevertheless, while Ívarr may not be noted for his physical abilities, whenever he does make a physical act, usually of violence, it is near-superhuman.

4.3 GÖNGU-HRÓLFR

From a purely physical perspective, Hrólfr's legs serve not solely as his main means of transportation, but also as the key to his competency in both conflict and quest. There are four specific episodes in the saga, before their removal, where Hrólfr's feet and legs contribute to the accomplishment of his task.

[203] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 271-272. ch 11.
[204] Rafn, "Þáttr af Ragnars sonum," 350. ch 2.

The first is in Hrólfr's violent altercation with the viking Jólgeirr. In this occurrence, the use, or lack thereof, of Hrólfr's legs is responsible for both his success and his vulnerability. The altercation begins with Jólgeirr striking the sleeping Hrólfr,[205] i.e., when he is not on his feet. While it may seem obvious that anyone who is not on their feet is vulnerable to attack, this is especially true in this instance when contrasted to how Hrólfr attains victory. Firstly, Hrólfr jumps to his feet[206] and in the ensuing struggle he and Jólgeirr topple off a cliff into the sea where they attempt to drown each other.[207] While evenly matched in the water, it is not until Hrólfr is able to touch the bottom that he succeeds in drowning Jólgeirr.[208] Great emphasis is placed in the text on the fact that "*tók Hrólfi þá í linda stað, en Jólgeir tók eigi niðri,"* after "*kom Hrólfr fótum undir sik*,"[209] thus emphasizing the important role Hrólfr's legs played in his victory.

The last three episodes that underline the physical importance of Hrólfr's legs take place during his tenure under the deceiver Vilhjálmr in service to King Eirekr. First, Eirekr tasks Vilhjálmr to retrieve for him a beautiful stag with gold-inlayed antlers that has been seen in the forest and thus far proven impossible to capture.[210] Hrólfr and Vilhjálmr chase the stag on foot and while Vilhjálmr is swifter at the outset, Hrólfr has the greater endurance, eventually catching up with the stag after both it and Vilhjálmr become exhausted.[211] Hrólfr carries the stag back to town but Vilhjálmr carries it into the hall to gain credit, his knees buckling under its mass.[212] This particular episode highlights Hrólfr's greater leg-based ability in relation to Vilhjálmr with regards to the prolonged running and carrying, thus enabling Hrólfr to complete the task.

The third episode, and second task from King Eirekr, is the breaking into Hreggviðr's burial mound to retrieve his armour. In the journey to the mound,

[205] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 256. ch 6.
[206] Ibid., 256. ch 6. Literally, "*Hrólfr vaknar með andfælum, ok sprettr upp*,"
[207] Ibid., 256-257. ch 6.
[208] Ibid., 257. ch 6.
[209] Ibid., 257. ch 6.
[210] Ibid., 273-274. ch 15.
[211] Ibid., 275. ch 15.
[212] Ibid., 277. ch 15.

Vilhjálmr rides while Hrólfr walks.[213] Hrólfr's podial proficiency is once again displayed when the pair endures two magical challenges put in place to defend the mound. The first ordeal is a harsh blizzard, which eventually forces Vilhjálmr to walk and soon after kills the horse and results in Vilhjálmr's temporary disappearance, and the second is a nigh-unbearable stench, both of which Hrólfr walks through.[214]

The battle with Sóti is the fourth and final episode examined here before the removal of Hrólfr's legs. Firstly, Hrólfr walks to the battleground in attendance of Vilhjálmr.[215] While Hrólfr does ride into combat, as mentioned above, it is important to note that the single combat between Hrólfr and Sóti is fought on foot. Sóti's defeat shows once again that Hrólfr's prowess and ability stems from his legs. It is also worth noting that Hrólfr dismounted only after his horse was cut in half "*fyrir framan boguna*," leaving "*Hrólfr þá á fæti mjök móðr,*" from which position Hrólfr also kills Sóti's horse, leaving him on foot.[216] Thus, the legs of the horse failed while those of Hrólfr contributed to his victory.

These four episodes show that, prior to their amputation, the legs and feet of Hrólfr play a pivotal role in his early success in physical ordeals. In some cases, their merit is explicit, such as his being able to touch the bottom first in his littoral fight with Jólgeirr. Other times, his legs serve as an accessory to success, as is the case with the capture of the stag or the perseverance in the journey to the mound. However, and most importantly, Hrólfr's legs also symbolically aid him such as in the battle with Sóti during which it is only when on foot that Hrólfr can land the deathblow. Indeed, Hrólfr's attack from horseback is ineffective: "*hann kom skildi fyrir sik, ok lagði í móti fyrir brjóst Sóta, ok beit ekki á, en brotnaði spjótit í falnum*."[217] However, Sóti's deathblow is problematic even on foot and Hrólfr's

[213] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 279. ch 16.
[214] Ibid., 279-280. ch 16.
[215] Ibid., 286. ch 17.
[216] Ibid., 287. ch 18.
[217] Ibid., 287. ch 18.

sword breaks in the attempt,[218] further emphasizing just how herculean of a feat Hrólfr accomplishes all while on foot.

4.3.1 HRÓLFR AFTER AMPUTATION

While Hrólfr's physical feats prior to the amputation of his legs are remarkable, his physical prowess only increases after their removal. In the final battle against King Eirekr, which takes places after the re-attachment of his legs, Hrólfr shows extreme physical ability hereto undemonstrated in the saga. While the earlier battle against the forces of Sóti witnessed Hrólfr killing many men,[219] this final battle has Hrólfr slaying men in heaps.[220]

In the first day of the battle against King Eirekr, Hrólfr faces off against the troll-like Röndólfr. Röndólfr is described as big, powerful, and prone to fits of rage, as well as potentially coming from Jötun stock.[221] He is clearly a formidable opponent due to the great destruction he carries out against Hrólfr's troops as well as his near-invulnerability.[222] Hrólfr's duel with Röndólfr is therefore his first test of strength after the removal of his legs and the significant happenings in the duel reflect this fact as well as the legs' importance. While Hrólfr begins the battle on horseback, he purposefully dismounts to fight Röndólfr.[223] As in the earlier battle against Sóti, this fact highlights the reliance Hrólfr places on his feet and how it is through the strength of his legs that he is able to attain victory. During the actual duel, the wounds Hrólfr inflicts on Röndólfr are also symbolic. Hrólfr's first blow removes a hand and all of the toes on one foot, and his final blow cuts off both of

[218] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 287. ch 18.
[219] Ibid., 287. ch 18.
[220] Ibid., 339-340. ch 33. Literally:
Hrólfr gengr nú fram hart, ok höggr til beggja handa, urðu þeir lèttir fyrir honum, fèll nú hverr um þveran annan; aungum þurfti hann at gefa meir enn eitt högg; gaf sá hverr dauðann fyrir lífit, er hann náði sverðinu til, ok báðar hans hendr voru blóðgaðar til axlar upp, bauð nú flestum hans framgánga ótta, var orrostan mjök mannskæð í baða armana.
[221] Ibid., 322. ch 30.
[222] Ibid., 322-323. ch 30.
[223] Ibid., 324. ch 30.

Röndólfr's buttocks.[224] Hrólfr wounds Röndólfr in the very extremities which grant Hrólfr his own strength.

Similarly, at the battle's climax, Hrólfr battles one-on-one with the Grímr *ægir*. Grímr *ægir* is supernatural in his own right, being not quite human and trained in *fjölkynngi*.[225] He is demonstrably strong and possesses supernatural powers such as the ability to travel through the earth and transform into monstrous creatures.[226] The duel between Hrólfr and Grímr *ægir* quickly becomes one of pure physical might when the two begin to grapple, churning up the earth with their legs.[227] Eventually, Grímr *ægir* is overcome through a combination of Hrólfr's strength and Möndull's cutting of Grímr *ægir*'s hamstrings, crippling him.[228] This struggle is the greatest physical feat Hrólfr must accomplish,[229] and it occurs after the removal and recovery of his legs. Just as the loss and reattachment of his legs proved to be the catalyst that spurred mental ability, so too did that same event inspire greater physical ability in Hrólfr.

4.4 Conclusion

The analysis in this section proves that there is a demonstrable link between physical ability, usually strength, and the legs of the three characters in question. Foremost, Elg-Fróði exhibits not only a great deal of bestial aesthetic in his legs, but also inhuman levels of strength. In addition to his individual might, Elg-Fróði is able to directly transmit his strength, or at least geminate a similar strength in others, through his blood. Most significantly, it is the blood that comes

[224] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 324-325. ch 30. The wounding of the buttocks carries a deeply-sexualized meaning and *Grágás* specifically mentions this type of wound as emasculating. Thus, Hrólfr can be said to be emasculating Röndólfr and/or asserting his own masculine dominance over him (Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins, trans. L*aws of Early Iceland, Grágás: The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from Other Manuscripts* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1980), 141. ch 86.).
[225] Ibid., ch 2.241. *Fjölkynngi* can be translated as the black art, witchcraft, wizardry, sorcery (Geir T. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 140.)
[226] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 339, 342. ch 33.
[227] Ibid., 344. ch 33. Literally: "*ok svá spyrndu þeir sterkliga til, at afgekk gras ok svörðr af jörðinni, þar er þeir gengu*."
[228] Ibid., 344. ch 33. Yet again, legs are shown to be correlational to physical and supernatural ability.
[229] Ibid., 343-344. ch 33. "*aldri þóttist Hrólfr í meiri mannraun komit hafa; þat sá hann, at hann mundi springa af mæði, ef þeir ættist tveir við lengi," and "Grímr brauzt um fast ok sótti í jörð niðr, en Hrólfr hèlt honum eftir megni*;"

from his deformed legs which possesses this supernatural property, further strengthening the link between legs and physical might.

Likewise, Ívarr accomplishes the most fantastic feats of strength in his respective saga, even greater than the titular Ragnarr. Indeed, Ívarr's physical prowess is unparalleled by any other character in the narrative, able-bodied or otherwise. The lack of other heroic feats of strength in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* alone serves to elevate Ívarr's already impressive physical accomplishments to the level of superhuman. Additionally, when coupled with the fact that Ívarr is impaired, these already outstanding instances become even more fantastic and significant in affiliating crural abnormality with physical proficiency.

Finally, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* provides a plethora of examples where Hrólfr's legs are involved directly, indirectly, or symbolically in feats of physical prowess. While the pre-amputation accomplishments are heroic, it is only post-amputation and after subsequent 're-memberment' that Hrólfr accomplishes his greatest physical achievement at the saga's climax and directly results in a romantic conclusion.

5. Get a Leg Up: Legs and Masculine Identity

Masculinity was an essential criterion for the identity of the medieval Icelandic male, but it was also an unstable commodity. The removal of one's masculine identity was the removal of one's social status,[230] and, as explored in section 2.3, the only status in medieval Icelandic society that mattered was human male. The medieval conception of men and women was based on religious teachings: the controlled, rational, active, and intellectual male as opposed to the wild, irrational, passive, and corporal female.[231]

Feats of wisdom or strength are more objectively identifiable than markers of masculinity. This is due in no small part to the cultural and temporal relativity of what defines, or transgresses, gendered behaviour. Thus, the present section draws more heavily on material external to the three *fornaldarsögur* of focus in an attempt to illuminate how the relationship between legs and masculinity is established therein. What follows below is, simultaneously, an exploration of the ways in which masculine identity could be challenged, expressed, and reclaimed in medieval Icelandic literature, as well as how the three characters of focus existed in this milieu and how that related to their lower extremities.

As Ívarr was the character of primary focus for the examination of wisdom, and Elg-Fróði the most significant on the matter of physical ability, it is only fitting that Göngu-Hrólfr is the primary focus concerning masculinity.

5.1. Challenges to Masculinity

Regarding masculinity, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s titular Hrólfr is the character who receives the most criticism. At the outset of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, Hrólfr is described in any way other than manly save for his great size. First described as harmless and inept, Hrólfr's masculinity is further called into question first implicitly when he admits he is unable to stand the sight of blood and shuns sea travel for fear of the ship sinking, and then explicitly when his father describes him

[230] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man* 83.
[231] David Clark, *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012), 151, 163.

as "*meir konu en karlmanni at hafa þvílíkt framferði sem þú hefir.*"[232] Based on the legal criteria discussed in section 2.3, it is possible to classify this statement an act of *níð*. Hrólfr seemingly affirms this claim when he states that he does not mean to marry and has no use for women.[233] This sentiment is confirmed throughout the saga when he continually denies an interest in women, even if the marriage would elevate his status,[234] or simply does not respond when the topic is brought up.[235] Not insignificantly, save for a single instance,[236] every occurrence of Hrólfr stating his disinterest in women takes place before the removal of his legs. From the saga's outset, Hrólfr's masculine identity is challenged in an explicit enough way that under non-*fornaldarsögur* circumstances, he would be entitled to take legal action.

Hrólfr's lack of retaliation, whether legal or physical, compounds the attack on his masculinity. In the medieval Icelandic mentality, not taking vengeance hindered, dampened, or diluted masculinity.[237] Indeed, "a man was a man only as long as he had the strength, courage and vitality to be so."[238] Looking to examples from contemporaneous literature, we see in *Eyrbyggja saga* that passivity can be a mark of androgyny; Þórarinn and his inaction being the prime example.[239] Indeed, it is evident that medieval Icelandic society "prizes valiant men of action"[240] and thus, by extension, the inability to act makes one unmanly. Throughout most of the saga, Hrólfr is plagued by inaction. Specifically, Hrólfr is continually distracted from completing the quest originally assigned to him by Jarl Þorgný to retrieve Princess Ingigerðr. It is not until after Hrólfr's appendageal re-joining that he is finally able to enter Russia and free Ingigerðr's kingdom. In the world outside of the sagas, the need for vengeance as part of the masculine ideal resulted in a crisis of gender and sexuality identity for clerical figures who were discouraged or

[232] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 248-249. ch 4.
[233] Ibid., 249. ch 4.
[234] Ibid., 268. ch 11.
[235] Ibid., 294. ch 20.
[236] Ibid., 336. ch 32.
[237] Clark, *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga*, 117.
[238] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 87.
[239] Sean Lawing, "Re-membering Auðr's Hand in *Eyrbyggja saga*," in *Proceedings of International Medieval Congress: The Literature of Medieval Scandinavia, III: Political, Cultural, and Mythological Empires*, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom (July 7, 2014): 1, accessed March 12, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/13176735/Re-membering_Auðr_s_Hand_in_Eyrbyggja_ saga.
[240] Ibid., 2.

prohibited from taken vengeance, as well, in some cases, as engaging in sexual relations.[241] Ívarr undergoes similar criticism from his brothers in his reluctance to take immediate vengeance upon learning of the death of Ragnarr.[242] Ívarr's inaction is seen as cowardly and thus serves to challenge his masculinity.

With the relationship between action and masculinity in mind, impairment, whether it be congenital or acquired, can thus be seen as an emasculating condition. If one is physically unable to act, whether it be in vengeance or otherwise, then one cannot be masculine. Indeed, it would not be recondite to equate the loss of podiatric function with metaphorical castration.

Vilhjálmr is the catalyst for the most explicit challenges to Hrólfr's masculinity. When chasing the prize stag and Vilhjálmr can no longer run, he challenges Hrólfr to continue by questioning his masculinity both directly and in relation to upholding his oath: "*en mér þikir þú skyldr at taka dýrit ok vinna allar þrautir fyrir mik eftir skildögum, ef þú ert maðr til.*"[243] However, the most dramatic attack on Hrólfr's masculinity occurs when Vilhjálmr immobilizes Hrólfr with a *svefnþorn*.[244] The verb used, *stakk*, the preterite third-person singular of *stinga*, has the meaning of thrusting, sticking, or stabbing.[245] All of these definitions can be related to an active, versus passive, sexual role, usually associated with the masculine. Vilhjálmr is literally penetrating Hrólfr, and through this display of sexual dominance, immobilizes and neutralizes him, making him powerless. In medieval Icelandic culture, being the penetrated party in a sexual act was the shameful position.[246] Indeed, homosexuality, especially passive homosexuality, and effeminacy were linked to cowardice.[247] The attack on Hrólfr's masculinity culminates in the removal of his legs at the hands of Vilhjálmr.[248] As demonstrated above, Hrólfr's legs aid him in the completion of his increasingly-heroic deeds as

[241] Clark, *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga*, 10.
[242] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 287. ch 17.
[243] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 275. ch 15.
[244] Ibid., 303. ch 24.
[245] Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, 408.
[246] Clover, "Regardless of Sex," 375.
[247] Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 85.
[248] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 303-304. ch 24.

the saga progresses, and thus their removal also signifies a removal of Hrólfr's ability to commit further deeds of heroism or indeed seemingly take any action at all. As heroism, or at least the ability to take action, and masculinity are connected, the removal of Hrólfr's legs serves as a symbolic castration of the character, leaving him completely emasculated and unable to act both literally and figuratively. Hrólfr has been robbed of his masculinity through both penetration and metaphorical castration.

5.2 Appearance, Composure, and Masculinity

Obsession over one's appearance was also correlative to a lack of manliness in medieval Iceland. [249] We see in *Brennu-Njáls saga* that Sigmundr's attention to appearance undermines his masculinity.[250] Indeed, it would appear that, in *Brennu-Njáls saga* at least, the ways in which masculinity is criticized by the characters often relates to appearance; beardlessness, colour of clothes, change in physical colour, losing composure, etc.[251] In this sense, we can read into *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* a challenge to Vilhjálmr's masculinity in contrast to Hrólfr. When Vilhjálmr is introduced in the text, it is said that "*þoldi hann ekki at gánga með vopnunum, var hann skrautmenni mikit at klæðum ok söðulreiði.*"[252] Not only does Vilhjálmr eschew a reliance on legs, but his masculinity is simultaneously questioned when reference to his penchant for finery is made.[253] Vilhjálmr's preference for riding contrasts Hrólfr's preference for walking and thus, by association, it can be deduced that the other aspects of Vilhjálmr's character, i.e. his obsession with appearance, and their gendered connotations, also contrast with Hrólfr.

The connection between appearance and masculine identity in the saga corpus has been well-established. In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, it is external, visual factors which prompt declarations of or challenges to masculinity. Therefore, the loss of legs is an attack on the visual and subsequently an attack on masculinity. The

[249] Ármann Jakobsson, "Masculinity and Politics in Njáls saga," 191.
[250] Ibid., 191.
[251] Ibid., 193.
[252] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 270. ch 12.
[253] C.f. Ármann Jakobsson, "Masculinity and Politics in Njáls saga," 198.

visual aspect also pertains to colour. Characters changing colour in reaction to an emotionally-charged event is a common theme in many sagas and not exclusive of the three *fornaldarsögur* discussed here. It is evident in Vilhjálmr when Hrólfr confronts him at the court of Jarl Þorgný, where it occurs immediately prior to his establishment as a deceiving coward and his subsequent execution.[254] However, it is most vivid in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* in relation to Ívarr. The saga frames the colour change as a difference in self-control that the brothers have upon receiving the news of Ragnarr's death. While Sigurð *ormr í auga* cuts his finger to the bone, Hvítserkr squeezes a gaming piece so hard blood flows, and Björn *járnsiðr* breaks a spear shaft, Ívarr changes colour: "*En Ívar spyrr at öllu sem gjörst, en litr hans var stundum rauðr, en stundum blárr, en lotum var hann bleikr, ok hann var svâ þrútinn, at hans hörund var allt blásit af þeim grimmleik, er í brjósti hans var***.**"[255] The younger brothers each damage themselves or an object in some way, but Ívarr undergoes a purely visual change that borders on the supernatural.[256] Ívarr's response is non-destructive, which is in keeping with his avoidance of unnecessary death thus far in the saga. Nevertheless, the loss of visual composure is still considered a challenge to his masculinity. Ívarr's change in colour is comparable to the greater violent temperament of Elg-Fróði in contrast to his less-deformed brothers; his uncontrolled rage is un-masculine and he must endeavour, as Ívarr does, to reclaim it. In both cases, as with Hrólfr, this is achieved, at least partially, through enacting revenge.[257]

To take the idea of composure being associated with manliness to its logical extreme, it is possible to correlate the composure of the body with the masculine ideal. If one's body is complete and composed it is considered manly; the wholeness of form is directly related to the wholeness of identity. Thus, the losing of bodily composure through the loss of normalcy due to impairment or

[254] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 311. ch 26.
[255] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 285-286. ch 16.
[256] A similar colour-based physical transformation appears elsewhere in the saga corpus. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, for example, describes how "*Flosa brá svo við að hann var í andliti stundum rauður sem blóð en stundum fölur sem gras en stundum blár sem hel*" in response to Hildigunnr's inciting revenge for her husband Höskuldr's murder (Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, in *Íslenzk fornrit*. Vol. XII (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka fornritafélag, 1954), 292. ch 116.).
[257] See section 5.4.

abnormality is considered unmanly; and such is the case for the characters in question. Furthermore, if one is able to compose one's bodily self, through the reattachment or normalizing of limbs, for example, then one is able to establish or re-attain manliness; this is certainly the case for Hrólfr.

Various verses in the Old Testament prohibit any impaired individual from functioning as a priest.[258] However, numerous later Church legislations maintained this standard only for higher orders, and dispensations could be granted.[259] Even so, a religious and cultural precedent was in place that implied that a bodily incomplete man was no man at all. Whether it be wholeness of body or wholeness of colour, a sense of completeness was required in order to establish a masculine identity.

5.3 Sex, Love, and Masculinity

Ívarr's boneless form suggests physical incompleteness and thus a potential challenge to his masculinity. However, *Ragnarssona þáttr* directly challenges Ívarr's masculinity when it mentions that he has no progeny: "*þvíat hann var svâ skapaðr, at honum fylgdi engi girnd nè ást, en eigi skorti hann spekt eða grimd*."[260] It is unclear whether this is a statement regarding Ívarr's virility due to his impairment or a facet of his personality, but it nevertheless serves as an attack on his masculinity. Indeed, even the epithet "*hinn beinlausi*" carries with it a hint of masculine and sexual criticism. The conferring of a quasi-asexual or androgynous nature to the impaired is prevalent in modern conceptions[261] and it is plausible that similar sentiments were not unknown in medieval Iceland.

None of the three characters in question can be described as lustful, and none of them are particularly amorous. Neither Ívarr nor Elg-Fróði ever engage in romantic interactions, and Hrólfr only marries reluctantly. All three sagas feature

[258] C.f. Lev 21:17
[259] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 40-41. The prominent example of such an exception being made in Iceland is with Bishop Guðmundur góði Arason (Stefán Karlsson, ed., *Guðmundar sögur biskups I*, 43-44. ch 14. *Guðmundars saga A*).
[260] Rafn, "Þáttr af Ragnars sonum." 356. ch 4.
[261] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 31.

themes of brotherhood and camaraderie: the main points of action in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* revolve around brothers avenging each other as well as their father; *Hrólfs saga kraka* emphasizes the bonds between Elg-Fróði and his brothers Þórir *hundsfótr* and Böðvarr bjarki, as well as the bond between Böðvarr and Hjalti; and even *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* makes note of the bonds between Hrólfr and both Björn and Stefnir. Within the saga context, showing a preference for female company over martial activity is effeminate.[262] Indeed, various social codes, with varying degrees of formality and compulsion, are identifiable in saga texts, including *fornaldarsögur*, which promote homosociality and discourage mixed-gender social relations.[263] It would then seem that the three characters in question are behaving in a masculine manner. However, Hrólfr in particular is not demonstrating a lack of preference for spending time with women, but rather an unwillingness to marry; i.e. fulfilling a traditionally masculine social role, thus diminishing his masculinity.

While romantic tendencies may not be a definitive feature in these three characters, the sagas examined here do indeed carry warnings about the dangers of lust. *Hrólfs saga kraka* displays two prominent examples both dealing with Skuld: her birth and the defeat of her half-brother King Hrólfr kraki. Skuld's birth was the result of a brief sexual encounter between King Helgi and an *álfkona*.[264] When the king did not go to retrieve the child, the *álfkona* returned with Skuld saying that King Helgi would pay for ignoring her request.[265] As a result, Skuld was vicious from an early age[266] and would eventually goad her husband, King Hjörvarðr, to attack King Hrólfr kraki and take his kingdom.[267] This is a clear example of uncontrolled sexual desire, specifically a man for a woman, leading to harmful consequences.[268] This parallels the second incident involving Skuld, namely, the attack on King Hrólfr kraki. The lustiness of Hrólfr kraki's men is

[262] Clark, *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and* Saga, 53-54.
[263] Carolyne Larrington, "A Viking in Shining Armour? Vikings and Chivalry in the *Fornaldarsögur*," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008): 272-273.
[264] Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 32. ch 15.
[265] Ibid., 32. ch 15.
[266] Ibid., 32. ch 15.
[267] Ibid., 96-97. ch 47.
[268] Phelpstead, "The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*," 9.

exemplified by their time spent drinking, gaming, and with mistresses when Skuld's army arrives.[269] Their unpreparedness leads to their defeat.[270]

Similarly, Ragnarr's potential sexual misconduct was examined in section 2.2 of this analysis concerning its potential effect on Ívarr's deformity. However, this episode can also be seen as evidence of lustful action on the part of Ragnarr.[271] In this sense, much like the lust of King Helgi and Hrólfr kraki's troops, Ragnarr's lust results in misfortune in the form of his son's impairment.

Somewhat differently, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* shows Vilhjálmr's prime motivation for most of his actions being a drive to accumulate power through marriage. At various point in the saga, Vilhjálmr seeks to wed both King Eirekr's sister Gyða,[272] and Jarl Þorgný's daughter Þóra,[273] in order to acquire power and potentially a kingdom. Vilhjálmr sees marriage, and by extension women, purely as a means to an end: securing a powerbase for himself.

Here, then, are contrasting examples of interactions between members of the opposite sex: one that views women as sexual objects, and one that views women as political tools. Yet the characters in question express neither of these viewpoints. Indeed, it would appear that, at least for Ívarr and Elg-Fróði, their respective impairments and deformities separate them enough from masculinity, if not humanity, that sexual or romantic interest is beyond their ability. Their liminality frees them from a need to conform to social norms. Exactly what a complete lack of interest in the opposite sex means for a character's masculine identity is far from clear. The answer hinges on the acceptance of whether or not marriage is a more masculine achievement than sexual conquest and what role a pursuit of neither end plays.

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[269] Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 97-98. ch 48.
[270] Phelpstead, "The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*," 20.
[271] Cf. Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 130-135. Here, a comparison is made between Áslaug and St. Agnes, both of whom are covered by their hair to protect their modesty against aggressive sexual advances. While this tactic works for St. Agnes, Ragnarr eventually overrules Áslaug's opposition and the result is Ívarr and his congenital impairment.
[272] Rafn, "Gaungu-Hrólfs saga," 269. ch 12.
[273] Ibid., 313. ch 27.

5.4 Reclaiming the Masculine

Attacks on a character's masculinity may not be as negative as they initially appear. Indeed, concern with preserving a masculine identity may actually be a weakness. To take another example from *Brennu-Njáls saga*, it can be argued that Njáll's lack of beard serves as a flaw to his masculinity[274] but he is made stronger because of it.[275] By escaping the social pressures of visually performing masculinity, Njáll is able to become a more powerful and influential character.[276] In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, masculinity "has less to do with beards and battle-axes than intelligence, restraint and power."[277] The same can be said of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* where it is explicitly the wisdom and cunning of Ívarr that brings about victory. However, Ívarr and Elg-Fróði are only able to escape the social binds of performative masculinity to a limited extent. While they are inhuman enough that a lack of marriage is inconsequential, they are not unmanly enough to eschew pursuing revenge.

Hrólfr is the only character who is truly robbed of his masculinity. Yet he is able to reclaim, and even forge anew, that masculine identity after the reattachment of his legs. It is only after the initial damage to his legs that Hrólfr achieves full masculine potential by fulfilling his oath to his lord, freeing himself from the control of others, and marrying a princess.

The situation is somewhat different for Ívarr and Elg-Fróði. Their masculinity is challenged both by the nature of their legs, and by external factors in the form of the slaying of a kinsman. Coincidently, both characters' masculine action takes the form of vengeance. Revenge is by no means consistently-portrayed as being inherently good or evil in the saga corpus,[278] but it has its associations with masculinity nevertheless. For Ívarr, it is in the use of his wisdom to usurp King Ella's kingdom, gaining wealth and glory as well as avenging his father's death. For Elg-Fróði, it is in his defeat of Skuld after the death of his brother

[274] Ármann Jakobsson, "Masculinity and Politics in Njáls saga," 196.
[275] Ibid., 212.
[276] Ibid., 215.
[277] Ibid.,," 210.
[278] Clark, *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga*, 135.

Böðvarr.[279] Elg-Fróði is only able to enact his vengeance because of the supernatural ritual he performs involving his hoofed foot, which informs him how his brother would die, thus providing impetus to take vengeance, if necessary. In both cases, the legs of the characters play a significant role in the execution of masculine vengeance: whether it be as the catalyst of wisdom, or as the means to know when vengeance should be taken.

5.5 Conclusion

Masculine identity is such a socially-constructed entity that it can be problematic to define or to demonstrate representations of it in a non-contemporaneous setting. However, study of medieval Icelandic literature on a wider scale has revealed indicative patterns that facilitate an understanding of the implications of being masculine in medieval Iceland.

Within the three sagas discussed here, it is evident that deformity exists as both a challenge to and way to reclaim masculine identity. With Ívarr and Elg-Fróði, the nature of their legs and feet limit them from subscribing to masculine norms to some extent. Their lack of bodily wholeness or normalcy corresponds to a lack of masculinity. As well, it is possible to interpret Ívarr's change in colour or Elg-Fróði's rage as a lack of bodily composure and thus a further lack of masculinity. However, both Ívarr and Elg-Fróði are able to utilize the abnormality of their legs to carry out masculine actions in the form of vengeance. This, of course, exists alongside their physical and mental abilities discussed above, which can be considered masculine in their own way.

Hrólfr, on the other hand, in continually emasculated throughout the saga by the actions of Vilhjálmr. Vilhjálmr prevents Hrólfr from taking action, both in the form of deflecting him from his mission for Jarl Þorgný, taking credit for his achievements, and most significantly, in his removal of Hrólfr's legs. In this final act, Vilhjálmr removes Hrólfr's ability to take action, violates his wholeness, and symbolically castrates him. However, through chiropodic abnormalizing, Hrólfr is

[279] Rafn, "Saga af Hrólfi konúngi kraka ok köppum hans," 109. ch 52.

able to assert his masculine identity by eliminating Vilhjálmr's limiting presence, acting on his own accord, and fulfilling the masculine social function of marrying.

In all three cases, the lower extremities play a significant role in relation to masculinity. Most importantly, it is only through the abnormal nature or damage of the lower limbs that masculinity, usually demonstrated through action, is achieved and expressed.

6. A LEG TO STAND ON: CONCLUSION

This analysis exists at a crossroads for a variety of foci within the field of medieval Icelandic literature studies. Elements of disability studies, human-animal spiritualism, religion, philosophy, gender and sexuality, literature, law, and history all contribute, to varying degrees, to the way the chosen material has been examined. Not a great deal has been said on abnormal representations of the body as it specifically pertains to the literature of medieval Iceland, and this is doubly true to the *fornaldarsögur* in particular.[280]

A great deal has been said regarding the relationship between the lower extremities and the characters of Ívarr *hinn beinlausi*, Elg-Fróði, and Göngu-Hrólfr from the three *fornaldarsögur Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, respectively. This analysis has drawn connections between abnormal representations of legs and feet and the presence of increased wisdom, physical ability, and masculinity. Generally, the correlation outlined is as Ívarr's impairment producing greater wisdom, Elg-Fróði's abnormality resulting in supernatural strength, and Hrólfr's amputation causing him to establish a masculine identity. However, all three characters exhibit some degree of enhanced wisdom, strength, and masculinity within their respective sagas.

In *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, in the battle with King Eysteinn, it is Ívarr who manages to defeat the sacred cow Síbilja. First, Ívarr had his men shout so loudly as to drown out the cow's enchanting bellows.[281] Secondly, he commissions the construction of a bow so large that it requires an entire tree to manufacture and he is the only one strong enough to draw it, which he does to shoot Síbilja in the eyes.[282] Finally, Ívarr supernaturally alters his weight so he is light enough to be tossed by the bearers of his shield-seat and then heavy enough to crush the cow

[280] One contemporary work is Sean Lawing's PhD. dissertation, "Perspectives on Disfigurement in Medieval Iceland" which, due to its parallel writing with this analysis, has not been heavily referenced. It does, however, have a degree of correlation to this analysis with regards to infant expose, *níð*, and the legal corpus surrounding mutilation and disfigurement. This work, along with the plethora of text cited in this analysis, provide a solid base for the expansion of the idea presented herein.
[281] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 270-271. ch 11.
[282] Ibid., 271. ch 11.

when he lands.[283] These three actions demonstrate Ívarr's capacity for wisdom, strength, and apparent supernatural manipulation of the physical world; the only character in the saga to display these qualities, and also the only one to have a noticeable impairment.

For Elg-Fróði in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, his strength is with him from birth, inseparable from the deformed quality of his legs. His bestial nature is further reflected in his aggressive temperament. However, Elg-Fróði demonstrates loyalty to his brothers as well as the ability to share his supernatural strength and use his legs as a quasi-prophetic medium.

It is in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*'s climax where Hrólfr manages to overcome all of the challenges to aspects of his masculinity both implicit and explicit: he outwits Vilhjálmr, overpowers Röndólfr and Grímr *ægir*, and marries Ingigerðr. Thus, after achieving feats of wisdom and strength, Hrólfr is able to also carry out the symbolically masculine role of marrying; all of which take place only after the removal of his legs.

Each character examined displays strength, wisdom, and some manifestation of masculinity, and all experience some form of ambulatory disfigurement. While the saga corpus is full of many characters who have legs which are deformed, abnormal, or, most often, damaged, it is only Ívarr, Elg-Fróði, and Hrólfr who exhibit abnormalities which are simultaneously more severe and, paradoxically, non-incapacitating. Rather, as has been demonstrated, the pedal abnormalities possessed by Ívarr, Elg-Fróði, and Hrólfr actually serve to enhance other abilities and qualities of character.

It is impossible to say whether podiatric idiosyncrasies were consciously-chosen by the sagas' respective authors with a particular symbolic intent in mind. At least in the case of Göngu-Hrólfr, "wandering/walking Hrólfr," some element of humour or irony was intended. But for Ívarr and Elg-Fróði, the motivation is far less clear. This analysis has drawn attention to issues of sexual immorality in

[283] Rafn, "Saga af Ragnari konúngi lodbrók ok sonum hans," 271-272. ch 11.

relation to Ívarr's birth, and magic is the explicit cause of Elg-Fróði's disfigurement, but neither of these reasons can explain to any degree of satisfaction why both of these characters display such greater ability than their conventionally-bodied peers.

It is important to keep in mind, too, the world which these characters inhabit. While some figures in the *fornaldarsögur* corpus are possibly based on real, historical figures, the characters in the corpus itself are not. As Torfi H. Tulinius has said:

> It must be stressed that the links between literature and reality are not direct, and that the differences between the situations and characters of the legendary sagas and those of reality is the difference between an idealized imaginary world and the world as it is.[284]

That being said, the fantastic nature of this literary corpus does not negate its relevance to actual contemporaneous happenings. That is not to say that this analysis endeavours to glean hard, historical truths about medieval Iceland from a literal reading of these *fornaldarsögur* and the characters therein; it does not. Rather, this analysis begs the question as to what an exploration of certain themes, namely impairment or bodily abnormality, within *fornaldarsögur* might have meant to the medieval Icelandic audience.

By nature of their temporal, geographic, and religious distance, all while retaining cultural links, the *fornaldarsögur* can be considered to display the ideas for social change within, and illuminating the faults of, medieval Icelandic society.[285] This same aesthetic distance allowed these sagas to represent and explore complex relationships within medieval Icelandic culture such as inheritance and legitimacy, the role of women,[286] or the relationship to the periphery.[287] This last aspect is of particular interest to the present analysis. As has

[284] Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, 183.
[285] Ibid., 186.
[286] Ibid., 183.
[287] Hans Jacob Orning, "The Magical Reality of the Late Middle Ages: Exploring the world of the fornaldarsögur," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 35, no. 1 (January 18, 2010): 12. While Orning speaks

been described above, the role of the deformed in medieval Icelandic society is a liminal one. From medical theory to religion, and from social class to masculinity, physical abnormalities, and what they represent, permeate all areas of medieval life. Furthermore, based on the evidence presented above, deformity and abnormality of the legs carry symbolic connotations both broad and specific. Thus, the inclusion of characters featuring abnormal legs and feet within the *fornaldarsögur* corpus imbue these individuals with a deep symbolic meaning that may have reflected or explored social features in the Icelandic cultural landscape contemporaneous to their composition.

While tales of impaired, supernatural, or disfigured protagonists are no doubt entertaining, and raise a cheer for the unlikely hero, they can also explore how a society understands and interacts with the places between realities. In the contexts discussed, it is clear that the abnormally-bodied exist in a place between sickness and health, ability and disability, animal and human, male and female, life and death, real and unreal. By straddling two worlds, Ívarr, Elg-Fróði, and Hrólfr represent a transcendence of bodily normalcy, but also symbolize the potential for greater social transcendence.

specifically about the geographic and cultural periphery of the Finns and Finnmark, it is also possible to apply the same relationship model to peripheral members of society, i.e. the deformed.

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