The Art of Healing in Medieval Iceland

Old Norse cultural perspectives on illness and health and its debt to the English medical tradition

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I, Luthien Cangemi, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis explores Icelandic medical manuscripts in the context of a pan-European medicine, offering insights into the development of a medical culture in medieval Iceland through the contacts with the medical theories and practices originated in the Continent and in England.

Old Norse medicine, as evidenced by medieval Icelandic manuscripts, reveals the ability of local healers and scribes to borrow medical material from the Continent and the British Isles. They merged these materials with medical theories and practices that medieval Icelanders developed independently. The thesis explores how imported materials have been assimilated and re-elaborated within the medieval Icelandic cultural framework.

The thesis analyses the surviving manuscripts thematically, providing insights into the exchange with Continental medicine and with Christian liturgy through the reading of a group of remedies working around the power of the words (charms, incantations and prayers) and the relationship between medicine, magic and religion. Furthermore, the thesis provides a reading of the surviving Icelandic medical remedies and their debts to the medical culture developed in England between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. In doing so, the thesis expands upon the influence exerted by English medical collections such as the *Old English Herbarium* and the *Lacnunga* in relation to developing a cognitive framework to better understand bodily effects of illness, and in relation to herbal and animal product remedies. This research will offer insights into the cognitive parallel between the Old English *ælfe* and *mære* and the Old Norse counterparts *álfar* and *mara* in medical culture, shedding light on how the Old English medical conceptions of *ælfe* and *mære* shaped the development of Old Norse *álfar* and *mara* in medical remedies and literature.

Overall, the thesis demonstrates that medieval Iceland developed a medical culture through the combination of imported and local medical practices, theories and beliefs and that medieval England played a more important role than scholarship has acknowledged.

Impact Statement

This thesis contributes to our understanding of Western European medieval medicine and its dissemination to more remote regions of medieval Europe, such as Iceland. The outputs from this research will specifically benefit a wide range of scholarly fields such as:

- Old Norse studies
- Medieval Medicine
- Medical Humanities
- Medieval History
- Manuscript studies
- Folklore
- History of Religion
- Linguistics and Lexicography
- Old and Middle English studies

The field of History of Medicine has largely overlooked the impact that medieval medicine had in the Latin West beyond the Mediterranean, Continental and Insular regions. This can be partially attributed to the lack of interest in the northern areas of medieval Europe and the limited understanding of comparative sources. Similarly, Old Norse scholars have shown limited interest in medical evidence preserved in Norse and Icelandic manuscript context and have privileged archaeological sources so far. This thesis intends to bring together these fields and approach the Old Norse medical manuscripts through the lens of medical history and contribute to the overall understanding of medieval medicine in medieval Iceland, Scandinavia and Europe.

The first pioneering work on Old Norse medical manuscripts was carried out by a small group of philologists in the early 1900s which mostly focussed on publishing editions of texts and providing a philological and linguistic interpretations of the edited remedies. This group of scholars, of whom Henning Larsen and Kristian Kålund are the most relevant ones for this research, privileged the idea that the medical remedies survived in Old Icelandic medical manuscripts were copied from medical miscellanies originated in Norway and Denmark. Although this argument holds true to a certain extent, this thesis demonstrates that the medical culture developed in medieval

England also exerted a major influence in the circulation of medical theories and practices in Iceland and this is evidenced in a number of remedies.

This thesis represents a new interpretation of Old Norse medical manuscripts surviving from medieval Iceland, shedding light on the ability of medical remedies to transcend geographical and temporal boundaries. Originating far away from Iceland, medical remedies of Mediterranean, Continental and Insular origins were able to travel widely, and were able to integrate to a new cultural frame and adapt to new contexts, challenges and needs. This thesis will provide a new perspective on the impact that medieval England had on the development of medical theories, practices and beliefs in Old Norse culture.

Acknowledgement

I returned to academic studies in January 2021, after a two-year break in full-time employment and during the last rigid lockdown prior to the release of the vaccine in the spring. I felt very happy to return to full-time research, but the conditions in which I started were not ideal. Firstly, isolation and the inability to get to know the department where I would have conducted my research had an impact on the early months. Secondly, I couldn't access my primary sources as all the libraries were shut and operated electronically. Thirdly, leaving full-time employment for a three-year research project with uncertain employment afterward was not the mood I had in mind when I received the offer of a place and funding.

After six months from the start of my PhD, I finally got hold of my primary sources, as libraries and universities reopened following the Covid-19 vaccination campaign. So, at least one of the three problems was resolved. The first book I laid my hands on was the 1908 edition of the fifteenth-century Icelandic medical miscellany Dublin Royal Irish Academy MS 23 D 43. The medical miscellany preserves an *Antidotarium,* a section devoted to how to make and administer antidotes to the patient. In reading the *Antidotarium* for the first time, I came across a curious remedy, an 'electuary', a medical substance mixed with honey or other sweet substances, which reads:

> *Elctuarium Ducis* is an electuary which the good physician Abbas who followed regularly the court, thought out and prepared for Duke Roger the son of Duke Robert. It is good when a man's food settles badly and does not digest, and for puffing up of the belly and for wind of the intestines, and for disease of the groin and of the small intestines and for rheumatism. One shall give it with warm wine after the day-meal or in the evening.

This remedy contains more than what it initially seems to convey, at least to me. With references to some of the topical historical figures of the Norman conquest of Sicily and Southern Italy in the eleventh century, such as Duke Roger (Borsa) and Robert the Guiscard of Hauteville, the *Electuarium Ducis* not only asserts the efficiency of the remedy according to a prominent contemporary physician (Jhoannes Abbas de Curtie), but it also provided me with a sign that perhaps I was on the right path after all.

The presence of a piece of Sicilian and Southern Italian history within a medieval Icelandic manuscript caught me by surprise, considering my Sicilian origins. Seeing a mention of one of my favourite parts of Sicilian history inside another of my cherished things in the world, Icelandic manuscripts, brought me immense joy and hope for the future. It offered me comfort that I was pursuing the right path, that I had not given up a career for nothing, and that I should be the pioneer researcher exploring these texts in the Icelandic manuscript landscape. This remedy served as a reminder of my islander origins, Sicily, and my love for another island, Iceland. With that mixture of love for two islands in my heart, I continued the research I am presenting here to you.

Love and passion for an academic subject, however, are not the only important elements in my PhD experience. I am grateful for the endless support that beloved friends, colleagues and academic members of the UCL's Scandinavian Department have provided throughout my research, and in particular, I would like to express my appreciation to the following:

First and foremost, my gratitude goes to my supervisors at UCL, who have been instrumental in supporting me throughout this amazing experience and have made a significant impact on the development of my research. My heartfelt thanks to my first supervisor, Prof. Haki Antonsson, who granted me the freedom to fully express myself in this research, occasionally guiding my judgment and analysis without imposing any views. Haki offered invaluable support for my research development and writing, providing opportunities for research both at UCL and abroad. I am endlessly thankful to him for always cheering me on and believing in me.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my second supervisor, Prof. Sophie Page, who has exceeded my expectations of a subsidiary supervisor by offering continuous support throughout the PhD. She has provided countless moments to supervise me, consistently offering constructive feedback, suggestions, comments and insights to refine my research. I will always be thankful to Sophie for her kindness and genuine interest in my research and for closely guiding me every step of the way.

Throughout my PhD journey, the varied support I received from people at UCL and beyond academic institutions meant a lot to me. I extend my gratitude to Prof. Richard North, who, despite not being my supervisor, closely followed my research with interest and enthusiasm and always found time to share his knowledge with me. Additionally, my best friend, Ema Sala, played a significant role in my academic

journey in the UK, offering unwavering support for my self-esteem, helping me navigate challenges, and providing emotional strength to make decisions in academic and personal life.

Last but certainly not least, I express my immense gratitude to family members especially my parents from which I inherited the passion for medieval Germanic literatures, and in particular to my dad without whom I would have never been able to move away from Sicily. And finally, my immense gratitude goes to my partner, Simon Alan Cooper, who has seen my academic journey since I moved to the UK, offering a positive perspective during moments of distress. Simon has been my stronghold of positivity throughout this journey, and this thesis has greatly benefited from his kindness, patience and love.

Beyond the emotional support from those mentioned above and many others I cannot individually name here, there is another crucial type of support that should be acknowledged here. I am eternally thankful to the Wellcome Trust for generously funding all aspects a doctoral researcher may need, from tuition fees to a dignified salary, fieldwork and training opportunities in the UK and overseas. By valuing the work of doctoral researchers on par with Post-docs, the Wellcome Trust provides a constructive environment for doctoral researchers to thrive in their research, contribute effectively to the research community, and focus on their work without seeking additional financial support that may detract from their research in terms of time and energy. I hope that universities and external funding bodies can draw inspiration from the Wellcome Trust's doctoral studentship scheme to create a more equitable and prosperous world for doctoral researchers.

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Abbreviations

Lat. = Latin
ME. = Middle English
MHG. = Middle High German
OHG. = Old High German
ModE. = Modern English
ON. = Old Norse
OE. = Old English
OF. = Old French

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1. 1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to bridge the gap between Old Norse Studies and the History of Medicine by analysing the surviving Old Icelandic medical manuscripts within the framework of medical history and using its analytical tools. This work contextualises the existing Old Icelandic medical treatises and texts within the broader European medical tradition, demonstrating that the inhabitants of medieval Iceland actively participated in the exchange of ideas and knowledge in Insular and Continental Europe. This will reveal how medicine played a pivotal role in the cultural dialogue between medieval Icelanders and the Continent.

By participating in this cultural and intellectual dialogue with the Continent, the thesis will demonstrate the innovative and receptive cultural environment that medieval Icelanders fostered. Icelanders did not passively import new knowledge, ideas and practices into their culture and society, but they were able to assimilate and re-elaborate these new influences within their cultural framework, blending imported influences with local medical paradigms and practices.

The primary sources that this thesis will employ are represented by four Icelandic medical manuscripts dated between the second half of the thirteenth to the late fifteenth century and they bear the following shelf marks:

- Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43
- Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 434 a 12mo
- Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 655 XXX 4to
- Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 194 8vo

They bear witness to a broader medical tradition that circulated in Iceland, rooted in medical practices and theories developed during Antiquity and Late Antiquity in the Mediterranean regions and on the Continent, which quickly spread to northern Europe.

Through the analysis of the content preserved in these manuscripts, the thesis will argue a dual phenomenon: firstly, when medieval Icelanders imported medical texts and remedies, they were not passively copying them without critically interpreting their usage for local healers and performers. In fact, the thesis will delve into the blending of imported rituals, remedies and practices which feature interpolations of local elements such as runes, names of Nordic heathen gods and cultural reference drawn from the saga corpus. This will shed light on social meaning of these practices, their usage and performance, as well as their assimilation into the Icelandic cultural framework.

The second output of this thesis will be the recognition of multiple streams of circulation of medical practices in the north. In the late Middle Ages, Icelanders acquired a substantial body of medical knowledge, theories and practices from the Continent through various sources. Some of these sources have already been established in previous scholarly contributions, highlighting the Danish and Norwegian parallels drawn from medical manuscripts on Icelandic medical compilations. My argument will build upon these earlier theories and investigate the contributions that early and late medieval England made in transmitting foreign medical theories and practices to Iceland and shaping Icelandic concepts related to health, illness and the body. This investigation will be carried out through a comparative analysis of Old Norse and Old and Middle English texts, drawing on some textual parallels and shared cognitive interpretations of health, illness and body.

Overall, the thesis will showcase a trajectory of exchanges of medical knowledge from the Continent and the Mediterranean regions to the northern areas of Europe and how these exchanges happened from textual, historical and cultural perspectives and the impact they had on the development of an Icelandic medical tradition.

The thesis will contribute to both the fields of Old Norse studies and the History of Medicine. In relation to the first field, this examination will introduce ideas, concepts and analytical tools developed by medieval medical historians and these will be applied to the studies of Old Norse medical manuscripts, as well as some literary and archaeological sources. Similarly, this thesis grounded on Old Norse studies will bring fresh insights to medieval medical historians, as it will demonstrate how Old Norse sources can be employed to broaden the study of medical history. Medieval medicine scholarship will benefit from this study in terms of broadening their comparative

materials, providing access to new primary sources to unearth a more realistic picture of medieval medicine.

1. 2 Schools of Thought on the History of Old Norse Medicine

The study of the History of Medicine has recently garnered increasing attention within the field of Old Norse studies. However, its origins can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when scholars initially focused on publishing standardised editions of Old Norse medical manuscripts. Nevertheless, by the 1930s, interest in this area of inquiry waned, diverting attention away from the mainstream research agendas and leaving the Old Norse medical corpus largely unexplored. In the past four decades, however, scholars specialising in Old Norse studies have gradually revisited the concepts of health, illness and disease from diverse perspectives, including linguistics, history, religion and philology.

Although the interest in Old Norse medicine has grown, there are still ample materials to be surveyed in order to gain an accurate understanding of the ways in which medieval Icelanders and Scandinavians perceived states of good and poor health. In comparison to other Germanic language traditions, particularly those of medieval England and medieval Germany, the field of medieval medicine studies is much more advanced. The abundance of sources allowed for pioneering studies on medicine in historical and literary contexts in Old English and Old High German. However, Old Norse medical accounts offer valuable insights into the broader medieval healing systems of Europe, how healing theories and practices circulated and how they were assimilated in diverse cultural frameworks.

This thesis will consider healing theories elaborated within the Mediterranean and Continental regions within the learned medical milieu upon which therapeutic intervention is based (e.g., humoral theory, occult properties and sympathetic relationship). The thesis will also explore how healing was practiced, hence looking at collections of practical therapeutics from use of herbs, words, letters and runes for healing purposes which consist of the basis for our healing practices.

In what follows, I will outline the scholarly interests surrounding medicine in Old Norse from various research fields. The discussion will primarily focus on a selection of the most significant contributions, examining them in a chronological and thematic

manner to construct a comprehensive view of the overlapping themes and approaches that have emerged over time.

1. 2. 1 Early Scholarship in Old Norse Medicine and their Sceptical View

During the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, there emerged a nascent interest in the study of medicine within the Old Norse tradition. This area of inquiry was primarily pursued by a group of philologists who aimed to elevate the cultural standing of their own society. The focal point of their research efforts revolved around the publication of normalised editions of Old Norse medical manuscripts. This scholarly endeavour was closely intertwined with the prevailing wave of nationalism that swept across Europe during that period, reflecting a desire to revive and celebrate their respective cultural heritage.[1]

During the specific period under examination, Old Norse medicine attracted significant interest from scholars specialising in Old English philology. These scholars primarily adopted an approach that involved utilizing Old Norse medical evidence as comparative material in support of a broader pan-Germanic healing system. In this context, the Old English medical corpus was considered the most extensively documented and well-supported example. The objective was to establish parallels and commonalities between Old Norse and Old English medical practices, thereby substantiating the existence of a shared healing tradition across the Germanic-speaking regions.[2] Early attempts to analyse medical remedies in Old English texts reduced medieval scribes and authors to a mere folkloristic and superstitious view of healing practices, and regarded medieval medicine as a collection of irrational therapeutics based on heathen customs and beliefs.[3] This interpretation was

[1] Henning Larsen and Royal Irish Academy, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany: MS Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43, with Supplement from MS Trinity College (Dublin) L-2-27,* ed. and trans. by Henning Larsen (Oslo: Dybwad, 1931); Henning Larsen, 'The Vocabulary of the Old Icelandic Medical MS: Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43,' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 26: 2 (1927), 174–97; Ingjald Reichborn-Kjennerud, trans. by Anna Tjomsland, 'The School of Salerno and Surgery in the North during the Saga Age,' *Annals of Medical History*, 9:4 (1937), 321–37; Kristian Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog Codex Arnamagnæanus 434a, 12mo*, *Codex Arnamagnæanus 434a. 12mo.* Udgivet Af Kr. Kålund Kgl. Dansk Videnskabernes Selskabs Skrifter. Række 6. Historisk Og Filosofisk Afd. Bd. 6. No. 4.] Med 2 Tavler. (København: Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri, 1907).

[2] Oswald T. Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864); John. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952); Wilfrid Bonser, *The Medical Background of the Anglo-Saxons: A Study in History, Psychology and Folklore* (London: The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1963).

[3] Wilfrid Bonser, 'Survivals of Paganism in Anglo-Saxon England,' *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, 56 (1939), 37–70; Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 158.

characterised by a sceptical viewpoint that projected modern medical paradigms onto past or alternative healing systems. Medical historians from the nineteenth and the early twentieth century approached the subject with a predisposition to view medieval medicine as a compilation of ignorance and superstitions, and as fundamentally opposed to the 'enlightened' biomedical knowledge of the modern era.[4] From within the same academic milieu, a theory of 'Teutonic medicine' emerged.

This theory, elaborated by Cockayne and his followers, posited the existence of a distinct form of Teutonic medicine that predates the influence of Latin-learned medicine. It contended that this pre-Latin medical tradition was primarily based on local superstitions, folklore and practices unique to the Germanic peoples. This interpretation gained significant traction within scholarly circles until it was subject to critical examination. In 1974, Gottfried Storms challenged the prevailing perspective of mainstream medical historians by arguing that medical remedies cannot be strictly confined to a single tradition. Storms proposed that magical and ritualistic therapies, involving the use of herbs and spells, were prevalent features found in both classical and medieval medical texts, transcending geographical confinements. Furthermore, these practices constituted shared characteristics within pre-modern Western medicine.[5]

In the 1990s, additional impetus for investigating the cultural and literary evidence surrounding health, illness and disease emerged from the fields of historical linguistics and mythology. These disciplines provided the foundation for a comparative approach to examining medical vocabulary across Indo-European languages. The findings of historical linguistics further bolstered Storms' argument by elucidating that the presence of parallels in poetry and linguistics across various Indo-European languages indicated that medical practices traditionally attributed to the 'Teutonic' tradition were, in fact, widespread and shared across all Indo-European traditions.[6]

During the latter half of the twentieth century, scholars reached a consensus that the cultural aspect of medieval healing practices held significant importance and should not be overlooked. It became evident that medicinal remedies could not be dismissed as mere vestiges of paganism or superstition. Additionally, local healing

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[4] Cockayne, *Leechdoms,* pp. xxvii–xxiv*;* Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, p. 92; Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.117–120.
[5] Gotfried Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijoff, 1974), p. 107, 115.
[6] Calver Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Enrico Campanile, 'Reflexions sur la reconstruction de la phraséologie poétique indoeuropéenne,' *Diachronica*, 10 (1993) 1–12.

practices should not be wielded as tools for political or nationalistic discourse. It was recognised that a shared cultural superstructure existed among Indo-European languages and poetics, influencing the cognitive framework pertaining to healing, especially in regards to the use of some healing charms.[7] This understanding predated the homogenization of healing practices under the influences of Latin-Greek and Arabic traditions, which began to take shape in the twelfth century.[8]

1. 2. 2 The Rational Approach and its Critique

The nineteenth and early twentieth century 'sceptical' view of medieval medicine, which failed to offer a comprehensive interpretative framework, faced criticism from emerging scholarly trends in the 1990s that focused on the biomedical effectiveness of medieval remedies. These new approaches sought to explore the medicinal value and therapeutic potential of the remedies employed during the medieval period.[9] The 'rational' approach aimed to establish empirical evidence that substantiated the biomedical understanding and efficacy of medieval remedies. In 1993, Malcolm Cameron endeavoured to elucidate the logical foundation of Anglo-Saxon medicine through the lens of modern physiology and pharmacology. His work sought to bridge the gap between the medical practices of the Anglo-Saxon era and contemporary scientific understanding, shedding light on the rationality behind the therapeutic techniques and remedies employed during that time.[10] Placing significant emphasis on the 'rational' perspective, Cameron concludes his investigation into the therapeutic effectiveness of medieval treatments as documented in Old English *Leechbooks*. His

[7] Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, pp. 519–40; David R. Langslow, 'Etymology and History: For a Study of 'Medical Language' in Indo-European', in *Indo-European Perspectives Studies in Honour of Anna Morpurgo Davies*, ed. by John H. W. Penney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) pp. 30–47.

[8] Charles S. F. Burnett, Danielle Jacquart, eds., *Constantine the African and 'Alī Ibn Al-'Abbās Al-Magūsī: The Pantegni and Related Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, ed. and trans. by Monica H. Green (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Danielle Jacquart, 'The Influence of Arabic Medicine in the Medieval West', in *Encyclopaedia of the History of Arabic Science*, vol. 3, ed. by Roshdi Rashed (London: Routledge, 1996) pp. 963–84; Charles Burnett, 'The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century', *Science in Context*, 14:1–2 (2001) 249–88.

[9] Charles H. Talbot, 'Some Notes on Anglo-Saxon Medicine,' *Medical History*, 9:2 (1965), 156–69; Malcolm L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine,* Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Sally Crawford and Tony Randall, 'Archaeology and Documentary Sources; Two Approaches to Anglo-Saxon Medicine,' in *The Archaeology of Medicine: Papers given at a session of the annual conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group held at the University of Birmingham on 20 December 1998*, ed. R. Arnott, B.A.R. International Ser. 1046 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports Publishing, 2002), 101–04; Barbara Brennessel et al., 'A Reassessment of the Efficacy of Anglo-Saxon Medicine,' *Anglo-Saxon England*, 34 (2005), 183–95.

[10] Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, p. 129.

study posits that the utilization of certain ingredients and remedies such as garlic and onion had antistaphylococcal properties until the advent of modern medicine.[11]

Moreover, the rational approach encompassed endeavours to engage in retrospective diagnosis. For instance, in 1993 Jesse Byock published a paper that proposed a fresh interpretation of the conflicting personality exhibited by the main character in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, attributing it to Paget's disease.[12] Although Byock's background in archaeology provided the basis for a compelling analysis using human osteoarchaeology, it is important to note that retrospective diagnosis does not serve as a comprehensive means of uncovering broader historical inquiries concerning concepts of health and illness. This analytical framework can solely offer insights within specific domains such as osteoarchaeology, which inherently focuses on the biological impacts of disease on human remains.

The rational approach gives rise to ethical quandaries and offers a limited framework for historians, whether investigating the effectiveness of medieval medicine through the lens of biomedical knowledge or employing retrospective diagnosis. As Crawford and Lee aptly argue, 'Illness possesses a cultural dimension, and in many ways, the treatment and understanding of illness in the past do not fare well when compared to modern medical practices'.[13] By superimposing modern notions of rationality and biomedicine onto historical societies, we inevitably impose constraints on our ability to attain an authentic understanding of the significance of medicine for medieval healers and patients.

Considering that our understanding of illness and its treatment is inherently influenced by cultural factors, the rational approach falls short in comprehending the complex intersectionality of medicine. Scholars specialising in medieval history, Norse studies and Old English literature have consequently rejected the rational approach, instead shifting their focus towards examining the interplay of race, class, gender, disability and sexuality in shaping notions of health and illness. The rational approach became obsolete as it failed to address inquiries concerning the cultural and social dimensions of illness and healing.

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[11] Ibid., p. 119.
[12] Jesse Byock, 'Skull and Bones in Egils saga: A Viking, A Grave, and Paget's Disease', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 24 (1993), 23–50 (p. 25).
[13] Sally Crawford and Christina Lee, 'Introduction', in *Bodies of Knowledge: Cultural Interpretations of Illness and Medicine in Medieval Europe,* Studies in Medieval Series 1, ed. by Sally Crawford and Christina Lee*,* BAR International Ser. 2170 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2010), p. 1.

The growing academic interest in intersectionality and social constructionism within the field of history paved the way for the development of a syncretic framework. This novel framework offers fresh perspectives for exploring concepts surrounding illness and healing in historical societies. In contrast to the assertions made by the 'sceptics', who suggest a linear progression from superstitions to scientific understanding in medicine, and contrary to the 'rational' notion of medieval medicine as a precursor to modern medicine, the syncretic approach allows scholars to delve into the social construction of health and illness. It enables reflection on how past societies conceptualised and constructed their understanding of health and illness, illuminating the intricacies of their lived reality.

1. 2. 3 Recent Interdisciplinary Studies and the Syncretic Approach

Recent research on the history of medieval medicine presents a counterargument to both the rational and sceptical approaches by drawing upon anthropological perspectives that emphasize the notion of therapeutic success. These studies consider therapeutic success not solely in terms of changes in pathology or biomedical outcomes, but rather as a broader assessment of overall patient's experience with the therapeutic encounter. By adopting this perspective, researchers are able to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and impact of medieval medical practices, taking into account the subjective experiences and perceptions of patients.[14] Horden highlights the significance of investigating historical understandings of health and illness by examining the therapeutic practices employed in the past, as well as the prevailing notions of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' bodies within those societies. The syncretic approach suggests that medieval medicine should be viewed as a comprehensive healing system guided by beliefs and principles that may differ from modern perspectives, but are not inherently less rational in their theoretical and practical application.[15]

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[14] Peregrine Horden, 'What's Wrong with Early Medieval Medicine?', *Social History of Medicine*, 24:1 (2009), 5–25 (p. 20).

[15] Deborah Lupton, *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease, and the Body in Western Societies* (London: Sage, 1994); Roy M. Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: An Edition and Translation of Texts from London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A.iii.*, Anglo-Saxon Texts 9 (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010); Peter M. Jones, 'Image, Word and Medicine in the Middle Ages', in *Visualizing Medieval Medicine and Natural History, 1200-1550*, ed. by Jean A. Givens et al., AVISTA Studies in the History of Medieval Technology, Science and Art (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 1–24; Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society in Later Medieval England* (Stroud: Allan Sutton, 1995); Peregrine Horden, 'Disease, Dragons, and Saints: The Management of Epidemics in the Dark Ages,' in *Epidemics*

The adoption of the syncretic approach in studying Old Norse healing practices aligns with the growing interest in interdisciplinarity and intersectionality within scholarly investigations. This approach is evidenced by numerous studies that investigate the multifaceted aspects of Old Norse healing practices, incorporating insights from various disciplines and acknowledging the interconnected nature of social, cultural and individual factors in shaping the understanding and application of medicine. [16]

The scholarly inquiry into medical themes in Old Norse language, literature and society experienced a notable decline during the twentieth century. After the initial interest expressed by Danish and Norwegian editors such as Kristian Kålund and others, the field of Old Norse scholarship did not subsequently engage in further investigations or research on these early medical manuscript editions. Nevertheless, in recent decades, there has been a discernible resurgence in scholars' recognition of the significance of the surviving Old Norse *materia medica* and the imperative to comprehensively survey this evidence to enhance our understanding of health and illness. Regrettably, no comprehensive study of medieval Scandinavian medicine exists; however, scholars have contributed to illuminating healing practices through diverse perspectives.

An important milestone was reached in 1980 with the publication of the first modern overview of Old Norse medical manuscripts by Jón Steffensen. This seminal work provided a crucial foundation for subsequent investigations into Old Norse medicine, serving as a valuable resource for scholars seeking to explore this field of study.[17] In 1987, the medical practices associated with the *Schola Medica Salernitana* in Iceland drew scholarly attention through Guðrún P. Helgadóttir's analysis of medical practices featured in the thirteenth-century *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, a biography of the

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and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence, ed. by Terence Ranger and Paul Slack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 45–76; Horden, 'What's Wrong with Early Medieval Medicine?', 5–25; Sally Crawford and Christina Lee, eds., *Social Dimensions of Medieval Disease and Disability.* Studies in Early Medicine 3, BAR International Ser. 2668 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports Publishing, 2014); Audrey L. Meaney, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Disease', in *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture,* ed. by Sheila Campbell et al. (Toronto: Palgrave Mcmillan, 1992), pp. 12–33; Audrey L. Meaney, 'The Practice of Medicine in England about the Year 1000,' *Social History of Medicine*, 13:2 (2000), 221–37; Monica H. Green, 'Documenting Medieval Women's Medical Practice', in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death,* ed. by Luis García-Ballester et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 322–52; Monica H. Green, 'Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe', *Signs*, 14: 2 (1989), 434–73; Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[16] How aspects of social and political identities such as class, social and political status, gender, social roles shape ideas of health and illness and related treatments.

[17] Jón Steffensen, 'Islandske medicinhistoriske kilder, der ikke har påviselige forbilleder i samtidens Europa', *Nordisk Medicinhistorisk Årsbok*, 121 (1980), 94–105; Jón Steffensen 'Alþýðulækninga', *Alþýðuvísindi: Raunvísindi og dul æði*, Íslensk þjóðmenning 7, ed. by Frosti F. Jóhannsson, (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1990), pp. 103–92.

local chieftain and healer named Hrafn.[18] Helgadóttir's study critically examined the literary evidence found in the saga, leading to the conclusion that there is support for the presence and dissemination of scholastic medical knowledge in Iceland as early as the thirteenth century. This investigation shed light on the transmission of medical knowledge and the potential influence of scholastic teachings within the Icelandic context during this period.[19] Religious texts have also been examined from a healing perspective, especially with regards to the interplay between miracles and medicine, and their integral role in constructing hagiographical narratives. In particular, considerable focus has been placed on childbirth miracles, as well as other miracles that revolve around the healing abilities attributed to saints' touch. Old Norse scholars have delved into these aspects to unravel the intricate connections between religious beliefs, healing practices and the portrayal of miraculous events within religious literature.[20]

Between the 1990s and the 2010s Old Norse scholars have undertaken an exploration of healing practices and their performers by adopting a gender perspective that considers the intersectionality of mothering, magic, power and social status to better delve into the social implication of healing and gender studies.[21] Employing an interdisciplinary approach, these researchers have examined sagas, the Edda corpus and archaeological evidence to elucidate the potential existence of healing practices in the Norse-speaking world both prior to and following Christianization. The results

[18] Jónas Kristjánsson, 'Bókmenntasaga', *Saga Íslands*, III (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag/Sögufélagið, 1978), p. 250.
[19] Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, 'Introduction', *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, ed. and trans. by Guðrún P. Helgadóttir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. xi–cxvi; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, 'Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar and Sturlunga saga', *Gripla*, 9 (1993), 55–80; Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, Pilgrim and Martyr', in *Sagas, Saints and Settelments*, ed. by Gareth Williams and Paul Bibire (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 29–40.
[20] Jón Steffensen, 'Margrétar Saga and its History in Iceland', *Saga-Book* XVI (London: Viking Society for Northern Research,1965), 273–82; Carl Phelpstead and Devra Kunin, ed. and trans., *A History of Norway, and the Passion and Miracles of Blessed Ólafr*, Text Series 13 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001); Diana Whaley, 'Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops: Icelandic Variations on an International Theme', *Collegium Medievale*, 7:2 (1994), 155–84 (p. 155); Margaret Cormack, 'Better off Dead: Medieval Miracles', in *Northern Sanctity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 334–52.
[21] Jenny Jochens, 'Old Norse Motherhood', in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. by John Cami Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), pp. 201–22; Margaret Cormack, '*Fyr kné meyio*: Notes on Childbirth in Medieval Iceland', *Saga-Book* XXV (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2000), pp. 314–15; Katherine Olley, 'Labour Pains: Scenes of Birth and Becoming in Old Norse Legendary Literature', *Quaestio Insularis: Selected Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic,* 18 (2018), 46–77; Johanna K. Fridriksdottir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power*, New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 46–77; Luthien Cangemi, 'Le figure dei guaritori nelle saghe: caratterizzazioni di uomini e donne nella medicina attraverso la performatività di genere', *Sogni, visioni e profezie nella letteratura germanica medievale*, XIX Seminario avanzato di filologia germanica, Bibliotheca Germanica. Studi e Testi 48, ed. by Roberto Rosselli Del Turco (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2021), pp. 225–46; Britt-Mari Näsström, 'Healing Hands and Magical Spells', in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: the proceeding of the 11th International Saga Conference*, ed. by Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 2000), pp. 356–62.

achieved by their investigation on women's roles in medicine were varied and included access to medical knowledge and training and perspectives on mothering, childbirth and kinship. This joint effort has shed light on the ways in which gender dynamics and societal structures impacted the participation of women in the realm of healing.

On the other hand, archaeological evidence played a pivotal role in the research conducted by Mindy MacLeod and Bernard Mees regarding runic amulets and magic objects in 2006.[22] Their investigations centred on the examination of medical amulets within the context of West Norse culture, aiming to identify comparable materials across various Germanic language traditions. By drawing upon archaeological findings, MacLeod and Mees have thrown light on the usage and significance of these runic and Latin amulets from the seventh to the fourteenth century, shedding light on their potential healing or protective properties and contributing to our understanding of the broader cultural and linguistic connections within the Germanic sphere.[23] The field of archaeology has served as a foundational basis for the research conducted by Judith Jesch, Christina Lee and Sally Crawford. These scholars have approached their investigations utilizing a comparative methodology, which involves a comprehensive examination of archaeological and literary evidence in both Old English and Old Norse contexts. Their studies have been guided by theoretical frameworks such as social constructionism and the intersectionality of gender and disability. By employing these perspectives, Jesch, Lee and Crawford have analysed the social and cultural constructions surrounding gender and disability as evidenced by the material remains and textual sources, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in these aspects within early and late medieval Scandinavia.[24] Lois Bragg's scholarly investigations have centred on the examination of thirteenth-century epic literature, particularly with a focus on the social construction of mythopoetic bodies. In her research, Bragg has drawn upon comparative materials derived from both Old Norse and medieval Celtic sources, aiming to shed light on the portrayal and construction of differently abled bodies of gods within these traditions. By exploring the representations of divine bodies with various abilities and disabilities, Bragg has contributed to our understanding of the cultural and social significance

[22] Mindy MacLeod and Bernard Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006).
[23] Ibid., pp. 116–62.
[24] Jesch and Lee, 'Healing Runes', pp. 386–98; Lee, 'Invisible Enemies', pp. 15–18; Lois Bragg, 'Disfigurement, Disability and Disintegration in Sturlunga saga', *Alvíssmál,* 4 (1994), 15–32.

ascribed to these mythic figures. In particular, she has provided valuable insights into the diverse ways in which differently abled bodies were perceived and interpreted within the mythological frameworks of both Old Norse and medieval Celtic traditions.[25] The work of both archaeologists and literary scholars have laid the foundation in Old Norse studies to begin exploring experience of health, illness and medicine from a social perspective.

The social perspective of health, illness and medicine has further intertwined with disability studies in the work of Christina Lee and Ármann Jakobsson. Their respective works delve into the construction and portrayal of abled, disabled and enabled bodies within the contexts of early medieval England and Old Norse sagas. By examining literary and cultural sources, Lee and Jakobsson aim to shed light on the complex social dynamics and cultural perceptions surrounding disability in these historical periods. Their research explores how societal attitudes, norms and narratives contribute to the construction of disabled and enabled bodies, offering valuable insights into the intersection of disability and social constructs in both early medieval England and the Old Norse sagas.[26]

The recognition of the social aspects of illness has had a significant impact on various scholarly endeavours within the field of Old Norse linguistics and philology. Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, for instance, has employed cognitive linguistics as a methodology to examine how emotions are portrayed in the literary representations of the body within the saga corpus. Through this approach, she explores the bodily effects of emotions as depicted in the sagas, as well as the lexical categories and metaphors that are employed to express emotions and their connection to the body in skaldic poetry. By utilizing cognitive linguistics, Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir aims to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and social dimensions of emotions as expressed through language and the body in Old Norse literature.[27] Matteo Tarsi's research focuses on the coexistence of native and loanwords in the pre-puristic period of the Icelandic language, drawing upon historical and cognitive linguistics as its theoretical

[25] Lois Bragg, 'From the Mute God to the Lesser God: Disability in Medieval Celtic and Old Norse Literature', *Disability & Society*, 12:2 (1997), 165–78.
[26] Ármann Jakobsson et al., 'Disability before Disability: Mapping the Uncharted in the Medieval Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies*, 92:4 (2020), 440–60; Christina Lee, 'Abled, Disabled, Enabled: An Attempt to Define Disability in Anglo-Saxon England', *Werkstatt Geschichte*, 65 (2013), 41–54.
[27] Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'The Head, the Heart, and the Breast: Bodily Conceptions of Emotion and Cognition in Old Norse Skaldic Poetry', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 15 (2019), 29–64; Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'The Language of Feeling in Njáls Saga and Egils Saga', *Scripta Islandica*, 71 (2020), 9–50.

foundations.[28] Tarsi's research centres on the retention of native words and language innovation in Old and Middle Icelandic following the influence of Latin. He conducts a systematic analysis of diverse literary sources, including medical manuscripts and associated technical terminology. One of his conclusions, which most directly pertains to my study, is that among the literary genres, the word-pair token and the type of word frequencies most prominently featured in treatises, a category to which medical treatises also belong.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the dissemination of medical and scientific texts in medieval Scandinavia. Building upon previous editions of Old Norse *materia medica*, Fabian Schwabe has examined the philological relationships among extant manuscripts. Through a comparative analysis of Old Norse medical manuscripts, Schwabe argues that the compilation of these texts cannot be solely attributed to the influence of a Danish herbal book. Instead, he suggests that the presence of other sources such as earlier version of *De viribus herbarum*, an eleventh-century hexameter poem on the properties of plants written by Macer Floridus (Odo de Meung), and other unidentified texts, which are now lost, have played a significant role in shaping the content and transmission of medical knowledge in the Old Norse tradition.[29] Christian Etherbridge and Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir have shed light on the circulation of scientific manuscripts and the dissemination of Galenic theories in the Nordic region. Their research focuses on the history of ideas and the phenomenon of cultural borrowing, providing valuable insights into the transmission and reception of scientific knowledge in the North.[30]

Old Norse scholars have embraced the challenge posed by the field of History of Medicine, adopting a syncretic perspective to explore the medical evidence of the past. While certain medical treatments may appear to exhibit biomedical efficacy from a modern standpoint, it should not be assumed that medieval healers administered these remedies solely based on their perceived biomedical effectiveness. A

[28] Matteo Tarsi, *Loanwords and Native Words in Old and Middle Icelandic (12th c.-c. 1550)*, Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022).
[29] Fabian Schwabe, 'Fragment Eines Altwestnordischen Arzneibuches Aus Dem 13. Jahrhundert', *Sudhoffs Archiv,* 93:2 (2009), 201–14 (p. 206); Fabian Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', in *Translation – Adaptation, Interpretation, Transformation: Proceedings from the 28th Study Conference of IASS, Lund 3–7 August 2010*, ed. by Claes-Göran Holmberg and Per Erik Ljung (Lund: Lund University, 2011), pp. 1–13 (pp. 4–6).
[30] Christian Etheridge, 'The Evidence for Islamic Scientific Works in Medieval Iceland', in *Fear and Loathing in the North* (Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 49–74; Christian Etheridge, 'Manuscript Culture and Intellectual Connections between Iceland and Lincoln in the Twelfth Century', *Saga-Book* XLV (2021), 29–58; Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory in the Medieval North: An Old Norse Translation of *Epistula Vindiciani* in Hauksbók', *Gripla*, 29 (2018), 35–66.

comprehensive interpretative framework is necessary to analyse the construction of categories related to health, illness and treatments, as well as to understand the broader context of what was considered therapeutic. In this regard, intersectionality and interdisciplinary approaches play a crucial role in facilitating a successful syncretic approach. By examining how these categories are socially constructed, we can also examine the influence of various factors such as social status, gender, race, bodily differences, religion and cultural interactions on local healing systems. The medieval understanding of health and illness extends far beyond a simplistic dichotomy between biomedical and non-biomedical efficacy, and thus it should be explored as a manifestation of medieval worldview.

1. 3 Methodology

1. 3. 1 An Account of Hypothesis and Research Questions

Inquiry into the social dimension of medicine has formed the basis of my scholarly interest in Old Norse and Old English studies. This has motivated my investigation into Old Norse medical manuscripts to examine the cultural exchange between medieval Iceland and the Continent. The study utilizes extant Old Norse medical manuscripts to interpret and contextualize remedies within a broader historical framework. The corpus of manuscripts presented in the introduction to this chapter is written in West Norse and dates from the thirteenth to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries, a period marked by significant religious and cultural transformations in insular and Continental Europe, which are reflected in medical writings.

The underlying research hypothesis of this study posits that the practices and rituals documented in these codices exhibit noteworthy similarities with both medieval European empirical and learned medicine. The empirical remedies embody a longstanding tradition of practical medicine adopted by medieval healers and practitioners, relying on the practical knowledge of remedies that were transmitted orally or in writing. The learned medical tradition flourished in the late twelfth century with the establishment of universities and the translation movement of Greek and Arabic medical texts. Some of these remedies demonstrate Icelandic innovation by incorporating local traditions (such as the use of runes and local herbs) and

conceptions of healing (such as attributing illnesses to revenants and elves). The encounter with Continental empirical and learned healing traditions may have engendered a new medical paradigm that, when blended with traditional elements, would have been assimilated into Icelandic worldview.

The research has a twofold objective. Firstly, it employs a syncretic approach and draws upon Green's concept of 'integrative medicine'.[31] According to this concept, health serves as a driving force that has played a pivotal role in shaping historical developments. This implies that the pursuit of health by human beings has not only contributed to develop medical practices and theories but has also been instrumental in determining significant historical changes (e.g. developing of public health policy against epidemics, local authority intervention on individual and public health). The study aims to provide an interpretation of the intersection between medicine, magic and religion through the lens of cultural history and the dissemination of ideas. The primary focus is on understanding the Old Norse concepts of magic and religion in post-Conversion Iceland and their influence on the medical paradigm and associated treatments. Additionally, the study will explore how techniques combine magical practices with liturgical formulas and rituals to achieve therapeutic efficacy on the patient.

The development of Christian theology and the history of pre-modern learned medicine are intricately intertwined in medieval Europe. Following the translations from Arabic medical treatises to Latin by the eleventh-century physicians, Constantinus Africanus († 1087 AD), Western medieval medicine underwent gradual advancements. At certain junctures, Christian principles were compelled to incorporate novel knowledge and accommodate new principles that could have gone against the Christian ones.[32] An additional osmosis occurred between several Christian principles and medical theories during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This period saw a reassessment of certain empirical practices, previously deemed illicit and thus excluded from the learned medical canon (e.g., charms,

[31] Green's idea of 'Integrative Medicine' lays on considering health a driving force that determined historical developments as much as other well-established focuses (i.e., politics and religion) and for this reason, there is a need to exceed the philological method and pursue a larger comparative analysis with cross disciplinary fields. Monica H. Green, 'Integrative Medicine: Incorporating Medicine and Health into the Canon of Medieval European History', *History Compass,* 7:4 (2009), 1218–45.

[32] Monica H. Green, 'Constantinus Africanus and the Conflict between Religion and Science', in *The Human Embryo: Aristotle and the Arabic and European Traditions*, ed. by Gordon Reginald Dunstan (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1990), pp. 47–69 (pp. 47–61); Monica H. Green, 'Making Motherhood in Medieval England: The Evidence from Medicine', in *Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400*, ed. by Lesley Smith and Conrad Leyser (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 173–204.

ligatures, stone, animal and herbal amulets and talismans), within the framework of natural philosophy. These practices began to be recognized by some learned physicians as efficacious therapies owing to their association with Natural magic.[33] Concurrently, empirical remedies presented at times a challenge to intellectual elites as their claims of efficacy were based on sources outside the realm of written scholarly discourse and academic debates. In the thirteenth century, medical authorities began justifying the employment of practices regarded heretofore as illicit such as charms, ligatures and talismans, through the Aristotelian natural philosophy framework. The introduction of Aristotelian natural philosophy led to the emergence of a new category of magic known as 'Natural Magic', which attributed the effectiveness of charms, ligatures and talismans to natural forces rather than malevolent actions. Therefore, through the lens of natural philosophy, some of the previously deemed illicit practices could be integrated within the medical canon fostered by certain medieval medical authorities.

This novel comprehension of natural forces was initially delineated as 'Natural Magic' within the works of William of Auvergne (1180-1249 AD) in the 1230s.[34] This concept entailed reinterpreting certain principles or areas of knowledge that had hitherto been categorized as 'bad magic' (e.g. certain aspects of alchemy and natural generation of animals) as manifestations of occult powers (*virtutes occultae*) intrinsic to the natural world and hidden from the major part of humankind, but revealed only to a selected group of practitioners.[35] While eluding explication through learned medicine, the principle of occult powers and 'Natural Magic' nonetheless exerted a positive impact on medieval medicine.

Although William of Auvergne never considered charms and incantations as part of his Natural Magic, as he attributed the healing forces of words to demonic operations rather than occult powers; nevertheless, his framework combined with the

[33] Faye M. Getz, 'Gilbertus Anglicus Anglicized', *Medical History*, 26: 4 (1982), 436–42; Katherine Park, 'Medicine and Magic: The Healing Arts', in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 129–49; Nancy G. Siraisi, 'Avicenna and the Teaching of Practical Medicine', in *Medicine and the Italian Universities, 1250–1600* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001), pp. 63–78; Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 12.

[34] Stephen P. Marrone, 'Magic and Natural Philosophy', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider, (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 287–98.

[35] Steven P. Marrone, 'William of Auvergne on Magic in Natural Philosophy and Theology', in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter? Qu'est-ce que la philosophie au moyen âge? What is Philosophy in the Middle Ages?: Akten des X. Internationalen Kongresses für Mittelalterliche Philosophie der Société Internationale pour l'Etude de la Philosophie Médiévale, 25. bis 30. August 1997 in Erfurt*, ed. by Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1998) pp. 741–48 (p. 745).

translation of Arabic medical and philosophical treatises informed other practitioners' view of charms.

In the late thirteenth century, Roger Bacon (1219-20–1292 AD) and Pietro d'Abano (1250 or 1257–1315 or 1316 AD) argued in favour of charms' efficacy on the ground of their power originating in natural phenomena. Such phenomena were the combination of the soul of the speaker and the stars, whose rays infuse all the earthly creation of power, including words spoken or written.[36]

However, unanimous consent on this matter was never fully reached among the medical intellectual community in Continental and Insular Europe, and comparable debates and contradictions are evident in the Icelandic medical manuscript corpus. Given the ongoing intellectual discourse in Continental Europe concerning medicine, religion and magic, and taking into consideration local Icelandic beliefs regarding magic, it is worth exploring how Icelandic clerical and medical authorities, as well as healers, distinguished between magic and medicine, if at all, within this manuscript corpus. Furthermore, how were remedies resembling magical rituals perceived as legitimate for medical purposes?

In the case of the Old Norse tradition, the thirteenth-century legal compilation known as *Grágás* classified the act of uttering words over a person as a form of magic punishable by law.[37] If such practices were deemed magical according to the legal codes, how were similar acts, such as the utterance of words, prayers and stories over a human body for medical purposes, justified by medieval Icelanders? Were these practices perceived as working or not? Were these practices, characterised by a blurred boundary between religion and magic, considered within the realm of religion and therefore deemed acceptable?

Shifting to the second objective of this research, through an examination of imported materials and local elements within the manuscript context, I aim to explore the assimilation and reinterpretation of therapies, as well as conceptions of health and illness, within the Icelandic cultural framework. Additionally, I seek to identify potential sources of influence. Of particular interest to this study is the extent to which English

[36] Peter M. Jones and Lea T. Olsan, 'Medicine and Magic', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 299–311 (p. 303); Roger Bacon, *Opus maius*, ed. by Henry Bridges (London: Williams and Norgate, 1900), p. 395; Béatrice Delaurenti, *La puissance des mots, virtus verborum: débats doctrinaux sur le pouvoir des incantations au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Cerf, 2007), p. 159.

[37] Vilhjálmur Finsen, *Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid, udg. efter det kongelige Bibliotheks Haanskrift*, 2 vols. ed. and trans. by Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Berling, 1852), pp. 22–23*; Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás, the Codex Regius of Grágás, with Material from other Manuscripts*, vol. 1, trans. by Dennis Andrew, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 39.

medical practices and theories influenced Old Norse medical traditions. In this thesis, I will argue that by closely analysing remedies we can discern philological similarities between Old English medical texts, on the one hand, and Old Norse medical miscellanies, on the other.

Furthermore, could an analysis of conceptual models of illness and disease in Old Norse medical miscellanies reveal similarities with Old English medical paradigms? And to what extent can we assert that Old Norse culture and society adopted an interpretative framework of illness as an external malevolent agent that disrupts the body? If this notion holds true, to what extent can we attribute the emergence of the materiality of illness in the manuscripts to medieval European and English influences, or are there local approaches and attitudes towards illness that can be discerned?

In the early twentieth century, the Danish scholar Henning Larsen suggested the possibility of textual parallels drawn from late Old English medical texts on Old Norse leechbook. I aim to expand on Larsen's proposition and present additional examples of textual parallels and cultural influence, especially to answer to questions such as how did *álfar* become associated with illness in Old Norse medical miscellanies?

These questions prompt a deeper exploration of the cultural, historical and linguistic context of Old Norse society and how they envisaged illness, disease, healing and medicine.

By examining individual remedies within their manuscript contexts, this research endeavour aims to provide evidence that sheds light on the reception and assimilation of new medical materials. This will contribute to a better understanding of the circulation of medical theories and practices in medieval Scandinavia.

1. 3. 2 A Note on Terminology: Local Beliefs, Traditions and Customs

When examining medieval Iceland, the term 'local' concerning beliefs, traditions and customs requires additional contextualization for two primary reasons. Firstly, the historical background of medieval Iceland and its inhabitants may challenge the conventional geographical interpretation of 'local'. Before the Norse arrival around 870

AD, the island we now know as Iceland was uninhabited.[38] With the Norse settlers arriving between 870 and 1000 AD, along with a minority of enslaved people from the British Isles, Norse society became the dominant community on the island.[39] As a result, the application of 'local' in its strictly geographical sense becomes complex; it raises questions about what exactly we are referring to as local. Is it the emerging Norse community in Iceland, or does 'local' pertain to a set of beliefs, traditions and customs brought from Norse settlements in Scandinavia to Iceland? The concept of 'local' as opposed to 'imported' or 'foreign' in this thesis is subject to human interpretation and evolution, and its meaning or framework can vary depending on the specific context in which it is employed.

In addition to its strict geographical significance, the adjective 'local' in relation to beliefs, traditions and customs may also encompass temporal contextualization. The classification of a particular practice as an active local custom, tradition, or belief in a society can evolve over time, leading to changes in perceptions. What may have been considered a relevant and thriving practice at one point in time could later be deemed obsolete within the same society. Similarly, a practice or body of knowledge that was once perceived as actively shaping the community's identity may, at a different juncture in time, continue to play a role in society, albeit no longer enjoying mainstream prominence.

To better elucidate this, let us turn to some practical examples. After the Conversion of Iceland, set in ca. 1000 AD,[40] we could consider the cult of St. Þorlákr in late medieval Iceland as a 'local belief' in the sense that it was geographically recognised within Iceland, actively practiced, underpinned contemporary social values, and was generally comprehensible to the entire Christian society in Iceland.[41]

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[38] Árný E. Sveinbjörnsdóttir, Jan Heinemeier and Gardar Gudmundsson, 'Dating of the Settlement of Iceland', *Radiocarbon*, 46: 1 (2004), 387–94.

[39] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Iceland', in *The Viking World*, ed. by Stefan Brink and Neil Price (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008), pp. 571–72, Poul Holm, 'Ireland, Norse', in *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia,* ed. by Philip Pulsiano (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 323–25; Margrét Hermanns-Audardóttir, 'The Early Settlements of Iceland: Results Based on Excavations of a Merovingian and Viking Farm Site at Herjólfsdalur in the Westman Islands', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 24:1 (1991) 1–9; Haraldur Sigurðsson, 'Comment on the Early Settlement of Iceland', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 24:1 (1991), 21–22; Brigit and Peter H. Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800–1500,* The Nordic Series 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Magnus Stefánsson, 'The Norse island communities of the Western Ocean', in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia: Prehistory to 1520*, vol. 1, ed. by Knut Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) p. 202.

[40] *Íslendingabók – Landnámabók*, Íslenzk Fornrit I, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson (Reykjavik: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1968), pp. 14-15.

[41] Orri Vesteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000-1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Thomas A. DuBois, ed., *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, Toronto Old Norse and Icelandic Studies 3 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008); Haki Antonsson and Ildar H. Garipzanov, 'Introduction: The Veneration of Saints in Early Christian Scandinavia and Eastern

However, the Reformation and subsequent secularization of Western societies altered the impact of the St. Þorlákr cult on shaping and uniting Icelandic society. While St. Þorlákr remains a well-known figure in modern Iceland, the perception and significance of his cult changed over time acquiring less importance in societal dynamics within a secularised setting.

Likewise, the ancestors of those who later worshipped St. Þorlákr in Iceland, including those who arrived in the ninth and tenth centuries, were not yet acquainted with the St. Þorlákr cult, as it only emerged in the twelfth century, and they adhered to different sets of beliefs and practices as their local traditions and customs. Over time, these older beliefs and practices underwent a transformation, either becoming obsolete and being supplanted by a new religious, moral and belief system, or persisting but with altered significance.

For instance, as noted by Battista, when Icelandic translators were tasked with rendering Roman deities in their writings, they often chose to convert their names to those of gods from the Scandinavian pantheon.[42] During this religious transition from one framework to another, the Icelandic Christian audience was consciously presented with names like Óðinn and Þórr, along with other Norse deities. However, it is essential to understand that the usage of these names did not imply any active religious value or worship associated with them at the time they were employed. Instead, they represented remnants of older traditions that were no longer actively practiced or venerated but had become inherent elements of common knowledge. Similarly, as will be explored in subsequent chapters, certain elements derived from an ostensibly ancient body of knowledge, such as the 'Helm of Awe', names and practices of Norse deities, and the use of runes, resurface within Old Norse medical remedies. These elements are deliberately incorporated from a knowledge base that predates Christianity, but to the users and readers of these remedies in fourteenth and fifteenth century Iceland, they no longer carry the active significance and value attributed to them in the past. Such elements surfacing from Old Norse medical remedies and combined with mainstream Christian practices represent my idea of local beliefs, traditions and customs. In this thesis, I will use this terminology to indicate

Europe', in *Saints and their Lives on the Periphery, Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (c. 1000-1200)*, ed. by Haki Antonsson and Ildar H. Garipzanov (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010) pp. 17–38.

[42] Simonetta Battista, 'Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon in the Old Norse Hagiographic Sagas', in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross and Geraldine Barnes (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, 2003), pp. 24–34.

a body of knowledge and practices that were elaborated before the Conversion period (i.e., runes) that were still intelligible to medieval Icelanders as being part of common inherited knowledge but that had gone through a change in use, meaning or value in society.

1. 3. 3 Comparative Methodology

The methodological approach employed in this study is rooted in the comparative method, which will be utilized to identify similarities in the development of therapies and the conceptualization of illness and health in medieval Iceland. This approach enables an examination of the influence exerted by Continental and Insular European contexts on Icelandic medical treatments and paradigms. The comparative method will be employed at two levels. Firstly, it will involve an analysis of medical evidence found in the Old Norse, Old English and Middle English manuscript corpus. Additionally, when relevant, it will encompass other Germanic-speaking traditions. Secondly, the manuscript evidence will be examined alongside depictions of medical practices in sagas and the Eddic corpus, as well as relevant archaeological discoveries that provide evidence for similar practices, rituals, attitudes and motifs. By adopting a syncretic perspective, the analysis of remedies will facilitate the identification of parallels between Old Norse medical practices and European empirical and learned traditions, highlighting the influences and parallels assimilated into Icelandic medical compilations.

1. 4 The Theoretical Background to Old Norse Medicine

1. 4. 1 Empirical and Learned Medicine in Old Norse Charms

Medieval Icelandic concern for preserving and restoring health has survived in multiple material forms such as literary depictions, archaeological finds and legal and manuscript contexts. This abundance of sources provides us with an exceptional opportunity to explore conceptions and approaches of pre-modern medicine in the Middle Ages. Healing practices in circulation in the late Middle Ages

were defined as both empirical and learned practices by professional and lay healers of the time. Empirical medicine was understood by medieval people as a collection of remedies whose good reputation laid on the observed efficacy following the administration of the remedy.[43] The second category, learned medicine, was deemed by medieval people efficient because their practices were based upon theoretical background elaborated within Greek and Arabic traditions and translated into Latin and vernaculars.[44] Old Norse culture integrated both learned and empirical traditions in their medical manuscripts, and comparable trends are evidenced in literature and archaeological findings. On the other hand, Old Norse culture proactively imported new concepts, practices and theories by assimilating and re-elaborating novel healing practices within the local medical framework.

The manuscripts and material artifacts (runic and Latin amulets) are of particular interest for my research because they are accountable for the dissemination of empirical and learned healing practices. Legal texts are not accountable for the circulation of medical practices in the same way as manuscripts or artifacts are; nevertheless, they will be employed to disentangle the boundaries between magic, medicine and religion later in the thesis. This perspective will help in the quest to understand the implications of empirical and learned medicine in the context of charms and other verbal remedies. Bringing together healing practices from multiple contexts offers an opportunity to investigate what was thought to

[43] Monica H. Green, 'The Possibilities of Literacy and Limits of Reading: Women and the Gendering of Medical Literary', in *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Monica H. Green (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 1–76; Monica H. Green, 'Gendering the History of Women's Healthcare', *Gender and History*, Twentieth Anniversary Special Issue, 20:3 (November 2008), 487–518; Horden, 'Medieval Medicine', pp. 40–56; Horden, 'What's Wrong with Early Medieval Medicine', pp. 5–25; Nancy G. Siraisi, *The Clock and the Mirror: Girolamo Cardano and Renaissance Medicine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Catherine Rider, 'Medical Magic and the Church in Thirteenth-Century England', *Social History of Medicine : The Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 24:1 (2011), 92–107.

[44] For a review of the translation movement, please see the following: Danielle Jacquart and Charles Burnett, *Constantine the African and 'Ali Ibn al-'Abbas al-Magusi: The Pantagni and Related Texts* (Leiden: BRILL, 1994); Jean Jolivet, 'The Arabic Inheritance', in *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Dronke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 113–48; Faith Wallis and Robert Wisnovsky, eds., *Medieval Textual Cultures: Agents of Transmission, Translation and Transformation* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016); Charles Burnett, *Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages: the Translators and Their Intellectual and Social Context* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Charles Burnett, *The Introduction of Arabic Learning into England* (Dorchester: Henry Ling Ltd – The British Library, 1997); William Crossgrove, 'The Vernaculation of Science, Medicine and Technology in Late Medieval Europe: Broadening Our Perspectives', *Early Science and Medicine*, 5:1 (2000), 47–63; Patrick Manning and Abigail Owen eds., *Knowledge in Translation. Global Patterns of Scientific Exchange, 1000-1800 CE* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018); Michele Goyens et al., eds., *Science Translated. Latin and Vernacular Translations of Scientific Treatises in Medieval Europe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008); Irma Taavitsainen and Paivi Pahta, 'Vernacularisation of Medical Writing in English: a Corpus-Based Study of Scholasticism', *Early Science and Medicine*, 3:2 (1998), 157–85.

determine a healthy and an unhealthy body, and related aetiology of illness and treatments.

To exemplify the intricate relationship between empirical and learned medicine in Old Norse, this study will confine the analysis to one specific category of healing practices with examples drawn from medical miscellanies with comparable examples drawn from the literary corpus. The survey will focus on what I call 'healing by words', whose main healing agent is represented either by the sound of the words and individual letters, or sequences of words in the form of sentences and formulas. This category comprises both written or spoken words such as: ritual charms (verbal charms combined with ritual performance), verbal charms (invocations, narrative charms and alliterative formulas not accompanied by ritualistic gestures or actions), written charms (written or carved on solid material, including runes) and prayers (a verbal act of intercession or supplication well rooted in the religious practices, e.g. the *pater noster*; we will see how certain rituals make a distinction between reciting the *pater noster* and an alliterative formula such as a narrative charms or a group of words deemed powerful). The survey will offer the following results:

1) An inventory of shared parallels and patterns in performing healing by words in Old Norse culture and a broader pan-European medical background.
2) The establishment of another classification - wherever possible – of this evidence between imported and local attitudes towards healing and medical practices.
3) An emic reading of the power of healing by words and its relationship with magic and religion in medieval Iceland.

Informed by Olsan and Jones's performative ritual framework in relation to healing practices and considering the influential cultural hegemony of Christianity,[45] this study

[45] Lea T. Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice', *The Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 16:3 (2003), 343–66; Lea T. Olsan, 'The Language of Charms in a Middle English Recipe Collection', *ANQ (Lexington, Ky.)*, 18:3 (2005), 31–7; Peter M. Jones and Lea T. Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 89:3 (2015), 406–33; Jones and Olsan, 'Medicine and Magic', pp. 299–311.; On Christianity as a cultural hegemon in Iceland see Haraldur Hreinsson, *Force of Words: A Cultural History of Christianity and Politics in Medieval Iceland 11th-13th Centuries* (Brill: Leiden, 2021), pp. 61–66; Sverrir Jakobsson, *Við og veröldin: heimsmynd Íslendinga 1100-1400* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2005), p. 65; Pernille Hermann, 'Literacy', in *Routledge Research Companion to the*

will explore the emic concepts of magic and religion and their connection to empirical and learned healing practices in late medieval Iceland. The analysis will approach healing practices as performative rituals, as suggested by Olsan and Jones, while also considering their association with Judeo-Christian theology and liturgy on the one hand, and occult virtues in natural objects and charms on the other hand. Defining the boundaries between magic, religion and medicine from an emic perspective poses a significant challenge within the limited scope of this project. Nevertheless, an attempt will be made to provide a plausible interpretation of how these categories intersect, overlap, and contribute to the formation of beliefs about health, illness and appropriate treatments.

The study will examine the apparent contradiction of certain practices being labelled as magical in secular and religious sources, or empirical in a given moment in time and space, while simultaneously being legitimised as medical interventions in medical manuscripts, justified by the healing power of God. The phenomenon of condemning or legitimising the same performative acts based on the context in which they were expressed may appear contradictory to contemporary sensibilities. However, it was not perceived as such by medieval individuals as medical practices incorporating natural magic testify, nor is it unique to the Icelandic context being investigated.[46]

While condemnations of magic were increasingly prevalent within legal codes and universities during the late medieval period,[47] another noteworthy development emerged within this cultural milieu. A growing number of clerical elites and medical authorities started to acknowledge the possibility of integrating certain magical concepts into the Christian framework,[48] therefore welcoming some of the empirical

Medieval Icelandic Sagas, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 34–47; for an European context see Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1992), pp. 2–5.

[46] Isabelle Draelants, 'The Notion of Properties: Tensions between *Scientia* and *Ars* in Medieval Natural Philosophy and Magic', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge 2019), pp. 169–186; Jones and Olsan, 'Medicine and Magic', pp. 299–311.

[47] Edward Peters, 'The Medieval Church and State on Superstition, Magic and Witchcraft: From Augustine to the Sixteenth Century', in *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 3, ed. by Karen Jolly et al. (London: The Anthlone Press, 2002), pp. 207–17; Michael D. Bailey, *Fearful Spirits. The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2013), pp. 14, 22, 28; Jean-Patrice Boudet, *Entre Science Et Nigromance: Astrologie, Divination Et Magie Dans l'Occident Médiéval (XIIe-XVe Siècle)* (Paris: Éditions De La Sorbonne, 2006), pp. 205–78.

[48] Frank Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), pp. 134–55; Draelants, 'The Notion of Properties', pp. 169–86.

remedies within the learned medical practices under the natural philosophy framework.

Compliance with Christian doctrine did not automatically lead to the abandonment and condemnation of magical practices, and there were practitioners who considered themselves to be 'good Christians' while still engaging in such practices. The acceptance or rejection of specific magical practices or empirical remedies depended on factors such as their purpose, context and manner of performance, resulting in a complex landscape where certain practices were embraced from a new perspective by sympathetic authors, readers, or practitioners while others were demonised by hostile critics or mainstream authorities.

1. 4. 2 The Medical Background to Old Norse Healing Practices

Medieval medicine operated within a framework of beliefs, techniques and paradigms that may appear perplexing to modern perspectives. The understanding of illness aetiology in medieval times did not adhere to the biomedical paradigm, but instead relied on a complex system of sympathetic relationships between the microcosm (the human body) and the macrocosm (the universe).[49] In accordance with this system, which was rooted in the Hippocratic humoral theory, the state of health or illness was believed to arise from the equilibrium or imbalance in the composition of bodily fluid (blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm).[50] According to Greek and Roman physicians, from which medieval medicine drew on this systematic principles, the balanced status of inner fluids was subject to interference from external agents or elements.[51] In this context, various elements, including fire, water, air and earth, occasionally influenced this process. Furthermore, factors such as dietary intake,

[49] Aristotle, *Physics*, ed. and trans. by David Bostock and Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), ch. 8:2, 252b; Mark Waddell, *Magic, Science, and Religion in Early Modern Europe,* New Approaches to the History of Science and Medicine, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 75–101; Goudas Palvos et al., 'The Human Skin: A Meeting Ground for the Ideas About Macrocosm and Microcosm in Ancient and Medieval and Greek Literature', *Vesalius: acta internationals historiae medicinae*, 7 (2002), 94–101.

[50] Jouanna Jacques and Neil Allies, 'The Legacy of the Hippocratic Treatise the Nature of Man', in *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen*, ed. by Philip van der Eijk, Studies in Ancient Medicine 40 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 335–60; Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Vivian Nutton, 'Healing and the Healing Act in Classical Greece', *European Review*, 7:1 (1999), 27–35 (p. 30); Peter N. Singer, *Galen Selected Works* (Oxford University Press, 1997) p. X; Ian Johnston, 'Causation in diseases and symptoms', in *Galen: On Diseases and Symptoms*, ed. by Ian Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 81–126.

[51] For some ideas on how external hostile forces operates on the body and its health see Siam Bhayro and Catherine Rider eds., *Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

seasonal changes, or lunar phases were also known to impact the constitution of bodily fluids. Each fluid and natural element was characterised by specific qualities, such as hot, cold, dry and moist, which could fluctuate in intensity and determined good or ill health in the human body.[52] Exegetical interpretations of the humoral theory developed throughout the Middle Ages became an integral part of learned medicine in the late Middle Ages. Amongst some of the most significant exegetical work, Bede (ca. 672–735 AD) linked the process of aging, situated within the microcosm framework, to the four seasons which represented the macrocosm. According to this theory, there existed quantitative and qualitative correspondences between the stages of human life and the progression of seasons, which led to the association of infancy to spring, childhood to summer, adulthood to the autumn and old age to winter.[53]

Within the humoral theory framework, various methods were employed to restore a balance of humours within the body. These interventions encompassed surgical procedures, administration of substances and prophylactic measures. Prophylaxis focused on preventive actions aimed at averting disruptions caused by external agents or internal corruption. Among the commonly employed prophylactic treatments in medieval European, Scandinavian and Icelandic medicine were *regimens*. Commonly employed in both learned and empiric medicine, these texts, varying in length, provided guidance on dietary practices, hygiene measures and the optimal timing for medication administration. *Regimens* often recommended seasonal or monthly adjustments to diet, specified appropriate hygiene practices and outlined the ideal times of the day or month for administering medication or performing bloodletting.

Twentieth-century medical historians, emerging within the field of Old English studies, thought that this emphasis on diet and hygiene stemmed from the establishment of the *Schola Medica Salernitana.*[54] If the *Schola*, on one hand, has

[52] Jouanna Jacques, *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen*, Studies in Ancient Medicine, vol. 40 (Leiden: Brill, 2012) p. 339.
[53] Bede the Venerable, *The Reckoning of Time. Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary by Faith Wallis*, ed. by Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), ch. 35; Bede the Venerable, *On the Nature of Things and on Times, Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary by Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis,* ed. by Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), ch. iv.
[54] Charles W. Singer, 'A Review of the Medical Literature of the Dark Ages, with a New Text of about 1110', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine 10:II*, Section of the History of Medicine (1917), pp. 107–60; Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science during the First Thirteen Centuries of our Era*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), pp. 731–41, Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, pp. 74–79; Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 47; Charles H. Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England* (London: Oldbourne, 1967), pp. 38–55.

undeniably played a significant role in the development of hygienic remedies,[55] on the other hand, preventive medicine such as *regimens* were part of an older humoral theory tradition circulating in the Latin West prior to the advent of the *Schola*. Chardonnens has challenged these early interpretations on *regimens* and demonstrated that these preventive measures were already widespread in Europe prior to the eleventh century in Old English medical texts.[56]

In medieval Icelandic medical manuscripts, the inclusion of *regimens* with a specific focus on diet and hygiene is observed in the leechbook section of a late fifteenth-century medical miscellany, as well as in a contemporaneous magico-medical compilation. These Icelandic *regimens* exhibit a pattern identified by Chardonnens in his analysis of Old English medical manuscripts, wherein prognostics (of which *regimens* are an expression) are exclusively found in computistic and prognostic sections.[57] In contrast, Continental and pre-Salernitan manuscripts contain prognostics and *regimens* in various textual contexts. Icelandic *regimens*, emphasising diet and hygienic practices, are exclusively located in prognostic sections within a magico-medical manuscript or a leechbook contained within a more extensive medical miscellany.

In addition to the framework of humoral theory, the aetiology of illness and the understanding of the delicate balance between a healthy and unhealthy body in medieval society were also shaped by gendered and religious models. These models provided interpretative frameworks for comprehending physical and mental illness as well as disability. In a world where gender and biological characteristics intersected, the gendered perspective of illness, disease and disability attributed body deformities to women, as explained by medical and religious authorities. The Aristotelian classification of the female body became prevalent in medieval Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with the dissemination of translations of Arabic medical texts incorporating Aristotelian and Galenic medical views. Consequently, religious writings, including biblical, patristic and exegetical works, were the first to highlight the differences and subordination of the female body to the male body. In the

[55] See for instance the advises in verses from 12th century *Schola Medica Salernitana* in Alexander Croke, ed., *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum a Poem on the Preservation of Health in Rhyming Latin Verse. Addressed by the School of Salerno to Robert of Normandy, Son of William the Conqueror, with an Ancient Translation: And an Introduction and Notes by Sir Alexander Croke* (Oxford: D.A. Talboys, 1830).
[56] László S. Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics 900-1100: Study and Texts*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, Brill's Texts and Sources in Intellectual History 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 44–45, 153.
[57] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

account of Eve's creation from Adam's rib in Genesis, the female body is classified as a deviation from the male body. As a result, the Creation story encapsulates the differences within social structures, wherein Eve, due to her perceived inferior physical embodiment, is assigned the roles of bearing and raising children and remaining subjugated to Adam.[58]

In accordance with this patriarchal interpretation of women's bodies,[59] certain illnesses, especially hysteria, were heavily stigmatised and attributed specifically to the female body. The medical causes of hysteria were believed to reside within women's physical constitution and their relationship to the womb. This belief, which established a distinctive connection between women's bodies and the disease, drew inspiration from Plato's depiction of the womb as a semi-autonomous entity that dwells within women and occasionally disrupts its host. Plato's theories exerted a profound influence on the medieval understanding of hysteria, shaping the notion that the womb physically traverses women's bodies, giving rise to hysterical behaviours. Women's physical features served the medical and religious authorities' agenda to establish the notion of women's social, emotional, spiritual and medical subordination to men.[60] In *De uteri dissectione*, Galen explains how women's bodily features constitute a disadvantage in purging the body of excess fluids:

> Now just as mankind is the most perfect of all animals, so within mankind the man is more perfect than the woman, and the reason for the perfection is his excess of heat, for heat is Nature's primary instrument. Hence in those animals that have less of it, her workmanship is necessarily more imperfect, and so it is no wonder that the female is less perfect than the male, by as much as she is colder than he.[61]

The innate heat of the male body enabled men to cook any the elements entering into contact with them: food, emotions, air and steam, which allowed them to discharge excess elements as human wastes correctly. However, because of their 'cold' nature, women were not physiologically able to 'cook' and discharge excess fluids. Consequently, menstruation was perceived as a mechanism for purging

[58] Tory Vandeventer Pearman, *Women and Disability in Medieval Literature*, New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[59] Paula M. Rieder, 'The Uses and Misuses of Misogyny: A Critical Historiography of the Language of Medieval Women's Oppression', *Historical* Reflections (2012), 1–18 (p. 13).
[60] *The Trotula,* ed. and trans. by Monica H. Green; Monica H. Green, 'Bodies, Gender, Health, Disease: Recent Work on Medieval Women's Medicine', in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History: Sexuality and Culture in Medieval and Renaissance Europe,* ed. by Philip M. Soergel, (New York: AMS Press, 2005), pp. 1–46.
[61] Galen, *On the Usefulness of Parts of the Body,* vol. 2, Book 14, ed. and trans. by Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca, New York, USA: Cornell University Press, 1968).

women's bodies of impurities and waste materials. This viewpoint rendered menstruation as an erroneous means through which women expelled excessive waste, leading to the characterization of women as deficient, corrupted and ultimately deviating from the conventional idealised image of the body.

Drawing upon Aristotle's theory of the subordination of the female soul to that of the male, the anonymous author of the thirteenth-century text *Women's Secrets* applies the Aristotelian notion male superiority to the realm of procreation.[62] According to this theory, men are responsible for the production of semen, while women serve as vessels to receive the semen and carry the foetus until the completion of pregnancy. Arabic physicians also adhere to this hierarchical physiological framework, following Aristotle's perspective. The philosopher and physician Avicenna, in the tenth century, further elaborated on this notion, attributing the physical inferiority of the uterus to its late formation in embryonic development, rendering it the weakest organ.[63]

To a certain extent, we can discern traces of a gendered model of illness and disability in a number of Old Norse medical remedies found in manuscripts, as well as in literary portrayals of men succumbing to illness. The gendered understanding of illness is evident in medical remedies within medical manuscripts that address the influence of external agents on the body such as remedies against *álfar* (elves) which I will argue are conceptualised as *incubi* in fifteenth century Iceland. The examination of gender-related factors in the medical realm will be further explored in a dedicated chapter of this thesis. Regarding the gendered model of illness and disability in Old Norse literature, it is pertinent to mention Caroline Batten's notion of a feminised male body when afflicted by disease.[64] Batten argues persuasively that in Old Icelandic literary depictions of male characters falling ill, their identity undergoes a metaphorical submission to the disease, leading to the feminization of their bodies and a subsequent subordination to a higher power. This portrayal reflects the deeply ingrained patriarchy that subjected female bodies to a subordinated hierarchy of male power. In Old Norse

[62] Helen R. Lemay, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's* De secretis mulierum *with Commentaries*, SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); Katharine Park and American Council of Learned Societies, *Secrets of Women Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York, Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ACLS Humanities, 2006), p. 186.
[63] For further literature on Avicenna see Monica H. Green, 'Flowers, Poisons, and Men: Menstruation in Medieval Western Europe', in *Menstruation: A Cultural History*, ed. by Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (New York: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 51–64; Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 199–200; Monica H. Green, 'Bodily Essences Bodies as Categories of Difference', in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Medieval Age*, ed. by Linda Kalof (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), pp. 141–162.
[64] Caroline R. Batten, 'Dark Riders: Disease, Sexual Violence, and Gender Performance in the Old English Mære and Old Norse Mara', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 120:3 (2021), 352–80.

literature, however, the physical agency of illness on a male body is turned into a metaphor encoded as a subordination of the male body to the disease, the higher power. The concept of a feminised body, functioning within a medical gender hierarchy, finds broader application within the medieval European context and is evident in Old Norse and Old Icelandic contexts as well.

Turning to the religious aspect of illness and health, specific conditions or ailments were strictly associated with social and moral transgressions giving rise to the belief that misconduct was sympathetically related to illness and disease. This connection resulted in a misfunction of the body and a corruption of its health. In a Christian framework, this sympathetic relation was embodied by the 'sin', which was frequently associated with individuals afflicted by conspicuous and stigmatised pathologies, commonly represented by leprosy and the plague.[65]

In contrast, the religious perspective on illness and disability also offered a unique interpretation of certain diseases. Leprosy, for example, was regarded as both a punishment for sinful individuals and a means of purging the soul on earth through bodily suffering. Thus, being afflicted with leprosy could be attributed not only to personal misbehaviour but also to God's will to test the afflicted. The sick were expected to atone for their sins and, after death, be reunited with Christ through their earthly suffering.[66]

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[65] Christina Lee, 'Disability', in *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, ed. by Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée Rebecca Trilling (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 23–38; Luke E. Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); William J. Hays, *The Burdens of Disease Epidemics and Human Response in Western History,* rev edn (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009); Damien Jeanne, 'Leprosy, Lepers and Leper-Houses: Between Human Law and God's Law (6th–15th centuries)', in *Social Dimensions of Medieval Disease and Disability*, ed. by Sally Crawford and Christina Lee, Studies in Early Medicine 3 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014), pp. 69–82; David Marcombe, *Leper Knights the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in England, c. 1150–1544* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003); François-Olivier Touati, 'Contagion and Leprosy: Myth, Ideas and Evolution in Medieval Minds and Societies', in *Contagion: Perspectives from Pre-modern Societies*, ed. by Lawrence I. Conrad and Dominic Wujastyk (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 179–201; Ninon Dubourg, 'Clerical Leprosy and the Ecclesiastical Office: Dis/Ability and Canon Law', in *New Approaches to Disease, Disability and Medicine in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Erin Connelly and Stefanie Künzel (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2018), pp. 62–77; Faye M. Getz 'Black Death and the Silver Lining; Meaning, Continuity and Revolutionary Change in Histories of Medieval Plagues', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 24.2 (1991) 265–89; Jeremy Brown, 'A World Turned Upside Down: The Black Death and Bubonic Plague', in *The Eleventh Plague: Jews and Pandemics from the Bible to COVID-19* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 72–73; Ann G. Carmichael, 'Universal and Particular: The Language of Plague, 1348–1500', *Medical History. Supplement, 27* (2008) 17–52.

[66] On leprosy in general, see Richards, *Medieval Leper;* Saul Nathaniel Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, New York, USA: Cornell University Press, 1974); Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 183–88; Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006).

The religious model of illness not only shaped the understanding of the causes of disease but also influenced the development of treatments believed to be effective against such ailments. In the subsequent chapters, a detailed examination of numerous remedies will reveal their reliance on Judeo-Christian liturgy, accounts and rituals. These Christian-inspired remedies often incorporate elements from local belief systems, herbal and gem lore and traditional healing practices (such as the use of plasters, infusions and animal-based remedies), resulting in a complex amalgamation. This dynamic setting allows for the active engagement of Judeo-Christian phraseology and narratives, which take on a significant role in the healing process.

A comprehensive study of Old Icelandic healing practices must take into account the various frameworks and factors that influence conceptions of health, illness, disease and the human body. By assessing and understanding the broader medieval European medical context, we gain a valuable interpretative tool that enables us to contextualize Old Norse and Old Icelandic medical practices found in manuscripts, archaeological records and literary sources. These cultural materials often echo Continental theories, motifs and metaphors of illness, providing us with a shared foundation for comprehending how disease affects the body and its implications for both the afflicted and the healer.

While we have discussed three prominent models of illness and disease originating from the Continent and the Mediterranean region, my analysis will reveal new perspectives as we explore how these frameworks are applied and adapted within Old Icelandic remedies. This exploration will involve a comparison of local beliefs and practices found in remedies, as well as a juxtaposition with medieval English medical remedies. By doing so, we will uncover the intricate intersections between medicine, religion and magic in Old Norse medical miscellanies within a broader European context.

1. 4. 3 Medicine, Religion and Magic

The demarcation between medicine, religion and magic was fluid and subject to ongoing development from Late Antiquity to the Enlightenment. While a formal distinction emerged among the local elites in Continental, Scandinavian and Icelandic societies, this did not imply uniform adherence throughout the broader social

spectrum. The legal and religious differentiation between rituals harnessing supernatural powers other than Christianity and those rooted in Christian liturgy began during the late Roman Empire and persisted through the early and late Middle Ages. To better elucidate this formal condemnation of certain practices let us now turn to one of the earliest examples such as approach the sixth century Gaul bishop Caesarius of Arles's work (470-542 AD). Caesarius denounced medical rituals, such as using divinatory practices to ensure pregnancies or facilitating abortions, on the grounds of associating them with magic and pagan practices.[67] Despite these type of formal condemnations divinatory practices associated with pregnancy and abortion techniques continued to circulate throughout early and late medieval Europe in various forms, including oral traditions and written sources.[68] These practices persisted despite attempts to suppress them, highlighting the resilience and ongoing presence of such beliefs and rituals within the broader cultural and social fabric of the time.

On the other hand, we witness actual practices of medical intervention in medical compilations from the early Middle Ages that imply the utilization of divinatory and other mantic practices in medical intervention, including how to discover the child's sex or to carry out abortion safely. One of the many examples surviving can be drawn from the eleventh-twelfth century Old English text, Cotton Tiberius A. iii, fols 42^{v}-43^{r}, probably of monastic origin, where we find prognostics based on the time of the year, dreams, or the woman's behaviour to assess the unborn child's sex.[69] Equally, the embryological treatise called *Gynaecia*, of the fourth century Roman physician Vindicianus, preserves a numerical divination to foretell the gender of the unborn child.[70]

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[67] See especially Caesarius of Arles, *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis sermones*, ed. by Germain Morin, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 103-104 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953), ch. 1.12,13.5,19.4,50.1–2,204.3; Marianne Elsakkers, 'The Early Medieval Latin and Vernacular Vocabulary of Abortion and Embryology', in *Latin and Cernacular Translations of Scientific Treatises in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Michèle Goyens et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008) 377–414 (p. 383); Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, pp. 46–47; Michael D. Bailey, 'The Age of Magicians. Periodization in the History of European Magic', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 3:1 (2008), 1–28 (p. 6).

[68] Giselle de Nie, 'Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours: Two Sixth-Century Gallic Bishops and 'Christian Magic'', in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages,* ed. by Doris Edel (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), pp. 170–96 (pp. 189–91); Zubin Mistry, *Abortion in the Early Middle Ages, c.500-900* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), pp. 57–78.

[69] London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. iii, fols 42^{v}-43^{r}; Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: 900-1100*, pp. 241–45; Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, pp. 183–84; Bruce Mitchell, *An Invitation to Old English and Anglo-Saxon England*. rev. edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 218; Stephanie J. Hollis, 'Scientific and Medical Writings', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Philip Pulsiano and Elaine M. Treharne (Oxford, Blackwell, 2001), pp. 188–208 (p. 197); Ann E. Hanson, '*Aphorismi* 5.28-63 and the Gynaecological Texts of the Corpus Hippocratum', in *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*, ed. by Manfred Horstmanshoff and Marten Stol, Studies in Ancient Medicine 27 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 277–304.

[70] Loiuse Cilliers, 'Vindicianus' Gynaecia and Theories on Generation and Embryology from the Babylonians up to Graeco-Roman Times', in *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*, ed. by Manfred Horstmanshoff and Marten Stol (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2004) pp. 343–67.

A similar situation of formal condemnation of certain medical practices and the simultaneous usage of the very condemned practiced in medical contexts can be observed in medieval Scandinavia and Iceland. For instance, in the twelfth-century Norwegian Gulaþing laws, which are preserved in a mid-fourteenth-century manuscript, there is a specific entry warning against engaging in magical practices such as 'spám ne golldrum ne gerningum illum' (prophecies nor incantations or magic acts.[71] Furthermore, in an additional list of prohibited magical practices, including performing a 'trollriding', we find the same allusion to the physical attack perpetrated by a woman skilled in magic in Old Norse literature in an early fourteenth-century supplement to these laws. Despite the presence of preventive legal measures, it is noteworthy that a late fifteenth-century Icelandic medical manuscript (Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo) includes a cure for a 'trollriding' indicating that the belief in this nocturnal entity persisted more than a century later. This suggests that the belief in magical practices, human beings skilled in magic and supernatural beings remained relevant in Icelandic society despite legal restrictions. These examples serve as concise pieces of evidence illustrating that the dissemination of ideas through legislation and sermons does not necessarily indicate widespread changes and adherence within society. Consequently, it becomes challenging to delineate a clear demarcation between practices that were considered outside the realm of religious and healing activities and those that were not. As Maraschi has recently suggested: 'drawing clear lines between the words and concepts magic, religion and medicine entails an etic – not emic – approach to the matter'.[72]

The problem with some modern readers, is that modern conceptions of religion and science interfere with our attempt to understand and categorise medieval magic. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that these rigid boundaries between magic, religion and science are products of the post-Reformation and, even more significantly, the post-Enlightenment era. As such, it would be inappropriate to evaluate the medieval magical worldview based on these later constructions and value systems.[73]

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[71] Rudolph Keyser, Peter Andreas Munch and Gustav Storm eds. and trans., *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*: *Ifölge offentlig foranstaltning og tillige med understöttelse af det Kongelige norske videnskabers selskab*. s.n. 1 (Trykt hos C. Gröndahl, 1846), p. 17.

[72] Andrea Maraschi, 'Sympathetic Graphophagy in Late Medieval Scandinavian Leechbooks and Collections of Charms', in *Civilizations of the Supernatural. Witchcraft, Ritual, and Religious Experience in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Traditions*, ed. by Fabrizio Conti, Advances in the History of Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion 1 (Budapest: Trivent Publishing, 2020), pp. 247–64.

[73] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 1–18; Maraschi, 'Sympathetic Graphophagy', pp. 247–48; Bailey, *Fearful spirits*, pp. 5–6; Thomas Ahnert, *Religion and the Origins of the German Enlightenment: Faith and the Reform of Learning in the Thought of Christian*

This approach may hinder the potential for gaining a deeper understanding of the medieval worldview as it relates to magic and its intricate relationship with medicine.

On the contrary, in this study, 'magic' aligns with Kieckhefer's notion of aggregating term.[74] He suggests that the difficulty we have in understanding and delimiting the notion of magic within fixed boundaries is due to the aggregating nature of the word itself.[75] Defining something magic or magical is intrinsically connected to a multi-layered condition, determined by what Kieckhefer has defined as 'constitutive terms'. Kieckhefer's 'constitutive terms' are three and they are: 1) 'conjuration', the ritual of summoning and command of spirits that could be both angels and demons; 2) 'symbolic manipulation', hence the notions of sympathy and contagion through the exploitation of natural forces explained in symbolic terms; 3) 'directly efficacious volition', which brings about malevolent and harmful results.[76] We will see how especially conjuration and symbolic manipulation intertwine their path with religion and medicine in Old Norse medical manuscripts.

When examining Old Norse remedies, it is crucial to acknowledge that acts such as predicting the progression of diseases or pregnancies, along with other significant life events, was not uniformly perceived by all segments of society as a magical practice in the malevolent and harmful sense as understood by religious and legal authorities. As we will see in the following chapters, seemingly magical practices (e.g. charms, amulets and talismans) are integrated within the local and imported medical framework and were collected alongside surgical and botanical practices deemed to be equally efficient. Similarly, the early Icelandic laws declared that *Menn scolo eigi fara meþ steina. eþa magna þa til þess at binda á menn eþa a fé manna. Ef men trva a steina til heilindis ser. eþa fé. oc varþar fiorbavgs Garþ* (people are not to do things with stones or fill them with magic power with the idea of tying them on people or livestock. If a man trusts stones for his health or that of his livestock, the penalty is lesser outlawry).[77] However, medical miscellanies testify to the opposite trend. Extant medieval Icelandic medical texts preserve a learned Lapidary such as the one of

Thomasius, Rochester Studies in Philosophy vol. 12 (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2006); Samuel J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

[74] Richard Kieckhefer, 'Rethinking How to Define Magic,' in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 15–25 (pp. 15–6).

[75] Ibid., p. 17.

[76] Ibid., pp. 17–18.

[77] Finsen, *Grágás,* pp. 22–23*; Laws of Early Iceland,* trans. by Dennis et al., p. 39.

Marbodious of Rennes, in which virtues of stones and gems were attributed to natural phenomena. On the other hand, Icelandic medical manuscripts also display an interest in healing stones grounded on a more empirical framework and practice, as the following excerpts show:

> Steinn sa er koralus heitir. Hann er góðr við augu ok augnamyrkva[78]
> (That stone is called Koralus. It is good for eyes and blindness.)
>
> Item vid þvi. Tak stein þann j saulu kvide finztt er hann bundinn aa mann. Þann er brot fall hefir þa mun honum bætaz.[79]
> (Item for that, take the stone that is found in the stomach of a swallow. If that is bound upon the man that has epilepsy, then he will improve.)[80]

The first remedy is preserved in a fragment of a thirteenth-century leechbook, and the second remedy is found in the leechbook section of a medical miscellany dated to the late fifteenth century. The first remedy suggests using a stone called *koralus* to improve the eyes' condition, but the second is more explicit in using the stone to bring about healing, which is however reminiscent of learned lapidaries. The second remedy reflects the very usage (tying the stone to people) that is being condemned in the early Icelandic laws. Once more, this underscores the faint lines between magic, medicine and religion and what was thought to fall within one category and another. As Mitchell pointed out, magic was not solely a 'poor man's panacea',[81] but it was part of everyday life of the spectrum of society.

From a textual perspective, it is evident that in the surviving Icelandic medical manuscripts, healing practices like the ones previously mentioned, such as the use of hanging stones and amulets, are documented. This suggests that such practices were not limited to oral traditions or confined to lower strata of society; rather, they held written significance. This attests to the notion that these practices were widely known among the Icelandic-Norwegian elites and were considered effective and valuable enough to be preserved in written form. After all, as Mitchell pointed out, in the mid-1300s, even Magnus Eriksson, king of Sweden and Norway, had a stone that he

[78] Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute AM 655 XXX, 4to, fol. 3^{r}.
[79] Leechbook in Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43, fol. 17^{v}.
[80] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 204.
[81] Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic*, p. 62.

believed would sweat if it came near poisons, acting as a prophylactic remedy against being poisoned.[82]

Additionally, one of the manuscripts employed in this study, the fifteenth-century magico-medical manuscript from Iceland, Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo preserves remedies that engage with not only everyday magical rituals (e.g. the use of milk from a woman with a boy child) but with more learned magical practices as well (e.g. sigils against demons). The transmission of rituals based on woman's milk, occurred through both oral traditions and written sources as advised in Egyptian papyri, Babylonian medicine, in Dioscorides and even in the tenth-century Old English *Lacnunga*,[83] allowing them to potentially reach a broader range of practitioners. In contrast, practices involving image magic and practising exorcisms were recognised as legitimate branches of natural philosophy and circulated primarily within an elite environment and literary culture. This indicates that in Iceland, as already recognised by historians in other parts of medieval Europe, the desire to attain power and exert control over the surrounding environment was not confined to a monolithic understanding of a magical worldview that positioned the lower strata of society in opposition to the highest echelons. A more nuanced narrative is required to explore individual and collective perspectives of people who actively sought power in terms of the achieving efficacy.

In my analysis of medical practices documented in Icelandic manuscripts, I perceive healing practices that draw upon natural philosophy, religion and magic as interconnected rituals, forming a continuum where science, religion and magic are inextricably linked. These practices are situated within the framework of what the Waxes refer to as 'power'.[84] Rather than approaching remedies from the perspective of a dichotomy between magic (involving the manipulation of otherworldly forces) and religion (involving the supplication of otherworldly forces), the Waxes' framework, subsequently adopted by Mitchell in the context of Nordic magic, introduces the concept of 'power' as the central focus for users of performative rituals. In this context,

[82] Ibid.
[83] R. A. Buck, 'Woman's Milk in Anglo-Saxon and Later Medieval Medical Texts', *Neophilologus*, 96:3 (2012), 467–85 (p. 472).
[84] Murray Wax and Rosalie H. Wax, 'The Notion of Magic', *Current Anthropology*, 4:5 (1963), 495–518; Rosalie H. Wax, *Magic, Fate and History: The Changing Ethos of the Vikings* (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado Press, 1969); Rosalie H. Wax and Murray Wax, 'The Magical World View', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1 (1962), 179–88; Rosalie H. Wax and Murray Wax, 'Magic and Monotheism', in *Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion: Proceedings of the 1964 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society*, ed. by June Helm (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964) pp. 50–60.

the pursuit of power is understood in terms of achieving effectiveness or desired outcomes.[85]

The pursuit of 'power' in medieval medical practices encompassed a range of methods, including supplicative, manipulative and sympathetic relationships. The concept of power as achieving effective results holds significant appeal within this context, as the primary goal of treatments was to achieve desired outcomes, which were conveyed and transmitted through oral and written traditions. In a society where the biomedical paradigm did not exist yet to define healing, the key to success lay in understanding and harnessing the forces of the universe for the purpose of healing.

To restore health in individuals, treatments drew from all three aspects of healing, recognising their complementary nature and their ability to exert influence in the material world. While certain medical remedies involving prescribed rituals or variations of Christian liturgy may have been viewed unfavourably by some individuals, they were embraced by others regardless of their social status, as previously noted. Likewise, certain prescribed medical rituals underwent reassessment during the high Middle Ages, aligning them with a natural philosophy framework and gaining legitimacy within specific medical authorities by the end of the Middle Ages. As Kieckhefer points out, late medieval European physicians and philosophers acknowledged the existence of three forms of magic associated with natural, angelic and demonic powers.[86] Natural magic was considered a branch of natural philosophy, leading to a re-evaluation of formerly prescribed rituals as efficient and capable of regaining their 'power'.[87]

1. 4. 4 General Principles of Old Norse Medicine: Health, Illness, Disease and Metaphors

The conceptualization of the health domain presents a multifaceted challenge when attempting to establish universal criteria. This complexity arises due to its inherent susceptibility to cultural and sociological perspectives that shape perceptions

[85] Wax and Wax, 'The Magical World View', pp. 182–83; Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic*, p. 13–14.
[86] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 1–2.
[87] Luke E. Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine: The Art of Healing, from Head to Toe* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013).

of what constitutes positive or negative health outcomes. Moreover, these perspectives are not static but rather underwent transformations over time and across different geographical locations.[88] The study of health during the Middle Ages poses challenges for both medieval people and contemporary medical historians in terms of interpretation. Initially, health in this era was governed by principles rooted in natural philosophy and believed to be under the control of divine intervention. Consequently, the medieval conception of health diverges considerably from our contemporary biomedical paradigm. Nonetheless, certain cognitive aspects of health, such as the human capacity to employ metaphorical language when discussing illness, have endured across time and geographic boundaries. This cognitive ability may facilitate a more relatable and comprehensive understanding of historical accounts pertaining to healing practices within various cultural contexts.

Within the field of modern medical anthropology, there exists a persistent challenge in defining fundamental concepts such as health, illness and disease. The difficulty arises from the fact that these terms are inherently subjective and open to diverse interpretations concerning what constitutes favourable or unfavourable conditions for both individual and collective well-being.[89] Anthropologists have made concerted efforts to rationalize and systematize these concepts through various theoretical frameworks and approaches. As a result of this collaborative endeavour, there has emerged a perspective that views 'health' as an inherently flexible and adaptable state, which can only be comprehensively understood when situated within a broader sociocultural and historical context.[90]

By incorporating a sociocultural and historical dimension into the study of health and illness, we gain the opportunity to delve into the realm of rhetorical devices, particularly the use of metaphors, which serve to construct a shared understanding of these states. Metaphors provide a rhetorical narrative that enables a more efficient comprehension of the dichotomy between good and bad health, while also assisting

[88] Bryan S. Turner, 'The History of the Changing Concepts of Health and Illness: Outline of a General Model of Illness Categories', in *Handbook of Social Studies in Health and Medicine*, ed. by Gary L. Albrecht et al. (London: Sage, 2000), pp. 9–23.
[89] Turner, 'The History of the Changing Concepts of Health and Illness', pp. 9–23.
[90] Johannes Siegrist, 'The Social Causation of Health and Illness', in *Handbook of Social Studies in Health and Medicine*, ed. by Gary L. Albrecht et al. (London: Sage, 2000), pp. 100–15; Turner, 'The History of Changing Concepts of health and illness', pp. 9–23; David Armstrong, 'Social Theorizing About Health and Illness', in *Handbook of Social Studies in Health and Medicine*, ed. by Gary L. Albrecht et al. (London: Sage, 2000), pp. 24–35; Mildred Blaxter, *Health*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); the "elastic" condition is further discussed in Merrill Singer and Hans Baer, eds., *Introducing Medical Anthropology: A Discipline in Action*, 3rd edn (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), p. 66.

individuals in grappling with the inevitability of mortality and the experience of suffering. These linguistic devices play a critical role in rationalising and communicating the experience of ill health, and most importantly, in fostering acceptance of such states. Metaphors are intricate constructs deeply rooted in societal values, and they have a profound impact on individuals at multiple levels, encompassing intellectual, emotional and physical dimensions.[91]

Within modern Western medicine, individual and collective discourses surrounding illness and disease, particularly in the case of certain conditions (i.e., cancer amongst all), frequently employ metaphorical frameworks that exhibit a militaristic inclination. These metaphors establish a conceptual connection between the state of being unwell and the terminology and imagery associated with warfare.[92] This approach to disease has produced a metaphoric narrative connected with terminology which tends to depict the body as a battlefield, wherein the Self engages in a battle between health and illness. Therefore, the employment of sentences such as 'to fight against a disease', 'to beat cancer', or again 'to lose the battle against cancer' may resonate with modern readers, as they have become ingrained in the prevailing language and discourse surrounding illnesses in contemporary society. As observed by Stoller, the adoption of this metaphorical narrative leads individuals to conceptualize malignant cells as external entities that intrude upon their personal domain, shaping their cognitive understanding of cancer.[93] The success of this metaphorical narrative in becoming the prevailing discourse within modern society can be attributed to its ability to provide a more accessible and acceptable framework for individuals living with cancer.

Metaphors serve as influential tools that facilitate the process of understanding and interpreting phenomena within society. These symbolic narratives possess the capacity to shape our perception of reality by prescribing specific readings or interpretations for a given phenomenon. When a particular metaphor 'prevails' over others, it becomes assimilated by the collective, thereby engendering a transformation in the collective perception of the associated phenomena.

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[91] Singer et al. eds., *Introducing Medical Anthropology*, p. 66.
[92] Ibid., p. 74.
[93] Paul Stroller, 'Remissioning Life, Reconfiguring Anthropology', in *Confronting Cancer: Metaphors, Advocacy, and Anthropology*, ed. by Juliet McMullin and Diane Weiner (Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 2008), p. 34; Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor, and Aids and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador US, 1990), p. 9. (Web).

Critical theory has sought to warn against the social and political misuse of metaphors when defining a disease. Adopting a scientific stance, critical theory advocates for a reductionist and empirically-grounded discourse on disease, discouraging the use of metaphoric language that could lead to the victimization of patients within the broader societal context.[94] This critique highlights the inherent limitations inherent in employing metaphorical language within the realm of health and illness. Conversely, it posits that adopting a purely scientific approach in narrating disease may be ethically preferable. However, this scientific orientation, which aims to reduce disease to a purely objective discourse, falls short in accommodating the dynamic and socially constructed nature of health and illness over time.

In contrast, social constructionism offers a broader framework for examining the conceptualizations of diseases by emphasising a cognitive approach and examining phenomena through a cultural and historical lens. This perspective enables an exploration of both historical and contemporary understandings of diseases, facilitating a more comprehensive investigation.[95]

Applying social constructionism to the examination of medieval medical practices and theories can offer the modern reader a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals in the Middle Ages developed categories to conceptualize diseases, illness, poor health and physical and emotional distress. During this historical period, society constructed metaphorical narratives as a means to comprehend and make sense of illness. The medieval perception of health and illness was profoundly influenced by a combination of local beliefs, Christian ideology and principles derived from natural philosophy. Factors such as morality, taboos and the transgression of social norms played a pivotal role in shaping treatment approaches and the narratives surrounding illness.

Alaric Hall's research on the Old English interpretation of health and illness provides an illustrative instance of how taboos and social norms were breached. Hall's analysis reveals that within early Old English society, the figure of *ælfe* was associated with human-like, non-monstrous otherworldly beings which society perceived as members of the in-group (a social group characterised by members who perceive

[94] Sontag, Ibid., p. 30.
[95] Peter Conrad and Kristin K. Barker, 'The Social Construction of Illness: Key Insights and Policy Implications', *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 51:1 suppl (2010), S67–S79; Ludmilla Jordanova, 'The Social Construction of Medical Knowledge', *Social History of Medicine,* 8:3 (December 1995), 361–81; Allan M. Brandt, 'Emerging Themes in the History of Medicine', *Milbank Memorial Quarterly,* 69:2 (1991), 199–214 (p. 202).

themselves as akin to each other for features, societal roles and interests).[96] In medical manuscripts, entities such as *ælfe* were traditionally interpreted as superstitious beliefs and, in modern scholarship, classified as potentially dangerous creatures that were distinctly separate from and often juxtaposed against human beings.[97] Nevertheless, this prevailing framework failed to critically examine the reasons behind perceiving these entities as dangerous and the extent of their perceived threat. Hall, on the other hand, effectively demonstrates that this framework was biased and that *ælfe* were initially considered by both Old English individuals and the community as belonging to the societal in-group.[98] Moreover, the perceived danger associated with *ælfe* was limited to transgressions of specific social norms, affecting only members of the human in-group.[99]

By examining corroborating evidence from other Germanic language traditions, a re-assessment of how *ælfe* were believed to cause illness became possible.[100] Hall argued that *ælfe* did not inflict illness through an arrow shot but by performing a ritual called *ælfsīden* and *sīda*, closely related to the Scandinavian *seiðr*.[101] He concludes that it is possible to read the existence of *ælfe* in Old English as a form of enforcing social norms and maintaining balance in society.[102] Contrary to the previous interpretative framework, which reduced *ælfe* to mere superstition,[103] he suggests that *ælfe* in Old English worldviews were a 'social reality', which denotes a reality that is socially constructed and maintained in a community through the collective acceptance of shared social tenets.[104]

Christianity played a significant role in shaping a framework through which interpreting the affliction of a number of diseases upon the human body. Within this framework, Christianity and natural philosophy were intertwined, as they both

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[96] Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell, 2007), pp. 31–32.
[97] Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology vol. 2*, trans. by James Steven Stallybrass (London: Bell, 1882–8), pp. 443–72; Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, Grundriss der germanischen Philologie 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1956–7), pp. 252–64; Lotte Motz, 'Of Elves and Dwarves', *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 29:30 (1973-4), 313–20; Claude Lecouteux, *Les nains et elfes au Moyen Age*, 2nd edn (Paris: Imago, 1997); Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol.1 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994–8), pp. 50–51, 54–56; Paul Acker, 'Dwarf-Lore in *Alvíssmál*', in *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. by Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 215–27.
[98] Hall, *Elves*, pp. 28–34.
[99] Ibid., p. 174.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., p. 97.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Cockayne*, Leechdoms*, pp. xxvii–xxiv*;* Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, p. 92; Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 117–20.
[104] Hall, *Elves*, p. 9

acknowledged that all elements in the world, both earthly and celestial, were created by God and therefore subject to His divine will. This association extended to medieval medical principles, where the intertwining of Christian beliefs and natural philosophical concepts served as an effective approach to comprehending and interpreting ailments. In the context of the plagues during Late Antiquity, Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636 AD) provides a dual explanation, employing both natural philosophical reasoning and Christian theological perspectives to elucidate the nature of this catastrophic phenomenon. Isidore describes the contagion: 'it arises from corrupt air, and by penetrating the viscera settles there'; moreover, he admits that natural phenomena like this are subordinate to God's will. Concerning the same event, Gregory of Tours, writing in the sixth century, believed that plagues resulted from communal sin.[105]

During the late Middle Ages and the early Modern period, metaphorical narratives were prevalent in relation to the occurrence of disease outbreaks. In his study examining the interconnectedness of saints, epidemic management and dragons during the early Middle Ages, Peregrine Horden analysed a distinct metaphorical portrayal of illness. Horden proposed that the motif of dragon-slayer was utilized in hagiographies to symbolically represent and describe epidemics.[106] Within this framework, hagiographic authors exploited dragons and serpents as metaphoric depictions of water-borne diseases (i.e., malaria).[107] Continuing his analysis, Horden further suggests that the accounts of miracles performed to eradicate dragon-infested waters can be interpreted within a historical context. Primary sources indicate that early medieval bishops were actively engaged in combating the spread of epidemics through practical means such as the implementation of drainage systems, rather than through literal dragon hunting.[108] In this context, we observe the emergence of a metaphorical narrative employed by authors of hagiographies to elucidate the concepts of health and illness within a symbolic realm. Within this framework, we can see echoes of Hall's theoretical approach to *ælfe*, where dragons are the embodiment

[105] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks,* trans. by Lewis Thrope (New York, Penguin 2010), ch. 10.1. For further readings on body, soul and sin in Old Norse see Stefka Georgieva Eriksen, 'Body and Soul in Old Norse Culture', in *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Scandinavia, c. 1100-1350,* ed. by Stefka Georgieva Eriksen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 393–428; Gunnar Harðarson, *Littérature et spiritualité en Scandinavie médiévale: La traduction norroise du De Arrha Animae de Hugues de Saint Victor. Étude historique et édition critique*, Bibliotheca Victorina 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).
[106] Peregrine Horden, 'Disease, Dragons and Saints: The Management of Epidemics in the Dark Ages', in *Epidemics and Ideas*: *Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*, ed. by Terence Ranger and Paul Slack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 45–76.
[107] Ibid., p. 75.
[108] Ibid.

of diseases (monstrous beings, out-group members) in contrast with bishops (human-like saviours, in-group members).

Another illustration of the interplay between Christianity and conceptions of health and illness can be found in the role played by saints. Within Christian belief systems, saints held a central position of devotion, as they were believed to possess the ability to intercede with God and bring about good health in accordance with His divine will. Nevertheless, the notion that saints could potentially inflict illness upon those who incurred their wrath, in addition to their primary role as healers, can be traced back to Late Antiquity, although its prominence reached its zenith during the Middle Ages.[109] Between the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries in the Holy Roman Empire, the occurrence of the dancing plague, a mass hysteria event characterized by individuals dancing to the point of exhaustion or death, was ascribed to the influence of St. Vitus. The attribution of the dancing plague to St. Vitus fuelled heightened devotion and efforts to appease the saint's presumed anger.[110]

By drawing upon the theoretical framework of social constructionism and building upon recent research on medieval medicine in both Insular and Continental Europe, this portion of my study aims to explore the cognitive approaches to health and illness within the context of Old Norse medical manuscripts and its possible debts to neighbouring medical traditions. Specifically, this research will investigate how social values can influence and shape the conceptualizations of health and illness within Old Norse society, as well as examine the similarities between Old Norse and Old English medical models in terms of illness metaphors. Through an analysis of remedies found in these manuscripts, this study seeks to interpret the underlying social values embedded within the depicted medical practices.

The subsequent sections will further explore these aspects. By closely examining the entries in the manuscripts, this chapter will present concrete examples of metaphorical narratives that elucidate the social values of health and illness in Old Norse culture. The framework of health and disease that emerges from these medical practices will be viewed as an adaptable construct, subject to negotiation and influenced by local beliefs, Christianity and natural philosophy.

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[109] Alfred Martin, 'Geschichte der Tanzkrankheit in Deutschland', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, 24 (1914), 113–239 (pp. 120-21); Erik H.C. Midelfort, *A History of Madness in 16th-Century Germany (*Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1999), p. 37.

[110] John Waller, *The Dancing Plague. The Strange, True Story of an Extraordinary Illness* (Naperwille: Illinois, 2009), pp. 95–96.

1. 4. 5 Principles, Mechanisms and Worldviews of Pre-Modern Medicine

The principles underlying pre-modern Western medicine,[111] along with its related treatments and medical practices, embody a healing concept that diverges significantly from the modern medical paradigm. The cultural landscape of healing has undergone profound transformations with the emergence of modern medicine and the establishment of germ theory, ushering contemporary society into a biomedical framework of medical practice. While the use of metaphorical language in addressing illness has experienced diachronic changes, it still retains a marginal role in modern society. Consequently, certain universal features can be identified in how humans conceptualize and approach the state of sickness, allowing for broad comparisons between pre-modern and modern healing cultures.

At the core of healing, both then and now, lays the restoration of what is perceived as normal bodily function. This restoration entails the transformation of an unhealthy physical and emotional state into a healthy one. Achieving such a transformation is the ultimate goal of pre-modern and modern treatments; however, the approaches employed to attain this objective differ significantly between the two.

The process of transformation is facilitated through actions that, within a ritual context, are believed to possess effective healing properties. In a modern world, these actions are grounded in the biomedical paradigm, such as the ingestion of paracetamol for its analgesic and antipyretic properties in cases of mild or moderate pain. Conversely, in pre-modern medicine, there were already actions capable of instigating such transformations in the body. While not based on a biomedical paradigm, except for certain herbal remedies, these actions were rooted in the negotiation of three key aspects:

- The most advanced medical intervention at the time (diagnosis and prognosis)
- The belief in a spiritual world that could have a negative physical agency on earthly affairs, and bringing upon the human body illness, ailments and disease (magic)

[111] With “pre-modern medicine” medical historians refers to the body of work, practices and theories on medical aid between ancient medicine and the mid-nineteenth century, when the germ theory and experimental pathology developed.

- The intervention of the divine will (religion)

The demarcation lines separating medical intervention, magic and religion were not as rigid in pre-modern times as they are often perceived by modern readers. Instead, from an emic perspective (i.e., from within the culture being studied), these realms exhibited constant interaction and mutually influenced one another. As Mitchell aptly describes, they collectively contributed to the creation of a comprehensive 'curative cocktail' aimed at healing.[112]

Treatments arising from the negotiation of the aforementioned aspects of intervention encompassed a wide range of practices and techniques, including but not limited to:

- Oral consumption (eating and drinking plain substances or a mixture of them)
- Air consumption, such as smoking or smelling substances
- Practising surgery and bloodletting by cupping or phlebotomy
- Divinatory practices
- Sympathetic treatments, which involve restoring a healthy status through physical contact with specific materials (ligature, amulets and talismans)
- The reciting of formulas

These actions were aimed at restoring normal bodily functions, but their efficacy was based on a different understanding than our modern paradigm. Cultures of healing indeed exhibit numerous variations, yet they consistently strive to facilitate transformative processes through treatments that reflect local worldviews, the latest scientific discoveries, and the interplay between actions and materials or substances.

By conducting a comparative examination of treatments within the context of medieval manuscripts, this thesis will explore how the dislocation of external agents from the body emerges as a significant aspect in facilitating healing in medieval Iceland and Scandinavia. Through an investigation of the healing properties attributed

[112] Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic*, p. 49.

to various treatments, I will examine how Old Norse societies and languages shaped their perceptions of illness based on an invasive model characterized by the presence of external, hostile and monstrous entities. This inquiry will provide evidence of shared approaches and understandings of healing and illness, which can be widely compared with pre-modern pan-European medical discourse, with a particular emphasis on parallels with the invasive model of illness found in Old English.

The case study will primarily focus on interpreting the aetiology of illness, seeking to understand what was believed to be the causes of illness and disease, as well as the criteria for determining good health or protection. Through an examination of treatments rooted in local traditions and those imported from the Continent, this chapter will explore the illness metaphors employed in Old Norse culture to explain and describe the state of sickness and recovery. By examining what medieval people believed to be effective against diseases, ailments, or illnesses, we can gain valuable insights into the social and cultural construction of health and illness. Treatments will be examined from a broader perspective, serving as a vehicle for understanding the emic worldviews of healing, illness and medicine.

1. 4. 6 The Materiality of Illness

Since ancient times, human societies have sought to comprehend the physical and spiritual mechanisms underlying the transition from a state of health to sickness and vice versa. This pursuit of understanding has led to the development of various methods aimed at countering the agency of illness and disease on the human body. From antiquity through the Middle Ages, the aetiology of illness and the corresponding development of treatments were shaped by three distinct levels of intervention.

Firstly, a system of prognosis was introduced by Hippocrates (ca. 460-370 BC) and further developed by his followers, as well as by Galen of Pergamon (ca. 130-210 AD). This system drew upon the intervention of natural phenomena upon the human body and rejected the notion of sickness originating from supernatural or otherworldly sources.[113] This system involved the careful observation of symptoms and natural

[113] Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, pp. 73–88; Galen, *On Prognosis*, ed. by Vivian Nutton (Berlin: Akad. Verlag, 1979); Galen, *Three Treatises on the Nature of Science. On the Sects for Beginners, An Outline of Empiricism, On Medical Experience*, trans. by Richard Walzer and Michael Frede (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), pp. 21–46; Galen, *On the*

phenomena to extract valuable information regarding the progression of illness and to determine appropriate treatment. Remedies within this framework were derived from the natural world and its constituent elements, such as herbs, animal parts, stones or gems, and their interactions with the human body. This approach considered the interconnectedness of the macrocosm (the natural world) and the microcosm (the human body).

Secondly, a fundamental belief shared among medical practitioners was the recognition of disease as an active agent exerting influence over both the body and the mind.[114] This underlying assumption played a crucial role in elucidating the mechanisms responsible for the transition from a state of health to illness and vice versa. Specifically, it was closely associated with the understanding of certain illnesses as being caused by external entities capable of infiltrating the body through various means, such as openings or the external surface, thereby disrupting human well-being.

In accordance with this explanatory framework, the restoration of health necessitated the expulsion or removal of the intrusive entity from the body.[115] Such a physical agency of disease can also have a natural explanation if caused by natural phenomena; therefore, this aetiology was integrated into Hippocratic-Galenic theories. However, such a materiality of the disease could also intersect with magic beliefs. Remedies often involved humans manipulating elements of the natural world to achieve desired outcomes such as, but not limited to, the banishing of malevolent spirits causing illness and progressively reducing the effect of a disease on the human body. Additionally, the agency of disease encompassed a spiritual dimension, which was an inherent component of pre-modern medical practices and aligned with prevailing worldviews of the time. The spiritual dimension recognised that the affliction of disease could be attributed to the intervention of divine will or other supernatural

Therapeutic Method, vol. 1-2, transl. with an introduction and commentary by Robert J. Hankinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1991), pp. xxxix, 269.

[114] Karen L. Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 143–45; Audrey L. Meaney, 'Extra Medical Elements in Anglo-Saxon Medicine', *Social History of Medicine*, 24:1 (2011), 41–56; Meaney, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness, Health, Disease and Healing', pp. 13–33; Stefanie Künzel, 'Þu miht wiþ þam laþan ðe geond lond færð: Concepts of Disease in Anglo-Saxon Charms', in *New Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Medicine in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Erin Connelly and Stefanie Künzel (Summertown, Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, 218), pp. 5–18.

[115] Meaney, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness', pp. 10–25.

forces, but it also acknowledged the potential for these forces to alleviate the suffering of the afflicted individuals.[116]

This third aspect regarded the divine will to be at times the cause and most of the time the solution to earthly afflictions. This gave rise to treatments exploiting Judeo-Christian liturgical and biblical elements and combining them with other herbal or animal remedies and performative rituals to achieve healing. Within this religious context, among the most productive source of inspiration were prayers and episodes drawn from the Bible, some of which concerned healing miracles. These episodes were used to create *historiola*, also known as narrative charms, which were verbal or written incantations based on specific biblical narratives and believed to exert healing powers through their sympathetic relationship between the healing miracle described and the patient.

The tripartite framework of medical intervention, inherited from Late Antiquity, was also evident in medieval medicine across Continental and Insular Europe. This framework was further enriched by its integration with Christian beliefs and principles.[117] Old Icelandic medical manuscripts, dating from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, serve as valuable sources that reflect this tripartite apparatus. By examining the scribes' selection and preservation of particular remedies within these manuscripts, we can discern the presence of all three levels of intervention—prognosis, physical agency of disease and spiritual dimensions—originating from Late Antique and Continental medieval medicine. However, these elements are filtered through an Icelandic context, demonstrating the unique intersection of local beliefs, cultural practices and medical knowledge:

1. Such remedies and recipes reveal an interest in applying a system of prognosis and diagnosis, according to Hippocratic-Galenic theories. Roman-Greek influence is evident from using local herbs and ingredients in the same manner as Mediterranean remedies. Secondly, such influence is evident in using

[116] Faye M. Getz, eds., *Healing and Society in Medieval England: A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. xix; 'Document 47. Gregory of Tours on Epidemic Disease and the Sickness of the Kings', in *Medicine and Healing in the Premodern West: A History in Documents,* ed. by Winston Black (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2020), pp. 137–38; Caesarius of Arles, *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis sermones*, ch. 17, 43, 57, 207; Valerie Flint, 'The Early Medical 'Medicus', the Saint and the Enchanter', *The Society for the Social History of Medicine,* 2:2 (1989), 127–42 (p. 132).
[117] Andrew T. Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism and the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 18–22.

prognostication based on the Galenic *signa mortifera* (signs of death) and, lastly, in re-establishing humoral balance in the body.

2. They show a practical interest in counteracting illness' effects through the physical dislocation of illness from the body, which is best evidenced by the banishment of hostile beings which belong to the Old Norse and Old Icelandic worldviews, including but not limited to *álfar, tröll* and *draugar*.
3. They accommodate a religious view of medical intervention by exploiting the *Christus Medicus* trope and exploiting Judeo-Christian liturgical formulas in the remedies.

The shared characteristic among all these levels of medical intervention lays on their fundamental premise: the disruption of bodily equilibrium caused by an external entity, whether of supernatural or natural origin. The conceptualization of diseases and illness as external causes has ancient roots and can be observed across various pan-European conceptions of illness agency, as evidenced by practices such as exorcisms, and in the use of written and oral charms or amulets when banishing external malevolent forces. Similar beliefs and practices can be traced back to early Germanic societies, indicating a widespread understanding of illness as being influenced by external forces that must be addressed and remedied. One notable example of early Germanic treatments that align with the invasive model of illness, necessitating the removal of the disruptive entity, is the Old Saxon *Contra Vermes* charm found in the ninth-century codex Vindobonensis 751.[118] Within this text, the process of expelling a *nesso* (worm) from the body, which is causing the illness, is depicted through the recitation and enumeration of various body parts that the worm must traverse in order to be expelled.[119]

Contra vermes

Gang ût, nesso, mit nigun nessiklînon,
ût fana themo margę an that ben, fan themo bene an that flesg,
ut fan themo flesgke an thia hud, ût fan thera hud an thesa strala.

[118] Wien, ONB, Codex Vindobonensis 751, f. 188^{v}.
[119] Brian Murdoch, 'Charms, Recipes, and Prayers', in *German Literature of the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Brian Murdoch (Boydell & Brewer, 2004), pp. 57–72 (p. 61).

Drohtin, uuerthe so.[120]

(Against worms
Go out worm, with nine little worms,
Out from the mark onto the bone, and from the bone onto the flesh,
out from the flesh onto the skin, out from the skin onto this arrow. Lord, make it so).

In the medical manuscripts and archaeological discoveries from Iceland and Scandinavia, a range of remedies can be found that focus on expelling malevolent agents from the body in order to restore health. These remedies employ diverse strategies to achieve the dislocation of the malevolent agent, often involving the concept of a sympathetic relationship. This relationship is occasionally manifested through the alleviation of disease symptoms and a reduction in the entity's influence over the body, thereby increasing the counteracting agency (i.e., a token) against the illness. On certain occasions, this sympathetic relationship may be represented by reciting a counting-up formula (i.e., *G, Gi, Gina, Gisman, Gismand, Gismanda, Gismanndand*), which metaphorically represents the increased healing effects of a given token on the body.[121] On other occasions, the malevolent entity is kept away by amulets or written and spoken charms which warn the illness away by calling upon biblical Archangels and Christian saints. Furthermore, the concept of a sympathetic relationship can be exemplified through the utilization of narrative that draws an analogy between the afflicted individual and a biblical event associated with the restoration of bodily health. This narrative technique serves to establish a connection between the sufferer and a sacred context, thus enhancing the belief in the potential for healing and the restoration of well-being.

In the realm of Old Norse remedies, the understanding of illness as a metaphorical physical agent with tangible effects reflects a dynamic interplay between local beliefs and medieval Christian motifs. However, it is worth considering that the materiality of illness was not a concept exclusive to the medieval period but can be traced back to ancient and classical societies. The medieval practitioners, healers and learned physicians appropriated and incorporated this notion into their own healing systems.

[120] Wilhlmen Braune et al., eds., 'Segensformeln', in *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch: Zusammengestellt und mit Wörterbuch versehen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), pp. 89–92 (p. 90).
[121] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 75.

1. 5 An Overview of the Thesis

1. 5. 1 Old Norse Medical Sources

In the initial chapter of this thesis, I will provide an overview of the relevant sources and outline their intended usage in the research. I will focus on Old Norse medical manuscripts originating from thirteenth to late fifteenth century Iceland exhibiting philological interconnectedness between them and other manuscripts traditions. Some of these connections have already established by previous scholars, others are instead underexplored and represent a second stream of circulation of medical practices in the North. I will elucidate the issues surrounding this second stream of medical practices in Iceland and outline the subsequent research plans. Within the manuscript context, I will also investigate the overarching influence of English medical texts and English textual parallels on Old Norse medicine, considering the historical background that justifies such a dialogue. Moreover, recent scholarship has shed light on the textual relationships between English centres of learning, their cathedral schools and the production of manuscripts in Iceland.[122] This provides valuable evidence regarding the acquisition of medical knowledge and manuscripts from England for use in Iceland.

Evidence of medical knowledge and practices in Old Norse culture can also be gleaned from Old Norse sagas and verses, thereby offering valuable insights into healing and medicine of the time. The significance of these literary works lays on their incorporation of references to medical practices or more broadly defined medical evidence. Such references encompass passing mentions of medical fees, physical impairments, the aetiology of illnesses and other themes related to the body, health, illness and ailments. These literary depictions parallel the practices and theories found within the manuscript corpus. Although these are not the main object of study of this thesis, they will be presented here to better exemplify how some medical evidence in the sagas and poetry corpus can offer a complementary insight into medical practices conveyed within the manuscript corpus.

[122] Christian Etheridge and Michele Campopiano, *Medieval Science in the North: Travelling Wisdom, 1000-1500*, Knowledge, Scholarship, and Science in the Middle Ages 2 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2021)*;* Vittoria Dolcetti Corazza, 'Crossing Paths in the Middle Ages: the Physiologus in Iceland', in *The Garden of Crossing Paths: The Manipulation and Rewriting of Medieval Texts: Venice, October 28-30,* eds. Marina Buzzoni and Massimiliano Bampi (Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2007) pp. 225–48; Etheridge, 'Manuscript Culture between Iceland and Lincoln', pp. 29–58.

1. 5. 2 Empirical and Learned Medicine in Iceland and Scandinavia

After having explored the manuscript corpus, establishing the historical context of medieval England's religious and cultural influence on Iceland, and the theoretical background of my research, the second chapter examines the interplay between empirical and learned medicine in relation to one case study of healing practices within the manuscript context. The objective is to elucidate the convergence of empirical and learned traditions within these texts and to develop an approach for comparing them to similar practices found in sagas, the Edda corpus and archaeological evidence. The overarching goal is to expand upon the scope of the first chapter and conduct a thorough investigation of the healing practices portrayed in the manuscript corpus, ultimately providing a typology of healing ideas and rituals. This typology of remedies will enable the differentiation between imported and local practices through the identification of parallels within manuscripts, literary works and archaeological discoveries.

The survey conducted in this chapter will establish a typology of healing practices that encompasses local elements in contrast to the imported learned materials. It will demonstrate how literature, archaeology, and, on occasion, medical manuscripts have preserved local traditions alongside remedies rooted in the humoral theory and Galeno-Hippocratic anatomy. However, it is important to acknowledge that an understanding of local medical practices rooted in the pre-Christian healing framework employed in Scandinavia cannot be derived solely from literary sources, as written documentation emerged only with the advent of Christianity and its impact on the region.[123]

The convergence of empirical and learned medicine raises additional intriguing questions, particularly in relation to the boundaries of two intertwined and complex concepts: magic and religion. To examine the influence of magic and religion on the development of medical treatments, this study will adopt a theoretical framework grounded in recent scholarship on the intersection of magic, religion and medicine in both Continental and Scandinavian contexts.[124] The results of this chapter will

[123] Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'The Church and Written Culture', in *The Manuscripts of Iceland*, ed. by Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Árni Magnùsson Institute, 2004), pp. 13–23.
[124] Catharina Raudvere, '*Trolldómr* in Early Medieval Scandinavia', in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages,* ed. by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 73–171; Sophie Page and Catherine Rider eds., *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2019); Siam Bhayro and Catherine Rider eds., *Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early-Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to*

demonstrate that an intertwined emic perspective of magic, religion and medicine in medieval Iceland.

1. 5. 3 Illness Metaphors in Iceland and England

Continuing the exploration of conceptual models of illness in Iceland previously outlined in the chapter about the theoretical background, the fourth chapter of this thesis will compare and expand upon ideas of illness and disease, particularly focusing on remedies that illustrate an invasive model of illness. The concept of the invasive model of illness entails the figurative representation of illness as an external hostile agent (e.g., a demon, a witch, an ogre or a ghost) bringing discomfort upon humankind. The invasive model of illness is not exclusive to the Old Norse medical tradition, but it constitutes a characteristic shared across all pre-modern medical systems both before the advent of Hippocrates and its 'rational' medicine based on natural phenomena and afterwards. Evidence of such a figurative interpretation of illness and disease that has a bodily agency is traceable back to early Egyptian papyri and Mesopotamians medicine such as Sumerian, Akkadian or Babylonian.[125] This framework persisted as a comprehensible paradigm embraced by broader segments of societies and medical practitioners throughout the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. This endurance is evidenced by the remedies directed at countering afflictions believed to be caused by otherworldly and supernatural creatures extant in medical miscellanies.[126]

This conceptual framework holds significant relevance within the context of my thesis, as I will argue that even within Old Norse society, as an integral component of the broader pre-modern medical system, a distinctive mode of interpreting illness and disease prevailed. Central to this shared framework is the personification, demonisation and conceptualisation of illness as a hostile external entity, positioned

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the Medieval Universe (Philadelphia: Philadelphia State University Press, 2013); Rider, 'Medical Magic and the Church in Thirteenth-Century England', pp. 92–107; Stephen A. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2011); Katherine Park, 'Medicine and Society in Medieval Europe, 500-1500', in *Medicine in Society: Historical Essays*, ed. by Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 59–90; Park, 'Medicine and Magic', pp. 129–149; Peregrine Horden, 'Medieval Medicine', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Medicine*, ed. by Mark Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 40–59; Monica H. Green, 'Conversing with the Minority: Relations among Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Women in the High Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval History*, 34 (2008), 105–18.

[125] Winston Black, 'Introduction', in *Medicine and Healing in the Premodern West: A History in Documents,* ed. by Winston Black (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2020), p. 12; Gary B. Ferngren and Ekaterina N. Lomperis, *Essential Readings in Medicine and Religion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 1–13.

[126] Cockayne, *Leechdoms,* vol. 3, pp. 47–49, 53–56.

in contrast to the human beings in manuscript corpus. The study will employ accounts of healing practices drawn from the sagas and poetry corpora to elucidate correspondences of attitudes towards concepts of medicine, health and illness in the medical manuscripts and the literary realm.

The research will demonstrate the effectiveness of this model in understanding why and how the human body becomes sick, metaphorically representing it as an attack by external hostile disease agents. Importantly, this model will be shown to extend beyond medieval Icelandic society, as evidence from late Old English society and Old English medical texts indicates its presence there as well.

In conclusion, the chapter will draw attention to philological parallels between Old Norse medical manuscripts and extant *Leechbooks* from Old and Middle English. This comparative analysis will reveal that a significant number of remedies in both corpora share similar attitudes towards practices and ingredients, suggesting potential textual and cultural contacts between the two societies. By highlighting these connections, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between medical traditions in different linguistic and cultural contexts.

1. 5. 4 Medical Practices in Medieval Iceland and England

In this concluding chapter, I undertake an examination of the comparative analysis of remedies excerpted from Old Norse medical manuscripts and their counterparts found in Old and Middle English medical texts. The sources under examination encompass a range of seminal texts, including the tenth-century medical compendium, *Lacnunga*, the eleventh-century Old English *Herbarium*, the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* and the twelfth-century Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17.

There is an inherent chronological disjunction here between Old English and the Old Norse medical texts, owing to the Old English being written between the tenth and the twelfth century, whereas the Old Norse texts are dated later from the middle of the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. There may appear a lack of temporal overlap between these two traditions which would not explain how Old English texts transited to Old Norse. My argument here will revolve around the many points of historical contacts happened between the two written traditions through which remedies from

Old English medicine, although of older origin, could have been transmitted and assimilated in the Old Norse medical milieu.

This final chapter serves to provide a synthesis the pivotal role played by three major instances of contact with the English written tradition. These encounters occurred during the early learning trips to England (eleventh to twelfth century), the intermediation facilitated by Norway (1264-1380 AD) and the consequential weakening of the Kalmar Union (fifteenth century). Subsequently, Iceland found itself exposed to a diverse array of written texts, encompassing medical literature, as a result of these historical developments. These multifaceted interactions contributed to the enrichment and diversification of Iceland's intellectual and cultural landscape.

Chapter 2

Old Norse Medicine in Context

2.1 Medicine in Old Norse Sources: Manuscripts, Literature and Archaeology

The exploration of health, illness and medicine with their cultural interpretations and literary representations remain themes that require further examination within Old Norse studies. While recent scholarship has partially investigated this subject matter, it has predominantly approached it from the angles of bodily emotions, archaeological discoveries and the dissemination of scientific knowledge.[1]

Learning from these early contributions, my study will turn the focus to medical practices preserved in medical texts such as leechbooks, book of simples, *Herbaria* and *Lapidaria*, which feature in medical, magico-medical and encyclopaedic manuscripts. This study of medical practices will emphasise the relationship with their sources by exploring shared motifs and patterns of interpreting illness in Old Norse and Old and Middle English texts.

The existence of surviving accounts and material evidence pertaining to medical intervention is of significant importance, as it provides valuable insights into the practical aspects of illness and medicine beyond the scope of manuscript traditions. These instances demonstrate that medieval Icelanders held a literary interest in these themes and incorporated medical knowledge into various forms of written expression. Moreover, the survival of medicinal remedies offers tangible evidence of a living tradition of medical intervention, which often aligns with the practices recorded in manuscripts. Regardless of whether we approach this subject matter from a literary, archaeological, or manuscript perspective, the writings and material artifacts reveal that medieval Icelanders engaged with healing through diverse avenues.

[1] Þorgeirsdóttir, 'The Head, the Heart, and the Breast', pp. 29–64; Þorgeirsdóttir, 'The Language of Feeling in Njáls Saga and Egils Saga', pp. 9–50; Etheridge, 'The Evidence for Islamic Scientific Works in Medieval Iceland', pp. 49–74; Corazza, 'Crossing paths in the Middle Ages', pp. 225–48; Etheridge, 'Manuscript Culture between Iceland and Lincoln', pp. 29–58; Jesch and Lee, 'Healing Runes', pp. 386–98; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*, pp. 116–62.

These practices, as preserved in all three contexts, indicate three key aspects: firstly, the influence of Continental centres of learning, as many remedies found in these contexts exhibit a classical origin. Secondly, an empirical approach to healing based on popular and widely known medical remedies, accessible across different social statuses and educational backgrounds. Lastly, they unveil a substratum of local beliefs that intermingles with the Latin and Classical cultures fostered by Christianity.

In this chapter, I will present the primary sources relevant to my research, with a particular focus on the medical tradition within the manuscripts. This will provide the necessary context for understanding the relationship between the surviving manuscripts and the research questions addressed in this thesis. The corpus under examination includes one complete medical miscellany and three fragmentary texts, which have been preserved in scientific manuscripts alongside a collection of practical texts encompassing scientific, culinary and encyclopaedic subjects. The manuscripts that form the basis of this investigation were written in the vernacular (Old Icelandic) with occasional Latin, Hebrew, Greek and runic interpolations. These texts encompass a range of medical practices found within leechbooks, books of simples, charms, computistics, magic and astrology texts, as well as encyclopaedic sections.

The extant medical texts within the manuscript context exhibit a distinct pragmatic character. They are recorded for consultation purposes, serving as reference volumes and providing guidance on the correct administration of specific medical practices. This pragmatic nature sets them apart from medical remedies found in literary sources such as the *Poetic Edda* and the sagas. Moreover, this characteristic aligns them more closely with the pragmatic use of medical practices observed in archaeological findings.

This study will employ medieval Icelandic literary sources to elucidate how they may contribute to a more comprehensive analysis of medical practices preserved in manuscripts. These secondary sources encompass the depiction of practices found in the *Poetic Edda* and the sagas (especially *Íslendingasögur* and *samtíðarsögur*), which diverge significantly from the medical practices preserved in medical manuscripts in terms of practical application and material intervention. Nevertheless, by adopting a comparative perspective, we can examine the motifs underlying conceptions of illness and patterns of medical intervention found in these literary sources and compare them with those documented in the manuscript context.

Another significant corpus of evidence for my analysis is derived from material culture and archaeological artifacts from Nordic regions, particularly amulets worn for prophylactic purposes originating from the Scandinavian peninsula, Jutland and Northern Germany. The medical practices conveyed within the context of these amulets resonate with the pragmatic purpose evidenced in medical and scientific manuscripts. The remedies preserved within the amulets exist precisely because they were believed to possess healing properties. Consequently, when charms or prayers are inscribed onto amulets and carried by the sick, they offer us a pragmatic glimpse into the material aspects of health and illness, akin to the remedies found in scientific manuscripts.

Despite the differences occurring in representing medicine in literary genres, manuscripts and other written formats, these texts can complement each other when approached from a comprehensive perspective. The occurrence of medical themes across a plethora of genres affords us an analysis of healing not only from a pragmatic viewpoint (medical manuscript), but also how the intersection of surrounding factors determined the narrative of health and illness in mythology, hagiography, saga literature and poetry and how these narratives relate to the manuscript tradition.

2.2 Manuscript Production and Medical Knowledge in Iceland

The surviving medical manuscripts from medieval Iceland primarily comprise texts written in Old Icelandic, as well as a highly standardised forms of Latin, Hebrew and Greek. These manuscripts are dated from the latter half of the thirteenth century (Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to) to the late fifteenth century, approximately around 1500 AD (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43). The majority of the content found within these manuscripts originated on the Continent and in the Mediterranean region, subsequently assimilated and reworked within the cultural context of Old Norse society.

In Iceland, the extant medical practices are preserved within two distinct categories of manuscripts: encyclopaedic manuscripts and magico-medical manuscripts. Encyclopaedic manuscripts can be further categorised into two subtypes based on their emphasis. Some of these manuscripts exhibit a pronounced medical focus, housing a larger collection of medical books alongside ancillary encyclopaedic

texts, such as treatises on maritime matters and culinary instructions. These encyclopaedic manuscripts with a stronger medical orientation will be referred to as 'medical manuscripts' for the sake of convenience. Conversely, other surviving manuscripts exhibit an opposite tendency, displaying a notable inclination towards encyclopaedic and scientific texts, such as treatises on geography, alongside a smaller selection of medical books.

The second type of manuscripts, that I define here as magico-medical manuscripts as preserving magical practices along with medical remedies, comprises only a solitary surviving Icelandic manuscript. Within this context, the medical practices are interspersed throughout the text with various other rituals pertaining to subjects such as love, warfare, gambling and luck, thus illuminating the compiler's interests and concerns.

Medical, encyclopaedic and magico-medical manuscripts were composed with a practical objective in mind, either to address didactic requirements or to serve as a comprehensive reference work for utilization during times of necessity. Due to their utilitarian nature, the information concerning medieval medicine documented in scientific manuscripts differs from that found in literary sources. Medical texts were often methodically structured, featuring divisions dedicated to specific categories of remedies or ailments, thereby fulfilling a dual mnemonic and referential purpose that also reflects the treatment taxonomy prevalent in the Mediterranean region. For example, some of these texts were organised following a head-to-toe system, presenting afflictions according to the respective anatomical regions of the human body from the uppermost part (the head) to the lower extremities (the feet or toes).[1] Another mnemonic-oriented approach entailed the concise formulation of remedies, whereby only the necessary ingredients were mentioned without specifying their quantities. This deliberate brevity facilitated the reader's recollection of the appropriate remedy for each ailment and the optimal timing for administration.[2]

Recipes within these manuscripts adhered to a distinctive structure which includes five key elements. Firstly, they began with an observation or identification of the particular ailment or disease to be addressed. Subsequently, one or more principal ingredients were recommended, encompassing various substances such as herbs,

[1] Anne Van Arsdall, 'Reading Medieval Medical Texts with an Open Mind', in *Textual Healing: Essays on Medieval and Early Modern Medicine*, ed. by Elizabeth Lane Furdell, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 9–29 (pp. 18–19).
[2] Ibid., p. 17.

animal parts, stones, or even verbal incantations. Instructions on the preparation and utilization of these ingredients followed, specifying actions such as grinding, mixing, chopping, writing, or engraving.

The fourth element entailed guidance on the administration of the resulting mixture, either by administering it to the afflicted individual or by applying it directly to the wound or affected area. Finally, the recipes concluded by indicating the anticipated outcome, often employing phrases such as 'This remedy really works' to denote the expected efficacy of the treatment.[3] As noted by Riddle in 1974, a prevalent perspective in contemporary scholarship, medical manuscripts frequently exhibit imprecise recipes.[4] This characteristic has prompted scholars to hypothesize the existence of an apprenticeship system within early medieval society, wherein seasoned masters imparted their healing knowledge and skills to aspiring apprentices.[5] Hence, practical recipes may have served as the foundation for an oral mode of education and a mnemonic system of documentation. From this perspective, the brevity and recurring patterns observed in the recipes also possessed a mnemonic dimension, encapsulating a wealth of profound knowledge that was transmitted orally across generations within the community.

The systematic structure and remedial patterns found in Old Icelandic medical manuscripts bear a striking resemblance to those originating from the Mediterranean region during the period spanning from Antiquity to early Middle Ages and, as we will see, some of these remedies bear striking resemblance to early medieval English remedies. Regardless of whether the medical entries are found in medical, encyclopaedic, or magico-medical manuscripts, contemporary readers can discern a systematic arrangement that fulfils both mnemonic and referential purposes.

Although Old Icelandic medical manuscripts were compiled at various points in history between the thirteenth and late fifteenth centuries, their narratives and texts share philological connections. To provide a chronological overview, the extant manuscripts are briefly introduced below, with detailed exploration to follow in subsequent sections. These manuscripts include: the thirteenth-century fragment Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to, a late fourteenth-century medical book found in Copenhagen, AM 194 8vo, a late fifteenth-century magico-medical compilation

[3] Ibid., p. 19.
[4] Ibid., pp. 19–20; John M. Riddle, 'Theory and Practice in Medieval Medicine', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 5 (1974), 157–84 (pp. 63–5).
[5] Riddle, ibid., pp. 163–65; Van Arsdall, ibid., pp. 19–20.

Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo and a medical miscellany dating from the late fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries, catalogued as Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43. These manuscripts represent two distinct medical traditions that circulated within medieval Iceland and Scandinavia.

Philological investigations have revealed that one of these traditions can be traced back to a shared foundational text, which was rooted in the realm of scholarly medicine and Henrik Harpestræng's medical writings († 1244), a Danish healer and canon of Roskilde.[6] The widespread distribution of Harpestræng's medical texts is evident from its presence in numerous Icelandic, Norwegian and Danish manuscript copies, suggesting that it was known and circulated across the Scandinavian region.[7] The second tradition, which features both learned and empirical remedies, has been recognised as distinct from Harpestræng's tradition. However, a precise precursor for this particular tradition has yet to be identified.[8]

In the early twentieth century, Henning Larsen presented the initial *stemma codicum* (a family tree of manuscripts) for Old Norse medical manuscripts. Larsen's analysis placed particular emphasis on the manuscript Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43, which he considered the primary source, while regarding Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo as secondary in importance.[9] Larsen's contribution extended beyond consolidating the notion that a learned tradition of medical practices had reached Iceland via Danish and Norwegian channels. He also brought attention to an intriguing observation that he was unable to thoroughly investigate at that stage. During his palaeographic examination, Larsen encountered certain remedies within the Icelandic manuscripts that exhibited comparable content and linguistic characteristics to those found in Old English medical texts. However, he only hinted at the potential presence of a more subtle influence from medieval England, and he focussed predominantly on the palaeographic evidence of cross-contamination from Danish and Norwegian medical manuscripts.[10]

Subsequent to Larsen's pioneering work on the *stemma codicum*, further research has been undertaken to strengthen the understanding of a dual medical

[6] Marius Kristensen, *Harpestræng. Gamle danske Urtebøger* (København: H. H. Thiele, 1908-1920), p. 283; Christian Molbech, *Henrik Harpestrengs danske Lægebog fra det trettende Århundrede* (København: H. H. Thiele, 1826), p. 2.
[7] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, pp. 16–49.
[8] Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 10–11.
[9] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 39.
[10] Ibid.

tradition. In 2007, Fabian Schwabe proposed a revised version of Larsen's *stemma*. Schwabe conducted a survey of Old Icelandic medical manuscripts with the aim of identifying two distinct streams of dissemination for medical practices and theories in the northern region. One stream, as originally suggested by Larsen, can be traced back to Harpestræng's work. The other stream, Schwabe observed, originates from a compilation of remedies sourced from diverse origins, including Salernitan works, a Danish leechbook (AM 187a, 8vo) and additional texts that have yet to be definitively identified.[11] The *stemma codicum* proposed by Schwabe, depicted in the diagram below, illustrates the interrelationships between various Old Icelandic medical manuscripts and their connections to both medical traditions. One tradition traces its lineage back to Harpestræng, and this lineage includes three out of the four Old Icelandic medical texts, namely the book of simples, lapidary and cookbook, which are preserved within the Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43. Partial connections to this tradition can also be observed in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo and Copenhagen, AM 194 8vo.[12] The *stemma codicum* also shows the relationship between the Old Icelandic medical texts and a third stream of circulation, of which we know little in terms of ancestry.

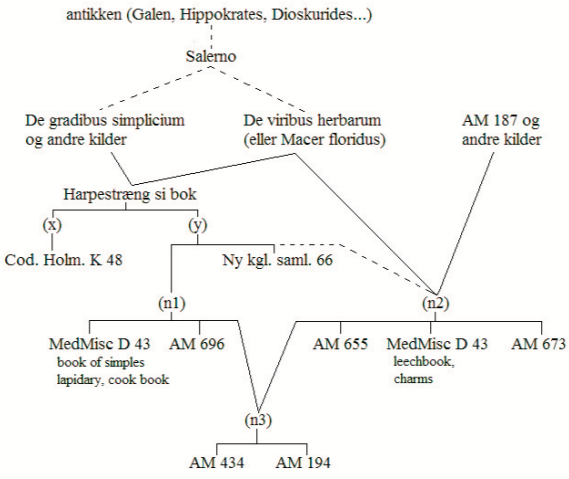

Figure 1. *Stemma codicum* proposed by Fabian Schwabe in Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 10–11.

The ancestor manuscript of the learned stream, represented in the *stemma codicum* by some sections of the Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43 and by the

[11] Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 10–11.
[12] Henrik Harpestræng, *Gamalnorsk Fragment av Henrik Harpestreng*, ed. by Marius Hægstad (Kristiania: Dybwad 1906).

Danish and Norwegian copies of the Old Danish *Herbarium* (OD. *Urtebog*).[13] Henrik Harpestræng's *Urtebog* is particularly interesting to this study because it seems to share parallel passages with at least three out of the four Old Icelandic medical texts (the book of simples, lapidary and cookbook in the Dublin, manuscript and in, Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, and Copenhagen, AM 194 8vo). We owe to his intellectual legacy the introduction of learned medical practices from the Mediterranean area, especially from Salerno to Scandinavia and Iceland, as the content of his herbal book heavily draws on Macer Floridus' *De viribus herbarum* and Constantinus Africanus' *De Gradibus Simplicium*.[14]

On the other side of the *stemma codicum*, we have the extant manuscript representing a second stream of circulation, which includes the leechbook and the charm section in the Dublin manuscript, the fragment Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to, and some passages in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, and Copenhagen, AM 194 8vo. These medical texts exhibit shared characteristics that do not appear to be present in the Old Danish herbal book.

The reconstruction of the Old Icelandic medical corpus has given rise to the possibility of the existence of a second medical book that circulated within Scandinavia and Iceland. This book contained medical content that extended beyond the influence of Salerno or other well-known centres of learning, encompassing a compilation of both scholarly and empirical medical practices. Comparable passages with Bede the Venerable, charms and prognostics indicate the diverse nature of this second medical tradition.

Through an examination of recipe patterns, motifs, medical intervention techniques and ingredients, I aim to analyse the remedies derived from this second medical tradition which I will argue are partially rooted in the Old English medical tradition and texts. The remedies featured in the second stream of circulation derived

[13] For medieval reception of the Urtebog in Scandinavia area see Uppsala, University Library, D 600 8°, a fifteenth-century manuscript collecting medical texts. The *Liber Herbarum* is included in fols. 175–195; Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 792 4°, also a fifteenth-century paper manuscript of mixed contents. Fols. 147^{r}–152^{v} preserve forty-eight chapters, each containing the description of an herb from the *Liber Herbarum*; Giessen, University Library, Ms. Giessensis 610. fol.: A paper manuscript from the middle of the fifteenth century. Twenty-six chapters from the *Liber Herbarum* are found in fols. 17^{v}–19 and two further chapters on fols. 42^{r}–44^{r}; Vienna, National Library, Bibl. Pal. Vind. Cod. 2962: A paper manuscript from the last half of the fifteenth century. Fols. 60^{v}–66^{r} preserve forty-five chapters of the *Liber Herbarum*; Copenhagen, Royal Library, GKS 3457 8°, from the beginning of the sixteenth century have forty-three chapters from the *Liber Herbarum* on fols. 144^{v}–151^{r}; Copenhagen, Royal Library, NKS 67 8°, from the end of the sixteenth century have five herbs from the *Liber Herbarum* at fols. 97–122.

[14] Charles Coulston Gillispie et al., *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (Detroit, Mich.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008), pp. 123–24.

from diverse medical traditions, including Danish medicine and earlier Latin copies of Macer Floridus, as Schwabe observed. However, I will argue that a number of remedies reflect a striking resemblance to eleventh and twelfth century English medical compilations. The resemblances that exist between the Old Norse and the Old English remedies is based upon palaeographical, linguistic and cultural interpretation of illness and health which will be explored in the last two chapters of this thesis.

In the ensuing sections, I will delineate the key surviving Old Norse scientific manuscripts that prominently feature this second medical tradition to provide the adequate context from which to take my examination further.

2. 2. 1 A Medical Miscellany: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43

The manuscript MS 23 D 43, preserved at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin, is the only complete surviving Old Norse medical manuscript from Iceland. Dated to the last quarter of the fifteenth century or very early sixteenth century, this Icelandic medical manuscript shows predominantly an interest in medicine, while also displaying less interest in encyclopaedic literature. It was compiled by two main anonymous scribes, four assistant scribes and an interpolator.[15] With the exception of a brief chapter on the sea and a cookbook, the manuscript is entirely dedicated to medicine. The Dublin manuscript contains a section about charms, a book of simples, an *antidotarium*, a lapidary, a leechbook and a cookbook. As previously mentioned, the book of simples, the lapidary and the cookbook, seem to be an indirect copy of Harpestræng's Old Danish herbal book.[16] Conversely, the remaining sections exhibit a certain degree of resemblance with other medical fragments, albeit with uncertain origins.[17]

The first critical edition on Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43 along a few articles were published in the in the 1930s by Larsen, paving the way for furthering the studies of medieval Icelandic medicine. In his study of the Dublin manuscript,

[15] "Icelandic Medical Manuscript" *ISOS (Irish Scripts on Screen)*, accessed on 6 July 2023 https://www.isos.dias.ie/RIA/RIA_MS_23_D_43.html
[16] Chapter 1, p. 74.
[17] Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', p. 6.

Larsen suggested that there might have been two ways for medieval Icelanders to adopt Salernitan practices: one through the Danish influence via the work of Henrik Harpestræng, and a second one through an Old English stream. Larsen noted that the section on bloodletting found in the Dublin manuscript is substantially similar to the one found in two Old English manuscripts: the Cambridge, University Library Gg.5.35 (Canterbury Classbook) and Oxford, St John's College, MS 17 dated to the eleventh century and the twelfth century respectively. In order to substantiate his findings, Larsen presented compelling evidence of an additional similarity between the Dublin and the Oxonian manuscript. He observed that the Galen's prognostication in the leechbook within the Dublin codex closely resembled its counterpart in Oxford, St John's College, MS 17.[18] This further grounded Larsen's hint of existing English textual parallels in Old Icelandic medical manuscripts. Further study of the Oxonian manuscript carried out by Faith Wallis in the project 'The Calendar and the Cloister' has shown that the bloodletting section in both the Oxonian manuscript and the Canterbury Classbook has a Carolingian antecedent.[19] Wallis's research further supported Larsen's assertion regarding the existence of a dual cultural stream of circulation of medical practices, originating from the European mainland, which exerted influences on Iceland. These studies have opened the possibility to further explore Old Norse remedies in a broader perspective, connecting them to a wider pan-European medical tradition and revaluating the Old English textual and cultural relevance in Old Norse medical tradition.

In his critical edition Larsen explored the linguistic and palaeographic connections between the Icelandic manuscript and its Danish and Norwegian ancestors, with a focus on the learned content of the manuscript and its privileged link with Salernitan teachings.[20] Larsen's identification of palaeographic similarities with medieval England were not part of the sections stemmed from the Old Danish herbal book, and they did not engage specifically with Salernitan medicine. These palaeographic similarities can be found in the leechbook of the Dublin manuscript, which, according to Schwabe, belongs to a separate stream of medical practices. Additionally, Wallis's study of Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17 has tangentially

[18] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, pp. 35–37; Henning Larsen, 'MS Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43', *Modern Philology* 23: 4 (1926), 385–92 (p. 388).
[19] Faith Wallis, 1. Medicine I fols.1^{v}-2^{v}: Overview: The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford - St. John's College MS 17, https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/, accessed on February 16, 2021; Carolingian manuscript Lan, Bibliothèque municipale 464 bis (s. IX/2), fols. 118^{r}–119^{v}.
[20] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, pp. 16–18.

contributed to the discussion by offering further glimpses into the origins of the Oxonian manuscript.[21] Her study establishes a connection with Carolingian medical texts, thereby tracing the lineage of Oxford, St John's College, MS 17's predecessors to a period predating the rise of learned medicine.[22] If we accept Larsen's suggestion of parallels, then we also have palaeographic evidence to discuss the leechbook in the Dublin manuscript and other sections related to the second stream of circulation as also preserving empirical remedies.

Grounded on these earlier contributions, my research will continue Larsen's and Wallis' intellectual legacy in exploring Old Norse medical remedies within a broader European medical tradition. My approach will not be limited to see the more substantial and evident textual parallels from medieval Scandinavia (Norway and Denmark), but it will extend to the medieval England and its role in transmitting early medieval medical theories and practices from the Continent to Iceland.

2. 2. 2 A Medical Miscellany: Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 434 a 12mo

The second most complete Icelandic leechbook is preserved at the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen with the shelf mark AM 434 a 12mo.[23] The codex dates to the end of the fifteenth century and was compiled by two scribes. There is still work to be done on determining the intended audience of the compilation, as it is unclear from the intrinsic features whether it was intended for secular or monastic use.[24] It chiefly contains medical-related remedies, although other types of more mundane remedies and practices are scattered throughout the text.

The codex is arranged into three sections: a *Læknisfræði* (a medical book with recipes and spells) from folios 1r-37r, a *Tunglfræði* between folios 37ra-39r (*Lunarium*, a book preserving prognostics and bloodletting depending on the moon phases) and another (or a continuation of) *Læknisfræði* (medical book with recipes and spells)

[21] Ibid.
[22] Faith Wallis, *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*. Reading in Medieval Civilizations and Culture ser. XV (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. xx–xxii.
[23] Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog*, pp. 355–400.
[24] Dror Segev, *Medieval Magic and Magicians - in Norway and Elsewhere: Based Upon 12th - 15th Centuries Manuscript and Runic Evidence*, Skriftserie 2 (Oslo: Senter for studier i vikingetid og nordisk middelalder), p. 62; Maraschi, 'Sympathetic Graphophagy', p. 255.

between folios 39rb-40rb.[25] The manuscript under scrutiny serves as a medical miscellany, encompassing a diverse array of remedies. It encompasses compound medicines, talismans in the form of magic symbols known in Old Icelandic as *galdrastafir*, spells intended to counteract malevolent influences or to enhance success in specific endeavours, as well as an extensive collection of prognostications. These prognostications encompass various forms of divination, ranging from celestial observations such as lunaries to signs of impending death known as *signa mortifera*.

The arrangement of recipes and ailments within the manuscript does not consistently adhere to a systematic structure. In certain instances, recipes may be categorised based on shared ingredients or their intended efficacy against specific ailments. The fragmentary nature of the manuscript becomes apparent as it begins abruptly in the middle of a section, likely dedicated to addressing external assaults by supernatural beings. It subsequently transitions into a section focusing on head and eye ailments, followed by remedies for controlling bleeding, prognostications and talismans in the form of *galdrastafir*. However, the flow of these sections dedicated to specific types of ailments or cures is occasionally interrupted by the inclusion of a remedy that seemingly lacks contextual relevance. For instance, amidst a list of remedies intended to counteract excessive bleeding or haemorrhages, the scribe inserts an excerpt from a book of simples, potentially of Danish origin, which discusses the medicinal properties of parsnip.

A further specific feature of this fragment is that it is the only surviving medical manuscript from Iceland that employs the runic alphabet alongside the Latin one. The fragment utilises runes on two occasions only: firstly, in the propitiatory ritual of carving names of Norwegian kings (Ólafr, Ólafr, Halladr, Halladr, Eirikr) on a stick or on a paper with runes to gamble with dice, of which a glossed translation is provided in Latin letters in the margin of the manuscript.[26] The second instance of runic inscription is at the end of the manuscript, where we find a runic alphabet with runic signs that

[25] "AM 434 a 12mo", *Handrit*, accessed on 6 July 2023 https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?m9117; Ben Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing: A Medical Book from Medieval Iceland* (New Haven: The Troth, 2011), p. xxxv; Christopher Alan Smith, *Icelandic Magic. Aims, Tools and Techniques of the Icelandic Sorcerers* (London: Avalonia, 2016).

[26] ᚬᚴᛁᚠᚱ:ᚬᚴᛁᚠᚱ:ᚼᚱᛅᚦᛚᚨᚦᚱ:ᚼᚱᛅᚦᛚᚨᚦᚱ:ᛁᚱᛁᚴᚱ: Rist á kefli stafi þesaa eður bladi ok legg unndir bordit, þar sem þu kastar, ok les pater noster til heidurs Olafi kongi. *Quia apud te prociciacio est et propter legeni*. Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog,* p. 367; Olafr, Olafr, Halladr, Halladr, Eirikr: carve these signs on a stick or a sheet of paper, and lay it under the table where you are gambling with dice, and read the Pater noster in honor of King Olaf. *Quia apud te prociciacio est et propter legeni*. Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 3.

were not part of older versions of futharks.[27] These runes show dot or bar diacritics, which are characteristic of medieval runes developing from the twelfth century onwards and they are accompanied by binding runes, which are ligatures of two or multiple runes.[28]

The runic form of Norwegian kings' names introduces a section of *galdrastafir* and rituals pertaining to various ordinary concerns, encompassing matters such as love, fortune and adversity. The magical staves (*galdrastafir*) are Icelandic staves represented in early modern manuscript contexts and are credited with having magical effects if drawn or carved on artifacts. *Galdrastafir* are typical iconographic symbols of early modern age Iceland, typically circulating more widely in the period post Reformation. However, the earliest attestation of these symbols in Iceland is in the late medieval magico-medical manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo. The section utilises runes, *galdrastafir* and Latin letters with the aim of enforcing magical power on the spell written or carved and carried by the person.

Within this context, a linguistic attribute emerges that affords us an emic differentiation, in terms of usage, between runes and *galdrastafir*, on one hand, and Latin letters, on the other. This distinction becomes apparent in the remedy concerning dice gambling, which begins with a roster of Norwegian kings' names inscribed in runic characters and then it continues by instructing the performer on how to use such a signs *Rist aa kefli stafi þessa* (carve these signs on a stick). The word used to indicate runes is *stafr/ir*, which also means 'sign/s' and is a synonym for runes. The same word is used to identify the magic symbols recommended to be carried by a person to bring them luck and love, as shown in the following examples:

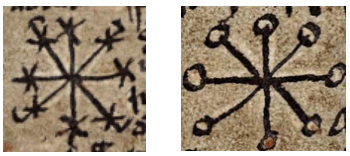

Figure 2. Earliest examples of Galdrastafir from Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12m, fols. 4v-5r.

This observation establishes a connection in the semantic and functional aspects of the term *stafr/ir* within the contexts of both runes and magical staves. However, as the section progresses to encompass other symbols, such as Latin

[27] Ibid., p. 91.
[28] Michael P. Barnes, *Runes: A Handbook*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 96–98.

letters, consistently associated with talismans, the scribe opts for the Latin term 'characters' to denote these specific Latin letters. For example, one of the remedies exploiting Latin letter reads: '*Ef madr hatar þic, þaa tac þetta rit ok legg undire sofanda manne, ok þaa munu þit skiott verdaa sattir* ✢ ✢ ✢ þ.q.c.g.q. ↄ. g. g. g. G. C. d. d. f. R. k h. l. m. s. m. b. t.' (If a man hates you, then take this writing and lay it under the man as he sleeps, and then you two will soon reach a settlement: ✢ ✢ ✢ p.q.c.g.q. C. g. g. g. g. G. C. d. d. f. R. k h. l. m. s. m. B. T.).[29] The change in lexicon usage here shows an emic distinction based on the specific sign used for a given talisman, depending on whether the sign was drawn from old customs and a runacy system or from the Latin legacy and therefore from a system based on literacy. The simultaneous presence of both runes and Latin letters, along with their differentiated utilization and nomenclature, strengthens the notion that the usage of runes as a writing system did not abruptly vanish with the advent of the Conversion and the introduction of *Latinitas*.[30] Instead, the continued usage of runes persisted well into the late Middle Ages, coexisting with Latin within educational practices and intellectual culture.[31]

Old customs and Latin legacy come together in relation to a spell preserved in the manuscript. The degree of syncretism between elements attributed to the pre-Christian legacy and other influences drawn from Christianity and Latin culture found in this manuscript cannot be paralleled in other Icelandic medical manuscripts but similar syncretism is evident in Continental and Mediterranean medical traditions.[32] The spell in question is supposed to help win at dice by invoking names from both the old religion and the new one:

> Ef þu villt hliota ur kasti, tac teningana þina ok graf þaa nidur fyrir nordann gard kirkiu iii nætur, adrar þriar fyrir sunnann ok iii fyrir austan, sidan lat aa alltari unndir duk iii mesur, sidan kastaa upp I hendi þeir med þessum ordum: Ek særi þic Þor ok Odinn fyrir Crist en crosfesta, at þid þverrsynit aa teninga þessa. Ok i annath sinn kasta upp ok seg sva: Ed særi þic fyrir Enok ok Heliam. Ok i hid

[29] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 368; trans from Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 4.
[30] Terje Spurkland, 'Literacy and 'Runacy' in Medieval Scandinavia', in *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict, and Coexistence*, ed. by Jonathan Adams and Katherine Holman, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004) 333–44 (pp. 340–43).
[31] Ryder Patzuk-Russell, *The Development of Education in Medieval Iceland* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2021), p. 215; James E. Knirk, 'Learning to Write with Runes in Medieval Norway', in *Medeltida skrift och språkkultur: Nordisk medeltidsliteracy i ett diglossiskt och digrafiskt perspektiv II*, vol. 2, ed. by Inger Lindell (Stockholm: Medeltidsseminariet och Institutionen för nordiska språk vid Stockholms universitet, 1994), pp. 169–212 (p. 171); Michael Schulte, 'Pragmatic Runic Literacy in Scandinavia c. 800–1300: With a Particular Focus on the Bryggen Material', in *Epigraphic Literacy and Christian Identity: Modes of Written Discourse in the Newly Christian European North*, ed. by Kristel Zilmer and Judith Jesch (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 155–82 (pp. 157–58).
[32] Korshi Dosoo, 'Healing Traditions in Coptic Magical Texts', *Trends in Classics*, 13:1 (2021), 44–94.

> m. sinn særi ek þig fyrir Frigg ok Freyiu, Þor ok Odin ok fyrir helgu mey fru sancte Marie, ath þu Fiolnir falla latir þat, er ec kasta kan.[33]
>
> If you want to win at dice-playing, take your dice and bury them to the north of the churchyard for three nights, for three more nights to the south and three to the east. Then place them on the altar under the cloth for three Masses. Then throw them up a second time and say "I invoke you, Thor and Odin, by Christ the crucified, that you transfigure these dice". And throw them up a second time and say "I invoke you by Enoch and Elijah." And on the third time "I invoke you by Frigg and Freyja, by Thor and Odin, and by the holy virgin lady Saint Mary that you Fjolnir let fall that which I can throw."[34]

The incorporation of ancient local deities, alongside Judeo-Christian names, does not suggest that active worship of these deities remained a viable practice in late medieval Iceland. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of Norse gods such as Odin, Thor, Frigg and Freyja with Judeo-Christian names does not indicate merging of the two religions. Rather, the syncretism between the two traditions can be interpreted as the performer's wish to utilize the names of old deities as associations with powerful demonic entities, exerting control over them through the Christian references.

Turning to the palaeographical perspective, the Icelandic medical manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo is the second youngest witness whose content derives from both streams of circulation of medical practices. The manuscript in question exhibits significant resemblances to the Dublin manuscript, particularly concerning its leechbook and book of simples sections. Additionally, it exhibits close parallels with Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to (the major stand-alone extant manuscript of the second stream of circulation). Upon closer examination of Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to, it appears that it had been entirely copied in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo.[35]

Considering the significant comparable passages between the manuscripts and other older or contemporary witnesses, as well as the empirical character of many remedies preserved within, this study will further analyse Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, and will investigate not only palaeographical entries but also the cultural perspective of illness and medicine. With such an investigation I will demonstrate that additional insights into the second stream of circulation of medical practices can afford us new interpretation of Old Norse remedies and a deeper understanding of later medieval Icelandic medical culture and society.

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[33] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 368.
[34] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 5.
[35] Schwabe, 'Fragment eines altwestnordischen', pp. 205–6.

2. 2. 3 Old Norse Medical Fragments

The survival of medical practices from medieval Iceland can also be observed in smaller fragments. Schwabe's *stemma codicum* establishes a connection between three existing medical fragments and the primary two manuscripts. The interrelationship among these fragments was examined in Schwabe's papers, which have contributed to the resolution of certain palaeographic inquiries. On the other hand, new unresolved questions have emerged from his studies, particularly concerning the sources involved and the means of their identification. Of all these fragments, the most relevant one to this study is consists of four parchment leaves from the middle of the thirteenth century and bears the shelf mark Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to.[36]

The other two fragments, respectively bearing the shelf marks Reykjavik, Árnastofnun, AM 673 a 4to and Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 696, II 4to, will not be included in this study as they represent particularly small witnesses, and they feature minor overlaps with larger extant manuscripts.

The manuscript Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to preserves a *Lækingabók* (Book of Remedies), which is the oldest Old Icelandic remedy book. The fragment contains an array of remedies, mostly based on herbs, but with occasional interpolations of other recipes based on animal parts and stones, as well as remedies attributed to Galen and Dioscorides. The fragment adheres to a recognizable recipe structure that we have previously identified, consisting of the following elements: 1) enumeration of ailments, 2) the identification of the solid ingredient used, 3) the choice of a liquid in which to mix the former ingredient and 4) the expected outcome.

The observed fragment does not appear to align with the contents of the Old Danish herbal book compiled by Henrik Harpestræng. Consequently, scholars have postulated the existence of an additional medical manuscript, originating from the European mainland, which served as the source material for the copied manuscript Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to.[37]

The fragment attributes some remedies to Galen and Dioscorides; however, these remedies appear to adhere better with the entries in the *De viribus herbarum*,

[36] "AM 655 XXX, 4to," *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, accessed on 6 July 2023 https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?m9118; "AM 655 XXX, 4to," *Handrit*, accessed on 6 july 2023 https://handrit.is/manuscript/view/en/AM04-0655-XXX/0#mode/2up.
[37] Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 7–8.

an eleventh-century hexameter poem on the properties of plants.[38] This analogy is better elucidated by the remedy attributed to Dioscorides, involving a boy suffering from epilepsy, and counteracting his symptoms by hanging a peony on his neck as a talisman against the falling sickness.

> Diascorides segir af grasi þvi er peonia heitir: ec sa svein ein viii vetra gamlan, er hafþi þat gras hengt a hals ser. En þa barsc sva at of dagin, at þat gras fell af honvm. En .þegar iafn skiot fell sveinin niðr oc hafþi brot fall. En þa var þat aptr horfit íannat sin a hann. oc þa sakaþi sveininn ecki meðan hann hafði þa taser. En þa fell af honum i annat sinn. En iafn skiott fell hann í ena somv sott sem hann hafþi fyr. En þa var grasit bvndið a hann enn oc bættiz iafn skiott. Oc samv lvnd for sinn ið þriðia: spilltizt er af va, en batnaði er avar bvnndit. Sama vitni ber Galienvs, en spakasti maðr, of þat sama gras.[39]
>
> Dioscorides says of an herb called Peony: "I saw a boy of seven years old, who had an herb hanging from his neck. But one day happened that the herb fell from him, and immediately fell down from the body and he had an epileptic seizure. And that after he was surrounded by another one that no harm came to the boy while he had it with himself. And when it fell from him a second time, immediately he fell in the same disease as he had had before. When the herb was tied on him, he improved immediately. But the same dispose went for a third time: he grew worse when [the plant] was off, and improved as it was tied on him". Galen, the wise man, bears testimony of the same grass.

The level of detail provided in Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to in this remedy corresponds to that of *De viribus herbarum*.[40] The same remedy is also found in both Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, fols. 21^{v}-22^{r} and in the leechbook in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43, 17v. A significantly briefer narrative concerning a young boy afflicted with epilepsy is also present in Harpestræng's herbal book. However, this account lacks the comprehensive level of detail found in the examined entry, thereby excluding the possibility that the entry and its contextual elements originated from the Old-Danish tradition.[41] This strengthens the hypothesis of another origin for the content in Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to.

This thirteenth-century fragment is not only the oldest surviving medical manuscript from Iceland but also the major stand-alone witness of the second stream of medical practices in the North, as the leechbook and charm sections in the Dublin manuscript have been blended with the other Danish tradition.

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[38] Schwabe, 'Fragment eines altwestnordischen', pp. 202–05.
[39] Ibid., pp. 211–12.
[40] Ibid., p. 202.
[41] Schwabe 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 8–9.

As previously indicated, the parallels observed in the fragments Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to and Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, and the Dublin manuscript, has prompted scholars to contemplate the potential existence of a dual transmission stream for the dissemination of medical practices within Old Norse manuscripts.[42] The first stream is represented by the Old Danish herbal book and its copies, which are partially copied in the Dublin manuscript and in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo. The second stream might correspond to a book now lost but seems to have been partially copied in Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to, Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, the leechbook and charm sections in the Dublin manuscript, as well as in an encyclopaedic codex Copenhagen, AM 194 8vo.

2. 2. 4 Medical Practices within an Encyclopaedia

Medieval medical practices and theories were not solely confined to dedicated medical miscellanies but were also documented within encyclopaedic manuscripts. These encyclopaedic compilations served as fitting repositories for hosting diverse medical and scientific treatises, aligning with the all-encompassing nature inherent to such manuscripts. Consistent with this prevailing trend in both Continental and insular medieval contexts, an Icelandic encyclopaedic miscellany from the fourteenth century, identified by the shelf mark Copenhagen, AM 194 8vo, exists. This manuscript comprises four distinct sections dedicated to medical topics. A colophon in the manuscript indicates that Óláfr Ormsson was the scribe, and he completed the writing in 1387 on the farm of Geirrøðareyri (now Narfeyri), located in Snæfellsness.[43] The parchment manuscript contains several texts that appear to have been collected based on a shared interest in universal history.[44]

Within this context, the interest in medieval universal history is represented by the following texts in the manuscript: a geographical treatise on northern Europe, an introduction to the people living in different parts of the world, an itinerary of a pilgrimage from Iceland to Rome known as *Leiðarvísir*. The codex then continues with a text based on Augustine's six ages of the world, *Heimsaldrar*, followed by *Veraldar*

[42] Ibid., pp. 7–9; Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, pp. 16–17, 37.
[43] Kristian Kålund and Natanael Beckman, *Alfræði Íslenzk: Islandsk encyklopædisk litteratur* (København: S.L. Møllers bogtrykkeri, 1908), p. xxxi.
[44] Arngrímur Vídalín, 'Óláfr Ormsson's *Leiðarvísir* and its Context: The Fourteenth-Century Text of a Supposed Twelfth-Century Itinerary', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 117:2 (2018), 212–34 (p. 212).

Saga (The Saga of the World), the Ten Commandments, fifteen signs before the doomsday, as well as a fragment of a law book and three medical fragments about human physiology, a lapidary and an herbal book.[45]

The medical sections in Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 194 8vo consist of a *Læknisfræði* (*Medicalia* or Leechbook) containing recipes and spells in folios 34^{r}, 37^{r}-39^{r}, 39^{r}-45^{v}, 48^{v} and a *Steinafræði* (*Lapidarium* or Lapidary) between 24^{v}-25^{v} and 45^{v}-48^{v}. Significant parallels have been found between passages in the *Lapidarium* in Copenhagen, AM 194 8vo, and the one in the Dublin manuscript. Likewise, notable parallels have been identified between the leechbook and the remedies found in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo. These comparable passages have strengthened the hypothesis of the existence of another medical book (n3 in the *stemma codicum*), which consolidated both medical traditions and generated a series of book production with mixed content, of which Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo and the medical sections in Copenhagen, AM 194 8vo are the extant witnesses.[46]

The manuscript is currently held at the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen. During my research trip, I was unable to examine it due to serious damage that has occurred over time, necessitating restoration. Therefore, further analysis of the content was not possible, and no edition has been published to date. As a result, the material I will be drawing from this manuscript is very limited, mostly relying on secondary sources that focus either on the medical sections or the surrounding encyclopaedic context.[47]

A preliminary examination of the manuscript environment in which medical practices are documented reveals a diverse range of textual forms and manuscript contexts in which medicine is recorded within Old Icelandic manuscripts. While medical remedies consistently feature in dedicated medical miscellanies, they are also encountered within magico-medical manuscripts and encyclopaedic codices.

In this thesis, the Old Norse medical fragments and more substantial witnesses such as the Dublin manuscript and the Iceland magico-medical fragment will be studied in more detailed and within a comparative framework to better assess philological connections between them and with the English medical tradition.

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[45] Margaret Cormack, 'The Holy Bishop Lucius in AM 194 8vo', *Opuscula* XI *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana*, XLII (2003), 188–92.
[46] Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 5–6.
[47] Kristian Kålund, *Alfræði Íslenzk: Islandsk Encyklopædisk Litteratur. 1 Cod. Mbr. Am. 194 8vo* (Møllers Bogtr 1908); Cormarck, 'The Holy Bishop Lucius in AM 194 8vo', pp. 188–92; Vídalín, 'Óláfr Ormsson's *Leiðarvísir* and its Contexts', 212–34.

2.3 Medical practices in Old Norse Sagas and Poetry

There exists a notable distinction between the medical remedies found in medical manuscripts and the remedies or medical evidence presented in literary contexts. In literary works, medicine and healing are not explicitly conveyed through recipes, dietary advice, or prognostics as observed in manuscripts. Instead, they are interwoven within the narrative fabric. In literary contexts, medicine assumes a functional role in plot development and character portrayal.[48] Knowledge of medical practices becomes a distinguishing characteristic of certain saga or epic poem characters, and their healing abilities can be interpreted as either an inherent virtue or a skill acquired through travel and exposure to external influences.

An illustrative example of the blending of different paths to acquiring healing knowledge can be found in the character of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson (1166–1213 AD). In his eponymous saga, Hrafn embodies a fusion of both hereditary and experiential sources of medical expertise. Hrafn is a chieftain and a local healer whose lineage traces back to a lineage of skilled physicians, with their ancestral connection attributed to a miraculous healing performed by Óláfr in *Óláfs saga helga*.[49] Additionally, Hrafn's healing abilities include surgical practices that he acquired during his travels on the Continent.[50] Furthermore, medical practitioners in Old Norse literature can also play a functional role in scene development, as exemplified in works such as *Oddrúnargrátr* and *Fóstbræðra saga*. In the Eddic poem *Oddrúnargrátr* (Oddrún's lament), the story recounts that amid Oddrún's sorrow over the loss of her lover Gunnar, she momentarily sets aside her own pain to aid the parturient woman Brogný during a challenging labour. Oddrún's medical skills are revealed upon successfully completion of Borgný's labour by performing *galdr* (charms) over the woman's body, resulting in its successful culmination.[51]

Moreover, literary references to medicine, the body, health and illness offer valuable insights into the cultural aspects of health and illness in Old Norse society. They illuminate the integration of these concepts within the Old Norse worldview and provide an understanding of how the influence of these ideas on the world and the

[48] Cangemi, 'Le figure dei guaritori nelle saghe', pp. 225–46.
[49] *Hrafns saga*, ed. by Helgadóttir, p. 1.
[50] Ibid., p. 24; Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Hvers manns gagn. Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and the Social Role of Icelandic Chieftains around 1200', *Saga-Book* XL (2016) 91–104 (p. 103).
[51] *Oddrúnargrátr* 7-10, *Eddukvæði*, ed. by Gísli Sigurðsson (Reykjavík: Mál Og Menning, 1998).

human body was conceptualised. Early poetry contains intriguing depictions of otherworldly creatures, which serve as valuable points of reference for contextualising and interpreting similar beings and phenomena depicted in the manuscript corpus.

In Old Norse sagas and poetry, medical practices are not documented with the same intention and function as in medical miscellanies. The depiction of medicine in sagas serves a broader purpose of informing the audience about the practices and knowledge associated with contemporary or historical events within their community. Moreover, the portrayal of medical practices within saga contexts, including specific accounts such as surgical procedures in *Hrafns saga*, can be understood as part of the broader purpose of sagas in serving as a medium for cultural memory. In this sense, these depictions fulfil a dual function of not only informing the audience about medical practices but also actively contributing to the construction and preservation of collective memory. Through the inclusion of such details, sagas facilitate the transmission and perpetuation of cultural knowledge and values, reinforcing the communal identity and historical consciousness of the audience.

Similarly, evidence of medicine or healing, in a broad sense, can be found in Eddic and skaldic poetry. However, the information provided in these poetic works may not always lead to the idetification of specific medical practices, as they do not primarily focus on enumerating ingredients or providing recipes. Instead, their value lays on the insights they offer regarding the performance and administration of remedies, which can be compared with similar performances documented in the manuscript corpus. Furthermore, skaldic poetry, while not yielding explicit medical remedies, enables us to explore a range of motifs and beliefs associated with phenomena and creatures, which will be dealt with in the appropriate chapter of this thesis.

2. 3. 1 Healing in Eddic and Skaldic Verses

In Old Norse literature narratives of medical practices fulfil a functional role in advancing the plot or shaping the characterisation of individuals. These accounts offer valuable insights into the lived experiences associated with healing, as well as the customs and beliefs that were perceived as representative of earlier healing approaches during the period in which they were documented. When examining

medical practices and healing in Eddic poetry, it is imperative to consider the social and chronological contexts in which these verses were elaborated orally and written. By situating the poems within their respective historical and cultural frameworks, we can better comprehend the motivations, beliefs and societal dynamics that influenced the portrayal of medicine in these poetic compositions. Such contextual analysis allows for a more nuanced understanding of the role of medicine and healing in the lives of the individuals and communities who composed and transmitted these verses.

Although Eddic poems were recorded in the thirteenth century, Old Norse scholars widely concur on the presence of inherent characteristics that attest to Eddic poems' formal antiquity such as the alliterative metre employed: *fornyrðislag* (old story metre), *ljóðaháttr* (song metre) and *málaháttr* (speech metre), their poetic significance and function in a pre-literate society, as well as subject-matter that inspired the poems including mythological episodes, creatures and legends.[52]

From a metrical perspective, Eddic poetry is firmly rooted in West Germanic alliterative verse, which constitutes the preferred metre in the West Germanic language family for recounting legendary and mythological narratives. This metrical choice serves as an indicator of the poetic tradition's historical lineage and provides valuable insights into the prevailing poetic conventions and preferences of the time.[53] Moreover, the subjects and themes explored in Eddic poetry resonate with the rich tapestry of pre-Christian religious beliefs and mythical figures, aligning closely with the motifs and narratives found in other West Germanic alliterative poems. The shared pool of cultural material in verses serves as a testament to the interconnectedness and continuity of mythological themes within the broader Germanic cultural sphere.[54] Nevertheless, Clunies Ross has persuasively proposed that the inclusion of pre-Christian elements in Eddic poetry necessitated a certain degree of adjustment to conform with the prevailing medieval and post-Conversion sensibilities in order to ensure their preservation on parchment.[55] Unravelling the precise extent of such

[52] For a review of the transmission of eddic poems, their inspiration, subjects and metre please see Carolyne Larrington et al., eds., *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[53] Diana Whaley, 'General Introduction', in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1*: *From Mythical Times to c. 1035*. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. li–liv.
[54] Carolyne Larrington, 'Eddic Poetry and Heroic Legend', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 147–72 (pp. 149–56).
[55] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Transmission and Preservation of Eddic Poetry', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia,* ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 12–32 (pp. 18–19).

adaptation and discerning what elements have remained intact in their original form proves to be exceedingly challenging. However, by the thirteenth century, these texts no longer posed a perceived threat to Christianity, allowing for a more effective reception of the pre-Christian themes and motifs embedded within Eddic poetry.[56]

In the thirteenth century, there was an increasing interest in recording and systematising old traditions and legends, leading to their preservation on parchment.[57] In light of the complex interplay between pre-Christian and Christian influences in Eddic poetry, it is imperative to approach the portrayal of medical practices with caution. The notion that these poems provide an unadulterated glimpse into pre-Christian practices must be critically examined, considering the potential incorporation of Christian values and the fluid nature of religious beliefs over time. On the other hand, when a poem is composed during Christian times and, consequently, it is expected to fully align with Christian values, it does not necessarily preclude the inclusion of old themes that have been assimilated and adjusted to accord with Christian values. As Jens Peter Schjødt reminds us, 'it might still very well contain some genuine pagan notions since folklore teaches us that religious notions do not change overnight'.[58]

Following Schjødt's perspective, this thesis aims to interpret references to medical lore and practices in Eddic poems as elements that evaded Christian censorship or were deemed compatible with the prevailing Christian values by the editors of these poems. These references are viewed as reflecting lived experiences of healing practices that held cultural significance despite the overarching Christian framework. The concept of lived experience suggests that certain healing practices, despite undergoing societal changes and religious transformations, continued to hold significance and remained embedded in the collective knowledge and practices of the people. These practices would have been familiar to the audience and scribes of the thirteenth century, allowing for their inclusion and portrayal in Eddic poems. The archaeological findings from pre-Christian periods further attest to the existence and continuity of such healing practices, offering tangible evidence of their cultural and historical relevance. Additionally, late medieval manuscripts provide glimpses into the

[56] John Lindow, 'Eddic poetry and mythology', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) pp. 114–31 (p. 118).
[57] Clunies Ross, 'The Transmission and Preservation of Eddic Poetry', p. 23.
[58] Jens P. Schjødt, 'Eddic poetry and the religion of pre-Christian Scandinavia', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, pp. 132–46 (p. 134).

continued transmission and utilization of medical knowledge, reflecting the ongoing engagement with healing practices within the evolving medieval society.

In addition to the insights gained from Eddic poems, early Skaldic verses provide further perspectives for examining notions of health, illness and disease as documented in the late medieval manuscript corpus. However, this perspective can be applied retrospectively to ninth and tenth century verses that incorporate kennings or descriptions of rituals within the poems. Through the lens of Skaldic poetry, we can explore the evolution of a distinct group of otherworldly creatures, such as the *álfar* (elves) within the Old Norse language, culture and society. While these creatures are associated with illness and disease in fifteenth century Icelandic medical manuscripts, in Skaldic poetry they are portrayed as manifestations of supernatural beings, not specifically link to illness and disease. Through *kenningar* as a gateway to the poets' and the audience's worldview,[59] Skaldic poetry serves as a starting point for exploring how the aetiology of certain illnesses developed and was influenced by local beliefs.

Skaldic and Eddic poetry corroborate manuscript evidence with oral material, and at times provide glimpses into the pre-Conversion worldview. They contribute to unravelling the medical theories and practices that have been preserved in manuscripts, allowing for the identification of comparable motifs and patterns in the realm of poetry. This facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the context in which certain healing rituals were performed and the categories of illness and health were conceptualized, considering how Christianity assimilated these practices into its own values and paradigms.

The dialogue between poetry and manuscripts reveals a more intricate perspective on health and illness that transcends a simplistic dichotomy between pre- and post-conversion periods. It demonstrates that various cognitive approaches to illness and disease persisted over time, exerting influence on the creation and enactment of medical practices. The interaction between poetry and manuscripts provides valuable insights into the complex nature of Old Norse medical traditions and enriches our understanding of the cultural dynamics that shaped them.

[59] Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'The Head, the Heart, and the Breast: Bodily Conceptions of Emotion and Cognition in Old Norse Skaldic Poetry', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia,* 15 (2019), 29–64 (pp. 29–30); Judy Quinn, 'Kennings and Other Forms of Figurative Language in Eddic Poetry', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 288–309 (p. 294).

2. 3. 2 Medical Practices in the Saga Context

Old Norse sagas may provide additional accounts of medical practices and further insights into conceptions of healing and illness. Aside from *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, which specifically and extensively deals with medicine, no other sagas focus on medicine in the same manner. Nevertheless, a careful examination of sagas reveals various practices intended to alleviate pain, facilitate recovery from injuries and occasionally even alludes to surgical interventions. These glimpses into the narratives offer insights into the medical knowledge and practices that were prevalent during the period, shedding light on what was deemed efficacious and plausible within the literary context.

The inclusion of medical practices within saga narratives enhances our interpretation of medical manuscripts by highlighting the common methods and treatments employed to address bodily ailments. Through a comparative analysis of remedies found in both manuscript and saga contexts, we can discern shared methods, techniques and approaches restore health. This comparative approach unearths more comprehensive understanding of Old Norse medicine, as it illuminates the recurring patterns and practices that were prevalent in the society of the time.

The Old Norse sagas represent a vast and diverse corpus, in terms of genres, themes, values, character development and fictional or historical settings.[60] Consequently, when examining medical practices within the diverse corous of sagas, it is important to recognize that many of these practices may be inspired by real-life experiences but are embedded within the realm of legend and fiction. Conversely, there may also be other medical practices grounded in reality that, by virtue of their authenticity, serve as a reflection of the reader's own reality.

In current scholarship, there is a growing consensus that the depicted world within sagas is connected to lived experiences beyond the text.[61] The narrative is not merely a textual imitation of imported literature against which Old Norse sagas were consistently evaluated, but rather it encompasses a broader engagement with the lives

[60] Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 70; Massimiliano Bampi, 'Genre', in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. by Massimiliano Bampi et al. (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020), pp. 4–14, Carol J. Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 239–315.

[61] Vésteinn Ólason, 'The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature with Special Reference to its Representation of Reality', in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. by Judy Quinn et al., Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 27–48.

of authors, scribes and the audience. This broader perspective integrates insights from oral tradition, local beliefs and customs. This realization has emerged due to the recognition that the traditional dichotomy between history and literature in saga studies has yielded limited advantages.[62] Contemporary Old Norse scholarship regards sagas as an integral component of broader medieval history, in the sense of medieval way to understand and write about historical events or to historicize a particular episode. In the thirteenth century, when Icelanders commenced chronicling their history in the vernacular, they emulated European narrative genres such as *historia* (an *origo gentis*), which served as a foundation for the presentation of their narratives as factual accounts. However, it is important to acknowledge that these sagas contain numerous fictional elements and incorporate oral traditions, drawing from socially and historically plausible events and settings.

The realm of extra-textual experiences encompasses not only the personal and immediate encounters of authors, scribes and the audience but also the accumulated experiences derived from the inherited legacy and shared worldview of the whole society, of which the authors, scribes and audience serve as representative figures. It is through saga narratives that this collective reservoir of lived experiences, cultural legacy and overarching worldview finds expression and takes shape. Scholars now refer to this amalgamation of cultural experiences as 'cultural memory'.

According to Pernille Herman's definition, 'cultural memory is a type of memory that is collectively shared and connected to the formation of a group's self-image and identity; secondly, that it takes the form of narrative, image and ritual, and is a kind of memory that, metaphorically speaking, is transferred to a variety of representational forms - including literature'.[63] The depiction of medical practices and knowledge in saga literature serves as an example of how the shared memory of such practices and knowledge influences the portrayal of healers and past events related to illness and injuries. In saga literature, medical practices, along with other events, are preserved memories through the medium of literature, representing what was believed to be plausible and acceptable in the past.[64] For example, *Hrafns saga* draws from

[62] Ralph O'Connor, 'History and Fiction', in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 88–110.
[63] Pernille Hermann, 'Saga Literature, Cultural Memory, and Storage', *Scandinavian Studies*, 85:3 (Fall 2013), 332–54 (p. 333).
[64] For an overview of Cultural memory please see Jan Assmann, 'Memory Culture: Preliminary Remarks', in *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 15–69.

Salernitan medical practices, making it appropriate and intelligible to the saga audience. However, medical practices, like other elements in sagas, are not simply repeated but can also be subject to interpretation and alteration, creating new practices and knowledge that are more meaningful to the users of sagas. This phenomenon shows us what was considered plausible and efficient at the time when the sagas were composed or transcribed.

In light of the revised understanding of sagas as a literary medium that mediates the past for medieval Icelandic authors, scribes and audiences, we can more effectively analyse the circulation and impact of cultural aspects, medical practices and knowledge within the realm of literature. The sagas serve as conduits for transmitting historical narratives or organised conceptions of the past, rendering them invaluable sources from which we can gain insights into the dissemination, preservation and transformation of cultural practices and beliefs related to medical theories and practices throughout the medieval period.

This study aims to employ sagas as a valuable tool for investigating the intricacies of medical knowledge and healing approaches as documented in manuscripts. By exploring the remedies and cognitive frameworks surrounding illness and disease, sagas offer valuable insights into the understanding and application of medical practices in the Old Norse tradition. While an exhaustive examination of the various saga genres is beyond the scope of this study, our focus will primarily revolve around the analysis of comparable remedies in medical manuscript and in the *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of Icelanders) and the *samtíðarsögur* (Contemporary Sagas).

The *Íslendingasögur* are sagas that narrate events set before the colonization of Iceland in the 870s AD and extend into the late eleventh century.[65] The readers or audience of the *Íslendingasögur* situate the narrative in the realm of realism, despite the fact that the events were recorded by scribes no earlier than the thirteenth century. The realism is achieved through a historicised narrative which includes events and phenomena considered plausible, drawn from lived experience and cultural heritage. While supernatural and fantastic elements also emerge from these sagas, they play a minor role compared to more legendary-oriented sagas such as the *fornaldarsögur* and the *riddarasögur*, which focus on legendary and chivalric themes. In the *Íslendingasögur*, we can observe medical practices and healing scenes that would

[65] Bampi, ‘Genre’, 5.

have appeared plausible to the sagas' audience and carried cultural memory. As previously noted by Assmann, the acceptance of collective memories can be mediated in narrative form, allowing for multiple devices and forms to convey them, as intrinsically recorded in the word 'saga' (narrative in the sense of artificial organization).[66]

As Clunies Ross observed in relation to the *Poetic Edda*, the oral material preserved in these texts must have undergone some sort of adaptation between their oral circulation and their written form.[67] Therefore, medical practices in *Íslendingasögur*, framed in a pre-Conversion setting, may still hold cultural meaning for those who wrote and listened to them when the sagas were performed. While archaeology can shed light on whether these remedies were practiced in pre-Conversion Old Norse society, examining their portrayal within a historiographical literary framework offers a unique perspective. Through the lens of a historicised literary context, replete with references to cultural memory, we can evaluate these remedies as elements that retained plausibility for both the authors and the audience.

In my analysis of medieval Icelandic medical manuscripts, I have identified recurring motifs and patterns in remedies that closely resemble healing treatments depicted in *Íslendingasögur*. When a specific practice portrayed in the thirteenth-century *Íslendingasögur* also appears in fifteenth-century medical manuscripts, I interpret this convergence as evidence of the widespread circulation of these remedies across different social strata and the enduring knowledge within the community. Such practices might have been slightly reinterpreted within a later cultural frame, but they still upheld social value. Accordingly, this study will closely examine the practice of carving healing charms on solid materials, as consistently depicted in archaeological findings from both pre- and post-Conversion periods in *Íslendingasögur*. Furthermore, we will explore how this practice continues to be relevant in the late medieval manuscript tradition.

[66] Assmann, 'Memory Culture', pp. 58–62.
[67] Clunies Ross, 'The Transmission and Preservation of Eddic Poetry', pp. 18–19.

2. 4 An Account of Political, Religious and Mercantile Relationships between England and Iceland

In the preceding paragraphs, I provided an overview of where evidence of medical practices and theories in medieval Icelandic literature and manuscripts can be found, and the most updated scholarship regarding medical manuscript interrelationship. This interrelationship can be traced to two main streams of medical practices represented by two key medical books. One book was influenced by Danish and Norwegian copies of Henrik Harpestræng's herbal book, with a more substantial scholarly orientation. The second book drew from a variety of sources, potentially including Latin versions of Macer Floridus and Constantinus Africanus predating Henrik Harpestræng's herbal book. Additionally, similarities were found between its content and the recipes in the Danish leechbook AM 187, 8vo. Other early sources, as noted by Schwabe, have yet to be explored by scholars.

This section will shift our attention to the second stream of medical practices to investigate Larsen's hypothesis of the presence of medieval English textual parallels on the *materia medica* found in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43. The goal is to explore potential links between the unidentified early sources in this stream and medieval England. To support this claim and extend Larsen's insights, I will provide contextual information on the historical relationship between Iceland and England. To begin, we will delve into the problematic aspects and the origins of my research questions, which are grounded in Larsen's examination of English textual parallels.

in Larsen's edition of the Dublin manuscript, he offered some observations regarding the similarities and shared features between certain remedies in the Dublin manuscript and English medical texts dating from the late Old English to the early Middle English period (specifically the second half of the eleventh and twelfth centuries). To support his assertions, Larsen provided evidence of another resemblance between the Dublin manuscript and the Oxonian manuscript. Specifically, the prognostic section ascribed to Galen in the Dublin codex, bore a striking resemblance to a prognostic section found in Oxford, St John's College, MS 17. These parallels indicate a possible connection between the medical traditions documented in the Dublin manuscript and those present in earlier English

manuscripts.[68] Faith Wallis' further study of Oxford, St John's College, MS 17 published in the project 'the Calendar and the Cloister' revealed that the bloodletting sections in both the Oxonian manuscript and the Canterbury Classbook have a Carolingian ancestor.[69] This is of fundamental importance to Old Norse scholars as it demonstrates the receptive environment of Old Norse medicine and, it further underscores the ability of these texts to circulate widely across time and space. Here is the text version published by Larsen and its parallel in the Oxonian manuscript:

> Hvert sinn er þorf er þa ma bloð lata. Enn fra octavo idus aprilis ok til kalendas iunii þa er betz við at lata. þviat þa veks bloð ok tekur aukaz I hveriu kykvenði. Enn þa siðan geta þeirra tida er setar eru eptir tungl fari. V. dagh. ok .XV. ok .XX. ok . XXV. ok .XXX. dagh þa er bannat bloð ath lata. En fra XV kalendas augusti ok til nonasceptembris þa eru lymskir dagar. þa eru hvorcki bloð lata nie drycki taka.[70]
>
> Whenever there is need, one shall let blood. But from the eight ides of April and to the calends of June, is the best time to let blood, for then the blood grows and increases in each living being. But afterwards one must observe the due seasons according to the course of the moon, the fifth day, the fifteenth, the twentieth, the twenty-fifth and thirtieth day. Then it is forbidden to let blood. But from the fifteenth calends of August to the nones of Septembers, the days are treacherous; then one shall neither let blood nor take potions.[71]
>
> De Flebotomia. Si necessitas fuerit omni tempore adhiben <dum> est fleobotomus. tamen precipue ab VIIII Kalendis aprilis. usque in <VII> kelandas iulii. Tunc est utilitas detrahendi sanguinem. quia tunc sanguis augmentum habet. Sed postea obseruationes sunt temporum & q[uali]tates. cursusque lunae oberuandae. hoc est. V Luna [.X. XV. XXX.] XXV et XXX. [...] Nam tamen super omnia obseruandum est. ut a XV kalendarum augusti usque nonas septembris quos caniculares dies pro stella que canicula uocatur dicti. nesque potionem neque flebotomum debet aliquis habere in [***] dium quia hi humores mixtis…..[72]
>
> On Phlebotomy. If the need arises, bloodletting should be applied at any time. However, especially from the ninth day before the calends of April to the seventh day before the Kalends of July. Then it is useful to draw blood because the blood is increasing during that time. But afterward, observations of the seasons and qualities must be made, and the course of the moon must be observed. That is, the fifth day of the moon [the tenth, fifteenth, thirtieth], the twenty-fifth and thirtieth. [...] Nevertheless, above all, it must be observed that from the fifteenth day before the calends of August until the Nones of

[68] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, pp. 35–37; Larsen, 'MS Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43', p. 388.
[69] Wallis Faith, 1. Medicine I fols.1^{v}-2^{v}: Overview: The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford - St. John's College MS 17, https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/, accessed on 16 February 2021; Carolingian manuscript Lan, Bibliothèque municipale 464 bis (s. IX/2), fols. 118^{r}–119^{v}.
[70] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 81.
[71] Ibid., p. 165; Translation is after Larsen's edition, but with some of my adjustments.
[72] Oxford. St John's College. MS 17; fol. 1^{vb}. The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford, St John's College MS17. 2007. McGill University Library. Digital Collections Program. https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/folio.php?p=1v&showitem=1v_1MedicineI_3Bloodletting1, accessed on 12 July 2021.

> September, which are called dog days after the star called the Dog Star, no one should have either a potion or bloodletting on those days, because these humours are mixed [***].

The resemblance between the two passages, particularly in terms of word choice, strongly suggests that Oxford, St John's College, MS 17 may have served as a source for the second stream of circulation in the medical book that influences our extant manuscripts. The text provides recommendations regarding the optimal timing for bloodletting, specifying precise periods and dates for the therapy. However, it also cautions against performing bloodletting on certain unlucky calendar days. In the Old Norse text, these days are referred to as *lymskir dagar* (cunning days), indicating a deceitful and hazardous time of the year when bloodletting is deemed perilous. The Latin text in the English manuscript employs the term *caniculares dies* (dog days) to refer to such days, which is another commonly recognised synonym for *dies Ægyptiaci* (Egyptian days), considered inauspicious and believed to bring disgrace upon individuals engaging in activities, particularly in the context of healing.[73]

The same remedy can also be found in the Canterbury Classbook, a manuscript dating from the early eleventh century. However, it is worth noting that this remedy appears in a section in fols. 425^{v}-426^{r} that was added later and is contemporaneous with Oxford, St John's College, MS 17. Additionally, the remedy is present in the Carolingian manuscript Laon, Bibliothèque municipale 464 bis, which dates to the second half of the ninth century.[74]

This correspondence is significant as it establishes palaeographical connections with an early source that predates the formal distinction between empirical and learned medicine. Of additional significance is the scholarly debate surrounding the attribution of the bloodletting section in the Oxonian manuscript to Bede. Singer's attribution, based on an outdated interpretation, has been challenged by Wallis and Jones, who argue that the inclusion of the bloodletting section does not align with Bede's thinking.[75] Moreover, the designation of *Egyptian days* and *lunaria*

[73] Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: 900-1100*, pp. 330–35.
[74] Oxford. St John's College. MS 17; fol. 1^{vb}. The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford, St John's College MS17. 2007. McGill University Library. Digital Collections Program. https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/folio.php?p=1v&showitem=1v_1MedicineI_3Bloodletting1, accessed on 12 July 2021.
[75] Oxford. St John's College. MS 17; fol. 1^{vb}. The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford, St John's College MS17. 2007. McGill University Library. Digital Collections Program. https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/folio.php?p=1v&showitem=1v_1MedicineI_3Bloodletting1, accessed on 12 July 2021.

as unlucky days is arbitrary and finds no support in Bede's works.[76] This raises questions about the origin and cultural context of the bloodletting practices depicted in Oxford, St John's College, MS 17. However, as Jones pointed out, it is true that Bede acknowledged the influence of the waxing and waning of the moon on organic phenomena in *De temporum ratione*.[77] This should be distinguished from the arbitrary assignment of lucky and unlucky lunar calendar days, which can be attributed to a natural philosophical explanation. Therefore, the inclusion of lucky and unlucky days prognostics based on arbitrary computations emphasizes the empirical medical origins of certain remedies found within the Old Norse manuscripts, attributing them to the secondary stream of transmission. Recognising the presence of empirical medicine within our Old Norse remedies leads us to expand our comparison with other surviving Old English medical manuscripts and reconsider their dating, despite their inclusion in later medieval Icelandic manuscripts.

Wallis' work further supports Larsen's argument for a dual cultural influence reaching Iceland from the Continent, where the second stream encompasses a more diverse background beyond learned medicine alone. Consequently, our line of inquiry needs to be broadened.

The following chapter will examine, whenever possible, the distinction between learned and empirical medicine and its manifestation in Old Norse medical manuscripts. However, at this stage, we will refrain from delving deeper into the subject and instead shift our focus to the historical context of Icelandic cultural, political and economic relations with mainland Scandinavia and England.

2. 4. 1 Religious and Political Contacts between England, Norway and Iceland

As previously indicated, this section aims to present the interconnections between medieval Iceland and England, particularly in terms of religious influence, scholarly exchanges and the role of Norway as a mediator between these two distinct geographical and political entities. Despite its peripheral location within medieval

[76] C. W. Jones, *Bedae Pseudopigrapha. Scientific Writings Falsely Attributed to the Venerable Bede* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1939) pp. 88–89.
[77] Bede the Venerable, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) p. 460.

Europe, Iceland maintained various connections with religious, academic and commercial centres in mainland Scandinavia, as well as with insular and Continental Europe. Through these networks, it is likely that Iceland was exposed to novel knowledge, influences and commodities that would have been introduced by Icelanders upon their return to the island, subsequently being assimilated into their religious customs, local economy and societal framework. Icelandic religious writings offer instances of this phenomenon, exemplified by the assimilation of sermon and homily structures, along with hagiographical narratives, derived from more sophisticated liturgical literature on the Continent. These imported elements were then adapted to local holy figures and liturgical practices.[78] Likewise, within the vast saga corpus, we can discern remnants of Continental themes and tropes, evident in the translation and adaptation of epic chivalric tales to cater to an Icelandic audience in the *riddarasögur*.

Considering the extensive circulation of literary works from the Continent, encompassing sermons and chivalric narratives that transcended geographical and cultural boundaries, it is reasonable to question why medicine should not have similarly disseminated. While we readily acknowledge the influence of literary tropes and themes across generations and cultures, we encounter difficulties in contextualising medicine within this fluid dynamic.

However, it is crucial to recognize that medicine has held a central role in both lay and monastic life, with healing practices being widely disseminated through oral and written forms. As a result, Icelanders would have inevitably encountered European medical literature and paradigms. The transmission of this body of medical knowledge was facilitated through religious and learning connections between Iceland and medieval Europe. Students aspiring to attain a master's level education (*magister*) or to deepen their expertise in the *artes liberales* were required to travel abroad to acquire specific knowledge. This educational pursuit applied not only to Continental students but also to Icelandic and Scandinavian students seeking to make religious and intellectual contributions in their homeland.

In medieval Iceland and Scandinavia, the opportunity for travel abroad was primarily limited to a select group within the clergy, particularly those destined for high-ranking positions such as bishops or influential political and religious roles. From the

[78] Vernacular sermons from the regions of Northwestern Europe most influential for the shaping of Christianity in Iceland during its early stages, that is Germany, England, and Norway, were being collected into manuscript form.

eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries, Scandinavian clergy, including Icelanders, were particularly inclined to pursue their studies in France and Germany. During the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, northern Germany, with its prominent archbishopric in Hamburg-Bremen (which later lost its status to Lund in Scania in 1104), held significant appeal for Scandinavians. Subsequently, Paris and Orléans emerged as major centres of educational interest.

For instance, Henrik Harpestræng, who is possibly identified as Hericus Dacus, pursued his studies in Paris and Orléans. Likewise, two other prominent Danes, Absalon († 1201) and Anders Sunesen († 1228), also studied in Paris before assuming positions as the bishop of Roskilde and a canon of Roskilde, respectively.[79]

The Icelandic clergy followed a similar trajectory to their Scandinavian counterparts, seeking education in both Germany and France. References in *Hungrvaka* indicate that Ísleifr Gizurarson (1056–80), the first Icelandic bishop, studied in Herford, located in Saxony. Similarly, Sæmundr the Wise is believed to have pursued his studies in France or Germany, although the specific location remains uncertain. However, Icelanders also demonstrated an interest in England, particularly in the city of Lincoln. The saga dedicated to Bishop Þorlákr mentions that he studied in both Paris and Lincoln, and his successor, Bishop Páll Jónsson (episcopal years 1195–1211), also pursued his education in England, potentially in Lincoln as well.[80]

The dynamics of free movement and the interrelationships with neighbouring countries underwent a significant shift following the submission of the Icelanders to the authority of King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway in 1262. This surrender of formal independence marked a pivotal moment in Icelandic history, as it relinquished the nation's status as a free state that had been integral since the establishment of the initial settlements in the 870s. Consequently, in the so-called 'Norwegian Age' (1262/64-1380) Icelanders intensified their interactions with Norway, fostering closer cultural, religious and commercial networks while experiencing a decline in the number of students traveling to the Continent and the British Isles. Nevertheless, despite

[79] Sten Ebbesen, 'Wisdom's Trips to Denmark', in *Medieval Science in the North: Travelling Wisdom, 1000–1500*, ed. by Christian Etheridge and Michele Campopiano (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), pp. 97–109; Anonymous, *Sancti Willelmi abbatis vita et miracula,* in *Vitae sanctorum danorum*, ed. by Martin C. Gertz and Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie (København: G.E.C. Gad, 1908), pp. 300–69 (p. 319); Sten Ebbesen and Lars B. Mortensen, 'Introduction', *Andreas Sunonis filii Hexaemeron*, Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi, 10.1 (Copenhagen: Hauniae - Gad, 1985), p. 31.

[80] *Þorláks saga Byskups in Elzta*, *Biskupa sögur* II, Íslenzk fornrit XVI, ed. by Ásdís Egilsdóttir (Rkjjkavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2002) ch. iv; Páls saga, *Biskupa sögur* II, Íslenzk fornrit XVI, ed. by Ásdís Egilsdóttir (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka Fornritafélag, 2002) ch. i.

Norway's monopolistic control over trade and contact with Iceland, external influences from both Continental Europe and the British Isles continued to permeate Icelandic society through the mediation of Norway. The close religious, political and economic ties between Norway and England during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries exerted a multifaceted impact on various aspects of Icelandic life.

Prior to the end of the Commonwealth (1262-64 AD), close contacts between Iceland and England and France were primarily related to pedagogical and religious education.[81] The influence of England over Iceland is predominantly discernible in matters pertaining to ecclesiastical affairs and the production of manuscripts. This influence can be observed in several aspects of Icelandic religious and literary practices. Firstly, English religious practices, such as sermons and homilies, were adopted and adapted to the local context in Iceland.[82] This adoption of English liturgical literature reflects the transmission of religious ideas and practices between the two regions. Additionally, the extensive saga corpus in Iceland shows traces of English themes and tropes, particularly in the translation and adaptation of epic chivalry stories.[83]

Furthermore, Ryder Patzuk-Russell has proposed that the development of vernacular education in Iceland could have been influenced by Ælfric's grammar.[84] Ælfric, an English writer and grammarian from the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, is known for his works on grammar and homilies in Old English. Patzuk-Russell's assertion suggests that Ælfric's grammar, with its focus on the vernacular language and its use in religious instruction, may have served as a model for the educational practices in Iceland.[85] The adoption of Ælfric's grammar in Iceland would have contributed to the promotion of literacy in the vernacular language and the

[81] Sian Grønlie, 'Conversion Narrative and Christian Identity: 'How Christianity Came to Iceland', *Medium Ævum,* 86:1 (2017), 135–37; Etheridge, 'Manuscript Culture and Intellectual Connections between Iceland and Lincoln', p. 29.
[82] Some examples might be the translation of Ælfric's homilies *De Falsis Diis* and *De Auguriis* amongst others, please see Maria Cristina Lombardi, 'The travel of a text in space and time: The Old Norse Translation of Ælfric's Homily De falsis diis', in *The Fantasic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Saga and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th–12th August, 2006,* ed. by John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick (Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp. 593–602.
[83] Sarah Baccianti, 'Translating England in Medieval Iceland: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* and *Breta sögur*', in *Reading La3amon's Brut: Approaches and Explorations*, ed. by Allen Roberts et al., Studies in Literature vol. 52 (Amsterdam: Brill, 2013), pp. 561–88; Michael Staunton, *The Lives of Thomas Becket: Selected Sources* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2001); Jón S. Eysteinsson, 'The Relationship of *Merlínússpá* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*,' *Saga-Book* XIV (1955), 95–112.
Russell Poole, 'The Sources of Merlínússpá: Gunnlaugr Leifsson's Use of Texts Additional to the *De gestis Britonum* of Geoffrey of Monmouth', in *Eddic, Skaldic, and Beyond: Poetic Variety in Medieval Iceland & Norway*, ed. by Martin Chase (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).
[84] Patzuk-Russell, *The Development of Education in Medieval Iceland*, p. 200.
[85] Ibid.

development of a native educational system. This claim offers an intriguing possibility for understanding the influence of Old English language and educational traditions on the cultural and intellectual landscape of medieval Iceland.

Recent studies have shed light on the English origin and influence of extant Icelandic fragments dating from the twelfth to the thirteenth century. These fragments encompass diverse subjects, including computistic matters (such as the Easter table in Reykjavík, AM 732 a VII 4to), religious affairs (such as psalters and hagiography in *Thómas saga erkibyskups*), Arthurian literature (such as *Merlínússpá*) and scientific literature (such as a bestiary, also known as Physiologus, in AM 673 a I 4to and 673 a II 4to, as well as early astronomy texts in Reykjavík, AM GKS 1812 4to). The range of topics covered by these five manuscripts serves as evidence of extensive knowledge exchange between England and Iceland, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. Scholars argue that these manuscripts likely originated in Lincoln, home to one of the most flourishing cathedral schools established in 1072, which maintained close educational connections with Paris and the Victorine centres. These connections significantly influenced the book collection, teachings and intellectual pursuits of the Lincoln school.

Among many of their other educational expeditions, Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson and his successor Páll Jónsson are thought to have attended the Cathedral school in Lincoln during its apex of prestige in the middle and second half of the twelfth century, before its role was overtaken by Oxford, where the first English university was established.[86] Their period of education at the Cathedral school entailed the acquisition of books and knowledge that they subsequently brought back to Iceland. These resources and insights were utilized by Icelanders for the purpose of enhancing literary production in Latin and in the vernacular, as well as facilitating the instruction of various subjects and the circulation of new literary themes.

Like numerous cathedral and monastic schools of the era, Lincoln Cathedral school adhered to an educational system rooted in the *septem artes liberales* (seven liberal arts), which can be traced back to the Romans. These arts were divided into two distinct groups: the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. The trivium encompassed the subjects of *grammatica, rhetorica* and *dialectica*, while the quadrivium comprised

[86] *The Saga of Bishop Thorlak (Þorláks saga Byskups)*, vol. XXI ed. and trans. by Ármann Jakobsson and David Clark (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2013), p. 4; Gottskálk Jensson and Susanne M. Fahn, **'**The Forgotten Poem: A Latin Panegyric for Saint Þorlákr in AM 382 4to**'**, *Gripla*, 21:2 (2010), 19–60.

musica, arithmetica, geometria and *astronomia*. It is worth noting that medicine was not formally included as part of the *septem artes liberales* until the eleventh or twelfth century. However, during this period, the teaching of medical treatises started to be actively integrated, particularly within monastic settings, and *physica* (learned medicine) gradually became a part of university instruction.[87]

The catalogues of Lincoln Cathedral manuscripts provide evidence that the incorporation of medical texts was indeed occurring in Lincoln during the time when Þorlákr and Páll were pursuing their studies. These catalogues reveal the existence of five medical collections dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. Among these collections, two are contemporaneous with the period when the Icelandic scholars were in Lincoln. They contain Hippocratic texts, and a work titled *De viribus herbarum*, which was incorrectly attributed to Amelius Macer by a seventeenth-century annotator, whilst it should be attributed to Macer Floridus.[88]

Unfortunately, no medical manuscripts from Iceland have survived from the twelfth to the early thirteenth century. However, a slightly later medical manuscript has been preserved from the latter half of that period (Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to). This manuscript not only shows direct parallels with the Latin version of *De viribus herbarum* but also exhibits certain orthographical elements of English origin.

As mentioned previously, the latter half of the thirteenth century marked a significant shift in Icelandic history as the country came under Norwegian control, leading to reduced direct interaction between Iceland and medieval England. Nonetheless, England maintained strong ties with Norway in terms of trade and cultural and religious influence, and its impact on Iceland persisted through the intermediary role played by Norway. Haraldur Bernharðsson has drawn attention to the substantial number of surviving manuscripts from the thirteenth century, including the medical fragment Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to. It is noteworthy that these manuscripts consistently incorporate Old English letters for ‘v,’ ‘f,’ and ‘ð’ in the Icelandic scribal tradition. Bernharðsson proposes that this orthographic innovation in Iceland was introduced through the influence of Norwegian scribes, and the consistent

[87] Nancy G. Siraisi, ‘The Faculty of Medicine’, in *A History of University in Europe*, ed. by Hilde de Ridder-Symoens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 360–87; David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, Prehistory to A.D. 1450*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) pp. 286–313; Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), pp. 19, 50.

[88] Rodney M., Thomson, and Lincoln Cathedral Library, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), p. 180.

usage of these new Old English letters indicates that their adoption likely stemmed from a collective decision within the thirteenth-century Icelandic scribal community under the influence of Norwegian manuscripts.[89]

After examining the impact of England on Icelandic educational and cultural matters, it is pertinent to shift our focus towards the economic and political ties between Iceland, Norway and England.

In a socio-political landscape where politics and religion are intricately intertwined and interdependent, the influence of England on Norwegian affairs can be traced back to the endeavours of English monks who embarked on conversion missions to the northern regions as early as the tenth century. Our knowledge about these missions led by English monks during the tenth and eleventh centuries is relatively more limited compared to the information available on the comparatively less successful initiatives undertaken by the See of Hamburg-Bremen in the ninth century, as highlighted by Lesley Abrams.[90]

The establishment of privileged diplomatic relations between Norway and England can be traced back to a significant decision made by King Haraldr Hárfagri, who arranged for his son Hákon (*Aðalsteins fóstri*) to be fostered at the court of King Athelstan in England during the period of 924-939 AD.[91] This strategic arrangement fostered a close bond between the two kingdoms and laid the foundation for subsequent political and cultural exchanges. Following Hákon's return from his fosterage in England, he played a crucial role in the introduction and dissemination of Christianity throughout Norway. According to *Hákonar saga góða*, Hákon likely invited English missionaries to Norway, thereby facilitating the spread of Christian teachings and practices.[92] While Christian missionaries had been active in Scandinavia since the ninth century, it was the English missionary efforts that emerged as the dominant force in the conversion of Norway. This shift in focus became a defining characteristic of Hákon's reign and the subsequent period. In the twelfth century, historical sources

[89] Haraldur Bernharðsson, 'Scribal Culture in Thirteenth-Century Iceland: The Introduction of Anglo-Saxon "f" in Icelandic Script', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 117:3 (2018), 279–314 (pp. 287, 314).
[90] Lesley Abrams, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 24 (1995), 213–49 (p. 215).
[91] Gustav Storm, *Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ: Latinske Kildeskrifter Til Norges Historie I Middelalderen* (Kristiania: A.W. Brøgger, 1880), pp. 104–5, Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium. An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*, Text series vol. XI, ed. and trans. by David and Ian McDougall (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), p. 7; *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum*, ASB 18, ed. by Finnur Jónsson (Halle: Niemeyer, 1929), p. 5; Snorri Sturluson, *Haralds saga ins hárfagra, Heimskringla I*, Íslenzk Fornrit XXVI, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1941), ch. 40.
[92] *Hákonar saga góða*, ch. 13, *Heimskringla I*, ed. by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2016).

credit the final stages of Norway's conversion, as well as the conversion of the North Atlantic regions, to Kings Óláfr Tryggvason (r. 995-1000 AD) and Óláfr Haraldsson (r. 1015-30 AD). Both kings had significant connections to England, as Óláfr Tryggvason was baptised in England and Óláfr Haraldsson in Normandy.[93]

Under the auspices and support of local authorities, English missionaries were instrumental in establishing monastic institutions within Norway during the eleventh and the twelfth century.[94] These monasteries played a crucial role in the propagation of religious and literary culture. In the late eleventh century the first bishoprics were established in the Nordic regions, and the first monastery around 1100 AD.[95] Cathedral schools were run already in the second half of the eleventh century in Iceland, with the consecration to bishop of Ísleifr Gizurarson (episcopal years 1056–80 AD). The establishment and success of these episcopal seats meant that both liturgical and educational works were circulated in Norway and Iceland.[96] As centres of literary dissemination, these religious and educational works likely found their way to Iceland through the strengthening of contacts between the two regions, even prior to the thirteenth century. For instance, this period coincided with the adoption of Old English orthographic variants for fricative sounds within Norwegian scribal culture, which subsequently influenced Icelandic scribal practices.[97]

The Norwegian assertion of control over the western settlements during the mid-thirteenth century can be understood as the culmination of prolonged endeavours aimed at extending their dominion over peripheral territories, which encompassed Iceland among other regions.[98] Subsequent to the political intrusion, a multifaceted interaction unfolded encompassing trade, religious affiliations and cultural exchanges.

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[93] Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, p. 17; Sverre Bagge, *Cross and Scepter. the Rise of the Scandinavian Kingdoms from the Vikings to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 63; Haki Antonsson, 'Traditions of Conversion in Medieval Scandinavia', *Saga-Book* XXXIV (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010), 25–74 (p. 37).

[94] Anders Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia. Vikings, Merchants, and Missionaries in the Remaking of Northern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 123, 156; Tore Nyberg, 'Early Monasticism in Scandinavia', in *Scandinavia and Europe 800-1350. Contact, Conflict*, and Coexistence, ed. by Johnathan Adams and Katherine Holman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 197–208 (p. 197).

[95] Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, 'The Origin and Development of Icelandic Script,' in *Régionalisme et Internationalisme—Problèmes de Paléographie et de Codicologie du Moyen Âge. Actes du XVe Colloque du Comité International de Paléographie Latine (Vienne, 13–17 Septembre 2005)*, ed. by Otto Kresten and Franz Lackner (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008), pp. 87–94 (p. 87).

[96] Ibid.

[97] Bernharðsson, 'Scribal Culture in Thirteenth-Century Iceland', pp. 287, 314.

[98] Thomas K. Derry, *A History of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979), p. 49; Birgit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer, 'Scandinavia Enters Christian Europe', in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia,* ed. by Knut Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 150–57; Sverrir Jakobsson, 'All the King's Men. The Incorporation of Iceland into the Norwegian Realm,' *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 46:5 (2021) 571–92.

This dynamic entailed the transmission of educational and religious material derived from Continental and Insular European sources, which found its way to Iceland through the intermediary role played by Norway and its monastic institutions and centres of learning.[99] During the post-Commonwealth era, a noticeable shift occurred within the Icelandic Church as it increasingly aligned itself with the more advanced ecclesiastical archbishopric of Niðarós (Nidaros) in Norway. This shift had consequential implications for the local bureaucracy and organizational structure within the Icelandic Church.[100] An important consequence of this realignment was the further separation of secular and ecclesiastical power by the Niðarós archbishopric in 1238 AD, which strengthened a decree issued by the archbishop in 1190 AD which rejected the Icelandic tradition of appointing local bishops from the local chieftains.[101] Consequently, in accordance with this decree, foreign bishops of Norwegian origin were subsequently appointed to the bishoprics of Skáholt and Hólar, along with their accompanying retinues and entourages.

In the fourteenth century, the Norwegian kingdom faced significant challenges that had a detrimental impact on Iceland's foreign policy. As recently observed by Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, the overall decline in the relationship between Iceland and Norway was further exacerbated by dynastic changes in the mid-fourteenth century, leading to the disintegration of the court (*hirð*) in the Kingdom of Norway, which had previously provided a welcoming environment for Icelandic aristocrats.[102] The consequences of Norway's protracted political decline were reflected in the diminished ties between Iceland and its neighbouring country. As Norway experienced a prolonged period of political instability, culminating in the formation of the Kalmar Union under Danish rule in 1380 AD, Iceland found itself increasingly marginalised within the political landscape of medieval Europe. The shifting dynamics of Scandinavian politics, albeit transient, highlighted Iceland's limited agency and reinforced its peripheral position. However, this situation eventually catalysed a re-

[99] Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change, 1000-1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 196.
[100] Erika Sigurdson, *The Church in Fourteenth Century Iceland: the Formation of an Elite Clerical Identity*, Northern world 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 86–87.
[101] Magnús Stefánsson, 'Kirkjuvald eflist', in *Saga Íslands II*: *samin að tilhlutan þjóðhátíðarnefndar 1974*, ed. by Sigurður Líndal (Reykjavík: Sögufelagið, 1975), pp. 57–144 (pp. 137–39); Sverrir Jakobsson, 'The Process of State-Formation in Medieval Iceland', *Viator*, 40:2 (2009), 151–70 (p. 161).
[102] Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *The Development of Flateyjarbók: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005), pp. 26–27.

evaluation of Iceland's circumstances, leading to a renewed focus on its own distinct identity and interests.

In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the influence of Danish political authority in Iceland experienced a significant decline, resulting in a political void. This period of political instability created an opportunity for direct intervention by the Roman Church in ecclesiastical matters and the emergence of new trade routes with Germany and England.[103]

However, the influence of the English gradually overshadowed other foreign powers. The weakening Danish crown was unable to effectively control foreign activities, leading to Iceland's renewed engagement in direct economic and trade relations with the British Isles. This facilitated the accumulation of wealth for landowners and fostered reciprocal exchanges with late medieval England.

It is noteworthy that mutual interactions between Iceland and medieval England were not uncommon. English missionaries played a crucial role in the early Christianization of both Norway and Iceland, and a more direct influence was exerted on Norway through the conversion of leaders such as Hákon *Athelsteins fóstri* (920-61 AD) and Óláfr Tryggvason (ca. 963-1000 AD).[104] Icelandic Christianisation was heavily influenced by Norwegian religious and political affairs as Ari recalls in his *Islendingabók*,[105] and consequently English religious, cultural and written influence exerted its power over the island. Furthermore, medieval England boasted several renowned centres of learning in the north-western regions. Consequently, it is evident that a substantial number of texts, knowledge and cultural influences extended beyond the confines of the British Isles and permeated neighbouring areas. Despite the diminished political and economic agency of Iceland during the Norwegian Age (1262-1380 AD), this did not impede the transmission of texts, knowledge and Christian education originating in England to Iceland through the intermediation of Norway.

Lastly, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries coincide with the dating of some of our medical manuscripts. This aligns with expectations, as during the period when Iceland regained the ability to engage in trade and exchange with neighbouring

[103] Bagge, *Cross and Scepter*, pp. 260–65; Sigurdson, *The Church in Fourteenth Century Iceland*, p. 29; Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland 1100's Years. History of a Marginal Society* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2000), pp. 200–7.
[104] Peter Sawyer, 'The Process of Scandinavian Christianization in the Tenth and the Eleventh centuries', in *The Christianization of Scandinavia: Report of a Symposium Held at Kungälv, Sweden, 4-9 August 1985*, ed. by Birgit Sawyer, Peter Sawyer, Ian Wood (Alingsås: Viktoria, 1987) pp. 68–87 (p. 71).
[105] *íslendingabók – Landnámabók*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson, pp. 14-15.

regions, a wide range of texts, knowledge and external influences would have made their way to the island.

Despite its geographical location at the periphery of medieval Europe, Iceland did not experience cultural isolation. There were at least three distinct junctures during the medieval period when Icelandic clerics and lay individuals could have engaged with the textual tradition and cultural heritage of medieval England. Initially, during the period spanning the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, Icelandic clerics of high standing embarked on educational journeys abroad, affording them the opportunity to pursue studies in England and on the Continent. This facilitated the acquisition of significant first-hand familiarity with the local textual tradition and classical literary works. Noteworthy among these acquisitions were early instances of Macer Floridus' *herbarium* and other seminal medical compendia.

Similarly, even amidst the Norwegian Age (1264-1380 AD), a phase during which external interactions were largely mediated through Norway, England played a subtle role in shaping Icelandic manuscript culture. This influence manifested in the incorporation of English variations of script forms.[106]

Lastly, the fifteenth century marked a notable transition, characterised by the waning authority of Danish rule over Iceland. This shift in governance created a window of opportunity for the establishment of direct connections with the British Isles and Continental Europe, particularly Germany. The diminished Danish control granted Iceland the prospect of fostering economic and trade relations with England and Germany, thus ushering in novel networks of interaction.

The historical context provides a framework for situating the dissemination of medical theories and practices in the form of manuscripts, as well as identifying the specific time periods during which this knowledge could have been transmitted to Iceland. In the subsequent chapters, I will undertake an examination of distinct remedies, considering their cultural, linguistic and intellectual ramifications within the Icelandic context. This exploration will commence with an analysis of learned and empirical remedies, followed by two subsequent chapters dedicated to assessing the linguistic, cultural and palaeographical impact of the English medical tradition on Iceland.

[106] Bernharðsson, 'Scribal Culture in Thirteenth-Century Iceland', pp. 287, 314.

2. 4. 2 Preliminary Conclusions

The chapter has explored the medieval medical framework along with its regulating factors, such as the intricate interplay between natural philosophy, religion and magic, in addition to the gendered and religious interpretations of the aetiology of illness and disease.

The examination of medieval medical history and literature through a delimited separation of healing, religion and magic has revealed limited progress in research, as this approach imposes an external, etic perspective upon concepts that were cultivated within their unique historical and contextual milieu. A more flexible approach, characterized by an open-minded recognition of the interconnections and overlaps among these three concepts, would provide scholars with a more valuable framework for comprehending medieval medicine. Healing practices that draw upon natural philosophy, religion and magic can be seen as interconnected rituals, forming a continuum where science, religion and magic are inextricably intertwined.

Rather than appraising remedies based on a rigid dichotomy between magic and religion, we need to lean towards the idea of 'power' and bear it in mind throughout this study, as achieving power and effectiveness is the central focus for practitioners of performative rituals. The pursuit of 'power' in medieval medical practices encompasses a diverse array of methods, including supplicative, manipulative and sympathetic relationships.

This chapter has highlighted how the outlined medieval medical ideas, concepts, paradigms and models persist throughout Old Norse medical evidence, whether in medical manuscripts or literary contexts. The analysis continued with the description of the manuscript corpus, which comprises surviving Old Norse medical manuscripts, elucidating their provenance, content and distinctive features. Furthermore, this chapter explored where evidence of Old Norse medicine can be found, particularly outside the medical manuscript context and within prose and verse literature, and how the corpus of medical evidence provided within literature diverges from that found in medical miscellany. Nevertheless, medical evidence in Old Norse prose and poetry remains valuable for addressing overarching medical paradigms and the aetiology of illness and disease.

Finally, an additional underlying theme has been introduced within the framework of this study, one that will be revisited in the concluding chapter of this

thesis. This theme pertains to the historical channels through which England might have facilitated its engagement with Iceland and exerted its influence in the realms of cultural, political and religious developments. This exploration has laid the foundation for the interpretation of certain remedies found in Old Norse medical miscellany as potentially originating from the English medical tradition. Given Iceland's sustained exposure to the English religious and cultural milieu, facilitated through direct learning trips to Lincoln or the mediation of Norway and its scribal culture, it is conceivable that Iceland absorbed a significant volume of texts that had been written and circulated in medieval England. Thus, delineating the historical context in which this assimilation occurred becomes instrumental in framing the argument that certain medical remedies present in Old Norse manuscripts are derived from Old and Middle English medical texts.

Chapter 3
Empirical and Learned Medicine in Old Norse Medical Texts

3. 1 The Empirical Tradition

From the northernmost region of medieval Europe, Iceland possessed an active network of relationships across the Latin West and beyond. Icelandic manuscripts and literature provide valuable insights into the assimilation and reinterpretation of Continental European motifs, thereby offering a glimpse into the negotiation of cultural exchanges between Iceland and Continental Europe. This cultural exchange also extended to the realm of medical theories and practices, as evidenced by surviving Old Norse sources. Primarily, these sources bear witness to the integration of Continental empirical remedies into Old Norse culture. Moreover, they provide a broader understanding of the reception and dissemination of Classical and Arabic treatments in northern Europe.

In relation to the first category of typology of remedies, the circulation of *empiricum* (empirical remedies) was widespread across insular and Continental Europe from Late Antiquity onwards. Empirical remedies rooted in folk medicine coexisted alongside *empiricum* based on humoral theories within the spheres of clerical, lay and medical authorities.[1]

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, remedies that were derived from the observation of symptoms, treatment efficacy and practical training, underwent a shift in their status as mainstream medical conventions. This transformation coincided with Western Christendom's discovery of Arabic and Greek medical and philosophical traditions, with particular emphasis on Aristotle's natural philosophy.

[1] Wallis, *Medieval Medicine*, pp. 1–2; Linda E. Voigts and Michael R. McVaugh, 'A Latin Technical Phlebotomy and Its Middle English Translation', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 74:2 (1984), 1–69; Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicin*e (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 202–15; Vivian Nutton, 'From Galen to Alexander: Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity', in *Papers XXXVIII*, ed. by John Scarborough and Dumbarton Oaks (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 1984), pp. 1–14; Anne Van Arsdall, 'Medical Training in Anglo-Saxon England: an Evaluation of the Evidence', in *Form and Content of Instruction in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Patrizia Lendinara, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 415–43.

As a result, these empirical remedies gradually lost their prominence within the medical discourse.[2] Before the onset of the twelfth century, Latin texts lacked the transmission of knowledge pertaining to anatomy and the physiological mechanisms of the human body. Moreover, the understanding of the causes of illness was primarily confined to select works of Hippocratic-Galenic origin.[3] To better exemplify medical knowledge inherited by the early Middle Ages from Late Antiquity, a passage extracted from Isidore's *Etymologies*, dating back to the seventh century, can be examined. Within this text, Isidore elucidates the three fundamental elements of medical schools in the ancient world, which subsequently influenced the approaches to medical intervention during the early medieval period:

> These three men founded as many sects. The first or Methodist was founded by Apollo, whose remedies are also discussed in poems. The second or Empiric, that is, the most fully tested, was established by Asclepius and is based upon observed factual experience alone, and not on mere signs and indications. The third or Logical, that is, rational sect, was founded by Hippocrates. For having discussed the qualities of the ages of life, regions, and illness, Hippocrates thoroughly and rationally investigated the management of the art; diseases were searched through to their causes in the light of reason and their cure was rationally studied. The Empirics follow only experience; the Logical join reason to experience; the Methodists study the relationships of neither elements, times, ages, nor causes, but only the properties of the diseases themselves. [4]

By the seventh century, based on the evidence provided by Isidore's enumeration of medical approaches, it is evident that the logical approach to medicine, rooted in the teachings of Hippocrates and Galen regarding the causes of illness, did not represent the sole prevailing standard in medical practice. Two additional approaches held significant value and were widely employed. It was not until the twelfth century that the logical approach gained recognition as a conventional medical paradigm. During the early Middle Ages, all three approaches were observed in medical interventions. However, in the twelfth century, the proliferation of exegetical studies on Galen and Hippocrates, along with the

[2] Faith Wallis, 'Structure and Philosophy in Mediaeval Encyclopaedias' (unpublished doctoral thesis, McGill University, 1974); Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, pp. 3–7.
[3] Vivian Nutton, 'Early-Medieval Medicine and Natural Science', in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. by David Lindberg and Michael Shank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 332; Nutton, 'From Galen to Alexander', pp. 1–14.
[4] 'The Three Sects of Physicians', *Medieval Medicine*, trans. by Faith Wallis, p. 6; Faye M. Getz, 'Introduction', in *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Sheila Campbell et al. (London: MacMillan Academic and Professional Ltd, 1992), pp. xiii–xx; Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, pp. 187–201; Wallis, *Medieval Medicine*, pp. 1–2.

incorporation of insights from Arabic and Greek treatises, occurred within an esteemed educational framework, thereby contributing to a greater understanding of the aetiology of illness.[5]

Empirical remedies held significant value due to their efficacy based on experiential knowledge. A considerable number of these *empirica* originated from popular sources and were initially transmitted orally before being documented in written form. One such example is the *Sator* palindrome, which originated orally in Antiquity and later found extensive usage in textual amulets.[6] Over time, this palindrome became associated with Christian symbols, such as the Cross and the *Pater Noster* anagram. Consequently, it was incorporated into medical miscellanies in Western Europe from the ninth century onwards.[7] Other *empirica*, on the other hand, were directly derived from Greek and Latin sources and aimed to align with the humoral system and the concept of sympathetic correspondence of microcosm and macrocosm.[8] Within this category we can identify multiple textual genres. Only a few examples here will serve our cause: *regimen* (seasonal dietary and hygienic advice, depending on the age of the patient), *lunaria* (divination of illness course and outcomes through lunar phases) and *Dies Ægyptiaci* or 'Egyptians days' (inherently unlucky days of the year falling when it is prescribed to refrain from carrying out any activities, especially bloodletting).[9] Such remedies were thought to

[5] Michael H. Shank, 'Schools and Universities in Medieval Latin Science', in *The Cambridge History of Science: Medieval Science* 2, ed. by David C. Lindberg and Michael H. Shank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[6] For further examples please see Katherine Storm Hindley, *Textual Magic. Charms and Written Amulets in Medieval England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023) p. 60.

[7] Lea T. Olsan, 'The Marginality of Charms in Medieval England', in *The Power of the Words*, ed. by James Kapaló et al. (Budapest, New York: CEU PRESS, 2013), pp. 135–64 (p. 143). On transmission of charms in Western Christendom see also T.M. Smallwood, 'The Transmission of Charms in English, Medieval and Modern', in *Charms, Charmers and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 11–31 (pp. 16–17); Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 77–78.

[8] Wallis, 'Structure and Philosophy in Mediaeval Encyclopaedias', pp. 6, 34–38; Kirsi Kanerva, 'Disturbances of the Mind and Body: Effects of the Living Dead in Medieval Iceland', in *Mental (Dis)Order in later Medieval Europe*, ed. by Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Susanna Niiranen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 219–42 (p. 233); Faith Wallis, 'Medicine, Theoretical', in *Medieval Science. Technology and Medicine: An Encyclopaedia, Encyclopaedias of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Thomas Glick et al. (New York; London: Routledge, 2005), p. 337; Laura Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic in Fifteenth-Century England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2011), pp. 110, 114; Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'Humoral Theory in the Medieval North. An Old Norse Translation of Epistula Vindiciani in *Hauksbók*', *Gripla* XXIX (2018), 35–66.

[9] For a review of the genres see Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010); Roy M. Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context: A Survey and Handlist of Manuscripts', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 30 (2001), 181–230; László S. Chardonnens, 'Norm and Practice of Divination and Prognostication in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *Mantik, Schicksal und Freiheit im Mittelalter*, ed. by Loris Sturlese (Köln Weimar Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2011), pp. 51–64; Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900-1100*, pp. 330–31; Marilina Cesario, 'An English Source for a Latin Text? Wind Prognostication in Oxford, Bodleian, Hatton 115 and Ashmole 345', *Studies in Philology*, 112: 2 (2015), 213–33; Faith Wallis, 'What a Medieval Diagram Shows: a Case Study of 'Computus', *Studies in Iconography*, 36 (2015), 1–40; Faith Wallis, 'Medicine in Medieval Calendar Manuscripts', in *Manuscript Sources of Medieval Medicine: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Margaret R. Schleissner (New York: Routledge, 1995), 105–43.

work around a sympathetic relation between a natural element (e.g., astral element, stone, animal and plant) and the patient's symptoms. Sympathetic action was also at the heart of the so-called 'narrative charm', whose agency was based upon a sympathetic correlation between the patient's circumstance and an exemplary event, usually of biblical origin.[10] The Empirical tradition did not cease to exist with the rediscovery of Aristotle through Arabic medicine. However, it gradually lost prominence within learned medicine and university physicians whilst still featuring prominently within medicine practiced by a variety of other local practitioners, midwives and healers.[11]

Despite the transmission of remedies rooted in empirical observations through written texts during the early Middle Ages, there is a lack of preserved material evidence from the Viking Age (approximately 800-1100 AD) in terms of such remedies, at least within the context of manuscripts. There are no manuscripts in Old Norse dated before the twelfth century,[12] and accordingly no popular remedies have been transmitted in writing until at least the advent of Christianity and the subsequent establishment of a learned medicine tradition. Despite the lack of written evidence, archaeological finds reveal certain healing practices within early medieval Scandinavian communities to serve prophylactic and medical purposes. While the available evidence for healing practices during the early stages is notably limited to archaeology, there is a discernible presence of medical practices from the twelfth century onwards in both manuscript and archaeology context.

These practices are influenced to some extent by the introduction of learned materials from external sources. However, they may also reflect an empirical approach to healing when compared to medical practices observed in archaeological findings. By examining such findings dating back to the Viking Age and the early stages of conversion, a comparative approach can shed light on local perspectives on healing. It is worth noting that a significant portion of these remedies are documented in texts that are known to belong to the oral tradition,[13]

[10] Karen L. Jolly, 'The Practice of Magic: Popular and Courtly Traditions', in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 3, ed. by Karen Jolly et al. (London: The Athlone Press, 2002), pp. 27–66 (p. 37).
[11] Horden, 'Medieval Medicine', p. 212.
[12] Jones and Olsan, 'Performative Rituals', pp. 415–20.
[13] Judy Quinn, 'The Endless Triangles of Eddic Tragedy: Reading *Oddrúnargrátr*', in *Studi anglo-norreni in onore di John S. McKinnell*, ed. by Maria Elena Ruggerini (Cagliari: CUEC, 2009), pp. 304–26.

such as the *Poetic Edda*. Therefore, motifs and attitudes displayed within can be regarded as being rooted in the centuries preceding their codification.

Within the corpus of empirical remedies documented in Old Norse literature and artifacts, it is possible to discern two distinct subgroups. The first subgroup pertains to the local empirical tradition, characterised by remedies that are forged on local belief systems and practices (*galdrar*, carved object and words, runes and healing hands). These remedies may exhibit shared features with the Continental empirical practices, particularly in terms of the therapeutic efficacy attributed to written and oral charms, as well as amulets.

The second subcategory encompasses the imported empirical tradition, consisting of remedies that incorporate foreign motifs, such as the *Sator* palindrome or narrative charms, with their therapeutic efficacy grounded in empirical experience. Remedies utilizing herbs and animal parts, talismans, amulets and charms can be found within this category. Although a substantial portion of early medieval medical practices within Scandinavian and Icelandic communities lacks written evidence, certain contexts, including oral traditions, artifacts and manuscripts, offer glimpses into the local medical culture preceding the encounter with Christianity and Latin culture. These sources shed light on how imported Continental and popular medicine became integrated into the local medical practices.

3. 2 The Learned Tradition

In medieval Scandinavia, medical writings, treatments and conceptions of health and illness were not solely based on empirical observations of symptoms and cures, but also on a theoretical framework that sought to establish connections between the external world and human physiology. This framework was inherited by medieval Christianity through a limited number of translations and encyclopaedic collections from Late Antiquity. The consolidation and further development of this framework within Scholasticism began in the late eleventh century, facilitated by extensive translations of Greek and Arabic texts initiated by figures such as Constantinus Africanus at Monte Cassino, intellectuals at the *Schola Medica Salernitana* and other contemporaneous translators in regions such as Sicily and

southern Spain.[14] Prior to this development, the term *Medicina* was employed in the Continent to denote a compilation of medical training centred around empirical practices and experiential knowledge.[15] With the rediscovery of Aristotle and the translation of more sophisticated Greek and Arabic medical treatises in Latin, medicine began to be understood within an aetiological framework.[16] This new framework flourished within Scholasticism, which fostered a university licence-based system limiting the access to perform medicine to an academic level.[17] With this development, medical practices and theories were framed within a natural phenomenon system and referred as *Physica*, to mark a distinction from the empirical-based *Medicina*.[18] *Physica* successfully attained a position within the realm of the liberal arts as a result of its examination within the framework of natural philosophy principles.[19] This new theoretical framework, on the other hand, did not affect the whole medical practices performed on the sick. Despite the embedding of medicine within the university *curricula*, medieval medicine, including the Old Norse tradition, remained predominantly grounded in holistic interventions. Central to these practices was an emphasis on achieving a balance between inner and outer substances, as well as the recognition of *Christus medicus*, which affirmed the subordination of health to divine will.[20]

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[14] Charles Burnett, 'The Translating Activity in Medieval Spain', in *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing ltd, 1996), pp. 1036–58; Charles Burnett, 'Translation and Transmission of Greek and Islamic Science to Latin Christendom', in *The Cambridge History of Science: Medieval Sciece,* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 341–64; Faith Wallis and Robert Wisnovsky, 'Agents of Transmission, Translation and Transformation', in *Medieval Textual Cultures*, ed. by Faith Wallis and Robert Wisnovsky (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, 2016); Burnett, 'The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century', 249–88.

[15] Meaney, 'The Practice of Medicine About the Year 1000', pp. 221–37; John M. Riddle, 'Theory and Practice in Medieval Medicine', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 5 (1974), 157–84; Faith Wallis, 'The Experience of the Book: Manuscripts, Texts, and the Role of Epistemology in Early Medieval Medicine', in *Knowledge and the Scholarly Medical Traditions*, ed. by Don Bates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 101–26.

[16] Danielle Jacquart, 'The Introduction of Arabic Medicine into the West', p. 186; Peregrine Horden, 'Sickness and Healing', in *Culture of Healing. Medieval and After*, ed. by Peregrine Horden (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 416–32 (p. 420).

[17] For further readings about this transition from *medicina pratica* (*Medicina*) to *medicina teorica* (*Physica*) see; Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*; Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*; David Langslow and Brigitte Maire, eds., *Body, Disease and Treatment in a Changing World: Latin Texts and Contexts in Ancient and Medieval Medicine: Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference "Ancient Latin Medical Texts", Hulme Hall, University of Manchester, 5th-8th September 2007* (Lausanne: Éditions BHMS, 2010); Wallis, 'Medicine, Practical', pp. 191–92.

[18] Wallis, *Medieval Medicine*, pp. xx–xxi.

[19] Ibid.; Danielle Jacquart, ''Theorica' et 'practica' dans l'enseignement de la médecine à Salerne au XIIe siècle', in *Vocabulaire des écoles et des méthodes d'enseignement au moyen âge*, Études sur le vocabulaire intellectuel du moyen âge 5, ed. by Olga Weijers (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), pp. 102–10; Michael R. McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague. Practitioners and their Patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285–1345* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[20] Andries G. Van Aarde, "Christus Medicus – Christus Patients: Healing as Exorcism in Context', *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 75:4 (2019), 1–10; Christoffer H. Grundmann, 'Christ as Physician: The Ancient Christus Medicus Trope and Christian Medical Missions as Imitation of Christ', *Christian Journal for Global Healt,* 5:3 (2018), 3–11.

The change of contextualisation provided grounds for further physiological and academic discussions on healing, but the practices employed by both university-trained physicians and the non-academic trained healers did not differ substantially.[21] For instance, medical practitioners could administer concoctions or ointments to give relief from headache just like academic trained physicians would do. Popular healers could deploy stones and herbs as amulets to prevent illness just like an academic Lapidary would recommend. Even the practice of verbal healing, which was effectively utilised by popular healers, found its way into learned collections on occasion. However, a notable distinction arises in terms of the asserted authority, which was upheld by academic physicians but not by popular healers, midwives, quacks and other marginalised individuals.

The emergence of scholarly medicine and the dissemination of Classical and Arabic treatments find resonance in Old Norse literary sources. The second half of the thirteenth century serves as the *terminus post quem* for the presence of Salernitan medical practices in sagas, legal and manuscript traditions.[22] During the transition from the eleventh to the twelfth century, the *Schola Medica Salernitana* enjoyed its peak prestige.[23] Consequently, the dissemination of Salernitan teachings in Iceland a mere few decades later reflects the receptive and vibrant cultural environment prevalent on the island. It is reasonable to assume that Icelanders had close connections with these sources and possessed the capacity and clientele to implement such teachings. The recipients of these teachings were primarily local clerical elites, who either travelled abroad to acquire first-hand knowledge or relied on itinerant scholars to bring back this acquired knowledge. In contrast to the development on the Continent, where learned traditions spread through guild-like university systems, medicine in this early stage of circulation took

[21] Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, p. 58.
[22] Reichborn-Kjennerud, 'The School of Salerno', p. 323.
[23] On the 'theoretical turn' of the Medical School of Salerno please see Wallis, *Medieval Medicine*, pp. 131–32; Iolanda Ventura, 'Classification and Description Systems in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: a Short History', in *Classification from Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. by Walter Bisang and Tanja Pommerening (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 101–66 (p. 120); Florence E. Glaze, 'Salerno's Lombard Price: Johannes 'Abbas de Curte' as Medical Practitioner', *Early Science and Medicine*, 23 (2018), 177–216; Roger French, 'De iuvamenis membrorum and the Reception of Galenic Physiological Anatomy', *Isis*, 70 (1979), 96–109; Danielle Jacquart, *La médecine médiévale dans le cadre parisien* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); Danielle Jacquart, 'La question disputée dans les Facultés de médecine', in *Les questions disputées dans les Facultés de Théologie, de Droit, et de Médecine*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 44–45, ed. by Bernardo C. Bazàn et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), pp. 280–315.

place through what has been referred to as a 'decentralized system' of Cathedral and minor schools, as described by Patzuk-Russell.[24]

Formal cathedral schools were established at Hólar and Skálholt since the late twelfth century and as medicine was growing in liberal arts and in the life of religious orders, these would likely have possessed medical miscellanies. Given the growing significance of medicine within the liberal arts and the lives of religious orders, it is likely that these schools possessed medical miscellanies.

The dissemination of learned medicine among clerical schools and monasteries is further illustrated by the life and work of Henrik Harpestræng († 1244), who possibly gained exposure to Salernitan teachings during his time in Orléans and Montpellier.[25] Another relevant figure is the Icelandic medical practitioner, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, whose saga contains rich descriptions of healing practices resembling the Salernitan *curricula*. The narrative of Hrafn's involvement with religion is substantiated by the mention in the saga that he had received the first tonsure prior to practicing healing.[26] Additionally, *Hrafns saga* emphasizes his association with Salerno by recounting his pilgrimage to St. Giles and Canterbury, and his extensive travels to renowned centres of knowledge throughout Europe.

The available evidence does not allow us to ascertain the degree to which this knowledge disseminated among lay healers in Iceland and Scandinavia. However, it can be hypothesized that certain practices introduced from the Continent likely circulated predominantly within lay circles during the performance of surgical procedures or ritualistic healing just like we see in *Hrafns saga* when Hrafn encourages the audience to recite the *pater nosters* with him prior to performing surgery.[27] However, no further data can be drawn from surviving evidence. In the sagas, the majority of healers appear to employ healing techniques that are not explicitly linked to Salernitan teachings, they encompass religious practices, and they also give insights into pre-Salernitan medical practice among the Old Norse communities. In cases where such practices exclusively drawn from Salerno occur, as seen in *Sturlunga saga*, the healer Vilhjálmr, who is said to be a foreigner, is

[24] Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason, *The Manuscripts of Iceland* (Reykjavík: Ární Magnússon Institute in Iceland, 2004), p. 19.
[25] Coulston Gillispie et al., *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, pp. 123–24.
[26] Úlfar Bragason, 'The Structure and Meaning of "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar"', *Scandinavian Studies*, 60:2 (Spring 1988), 266–92.
[27] *Hrafns saga*, ed. by Helgadóttir, p. 6.

depicted performing cosmetic surgery without further engagement of runic inscriptions or Christian prayers.[28]

In drawing initial conclusions, it is evident that both empirical and learned medical traditions from the Continent hold significant prominence within Old Norse literature and culture. It can be inferred that a local empirical stream developed, incorporating local elements inherent in empirical medical practices. Additionally, further empirical treatments were introduced to Iceland and Scandinavia from the Continent, alongside the dissemination of learned medicine. These three traditions are not portrayed in isolation but intricately interweave with one another in shaping the concept of medicine within Old Norse literature and culture.

3. 3 Charms as a Genre

In addressing the learned and empirical healing practices documented in Old Norse manuscripts, I shall begin with an examination of the 'Charm' genre, which I perceive as a multifaceted practice. This genre is extensively represented in manuscript, archaeological, legal and literary sources. In this chapter, my primary emphasis will be on charms found within the manuscript corpus. I deem this genre to be versatile due to its incorporation of both oral and written traditions. Additionally, the utilization of words for curative purposes transcends religious boundaries, thereby providing us with multiple perspectives from which to explore this healing agent.

The modern English term 'charm' comes from the Middle English *Charme*, which is a loan of an Old French word for chant and magic spells, *charme*, which in turn, ultimately originated in the Latin word *carmen*.[29] The meaning underlying the Latin word *carmen* is a 'solemn ritual utterance, usually sung or chanted in a metrical form'.[30] This meaning has endured through centuries and continued denoting the act of uttering words in a solemn or ritual performance in the late Middle Ages. The word *charme* became dominant in Middle English to address these types of 'solemn ritual utterance' after the Germanic term *galdor*, also indicating the act of uttering words in ritual performance, suffered from a condemnatory use in the late Old

[28] Reichborn-Kjennerud, 'The School of Salerno', p. 332.
[29] "Charme," *Middle English Compendium Online*, Middle English Compendium, 2022. Web. 5 April 2022.
[30] "Carmen," *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. by P. G. W. Glare. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

English period.[31] Old English *galdor* had cognates in other Germanic languages, including Old Norse.

The use of *galdr* (pl. *galdrar*) in Old Norse whether as an individual noun, verb (*galdra*), or compound noun, did not diminish despite its contradictory usage to connote both positive supernatural power and negative actions associated with curses and harm. Therefore, I will use the term 'charm' as a technical word to indicate a textual genre that has been identified in Continental medical miscellanies and which I consider applicable in Old Norse medical counterparts.[32] There are, of course, many subgenres within this category and some of them will be outlined in the following sections.

On the other hand, I will use the term *galdr* (pl. *galdrar*) when the text refers to it as such: *rikt gól Oddrún, ramt gól/ Oddrún bitra galdra at Borgnýju* (strongly Oddrun sang, powerfully Oddrun sang, sharp spells for Borgny),[33] or more implicitly when the text shows *galdralag* metre.

In contemporary scholarship, the term 'charm' is commonly utilized to designate an empirical category that encompasses verbal remedies. As such, 'charms' are situated within the framework of empirical medical intervention, whereby their effectiveness was believed to stem from the invocation and manipulation of potent symbols derived from either Christian liturgy or local belief systems. The efficacy of these verbal remedies is contingent upon the patient's receptivity to the powers associated with the evoked symbols from both traditions.

In theory, to learned physicians and clericals charms were amongst the empirical remedies of the most dubious nature; as Michael McVaugh adeptly summarises the apprehensions around *empiricum*: 'the less concrete the curative agent, the less physical the procedure, the less plausible it appeared'.[34] However, in practice, incantations and other unofficial rites (e.g. ligatures and amulets) were

[31] Ciaran Arthur, *'Charms', Liturgies, and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018), p. 21.
[32] For literature on "charms" please see Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Tony Hunt, *Popular Medicine* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990); Edina Bozoki, 'Mythic Mediation in Healing Incantations', in *Health, Disease, and Healing in Medieval Culture,* ed. by Sheila Campbell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,1992) pp. 84–92.; James A. Kapaló, *The Power of Words. Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe* (Budapest: European University Press, 2013); Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice', pp. 343–66; Olsan, 'The Language of Charms in a Middle English Recipe Collection', pp. 31–37; Lea T. Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition', *Oral Tradition*, 7:1 (1992), 116–42.
[33] *The Lament of Oddrun* 7, *The Poetic Edda*, p. 200; Kapaló, 'Introduction,' *The Power of Words*, pp. 2–3.
[34] Michael R. McVaugh, '*Intantationes* in Late Medieval Surgery', in *Ratio et Superstition: Essays in Honor of Graziella Federici Vescovini*, ed. by Giancarlo Marchetti, Orsola Rignani and Valeria Sorge (Louvain: La-Neuve, 2003), pp. 319–45 (p. 334).

often allowed in medical intervention by both medical and ecclesiastical authorities involved in healing,[35] and in the context of trained healers and practitioners. During Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, charms thrived in popular medicine by circulating both orally and in written form, as the watershed between *Medicina* and *Physica* had not yet happened.[36] During the transition of the high Middle Ages, doubts regarding the effectiveness of verbal remedies led to the exclusion of charms from the emerging standard medical convention influenced by Scholasticism. Nevertheless, in the early period corresponding to the compilation of our corpus, specifically the late thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century, medical authorities made a deliberate effort to incorporate the principle of *proprietas* into the medical canon. This principle served as a justification for the utilization of specific incantations in medical practice and to explain why such practices were regarded as efficient from the practitioners and the patients.

Following Aristotelian physics, *proprietas* (or *virtus specifica*) indicated the specific occult properties of a natural element which were impossible to explain through a learned perspective, and through which the element operated a transformation onto another physical element.[37] In our case, this effort from Scholasticism allowed for explaining, in certain circumstances, how *proprietas* of healing natural elements, including words (*virtus verborum*),[38] performed healing on the human body. The Latin version of a text about astronomy titled *De radiis stellarum*, whose original is attributed to the ninth-century Baghdadi astrologer al-Kindī, provides insights into the concept of *virtus verborum*:

> Because, then, words (verba) are believed by men to have the effect of moving things, taking up this idea, we say that words, when actually spoken, make rays, just as other actual things do, and by their rays

[35] Bailey, *Fearful Spirits*, p. 196.
[36] For further insights into the textualization of oral form, please see Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition', pp. 116–42.
[37] Isabelle Draelants, 'The Notion of Properties. Tensions Between Scientia and Ars in Medieval Natural Philosophy and Magic', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 169–88 (p. 169).
[38] Béatrice Delaurenti, 'La pratique incantatoire à l'époque scolastique. Charmes et formules des réceptaires médicaux en latin et en langues romanes (xiii^{e}-xv^{e} siècle) ', in *La formule au Moyen Âge, II. Formulas in Medieval Culture, II: Actes du colloque international de Nancy et Metz, 7-9 juin 2012. Proceedings of the International Conference, Nancy and Metz, 7th-9th June 2012*, ed. by Isabelle Draelants and Christelle Balouzat-Loubet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 473–94; Iolanda Ventura, 'Pharmacopéè et 'Pharmacologie' entre textes et pratiques: Nouvelles perspectives', in *Le Moyen Âge et les sciences*, 2nd edn, ed. by Danielle Jacquart and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Firenze: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2021), pp. 487–517; Jean-Patrice Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance: Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident medieval (XIIe-XVe siecle)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006); Charles Burnett and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, *From Māshā 'allāh to Kepler: Theory and Practice in Medieval and Renaissance Astrology* (Ceredigion, Wales: Sophia Centre Press, 2015), pp. 215–31.

> operate on the world of the elements just like other individuals. And since the differences between utterances (voces) are innumerable, each one of them, when actually spoken, has a different effect on different things made out of the elements, and utterances have obtained their effect from the celestial harmony, just as have herbs (herbe) and other things, and have obtained very different kinds of effect on different things.[39]

The inclusion of the charm genre in medieval medical miscellanies signifies the presence of verbal remedies that could manifest in either written or oral form. When a charm is documented in written format, whether it appears in a collection of empirical practices or in a learned manual, it signifies a treatment approach that combines multiple elements. In this context, a verbal cure is believed to operate in conjunction with other components of the healing process. For example, charms may be inscribed on amulets to be carried by the patient, written on sacramental wafers to be ingested, or written on strips of fabric to be tied as a ligature around the affected body part.[40] However, a charm can also be written in the medical miscellanies as instruction to be performed orally, i.e*., Vid blod ras. les. iij.* pater noster *ok þessi ord. Jeva var et pasciem vite* (against bleeding, read three *pater noster* and these words Jesus was *et pasciem vite*).[41] Sometimes, oral performance in Old Norse medical manuscripts is accompanied by performative rituals that often may resemble Christian liturgy, as the following remedy against fever drawn from Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43 shows:

> Sa er ridu hefir, komi til prestz ok til þess kross er borin um er j kirkiu ok tak paternam med vigdu vatni. Ok þvo med krossinum. Ok hellvatninu a hofud ok alla. Limu þess er siukur er. Sidan hirde kross ok lesi yfir .iij. godspioll firir þeim er siukur er. In principio erat verbum. Si quis diligit me. Cum venerit paraclitus. Ok. Gef honum þa af drecka. Þvi vatni ok mun honum batna. [42]

> He who has a fever let him come to the priest and to that cross, which is carried about in church, and take a dish of holy water and wash the cross therein. And pour the water upon the head and all the limbs of him who is ill. Then hide the cross and read over it three gospels for him who is ill: *In principio erta verbum. Si quis diligit me. Cum venerit paraclitus.* And give him then to drink that water and he will improve.[43]

[39] Al-Kindī, *De radiis*, translated in Charles Burnett, 'The Theory and Practice of Powerful Words in Medieval Magical Texts', in *The Word in Medieval Logic, Theology and Psychology*, ed. by Tetsuro Shimizu and Charles Burnett (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 215–31 (p. 218).
[40] Hindley, *Textual Magic*, p. 68–69.
[41] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 50.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., p. 188.

Detailed information about the performers of charms and other healing practices is not always possible to retrieve from medical miscellanies. These practices were carried out by a diverse range of individuals including midwives, popular healers, clerics and professional healers. The involvement of professional healers was limited to specific circumstances, and in some cases, patients themselves may have performed charms. The specific role of reading or writing charms is not explicitly stated but can be inferred from the context in which the charm is found. If the charm involves articulated liturgical acts or the use of sacred objects such as sacramental hosts (Lat. *oblata*), it is reasonable to assume that it was likely performed by someone in clerical orders, as the use of symbolic signs and acts was predominantly restricted to clerics.

In the standalone example of an Icelandic professional healer, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, the combination of medical practices with his educational background indicates a connection between religious orders and professional medical intervention. As a healer, he performs various surgical procedures on patients, drawing inspiration from Salernitan teachings, but he also incorporates the power of words by reciting prayers after performing surgeries.[44] Depending on the degree of religiosity depicted in a performative ritual using verbal healing, the actual ritual might be limited to religious healers because sacred words, gestures and objects are involved.

Religion is, however, not the only source of inspiration of ritual charms. In the forthcoming sections, we will encounter instances of verbal healing within the realm of oral or written charms that draw inspiration from alternative sources. In one of the manuscripts under examination, Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, we see a charm against the burning of a fire: *Vid ellz-bruna: dixit mea Emmanuel Sabaoth eue omnes beatorem beata benedicti vos genntes peccatorum. Tak tolgu-augzi þina ok haugg i elldin*.[45] The Latin formula is rather garbled and challenging to translate owing to the number of misspelled Latin words such as *eue omnes*, therefore the best translation I can render is 'Against the flames of fire: My Emmanuel said *Sabaoth eue omens*, blessed you are, the sinful people. Take your adze and strike a blow into the fire'. The verbal component of this ritual undoubtedly carries religious connotations, but the subsequent actions described do not align

[44] Helgadóttir, 'Introduction', *Hrafns Saga*, xcvi–cvii; McVaugh, '*Incantationes* in Late Medieval Surgery', p. 334.
[45] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægbog*, p. 365.

with Christian liturgy. Therefore, it is not impossible to think that such charms could have been performed by a wider spectrum of figures.

The presence of narratives, allusions and motifs associated with biblical figures and events in verbal remedies not only signifies their oral performance but also indicates their transmission within the oral tradition.[46] The event narrated in the so-called 'Narrative charms', whose narrative structure is based on biblical events and characters, are not always drawn precisely from scriptural sources. Biblical events might sometimes function as a model to create new exemplary narratives that better fit with the patient's circumstances. The following fifteenth century charm, for instance, is preserved in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, and it is an example of how such a motif was employed in the context of charms. The charm exploits the biblical motif of the conception of Christ and merges it with the *Sator* palindrome and the Latinised name of the Prophet Muhammed (Lat. *Machumetus*):

> *Sator arepo tenet opera rotas. Machumetus in labora lago per sanctam virginitatem Marie que portauit Iesum Christum de utero suo per verbum Gabrielis archanngeli***,** þesi ord skaltu lesaa in sinnum yfvir lenndum konunnar ok giora m cros-mork i hvert sinne *In nomine patris et fiiii et sancti spiritus amen.*[47]
>
> *Sator arepo tenet opera rotas. Machumetus in labora lago* holy virginity of Mary, who bore Jesus Christ from her womb through the word of the archangel Gabriel.[48] You shall read these words three times over the woman's loins and make three times the sign of the cross: in the name of the father, the son, and the holy ghost. Amen.

[46] I make here a distinction between oral performance and oral tradition because, although at times they might cross each other's path, on other occasions they can refer to two different things. In the case of oral performance, I refer to written remedies that recommend performing the charm orally by reciting formulas. Not all these remedies were circulating orally before being written down, but they were certainly performed aloud when required. Therefore, some of these texts are not the result of textualization of charms passed down through oral tradition, but they were elaborated within a written context and then performed orally. For what concerns oral tradition, I follow Olsan's studies on charms. I refer to charms which were elaborated and transmitted orally until they were written down at a certain point of the transmission. Examples of the textualization of oral tradition in charms can be the corruption of words as well as the multiple versions of the same biblical anecdote in narrative charms. For further readings please see Francisco Alonso-Almeida, 'The Middle English Medical Charm: Register, Genre and Text Type Variables', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 109:1 (2008), 9–38 (p. 12); Alessandra Foscati, 'I miracoli del parto: personaggi e rituali nelle fonti agiografiche tra XIII e XVI secolo', *Reti Medievali Rivista,* 19:2 (2018), 63–83; Jones and Olsan, 'Performative Rituals', pp. 406–33; Delaurenti, 'La pratique incantatoire à l'époque scolastique', pp. 483–84.

[47] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægbog*, p. 391.

[48] Unintelligible Latin sentence. 'Machumetus' is the Latin version of the name of the Islamic Prophet Mohammad in the thirteenth-century *Liber Nycolay*, a biography of the life of Prophet and the origins of the Islam based on western Christian traditions. Julian Yolles and Jessica Weiss eds., *Medieval Latin Lives of Muhammad* (Harvard University Press, 2018) p. 518; Fernando González Muñoz, 'Liber Nycholay: la leyenda de Mahoma y el cardenal Nicolás', *Al-Qanṭara*, 25: 1 (2004), 5–43.

Remedies for childbirth, similar to the aforementioned charm, were prevalent in empirical and sometimes might also feature in learned medicine. This particular charm encompasses a performative healing ritual consisting of three distinct components: the *Sator* palindrome, the *peperit*-charm and the ritual action of uttering words upon a part of the body. To review them in detail, the *Sator* palindrome is a well-known sequence of words of Latin and early Christian origin, adopted into learned magic as well as in medical texts.[49] It seemed to have been a popular element to facilitate mothers in childbirth for centuries before entering the learned tradition.[50] The second element, *in labora lago per sanctam virginitatem Marie que portauit Iesum Christum de utero suo per verbum Gabrieli archanngeli,* falls within the remit of a *Peperit*–charm. Within medical and magical historiography, the *Peperit*-charm is the name by which scholars identify one of the longest surviving motifs in childbirth assistance, the sequence of holy mothers.[51] Sometimes two or three biblical mothers are mentioned, other times just the Virgin Mary serves the purpose of the charm. The scope of the charm is to create a constructed reality based on analogies between the biblical and the current events that allow the woman to shift into such reality in which the sympathetic analogies provide a healing space. The third component consists of the description of a ritual act of uttering the previous words over the woman's loins and making the sign of the cross each time, along with the closing line *In nomina patris et filii et spiritus amen*. When the text reveals the instruction *þesi ord skaltu lesaa* (you shall read these words) Olsan reminds us that this type of exhortation should be taken as a direct example of textualization of an oral performance.[52] Such exhortation allows the ritual to trigger its illocutionary force and to persuade the woman in believing in the healer's utterance as an efficient mean of delivering the child.

Similarly, another charm contained in the same fifteenth-century manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, 6v not only suggests a certain degree of oral

[49] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 77–78; Jolly, *Popular Religion*, pp. 117–18; Leslie Arnovick, *Written Reliquaries: The Resonance of Orality in Medieval English Texts* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006), pp. 27–60; Rosanne Hebing, 'The Textual Tradition of Heavenly Letter Charms in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', in *Secular Learning in Anglo-Saxon England: Exploring the Vernacular*, ed. by Lázló S. Chardonnens and Bryan Carella (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 203–22; Ciaran Arthur, 'The Gift of the Gab in Post-Conquest Canterbury: Mystical 'Gibberish' in London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A. xv', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 118:2 (April 2019), 177–210.
[50] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 78.
[51] Foscati, 'I miracoli del parto', pp. 63–83.
[52] Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England', pp. 120–24; John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. by James O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 99–102.

transmission through the direct speech structure, but through the lens of speech-act theory. It provides an exemplary case of illocutionary act and how this triggers the illocutionary force:[53]

> Ef þu villt hliota ur kasti, tak teningana þina ok graf þaa niður fyrir norðann gard kirkiu III nætur, aðrar þriar fyrir sunnann ok in fyrir austan, siðan lat aa alltari unnðir duk III mesur, siðan kastaa upp i hendí þier með þessum orðum : Ek særi þik Þor ok Odinn fyrir Crist en crosfesta, at þid þverr-synit aa teninga þessa. Ok i annath sinn kasta upp ok seg sva: Ek særi þik fyrir Enok ok Heliam. Ok i hid III. sinn særi ek pig fyrir Frigg ok Freyiu, Þ(or) ok O(din) ok fyrir helgu mey fru sancte Marie, ath þu Fiolnir falla latir þat, er ek kasta kan. [54]

> If you want to win at dice, take your dice and bury them to the north of the churchyard for three nights, for three more nights to the south, and three to the east. Then place them on the altar under the cloth for three Masses. Then throw them up with your hands with these words: 'I invoke you, Thor and Odin, by Christ the crucified, that you transfigure these dice.' And throw them up a second time and say 'I invoke you by Enoch and Elijah,' and on the third time: 'I invoke you, by Frigg and Freyja, by Thor and Odin, and by the holy virgin lady Saint Mary, that you, Fjolnir, let fall that which I can throw.'[55]

The invocation of otherwordly entities and the order to transfigure the dice represent the illocutionary act which brings about the illocutory force to believe that the charm will deliver the desired result: loaded dice. The charm also shows a clear overlap between names drawn from the Judeo-Christian tradition and names drawn from the pre-Christian Norse religions. The coexistence of both kind of names, and perhaps even the subordination of Christian entities to pre-Christian religious gods, might not only be seen as the result of syncretism. The texts surrounding this charm are infused with local and imported materials, and the overall tones and motifs diplayed within it might suggest that our medical miscellany might have been composed by someone with a strong interest and knowledge of both popular and learned magic.

Verbal healing plays a crucial role in comprehending the contents of both learned and empirical medical collections. By studying the described ritual, we can infer that certain charms were likely performed by religious individuals, while others were not explicitly connected to Christian liturgy and were more commonly conducted by lay healers. Linguistic elements found in charms provide indications of oral

[53] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 99–102.
[54] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægbog*, p. 368.
[55] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 4.

transmission, including word corruptions, tonal variations, motifs and formulaic language that suggest the textualization of oral traditions. The concept of 'healing by words' offers a valuable perspective for examining the incorporation of words, sounds, Latin letters and runes into both learned and empirical medical miscellanies. In the subsequent section, I will conduct a survey of the two largest extant medical miscellanies in Old Norse literature and explore the presence of verbal healing within them. My focus will be on how charms are represented in learned and empirical manuscript traditions and their integration within the text. Additionally, I aim to investigate how these charms can shed light on the societal acceptance of verbal healing practices.

3. 3. 1 Verbal and Written Charms in Old Norse Medical Miscellanies

'Healing by words' is a category of medical intervention that I use to denote a multitude of remedies working around words and sound patterns traceable in Old Norse medical sources. Among these sources, one of the most significant manuscripts is the medical miscellany Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43. The Dublin manuscript contains a section about charms, which comprises of ritual charms, verbal charms, formulas, prayers, symbols and written charms. The miscellany also features a book of simples, an *antidotarium*, a lapidary and a leechbook. This manuscript represents an attempt by two scribes to collate learned materials for a possible prominent Icelander.[56] As Larsen pointed out, the leechbook section begins with the clause *Hier hefir læknabok Þorleifs biornssonar* (here begins Thorleif Bjornsson's leechbook), providing a glimpse into who could have owned the volume and might have been required to add further remedies. Scholarship has not found evidence of a fifteenth-century healer bearing the name Þorleifr Bjornsson, but legal documents from 1478 AD reveal that a homonymous rich Icelandic leader had political and economic business in both Iceland and Norway.[57]

The learned nature of the manuscript can be deduced from several characteristics that are absent in the medical fragment Copenhagen, AM 434 a

[56] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 21.
[57] Ibid., pp. 21–23.

12mo, which will be examined later in this discussion. The first learned feature is represented by the order of the sections, which suggests that the content was put together with a methodological order relating to medical advice. The manuscript is heavily informed by Latin expressions. Especially the charms section shows long formulaic Latin phraseology. This could suggest that the owner of the manuscript, or his *entourage,* would have been able to read, understand and correctly pronounce Latin. The content surrounding the charm section in the Dublin manuscript also reveals learned influences: in the fourth section of the manuscript we find an *Antidotarium*, a fine example of interest in compound medicine mainly derived from the *Antidotarium Nicolai*, a twelfth-century Latin list of compound simples written at the *Schola Medica Salernitana*.[58] The content of the Old Norse *Antidotarium* reflects learned interest in the usage of the *Theriac* infusion and in citing a Lombard physician 'Abbas de Curte', likely active in Salerno and at the court of Duke Roger III of Apulia.[59]

Another striking learned element is a clause at folio 16v of the leechbook marking a new section *hjer hefir svo morg experimenta* (here begins many *experimenta*).[60] The scribe has clearly felt the need to mark a distinction between the remedies preceding such a section and those following the clause. In late Middle Ages, *experimenta* was another term used by medical authorities to identify empirical remedies.[61] The use of such a clause to mark the beginning of a section may suggest the willingness of the scribe to distinguish between preceding 'learned' remedies and the new 'empiric' ones. Signposting a section dedicated to *empiricum* in a learned manual is in fact a very well-known custom among late medieval physicians. This technique aimed at drawing a line between what was thought to respond to elaborated medical theories and what was instead working through the principle of the *proprietas*. There are a number of examples of learned physicians on the Continent that were embedding *empiricum* in their works. In his *Compendium medicine*, for instance, Gilbertus Anglicus (1180-1250 AD) marks the start of an empirical remedy as follows: *Empericum: accipe de cera que in sabbato*

[58] Ibid. p. 40.
[59] Ibid., pp.102, 106.
[60] Ibid., p. 202.
[61] Michael R. McVaugh, 'The Experimenta of Arnald of Villanova', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 1 (1971) 107–18; Michael R. McVaugh, 'The 'Experienced-Based Medicine' of the Thirteenth Century', *Early Science and Medicine*, 14 (2009), 105–30.

sancto pasche in fonte ponitur [...].[62] The integration of certain *empiricum* into a learned manual is the result of the effort displayed by learned physicians since the thirteenth century to accept some *experimenta* as plausible and embed them into their canon through the concept of the occult *proprietas*.

Within such a strong learned context, the charm section, comprising of four folios, is situated at the beginning of the codex. The section is not signposted with an initial clause nor a title; this however should not mislead us into regarding such remedies as *experimenta* or *empiricum.* These verbal remedies had been chosen with the purpose to fit into a learned text because their features could easily be conceived within a natural philosophy explanation of occult *proprietas.* By heavily featuring Christian terminology, liturgy and entire phraseology, these charms could be legitimised by learned physicians and philosophers under the principle that '…utterances have obtained their effect from the celestial harmony'.[63] The extraordinary healing efficacy of elements, unexplainable through the known medical theories at the time, was justified under the *proprietas* principles which were, in turn, subordinated to the Christian 'celestial harmony'.

A comparison between the charms preserved in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43 and other Old Norse medical miscellanies, such as Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, reveals significant differences. Firstly, it is notable that Latin plays a prominent role in the charm section of the Dublin manuscript. The scribe appears to have been skilled in the use of Latin, as evidenced by the accurate copying of Latin words without significant corruptions. Secondly, it is worth mentioning that no direct sources have been identified for these charms. Each charm represents a unique version of widely known motifs and themes. While it is challenging to find precise sources, it is plausible to suggest that the scribe of the Dublin manuscript was familiar with learned *curricula* or had copied the charm section from another manuscript that engaged with learned materials, particularly in the field of astronomy. The familiarity with a learned dimension in this section is evidenced in two charms. At folios 1r and 3r we read respectively:

[62] Gilbertus Anglicus, *Compendium medicine,* ed. by Michael de Capella (Lyons: Jacques Sacon, 1510), fol. 180[ra].
[63] Burnett, 'The Theory and Practice of Powerful Words', 218. Also see Graziella Federici Vescovini, 'La concezione della *virtus occulta* nella dottrina medica di Arnaldo da Villanova e Pietro d'Abano', in *Écritures et récritures des textes philosophiques médiévaux. Volume d'hommages à Colette Sirat*, ed. by Jaqueline Hamesse and Olga Weijers (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 107–36; Delaurenti, *La puissance des mots «Virtus verborum»*; Béatrice Delaurenti, 'La pratique incantatoire à l'époque scolastique', pp. 473–94.

> Þetta er gott vid ridu. ath Rista a epli eda lauki hasis eos trema. Neos salvator emanuel. ᛏ *has himas agios fremaos salvator vao, fao, fao.* [64]
>
> For a fever it is good to cut this on an apple or an onion: *Hasis eos trema, neos salvator Emanuel.* ᛏ *has himas agios fremaos salvator vao, fao, fao*.[65]
>
> Fadir vor stattu firir medan sonur stodvar blod mitt þatt er nu renur. ᛣ. Svo sem drottinn. Wor stod Jordan. *Adveniat regnum tuum*, til kome riki þitt drottinn mitt at þu stodvir blod þat er nu rennr or undum)o(*Stad + stad + sanguis stad + Sed libra nos a malo,* helldur leystu oss fra jllo.[66]
>
> Our Father stand Thou by whilst Thy Son stops my blood, which now is running. ᛣ . just as Our Lord…… Thy kingdom come. Thy kingdom come, Lord, that you stop blood that is now running from the wounds)o(*Stad + stad + sangvis stad + Sed libra nos a malo*, but deliver us from evil.[67]

Analogous formulas were employed in charms in medieval Continental and insular Europe, and their origins were rooted in popular medicine. The first charm shows a corrupted version (*vao, fao, fao*) of the very well-known *faifaofau* formula found carved in amulets in Norway and Sweden (ca.1300-1500 AD).[68] It has been suggested that such an unintelligible formula was the corrupted remnants of a foreign expression employed in the construction of charms to enhance their mystical significance.[69] Alliteration and assonance effects, rather than linguistic meaning, following liturgical formulas (*salvator Emanuel*) were the key instrument of constructing such mystical significance.

Both charms are clearly forged on religious terminology, especially the second one which follows a longstanding motif concerned with stanching blood through a biblical narrative and excerpts of prayers. However, in both charms three symbols stand out from the mystical and religious significance. For the last symbol)o(, I have not found a relevant source yet; but for the first symbol ᛏ and second the ᛣ my survey has offered some interpretations. The first symbol ᛏ shares iconographic style with a multitude of *galdrastafir* (magic staves) that were collected

[64] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 50.
[65] Ibid., p. 188.
[66] Ibid., p. 52.
[67] Following standard scholarly practice, and unless translations are not taken from other scholars and correctly cited, I chose not to translate Latin, Hebrew or Greek words or sentences in medical charms or other remedies employing words and sounds to achieve healing. This is because biblical languages were believed to conceal and manipulate power, therefore the words or sentences written in such languages where consciously employed not in translation by the practitioner to exert power. Translations will be provided in the footnotes for clarity purpose.
[68] MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*, p. 145.
[69] Ibid., p. 144.

in post-reformation Iceland. Among these *galdrastafir* we can recall a version in a seventeenth century *grimoire*, shelf-mark Lbs 143 8vo, f.11v, mostly devoted to protective magic.[70]

More interesting is that this symbol could be considered as one of the multiple one-barred versions of the *tvísteyptr maðr* (twice-dunked man), also known as '*m*-rune' or *harðsól*, 'heavy-sun (*s*-rune)' in several runic texts.[71] *Tvísteyptr maðr* ᛯ has been found on Norwegian late medieval rune-sticks and amulets against eye problems such as inflammation and bleeding. For instance, a rune-stick from Bergen dated to ca. 1335 AD preserves the two-barred version, and the formula reads ᛯ *Við augum. Tobias sanat oculus istius hominis fa[i] i fau i fao i i. Sidrak, Misak et auk Abdenago. myl (?) augum (?) eomeos (?) Við blóð* (For the eyes. *Tobias sanat oculus istius hominis fa[i] i*. *fa[i]faufao*. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (?). Salve (?) the eyes (?) *eomeos* (?). For the blood).[72] Although the single-barred variant ᛘ in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo might sometimes be identified as a Christian cross, McLeod and Mees argued that it has some magical significance as it is often found in Icelandic magical manuscripts and in a tenfold sequence occurring in the Borgund lead plate from Norway.[73]

The second symbol ᛢ can be clearly ascribed to astronomy, and in particular to the medieval sign for Jupiter.[74] The integration of a planetary sign in verbal healing may reinforce the belief in celestial bodies having an agency over earthly affairs and events. Astronomy was amongst the seven Liberal Arts constituting the university *curriculum*, and therefore it is not unthinkable that academic-trained physicians could have been knowledgeable in that art too. Besides, religious education also encompassed astronomy as an art in which clerics were supposed to be well-versed to calculate the Christian calendar and related festivities.[75] Within

[70] *Galdrakver*. *Textaútgáfa Lbs 143 8º*, ed. Emilía Sigmarsdóttir, Rannver H. Hannesson, and Ögmundur Helgason (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, Háskólabókasafn, 2004). All post late-1600s Icelandic magic symbols recall similar iconography: Lbs 2313vo, ff25v, 28r, 31v, 44r; Stephen Flowers, *Galdrabók: An Icelandic Grimoire* (York Brach, Maine: Samuel Weiser Inc.,1989), p. 93.
[71] (Tobias heals the eyes of this person) MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*, p. 158.
[72] Ibid., p. 157.
[73] Ibid., p. 158.
[74] Helena Avelar de Carvalho, *An Astrologer at Work in Late Medieval France: The Notebooks of S. Belle* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), p. 122.
[75] Faith Wallis, 'Medicine in Medieval Calendar Manuscripts', in *Manuscript Sources of Medieval Medicine. A Book of Essay* 8, ed. by Margaret Schleissner (New York: Garland, 1995) 105–43; *Bede. The Reckoning of Time*, ed. and trans. by Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999); Roy M. Liuzza, 'The Sphere of Life and Death: Time, Medicine, and the Visual Imagination', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: studies in Anglo-Saxon literature for Michael Lapidge*, vol. 2, ed. by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard, Toronto Old English series 14 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016) 28–52.

the charm section of the Dublin manuscript, the incorporation of astronomical symbols alongside mystical formulas served to validate the efficacy of verbal remedies and establish charms as an accepted practice within a learned medical manual. The inclusion of celestial references, such as astronomical signs, not only enhanced the symbolic and mystical elements of the charms but also lent them an air of authority and legitimacy. By connecting the divine and natural realms through the use of these symbols, the charm section of the Dublin manuscript positioned verbal remedies as a valid and effective form of medical intervention within the context of a learned medical manuscript.

The second manuscript is a fragment of an Old-Icelandic leechbook Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo. The codex shares some parallels with Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 D 43, and ultimately the simples, which are also comparable in content with the Old Danish herbal book.[76]

The content of the fragment suggests that its compiler possessed knowledge in both popular medicine and magical practices. Clearly the fragment exhibits different tones and motifs compared to Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43. The arrangement of entries in the fragment is not as structured as in the Dublin manuscript. It begins with a small charm section, followed by various charms and verbal remedies such as prayers, blessings and written charms scattered throughout. The charm section presents a range of linguistic formulas with connections to Christian terminology, similar to those found in the Dublin manuscript. However, the complex ritual charms in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo not only draw from Christian liturgy but also incorporate traditional elements and popular ritual performance.

Furthermore, the material contained within the fragment reveals the compiler's diverse interests, which extend beyond medicine and encompass a multitude of areas. Alongside the medical recipes, descriptions of rituals pertaining to protection against enemies, discovery or revenge of theft, dice gambling, gaining favour with rulers and love potions are present. These are accompanied by remedies addressing various daily challenges, such as the use of seals and staves as talismans. These talismans bear similarities in design, fashion and usage to those found in both local popular magic and imported learned magic texts.

[76] Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', p. 4.

The category of 'healing by words' expressed in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo shares certain common features with the practices observed in the Dublin manuscript, but also exhibits distinct characteristics. Firstly, a relatively short section of healing practices based on words is placed at the beginning of the manuscript. Within the manuscript, a multitude of other practices centered around verbal healing can be found, encompassing a range of techniques such as charms, prayers, conjurations and runes. These practices are interspersed with various types of medical intervention and genres, including *lunaria*, *regimen* and anatomy treatises, among others.

A notable distinction from the Dublin manuscript is the lack of Latin as the predominant language employed in verbal healing practices. Instead, the use of Latin is limited to brief and formulaic words and sentences, alongside Hebrew. Latin and Hebrew are considered languages that possess the ability to conceal and reveal religious and divine meanings, but their usage in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo is confined to specific instances within the verbal healing practices.

Some of the findings that best elucidate this approach are three examples drawn from folio 1v of our fragment:

> Wid traull-ridu: *Res* ✣, *fres* †, *pres* †, *tres* †, *gres* †, visar ec fra mier flaugdum ok flagd-konum, trollom ok illvættum, bid ec sætuztu fro sanctam Mariam, ath ec lifæ bædi mier ok aodrum til bata i nafne faodur ok sonar.[77]
>
> (Against Troll-riding: *Res* ✣*, fres* †*, pres* †*, tres* †*, gres* †, 'I expel from me ogres and ogresses, trolls and evil beings, I ask the sweetest lady Saintly Mary that I may save both my own life and others', in the name of the Father and the Son').
>
> Vid alfa-vǫlkun: *In nomine patris Samuel et filii Misael et spiritus sancti Raguel.*[78]
>
> (Against illness caused by elves: *In nomine patris Samuel et filii Misael et spiritus sancti Raguel*).
>
> Vid augna-verk rita æ bok-felli *vau, ñau, dele, neamon, æ-leph, gimel* ok *anne*; tak (Ära) konu-miolk er svein- barn hefir æ briosli, þria dropa, ok lat i biautt egg ok lat þann mann gefa honum, er alldri sæ hann adur.[79]
>
> (For pain in the eyes, write on vellum *vau, nau, dele, neamon, aa-leph, gimel* and *anne*; take three drops of milk from a woman who has a boy-

[77] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 365.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

child at the breast and add it to a raw egg, and let a man whom he has never seen before give it to him).

The aforementioned examples highlight the presence of the many practices working around the idea of 'healing by words' in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo that are preserved in the vernacular language. These practices, which also include charms, utilize the vernacular both when incorporating Christian elements and when incorporating local and traditional motifs. The preference for expressing these concepts in the vernacular cannot be solely attributed to the scribe's personal choice; rather, the use of the vernacular indicates the necessity to create a suitable conceptual framework in which to express traditional elements and motifs.

To further illustrate the significance of the vernacular choice, I present the following prayer as an exemplar of a protective verbal ritual that combines Judeo-Christian traditions with local magical objects and motifs:

> Þvo þic i vatnni III sinnum ok les pater noster i millum ok kved þetta iii tima: Fion Þvær ec af mier fiandaa minna, ran ok reidi ricra manna, sva at þeir gladliga mier gangi aa moti ok hlæandi mic augum liti. Ast drep ec hendi, lyk ec fe sækir, lyk ec fior sækir, lyk ec eny mesty manna sakir. Gud liti mic ok godir menn, siae hverr aa mic sælldar aaugum, ægia-hialm er ec berr i millum bruna, þo vo tignar manna aull se mier veraulld þion at vinum. Haf vatnit millym gaupnna þier.[80]

(Wash yourself in water three times and read the Lord's Prayer in between,
and say this three times:

I wash from me my enemies' hatred,
The greed and wrath of powerful men,
That they may happily come to meet me
And look me in the eyes laughing
I strike love with my hand
I put an end to lawsuits for money
I put an end to prosecution for money
I put an end to the persecutions of the strongest men
May God look upon me, and good men,
May they always see on me with joyful eyes
The Helm of Awe that I bear between my brows,
When I strive against notable men.
May everyone in the world serve me in friendship.

Holy water in the hollows of your cupped hands).[81]

[80] Ibid., p. 368.
[81] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 5.

The prayer appears to address the political and social concerns of the performer, seeking protection and success through the intervention of the Christian God. The supplicant's plea encompasses a wide range of circumstances, including the desire to be shielded from hatred, the transformation of enemies into allies, and the alleviation of suffering. Additionally, the prayer seeks divine assistance in achieving victory over notable individuals.

The prayer demonstrates a blending of Christian elements, such as the mention of 'holy water in the hollows of your cupped hands' and the invocation of the Christian God with the phrase 'May God look upon me'. However, the text also incorporates a local element, namely the *Ægishjálmr* ('Helm of Awe' or 'Helm of Terror'). This local component can be compared to analogous versions in Old Norse literature, which share the same intent of promoting the wearer's success and protection but not in a benevolent sense. In the thirteenth-century *Völsunga saga*, for instance, the *Ægishjálmr* features in the dialogue between the dragon Fafnir and the hero Sigurðr:

> Enn mælti Fáfnir: "Ek bar ægishjálm yfir öllu fólki, síðan ek lá á arfi míns bróður, ok svá fnýsta ek eitri alla vega frá mér í brott, at engi þorði at koma í nánd mér, ok engi vápn hræddumst ek, ok aldri fann ek svá margan mann fyrir mér, at ek þættumst eigi miklu sterkari, en allir váru hræddir við mik". Sigurðr mælti: "Sá ægishjálmr, er þú sagðir frá, gefr fám sigr, því at hverr sá, er með mörgum kemr, má þat finna eitthvert sinn, at engi er einna hvatastr.[82]
>
> (Again Fafnir spoke: "I have borne a helm of terror over all people since I lay on my brother's inheritance. And I blew poison in all directions around me, so that none dared come near me, and I feared no weapon. I never found so many men before me that I did not think myself much stronger, and everyone was afraid of me." Sigurd said: "This helm of terror you speak of gives victory to few, because each man who finds himself in company with many others must at one time discover that no one is the boldest of all"). [83]

Two versions of the prayer discovered in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo are also recorded in a seventeenth-century grimoire known as *Galdrabók*, which is an Icelandic magical book. Within this grimoire, the prayers are identified by headings such as 'the washing verse' or 'For the wrath of mighty men'. One of the prayers

[82] *Völsunga saga,* ch. XXVIII, *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, bindi I., ed. by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavìk: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1944).
[83] *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*, ed. and trans. by Jesse L. Byock (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1990), p. 64.

still includes *Ægishjálmr* in the text, whereas the other paraphrases it as 'I set thy blessed form between my eyes'.[84] The close association between this popular element and the head of the wearer is unmistakable. If this association has been preserved through centuries, perhaps the cultural understanding of the *Ægishjálmr* might have changed. In *Völsunga saga*, the helm of terror is amongst the objects that Sigurðr takes from Fáfnir's hoard: *ok þar tók hann ægishjálm ok gullbrynjuna ok marga dýrgripi* (He took from there the helm of terror, the golden coat of chain mail, and many other precious things).[85] In another thirteenth-century text, *Laxdæla saga*, Guðrún recounts her dream in which *Ægishjálmr* is described as an object to be worn:

> Ok enn mælti Guðrún: „Sá er inn fjórði draumr minn, at uk þóttumsk hafa hjálm á hǫfði af gulli ok mjǫk gimsteinum settan. Ek þóttumk eiga þá gersemi; en þat þótti mér helzt at, at hann var nǫkkurs til þungr, því at ek fekk varla valdit, ok bar ek hallt hǫfuðit, ok gaf ek þó hjálminum enga sǫk á því ok ætlaða ekki at lóga honum, en þó steypðisk hann af hǫfði mér ok út á Hvammsfjorð, ok eptir þat vaknaða ek.[86]
>
> (Then said Gudrun, 'This is my fourth dream. I thought I had a helm of gold upon my head, set with many precious stones. And I thought this precious thing belonged to me, but what I chiefly found fault with was that it was rather too heavy, and I could scarcely bear it, so that I carried my head on one side, yet I did not blame the helm for this, nor had I any mind to part with it. Yet the helm tumbled from my head out into Hvammfirth, and after that I awoke […]').[87]

This suggests that *Ægishjálmr* was understood as a physical object and perhaps even a wearable helmet within thirteenth-century literary texts. On the other hand, a few centuries later and within a medical manuscript, the descriptions surrounding the word *Ægishjálmr* call to mind an image to be applied on the body, rather than an object to be worn.

In our fifteenth-century prayer, the supplicant describes the Helm of Awe as something *ec berr i millum bruna* (I bear it between my brows); similarly, the seventeenth-century charm in the *Galdrabók* says, 'I set thy blessed form between my eyes'. This would suggest that in the late fifteenth century, the *Ægishjálmr* is

[84] Flowers, *The Galdrabók*, p. 65.
[85] *The Saga of the Volsungs*, ch. 19, ed. by Byock; *Völunga saga*, ch. XIX, eds. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson.
[86] *Laxdœla saga*, ch. 33, Íslenzk Fornrit V, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag: Reykjavík, 1934) p. 89.
[87] *Laxdæla saga,* ch. 33, *Laxdæla Saga Translated from the Icelandic*, ed. by Muriel A. C. Press (Project Gutenberg, 2006) p. 102.

already conceptualised as a design, probably an *insigli* (seal) to be painted or written on the forehead. Pictorial examples of such a seal, known in Old Norse as *galdrastafir*, have not survived from the fifteenth century. However, evidence of *Ægishjálmr* in *galdrastafr* forms have survived in a *grimoire* from the mid-1600s.[88] If a shift had happened in conceiving the Helm of Awe from an object to a seal, then probably the prayer in the fifteenth-century manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, is the *terminus post quem* this protective instrument of heroic and mythic origins entered the healing domain as a magical seal.

Turning to our last example of popular motifs in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, we observe a notable preference for textual charms that are believed to be effective when carved onto solid materials. Out of the eight charms mentioned, six explicitly state that they should be carved, while the remaining two are recommended to be written. Among the six carved charms, five specify wood or oak bark as the preferred material, while one allows the performer to choose the solid material. This preference for engraving or carving on solid materials reflects the cultural practices of pre-modern societies, where communication through carved objects made from clay, stone, wood and other solid materials was commonplace. Therefore, the inclusion of carving as a method in medical miscellanies may not necessarily be seen as a unique expression of local customs, but rather as a reflection of broader cultural practicality. For instance, the *Sator* palindrome (*sator arepo opera tenet rotas*) can be attested since the first century in multiple forms, including inscribed amulets.[89] However, there are two notable elements that indicate the significance of carving on wood as a characteristic feature of Old Norse medical intervention, which aims to imbue the healing power of words onto an object. Firstly, the effectiveness of carving as a medical intervention is attested in other aspects of Old Norse culture predating the fifteenth century. Two verses from the heroic poem *Sigrdrífumál* describe the proper method of carving runes to aid women in childbirth and heal wounds:

> Bjargrúnar skaltu kunna,
> ef þú bjarga vilt
> ok leysa kind frá konum

[88] *'Ægishjálmr, it must be made in lead and printed on one's forehead when a man has an expectation that he might meet his enemy and you will overcome him' Galdrakver: Textaútgáfa Lbs 143 8º*, ed. by Emilía Sigmarsdóttir et al. (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, Háskólabókasafn, 2004), p. 159.

[89] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 80.

á lófum þær skal rísta
ok of liðu spenna
ok biðja þá dísir duga
[…]
Limrúnar skaltu kunna,
af þú vilt læknir vera,
ok kunna sár at sjá;
á berki skal þær rísta
ok á baði viðar,
þeim er lúta austr limar.[90]

("Helping-runes you must know if you want to assist
and release children from women;
they shall be cut on the palms and clasped on the joints,
and then the disir asked for help.
[…]
Limb-runes you must know if you want to be a healer
and know how to see to wounds;
on bark they must be cut and of the tree of the wood,
on those whose branches bend east.")[91]

The poem *Sigrdrífumál*, believed to have been written in the thirteenth century, likely had a prior oral circulation. The themes and content of the verses exhibit an archaic quality and can be attributed to pan-Germanic traditions, as evidenced by the presence of parallel stories and motifs found in various Germanic literatures.[92] Given the gradual and protracted nature of the Christian conversion in the region, the practice of carving runes for healing purposes, as opposed to writing or painting them on a solid surface, may indicate the survival of a local healing tradition that persisted in thirteenth-century Iceland and beyond.

Archaeological discoveries provide additional insights into the practice of carving runes on wood, especially Bryggen runic inscription found in Søndre Gullskoen (N B257), Ribe healing stick (DR EM85, 493) and the runic amulet from Strand, Åfjord in Norway. The Bryggen runic inscription is a wood rune stick from Norway dated 1380-90 AD.[93] The charm carved thereon not only uses runes as a means of communication, but the text also suggests to *rísta* (cut) specific runes associated with prophylactic and medical intervention: *bótrúnar* and *bjargrúnar*. The initial section of the charm reads as follows: *ríst ek bótrúnar, ríst ek bjargrúnar, einfalt við*

[90] *Sígrðrifumál*, *Edduvæði: Edda Sæmundar*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949), pp. 308–09.
[91] *The Lay of Sigrdrifa* 9-10*, The Poetic Edda,* trans. by Larrington, p. 164.
[92] *The Nibelungenlied*, ed. and trans. by Arthur T. Hatto (New York: Penguin, 1969); *The Saga of the Volsungs*, ed. and trans. by Byock.
[93] John McKinnell et al., *Runes, Magic and Religion: A Sourcebook* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2004), p. 131; "N B257," *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, Old Norse Text Database, accessed on 5 May 2022, https://skaldic.org/db.php?table=mss&id=15070&if=db&view=

alfum, tvífalt við trollum, þrífalt við þurs[um] […] (I cut runes of help, I cut runes of protection, once against the elves, twice against the trolls, thrice against the ogres […]).[94]

A second relevant example is the Ribe healing stick (DR EM85, 493), which also dates to the early fourteenth century.[95] The text of this amulet reads as follows: *Iorþ biþ ak uarþæ ok uphimæn, sol ok santæ Maria ok sialfæn Guþ drottin, þæt han læ mik læknæshand ok lif-tungæ at liuæ / biuianda ær bota þarf* […] (I pray Earth to guard and High Heaven, the sun and Saint Mary and Lord God himself, that he grant me medicinal hands and healing tongue to heal / the Trembler when a cure is needed […]).[96] This artifact further shows how cutting charms on wood in the centuries post conversion, especially by using runes, is a local healing practice which can be comparable with later evidence such as the fifteenth-century manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo.

The scene in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* supports the notion of carving as an integral aspect of Old Norse medical practices. This saga is written in the first half of the thirteenth century and it belongs to the *Íslendingasögur*. Towards the end of the saga, the author describes a scene where Egill is visiting a farmer, Þorfinnr, in Eiðskóg, a place in Vermaland, and he learns that his daughter, Helga, has been ill for long time. The farmer tells Egill that runes were carved to help her, but her conditions worsened. Egill approaches the bed of the infirm woman and realises that the runes carved on a whalebone placed under her bed were wrong. Hence, he scrapes the wrong runes and burns the bone whilst reciting a stanza to warn against the misuses of the healing runes. Then, he carves the correct sequence of healing runes on a new whalebone and place the item under the bed.[97] The new rune sequence seems to work as a talisman against the illness and the woman is restored to full health.

Last but not least, a direct example of a carved inscription on an amulet with a clear prophylactic treatment, *Sigli (i)s ná-hlé* (Brooch (i)s corpse-protection), was found in Strand, Åfjord in Norway and can be dated to pre-Christian times (ca. 700

[94] John McKinnell et al, *Runes, Magic and Religion,* pp. 131–32.
[95] "DR EM85, 493," *Runic Dictionary*, *Runic dictionary*. Skaldic Project of the Scandinavia Middle Ages, accessed on 5 May 2022, https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=ms&i=15226 ; Jesch and Lee, 'Healing runes', p. 11.
[96] MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*, p. 124.
[97] *Egils saga*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2013), p. 136.

AD).[98] This allows us to interpret the presence of carved charms within the context of the manuscript as a longstanding tradition, stemming from the local custom of engraving runes and words onto solid materials in order to enhance their healing efficacy.

Given that carving has been recognized as a local healing technique deeply rooted in pre-Christian traditions and subsequently assimilated into Christian culture alongside writing, an examination of the charms inscribed on wooden artifacts within the context of manuscripts would provide insights into the specific elements intended to be carved on wood to invoke therapeutic efficacy:

> Wid hofud-verk rist aa tre *Misakx* at rik *sator arepo uere rotas*.[99]
>
> (For headache, carve on wood Misakx at rik sator arepo uere rotas.)

> Wid blastrum ok þrotaa i haurundi rist aa þvi sem þu villt In nomine patris Annanias et filii Zacharias et spiritus sancti Sinnisael.[100]
>
> (For inflammation and swelling of the skin, carve on whatever you wish, *In nomine patris Annanias et fili Zacharias et spiritus sancti Sinnisael.)*

> Wid grati rist aa eiki-kefli Funnde peccatoris verdum syna ok lat liggia undire messo.[101]
>
> (For weeping, carve on an oaken stick *Funnde peccatoris verdum syna* and let it lie under the Mass altar.)

> Wid svefn-leysi rist þetta aa tre ok legg i hægindit undir hofud hans: Res, refres, prefers, pregi, prodiui, esto labia uolunnt, post hoc dormivit.[102]
>
> (For sleeplessness, carve this on wood and place it in the pillow under his head: *Res, refres, prefers, pregi, prodiui, esto labia uolunnt, post hoc dormivit.*)

> ᚼᛚᚼᛦᚱ:ᚼᛚᚼᛦᚱ:ᛋᚼᚱᚼᛚᛚᛘᚱ:ᛋᚼᚱᚼᛚᛚᛘᚱ:ᚼᛁᚱᛁᛦᚱ: Rist aa kefli stafi þesaa edur bladi ok legg unndir bordit, þar sem þu kastar, ok les pater noster til heidurs Olafi kongi. Quia apud te propiciacio est et propter legeni.[103]
>
> (ᚼᛚᚼᛦᚱ:ᚼᛚᚼᛦᚱ:ᛋᚼᚱᚼᛚᛚᛘᚱ:ᛋᚼᚱᚼᛚᛚᛘᚱ:ᚼᛁᚱᛁᛦᚱ: Carve these runes on a stick or on a piece of paper, and lay it under the table where you play with dice, and

[98] McLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*, p. 75.
[99] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 365.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., p. 367.

read the *Pater noster* in honour of king Olaf. *Quia apud te propiciacio est et propter legeni.*)[104]

Figure 2. Magic sign followed by instruction how to use it in a ritual in Copenhagen AM 434 a 12mo f. 4^{v}

Ef madr vill vitaa, hverr et tace fra honum, rist staf þenna aa botnnenum aa aski ok haf i vatnn breint ok meli sem smærst mellifolium i vatniit ok mæli þetta: þat æski ec fyrir grasins natturu ok stafsins mattugleik, at ec siae skugga þess, sem tecid hefir fra mier ok audrum.

(If a man wants to know who has stolen from him, carve this sign on the bottom of a wooden dish and pour water in it, and grind up a smaller quantity of yarrow in the water, and speak these words "I desire, by the nature of the herb and the sign, that I may see the shadow of the one who has stolen from me and others.)

The practice of carving is a significant aspect of Old Norse culture; nonetheless, the perceived therapeutic efficacy associated with carved objects underwent a transformation. Several of the aforementioned texts display formulas that were commonly found in European medical miscellanies and were predominantly associated with the act of writing. Charms drawn from Western Christendom in the late Middle Ages show that formulaic phrases such as the *sator* palindrome, the gibberish (unintelligible writings)[105] such as *Res, refres, prefer* (modelled on alliteration of 'rex')[106] or sequences of letters were often associated with the writing system. In order to provide a better contextual understanding of Old Norse remedies, it is beneficial to examine selected examples from the wider vernacular landscape of Western Europe. In the first instance, from the Middle English manuscript (ca. 1440 AD), Lincoln Cathedral A. 5. 2., we have a remedy which employs our *sator* palindrome by placing it within a written context: *Tak & write thir wordis in buttre or in chese & gare hir*

[104] Runic translation: Ólafr, Ólafr, Haralldr, Haralldr, Eirikr.; Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 3.
[105] Gibberish indicates formulas that seem to be nonsensical, but they conceal mystical and healing powers such as in our case *Res, refres, prefer*. Such formulas work around repetitions, assonance, and alliteration of Latin and Greek words (or words resembling Latin and Greek words) to enhance the persuasive effect of the ritual.
[106] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 4.

ett it: Sator sarepo tenet opera rotas (take and write these words on butter or on cheese and make them eat it: *Sator sarepo tenet opera rotas*).[107]

Similarly, as we find a carved charm working on sound patterns (i.e., alliteration and assonance in *Res, refres, prefers, pregi, prodiui*), comparable forms of gibberish words and sounds are found elsewhere in Continental and insular medical miscellanies. In a fourteenth-century Parisian manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 1319, a remedy works around a similar pattern and it suggests the gibberish to be written: *Item .I. tel escrip feré et dessoulz la dent le mettrés: ren, rim, ran, rex, crux, pax, Jhesu Christo lio Domino nostro. Amen. La dent dolant moult tost garra, et le ver, s'il li est, morra.* (Item .I. Place the following script and below the tooth: ren, rin, ran, rex, cruz, pax, Jhesu Christo lio Domino nostro, Amen. The sore tooth will quickly heal, and the worm, if there is any, will die).[108]

The preference for the act of carving in the context of charms' efficacy, as opposed to writing, suggests that during the transmission of medical texts from the Continent to Iceland and Scandinavia, imported healing rituals were assimilated into the Icelandic cultural framework. This assimilation involved a deliberate change of the verb 'to write' (e.g. OF. *écrit* - *tel escrip feré* - Lat. *scriptus*) to 'to carve' by local Icelandic and Scandinavian scribes during the process of translating texts. The deliberate alteration of the main verb from 'to write' to 'to carve' by local Icelandic and Scandinavian scribes served a dual purpose. Firstly, it facilitated the efficient assimilation of remedies and the expression of imported material in a manner that was intelligible to local practitioners. By using the verb 'to carve', the scribes aimed to make the remedies more relatable and accessible within the cultural context of Iceland and Scandinavia. Secondly, this change in verb usage may have allowed for the textualization of an existing oral and local tradition, where similar remedies or variants were already in circulation. It is possible that the transition from 'writing' to 'carving' had already taken place in this oral tradition, and the scribes reflected

[107] Margaret Sinclair Ogden, *The 'Liber de Diversis Medicinis' in the Thornton Manuscript (MS. Lincoln Cathedral A. 5. 2.)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 57.
[108] Caude de Tovar, 'Contamination, interférences et tentatives de systématisation dans la tradition manuscrite des réceptaires médicaux français: le réceptaire de Jean Sauvage', *Revue d'Histoire des Textes*, 4 (1974), 239–88 (p. 245).

this shift in their translations to align with the prevailing practices and beliefs of the local community.

3. 3. 2 Preliminary Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the Dublin manuscript and Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, reveals notable divergences in terms of surrounding texts and the integration of verbal healing practices. The focus of this chapter has been limited to the examination of the 'healing by words' genre and specifically how the power of words is employed in both empirical and learned contexts.

The study of Old Norse charms within the context of manuscripts provides an effective means to investigate local and imported empirical medicine, as well as the learned Continental medical tradition. Charms offer valuable insights into the interconnectedness of these three traditions and their influence on conceptions of healing and medical practices in Old Norse culture. Through an analysis of charms in their contextual framework, we can infer that Old Norse communities had developed their own healing practices before the encounter with the Classical and Continental medical traditions, which were subsequently preserved and incorporated into imported empirical medical practices and motifs. This is particularly evident in the prevalence of carved charms and the presence of Judeo-Christian motifs derived from the Continental charm tradition.

The examination of healing practices within the manuscript context provides insights into the development of attitudes towards medicine, including prophylactic measures and the incorporation of traditional protective motifs. An example of this cultural shift can be observed in the case of the *Ægishjálmr*, which transitions from a heroic object discussed in literature to a medical symbol present in medical miscellanies, taking the form of a seal. This transformation reflects the Christianization of the motif and its integration into a medical framework.

The power of words is effectively utilized in the construction of Old Norse charms found in learned medical miscellanies. The incorporation of the concept of *proprietas* into the learned canon allowed for the understanding of words, both written and spoken, as a medicinal agent whose healing efficacy was contingent upon God's powers. The Dublin manuscript exemplifies this learned dimension of

charms, as they are often combined with extensive liturgical rituals, draw motifs from biblical events and Christian liturgy, and focus exclusively on matters of health. The learned nature of these charms is evident not only in their subordination to Christian belief through *proprietas*, but also in their incorporation of the beneficial influence of celestial bodies through astronomical symbols.

The power of words, which was considered an empirical medical intervention by a twelfth-century learned audience, found its way into fifteenth and sixteenth-century medical miscellanies that encompassed both empirical and learned remedies. The integration and legitimization of this power differ in the two miscellanies. In the Dublin manuscript, the inclusion of charms in a learned manual can be justified as a 'learned practice' within the new framework of occult and divine *proprietas*. In contrast, Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo integrates imported empirical traditions, such as gibberish and liturgical words, into a system of empirical healing, as evidenced by the act of carving and the syncretism with traditional elements.

The study of Old Norse charms in medical manuscripts highlights the social acceptance of verbal healing within both traditional and empirical settings, as well as within a learned setting. While suggestions of verbal healing from the Continent reached the northern regions through various transmission routes, they did not supplant local empirical attitudes. Late medieval Icelandic intellectuals and scribes not only assimilated complex learned theories and remedies, but also effectively absorbed imported medical traditions into their local medical framework.

Chapter 4

Conceptual Models of Illness in Iceland and England

4. 1 Physical and Invasive Agency of Illness

4. 1. 1 Flagð ok Flagð-kona, Trǫll ok Illvættr

In this chapter I will apply the theoretical background discussed previously in chapter 2 concerning the ideas surrounding the materiality of illness, including the malevolent agency of otherworldly forces, and how these manifest within Old Norse language, culture and society.

The notion of illness as an external entity capable of entering the body is prominently manifested in Old Norse medical manuscripts. Additional support for this understanding can be found in archaeological discoveries, in the form of apotropaic amulets dating from 700 to 1400 AD. Furthermore, specific episodes depicted in Old Norse sagas and Eddic verses that portray individuals afflicted by illness and disease provide additional evidence for the presence of this invasive model of illness.

The collection of Old Norse medical texts features a range of remedies that are focused on the expulsion, exorcism and prevention of malevolent entities. These texts demonstrate a clear interest in countering and warding off such external forces that are believed to cause illness and afflict the body.

To begin our investigation into this model of illness, let us turn to one of the manuscripts under examination: the fragment of a leechbook Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo. Unfortunately, the leechbook is missing one or more initial pages; therefore, the first folio (1r) of the *Læknisfræði* section begins with a list of remedies lacking a title. The second remedy of this first folio concerns banishing supernatural beings like ogres, trolls and other evil beings, traditionally associated with hostile forces in clear opposition to humankind. The remedy reads:

> Wid traull-ridu: Res ✣, fres †, pres †, tres †, gres †, visar ec fra mier flaugdum ok flagd-konum, trollum ok illvættum, bid ec sætuztu fru sanctam Mariam, ath ec lifaa bædi mier ok audrum til bata i nafne faudur ok sonar.[1]
>
> (Against troll-riding: *Res* ✣, *fres* †, *pres* †, *tres* †, *gres* †, I expel from me ogres and ogresses, trolls and evil beings, I ask the sweetest lady Saintly Mary that I may save both my own life and others, in the name of the Father and the Son).

This remedy incorporates elements from Christian liturgy, evident through the invocation of the Virgin Mary and the Trinity, alongside the employment of the sign of the cross alternating the gibberish words *Res, fres, pres, tres, gres.* Similar variations of the gibberish formula can be found in the Dublin manuscript (ca. early 1500 AD), specifically in the context of charms used to stop excess bleeding. The inclusion of gibberish and the prayer to *fru sanctam Mariam* serve as verbal ingredients aimed at expelling *flaugdum ok flagd-konum, trollum ok illvættum*. In a 2011 study, the entities against which the remedy is supposed to work were rendered 'ogres and ogresses, troll and evil beings'.[2] The terms *Flaugdum* and *flagd-konum* appear elsewhere in Norse literature with a specific meaning of female ogress, female giants, she-troll and at times, sorceresses. These terms often occur in poetry, particularly in *kennings* and *heiti*. For example, the genitive form *flagðs*, translated as 'of the troll-woman',[3] is found in a productive kenning known as 'the horse of the troll-woman', which stands for either 'wolf' or 'warrior'. The Dictionary of Old Icelandic specifically defines *flagð* as a female monster, ogress and witch, whereas *flagð-kona* is listed as a synonym of *tröllkona*.[4] Instances where the etymon *flagð-* indicates a male identity or a collective noun are relatively rare. Once such example can be found in the poem *Víkarsbálkr* by Starkaðr gamli Stórvirksson, preserved in chapter 34 of *Gautreks saga*; in verse 26, *Starkaðr* says *en því flögð ollu* (but demons caused that).[5] On another occasion, in the stanza

[1] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 365.
[2] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 1.
[3] Kari E. Gade, 'Bǫðvarr baldi, Sigurðardrápa 2', in *Poetry from the King's Sagas 2: From c. 1035 to c. 1300*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2, ed. by Kari E. Gade (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 535–36; Margaret Clunies Ross ed., 'Friðþjófs saga ins frœkna 17', Friðþjófr Þorsteinsson*, Lausavísur 15*, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur,* ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 8, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), p. 214; Emily Lethbridge, 'Þorkell Gíslason, Búadrápa 10', in *Poetry from the King's Saga 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, ed. by Diana Whaley. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), p. 950.
[4] "flagð-kona," *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, ed. by Geir T. Zoega (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 2004).
[5] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Gautreks saga 34, Starkaðr gamli Víkarsbálkr 26', in *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur,* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), p. 277.

Lausavísa 1, *Ingimarr af Aski Sveinsson* says: *Floǫgð hvǫttu / mik til Fyrileifar* (trolls incited me [to go] to Färlev).[6]

Through an analysis of these linguistic and literary sources, we gain insight into the semantic nuances of the terms *flaugdum* and *flagd-konum*, which denote female supernatural beings associated with notions of ogresses, giants, trolls and sorceresses.

While there are a few instances where *flagð-* can be interpreted as a collective noun referring to 'demons' or 'trolls', the overwhelming majority of the twenty-two known occurrences of *flagd*, and their variants, indicate the presence of a female influential and hostile figure associated with otherworldly beings or a human sorceress. Based on the compound term *flagd-konum*, meaning 'women-ogres' or 'she-ogres', Waggoner translated the pair of words as 'ogres and ogresses', suggesting a binary opposition and implying that flaugdum is the plural form of a male ogre.[7] However, other evidence suggests that *flaugdum* is the plural of *flagð* and refers to female entities, which can encompass ogresses, trolls, sorceresses and witches. Consequently, I propose that the entities targeted by the remedy are specifically female, at least in the first part of the formula, which I interpret as 'sorceresses and ogresses, trolls and evil beings'. This gender-based interpretation of both nouns as female is further supported by the specific disease or illness that the remedy aims to counteract.

The remedy is designed to counteract the phenomenon of the *traull-ridu* (troll-riding) which is also described in Old Norse literature. As Ármann Jakobsson has argued, the word *troll* in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries Icelandic sources has not yet defined what he calls a 'clearly demarcated supernatural species'.[8] In the late fifteenth century, when our manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo originated, a primary meaning of an 'ugly and subhuman creature' associated with the word troll emerges.[9] However, the association of the word troll with an 'ugly and subhuman creature' is not completed by the thirteenth century, and still between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, the word troll retains a broader meaning. It could be

[6] Kari E. Gade, 'Ingimarr af Aski Sveinsson, Lausavísa 1', in *Poetry from the Kings's Sagas 2: From c. 1035 to c. 1300*, ed. by Kari E. Gade. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 497–98.
[7] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 1.
[8] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch: the Meaning of Troll and Ergi in Medieval Iceland', *Saga-Book*, 32 (2008), 39–68 (p. 63).
[9] Ibid., p. 63–64.

employed to describe or allude to evil, deviant and magical entities, both a human-like entity such as a sorcerer or a supernatural creature.[10]

Furthermore, Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo is in part a later copy of an early thirteenth-century fragment with shelf mark Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to which has survived only in 9 folios. This manuscript reveals a lack of both a beginning and an end. However, the manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo contains numerous remedies positioned before and after the list of remedies shared with Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to. Given that the term 'troll' had an even broader range of meanings in the thirteenth century, it is no longer possible to dismiss the possibility that the section in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, which mentions the *traull-ridu* remedy, may have originated from earlier copies. It could have been derived from the missing passages in Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to or from an intermediary manuscript that has not survived.

An additional perspective that supports the interpretation of *flaugdum* as a sorceress is found in Old Norse sagas, where the *traull-ridu* is an act explicitly performed by 'night riders' such as the *kveldriða*, the *mara*, the *myrkriða* and the *tunriða*. Additionally, as Mitchell has pointed out, the term *trollriða* (witch-ridden) is used to describe individuals (victims) who have undergone such an act.[11]

Recently investigated by Caroline Batten, the act of 'riding' in Old Norse literature can have a sexual and erotic connotation. If performed by nocturnal riders, 'riding' in Old Norse literature can be understood as an act of carnal and lustful nature encompassing physical violence towards a man and resulting in bodily injuries. According to Batten, the act of traull-ridu takes on a metaphorical quality of 'eroticised violence' when carried out under specific circumstances. Firstly, the act occurs in an intimate setting, away from potential witnesses. Secondly, it typically takes place during the night. Lastly, the act of 'riding' can result in the victim's death, often accompanied by sensations of being 'crushed and suffocated' to the point of demise (Cfr. *riða* in Eidsivathing law).[12] Finally, the troll-riding inflicts severe injures upon the victims or leads them to death. Although not explicitly stated, the underlying motivation

[10] Ármann Jakobsson, *The Troll Inside You: Paranormal Activity in the Medieval North,* 1st edn (Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2017), p. 18, Ármann Jakobsson, 'Vad är ett troll? Betydelsen av ett isländskt medeltidsbegrepp', *Saga och sed* (2008), 101–17.
[11] Stephen A. Mitchell, 'Blåkulla and its Antecedents: Transvection and Conventicles in Nordic Witchcraft', *Alvíssmál. Forschungen zur mittelalterlichen Kultur Skandinaviens*, 7 (1997), 81–100 (p. 88).
[12] *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, vol 1, ed. by Rudolph Keyser et al. (Oslo: C. Gröndahl, 1846–95), pp. 390, 403; Batten, 'Dark Riders', p. 365.

behind the troll-riding implies inappropriate sexual desire originating from a woman towards a man, or alternatively, the notion of inflicting physical and metaphorical punishment upon the man through an act of violence carried out by a woman.

The other element that affords us to interpret *traull-ridu* as a metaphorical 'eroticised violence' is underlined by the close link between women and magic. Women who engage in troll-riding within Old Norse sagas are described as *fjölkunnug,* possessing a high level of skill in magic, and exhibiting qualities akin to those of a sorceress (*flaugdum*, as mentioned in our remedy). The ability of the woman to perform 'eroticised violence' and other nocturnal assaults, both symbolically and physically, on a man has a gender implication for both the victim and the sexual predator.[13] The nocturnal assault is seen as an unnatural act performed by a powerful woman upon a man, thereby subverting the conventional and binary gender dynamics prevalent in medieval society.[14]

In addition to its gender implications, this act of aggression holds dual medical significance. Firstly, a direct medical implication arises from the physical injuries inflicted upon the man, which can result in his ultimate demise through being crushed or suffocated. Physical injuries resulting from nocturnal assault, which are comparable to the practice depicted in medical manuscripts, can be observed in the narrative of *Eyrbyggja saga*. In this saga, a woman named Katla, possessing expertise in magic and being of mature age, assumes the role of a *kveldriða* or night-rider. Following repeated rejections from the young Gunnlaugr, she resorts to riding him during the night, which results in the victim suffering significant bodily harm. […] *Lá hann þar ok var vitlauss. Þá var hann borinn inn, ok dregin af honum klæði; hann var allr blóðrisa um herðarnar, en hlaupit holdit af beinunum; lá hann allan vetrinn í sárum* […] (He was laying there unconscious. He was scratched all over the shoulders, and the flesh had been ripped to the bone. His injuries kept him in bed for the rest of the winter).[15]

Similarly, another nocturnal creature called *mara* shares striking features with the *kveldriða* and their type of attacks.[16] In the early thirteenth-century *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson recounts the incident of the death of the Swedish king Vanlandi, attributing it to the malevolent influence of the witch Hulð. In the verses that describe

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 16, ed. by Einar Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, Íslenzk Fornrit IV (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1935); *Eyrbyggja Saga*, ch. 16, trans. by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (London: Penguin Classics, 2006).
[16] Batten, 'Dark Riders', p. 353.

this event, the witch is referred to by the name *mara* and by the kenning *trollkund* [...] *líðs grímhildr* (the troll-related Grìmhildr of ale), providing further evidence of Hulð's portrayal as a hostile magical entity.[17] The motive behind this assault, as highlighted by Batten, once again has a sexual connotation, as Vanlandi's wife Drífa, driven by jealousy due to his absence, seeks revenge by enlisting the aid of a witch.[18]

In their translation of the attack described in *Ynglinga saga*, Batten suggested that the king calls upon his men for help because a mara is crushing him: *Kallaði hann ok sagði, at mara trað hann* (he called [them] and said that a mara was crushing him).[19] Following the interpretation of *trað* as 'crushed' and not 'trampled', the episode continues, describing: *þá trað hon fótleggina, svá at nær brotnuðu* (then she crushed his legs so that they almost broke) and *þá kafði hon höfuðit, svá at þar dó hann* (then she smothered his head, so that he died there).[20]

Beyond the physical effect, this type of aggression has further and subtle medical implications. The inclusion of the *trollriða* in a medical miscellany, alongside remedies concerning the banishing of evil forces, suggests that the act of troll-riding was likely equated to the idea of an external agent's physical attack on the body. Such an assault could be counteracted by the dislocation of the physical (but also metaphorical) entity from the body. The conceptual framework underlying this approach was based on the premise that the *heill* of the body, encompassing not only physical health but also the integrity and wholeness of the body, was threatened by the phenomenon of troll-riding.[21] The relationship between *heill* and body underscores a holistic approach to illness and health in the Old Norse worldview, for which if men were attacked at night, as in Gunnlaugr's case, the whole integrity of the body was endangered. Such kind of aggression not only provokes severe physical traumas and wounds, which can potentially lead to death, but it also corrupts the body's integrity from within. On a subtle level, this corruption of the body's wholeness (*heill*) is metaphorically encoded as sexual submission to the opponent. Therefore, it is metaphorically linked to sexual violence perpetrated by a hostile female force.[22]

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[17] Snorri Sturluson, 'Ynglinga saga', *Heimskringla* I, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit, XXVI (Reykjavík, Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1961), ch. 13.
[18] Batten, 'Dark Riders', pp. 371–72.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., p. 375; "Heill," *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, with a Supplement by Sir William A. Craigie Containing Many Additional Words and References, ed. by Craigie Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).
[22] Batten, Ibid., pp. 375–78.

In the Old Norse worldview, the sorceress that perpetrates such an act of sexually assaulting and metaphorically shaming a man no longer conforms to the contemporary gender standard and becomes a deviant being in the Old Norse worldview. The sorceress assumes monstrous connotations as she engages in a role that transcends the societal and gender boundaries imposed upon her. Applying Hall's framework of in-group and out-group categorization, the woman embodying the sorceress is no longer perceived as a member of the human in-group. Instead, she assumes characteristics and a role typically associated with hostile individuals outside the accepted social norms, aligning herself with the out-group. As a representative of the out-group, the sorceress stands in opposition to human society, thereby being viewed as 'the other' and regarded as a malevolent entity capable of inflicting physical affliction upon men.

In the manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, instances of inappropriate desire, alongside non-conforming sexual and gender behaviours, are documented in five additional occurrences. It is worth noting that two remedies within the manuscript address liminal themes and incorporate the term *ergi*. The first of the two remedies reads: *Gras pat, er ambrosia heitir, siod i epla laug ok dreck, pat staudvar ergi ok allann losta* (Boil the herb called 'ambrosia' in apple juice and drink it. That stops unmanliness and all lusts). The second remedy no longer includes the explicit outcome of 'banishing lust', yet it remains focused on the concept of *ergi*, as evidenced by the content of the text: *Vid ergi tac madk pann, er skin urn nætr, ok stappa vid vin ok dreck, þaa mun falla* (For unmanliness, take the worm that shines in the night, crush it in wine and drink it, then it will go away). As Sørensen pointed out, *ergi* is a deviant state resulting from primarily men, but sometimes women, failing to conform to a normative standard of gender performance.[23] For men, this failure encompasses manifestations of cowardice or the inability to establish dominance over others, succumbing to an aggressive adversary, and assuming a receptive role in homosexual intercourse.[24]

[23] Preben M. Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man. Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983), pp. 18–20.

[24] Jakobsson, 'The Trollish Acts', pp. 55–57; Fredrik C. Ljungqvist, 'Rape in the Icelandic Sagas: An Insight in the Perceptions about Sexual Assaults on Women in the Old Norse World', *Journal of Family History*, 40:4 (2015), 431–47; Kari E. Gade, 'Homosexuality and Rape of Males in Old Norse Law and Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, *Early Law and Society*, 58:2 (1986), 124–41; Gunnar Karlsson, 'Karlmennska, drenskapur, bleyði og ergi', in *Bókmenta-Ljós: Heiðursrit til Turid Sigurðardóttur,* ed. by Malan Marnersdóttir (Tórshavn: Faroe University Press, 2006), pp. 371–86; Ármann Jakobsson, 'Hversu argur er Óðinn?: Seiður, kynferdi og Hvamm-Sturla', in *Í Galdramenn: Galdur og samfélag á miðöldum*, ed. by Torfi H. Tulinius (Reykjavík: Hugvísindastofnun, 2008), pp. 51–71; Ármann Jakobsson, 'Hvað er tröll?: Galdrar, tröllskapur og samfélagsó-vinir', in *Galdur og samfélag*, ed. by Torfi H. Tulinius (Reykjavík: Hugvísindastofnun, 2008), pp. 95–119.

Both remedies fall in the section shared by the fifteenth-century manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo and the early thirteenth-century manuscript Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to. Such an occurrence could reinforce the two interpretations provided here. Firstly, a consistent belief can be observed in regarding non-conforming sexual and gender behaviours as something that can be actively avoided or eliminated from the body. Secondly, for the treatment to specifically target the expulsion of these forces, beings, or substances, there must be a recognized physical pathway for their entry or contact with the body. Consequently, this process culminates in a tangible impact on the physical well-being of the individual.

The continuity of such remedies in manuscripts context and across centuries reinforces the possibility that *wid traul-rid* would be a remedy to banish all the otherworldly and human creatures that could attack specifically men at night. *Traul-rid* is amongst those attacks that were metaphorically encoded as an 'eroticised violence' which would have corrupted the victim's body.

4. 1. 2 Vid Álfavǫlkun

The manuscript context within which the *wid traull-ridu* remedy is featured points towards understanding certain illnesses and diseases as malevolent external agents entering contact with the human body. Within the same section of folio 1r of the manuscript, *wid traull-ridu* is succeeded by three subsequent remedies that exhibit a distinct preoccupation with supernatural entities. Two of these remedies appear to be rooted in the conceptualization of illness as an external agent invading the body.

Of the two aforementioned remedies, the first holds particular significance as it offers additional elements that warrant further interpretation. The remedy reads as follows: *Vid álfavǫlkun: in nomine patris Samuel et fili Misael et spiritus sancti Raguel* (against the torment caused by elves: *in nomine patris Samuel et fili Misael et spiritus sancti Raguel*). The remedy again exploits Jewish-Christian liturgy and Holy Scriptures to counteract the *álfavǫlkun*. In this instance, the renowned names of the Holy Trinity are substituted with three names of Archangels sourced from the first book of Enoch, namely Saraquel (possibly derived from alternative spellings such as 'Samuil'), Michael, and Raguel.

The term *Álfavǫlkun* is a hapax legomenon in Old Norse, which makes interpretations challenging. *The Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* proposes various translations, including 'torment', 'misery', or 'harsh conditions'.[25] In the early twentieth century, the word was interpreted as rickets, referring to the knots of the ribs in people affected by rickets. This interpretation was grounded on the linguistic link provided with the word *valk* or *valken*, used to denote rickets in coeval Norwegian and Swedish rural areas.[26] However, Falk suggested that the name of the disease cannot be identical to the old word but must - like Icelandic *volkun* - be a more recent derivation of the verb *valka*, probably in its original meaning 'grip, knead, press'.[27] Subsequently, Falk further elaborates that the term *valken* refers to the sensation of pressure exerted on the chest as a result of heart contractions, commonly experienced in cases of rickets. This condition is believed to be attributed to the actions of a supernatural entity known as *álfr* pressing down their victim.[28] Recently, the compound has acquired a more generic translation as 'for illness caused by elves' or 'hardship caused by elves'.[29]

The notion of elves being responsible for physical ailments in Old Norse medical remedies exhibits similarities and linguistic correlations in Old English. This is primarily evidenced in ninth-tenth centuries medical compilations such as *Bald's Leechbook*, in which two remedies refer directly to illness caused by *ælfe*, and the *Leechbook III*, in which *ælf* is employed in compound nouns for a number of ailments.[30] Within *Bald's Leechbook*, there is a specific remedy that addresses the treatment of various afflictions as follows: *Læcedomas wiþ ælcre leodrunana & ælfsidenne* (against every evil *leod-rune* and against *ælf-siden*).[31] Hall argues that the term *siden* in the context of *ælf-siden* is etymologically related to the Old Norse word *síða*. As a result, Hall proposes that *ælf-siden* can be interpreted as 'the magic worked' by elves.[32] Similar echoes of elves associated with illness are found in three twelfth and thirteenth-

[25] "Álfavölkun", ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose, https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o1692 accessed on 6 February 2023.
[26] Nils A. Quisling, *Overtroiske kure og folksmedicin i Norge* (Kristiana: Forlagt av H. Aschehoug & Co. W. Nygaard, 1918), p. 111.
[27] Hjalmar Falk, 'De nordiske navn for rakitt', *Maal og Minne* (1921), 18–31 (p. 20).
[28] Ibid.
[29] "Álfavölkun", ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose, https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o1692 accessed on 6 February 2023; Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 1.
[30] Remedies 64 in book I, book II, 65.14, Royal MS 12 D XVII, fol. 5^{r}-5^{v}, 108^{r}, and remedies 61 and 62 in Leechbook III, Royal MS 12 D XVII, fols. 123^{r}-123^{v}.
[31] Cyril E. Wright (ed.), *Bald's Leechbook (British Museum, Royal Manuscript 12 D. xvii),* English Manuscripts in Facsimile, 5 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955), pp. 12–27; Audrey L. Meaney, 'Variant Versions of Old English Medical Remedies and the Compilation of Bald's *Leechbook*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 13 (1984), 235–68 (p. 250–1); Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, pp. 30–31; Cockayne, *Leechdoms,* p. 64; translation drawn from Emily Kesling, *Medical Texts in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), p. 61.
[32] Hall, Elves, pp. 119–20.

centuries Latin medical charms on lead amulets excavated in modern North Germany and North Jutland.[33] Regarding the eleventh-century Schleswig amulet, one of the two amulets found in North Germany, Simek points out that there is a lack of detailed information regarding its specific purpose or usage.[34] However, the inscription makes use of the beginning of John's Gospel and it addresses specific entities (demons and elves and all the infections of all illnesses, and all obstructions):

> The beginning of the Holy Gospel according to John. In the beginning was the Word and this Word has no beginning and remains without end. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I conjure you, demons and elves, and all the infections of all illnesses, and all obstructions, by the one God, the almighty Father and his son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, that you may not harm this servant of God by day or by night, nor at any hours. Behold the cross of Christ! Begone, ye enemy powers! The lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed, the root of David, amen. May the cross bless me, name, amen. May Christ's cross protect, may Christ's cross deliver me, name, from the devil and from all evils, amen. *Sator arepo tenet opera rotas. Sator arepo tenet opera rotas.*[35]

the Halberstadt Lead Tablet was the only grave good of an eight-year old boy which archaeological stratigraphy dates to 1150 AD. The amulet itself, however, dates the textual charm to 1142 AD, perhaps suggesting that this propylitic device might have accompanied the carrier (the child) since birth.[36] The Jutland Lead amulet found in Romdrup was once carried by its owner and then reused to hold relics together and placed within the altar slab.[37] Despite a lack of material culture context, the Schleswig amulet provides us with an exceptional glimpse into how elves, demons, infections and illness were associated with one another. The exorcism is introduced by the beginning of the Gospel of John and closed by other liturgical formulas. The core of the exorcism (lines 3-5) reads as follows:

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[33] Rikke Olesen, 'Runic Amulets from Medieval Denmark', *Futhark: International Journal of Runic Studies*, 1 (2010), 161–76; Erik Moltke, *Runerne I Danmark og deres oprindelse* (Forum: Copenhagen, 1985), pp. 326–407 Klaus Düwel, 'Mittelalterliche Amulette aus Holz und Blei mit lateinischen und runischen Inschriften', in *Runica minora: ausgewählte kleine Schriften zur Runenkunde*, ed. by Klaus Düwel and Simek Rudolf, Studia medievalia septentrionalia 25 (Fassbaender Verlag: Wien, 2015), pp. 251–330; Christian Gastgeber and Hermann Harrauer, 'Ein christliches Bleiamulett aus Schleswig', in *Ausgrabungen in Schleswig,* vol. 15, ed. by Volker Vogel (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 2001), pp. 207–26.

[34] Rudolf Simek, 'Elves and Exorcism: Runic and Other Lead Amulets in Medieval Popular Religion', in *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature*, ed. by Daniel Anlezark (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011) p. 26.

[35] MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*, p. 134.

[36] Ibid., pp. 27–28.

[37] Ibid., p. 28.

> […] c(on)iuro vos demones sive albes ac om(ne)s pestes om(n)iu(m) in rmitatu(m) ac om(ne)s int(er)iectiones in unicum d(eu)m patre(m) om(n)ip(otente)m ac Ie(su) m Chr(istu)m liu(m) eius
> ac sp(iritu)m s(an)c(tu)m ut n(on) noceatis famulo d(e)i neq(ue) in die nec i(n) nocte […]
>
> ([…] I conjure you, demons and elves, and all the infections of all illnesses, and all obstructions, by the one God, the almighty Father and his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, that you may not harm this [male] servant of God by day or by night […]).[38]

In this context, elves are depicted as malevolent entities and demons within a strictly Christian framework, as indicated by the formula 'elves and demons'. This distinct pair of harmful beings is closely associated with infections and illnesses, highlighting the correlation between external malevolent forces and the onset of illness or disease. In another lead strip found in Romdrup, north Jutland peninsula, which dates before 1200 AD, we read of the same association of elves (male and female beings) with demons yet again in the context of an exorcism.

> […] † In nomine patris † et lii † et spiritus sancti amen † adiuro uos eluos uel eluas aut demones per patrem et lium et spiritum sanctum ut non noceatis huic famu-lo dei nicholao in oculis nec in capite neque in ulla compagine membrorum set in habitat in eis uirtus christi altissimi amen † […]
>
> ([…] † In the name of the Father † and the Son † and the Holy Spirit, Amen. + I conjure you, elves [masc.] or elves [fem.] and demons by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that you may not harm this [male] servant of God Nicholas in the eyes nor in the head nor in his members, but rather that the power of Christ may inhabit him. Amen. † […]).[39]

During the high Middle Ages, specifically from the tenth to thirteenth centuries, both Continental and Insular Germanic regions demonstrate a level of familiarity with the concept *ælf* (OE), *alben* (MHG) and *elvos* (Lat.) and their association with demonic forces.[40] This semantic meaning seems to have been an innovation in Continental and insular Germanic areas, whose concept of 'elves' departed from the Scandinavian one in the late early and high Middle Ages. The available sources indicate that inhabitants of Germanic regions during the post-Millennial period had developed a notion of 'elves'

[38] John McKinnell et al., *Runes, Magic and Religion: a Sourcebook* (Wien: Fassbaender, 2004), pp. 153–54; Gastgeber and Harrauer, 'Ein christliches Bleiamulett aus Schleswig', pp. 207–26; Mees and MacLeod, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*, p. 134.
[39] Simek, 'Elves and Exorcism', p. 29.
[40] Rudolf Simek, 'On Elves', in *Theorizing Old Norse Myth*, ed. by Stefan Brink and Lisa Collinson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), pp. 195–223 (p. 218); Jolly, *Popular Religion*, pp. 132–68; Lotte Motz, 'Of Elves and Dwarfs', *Arv*, 29: 30 (1973–74), 93–127; Simek Rudolf, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology,* trans. by Angela Hall (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1993); Arthur, '*Charms', Liturgies, and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England*, p. 112.

as supernatural entities capable of posing a threat to human well-being. While in both Insular and Continental Germanic areas, a semantic understanding of illness as an external malevolent force had already begun to take shape by the tenth century, the usage of *álfar* as a term denoting a hostile agent of illness within Old Norse society did not emerge until the later Middle Ages. This development followed a unique and somewhat contradictory trajectory.

The interpretations of the *álfar* in Old Norse are notably more complex compared to other Germanic-speaking regions, such as Old English. This complexity arises from the absence of glosses that could facilitate the semantic identification of *álfar* with other Classical otherworldly beings. Consequently, the emic Norse perspective on such entities remains elusive, and further investigation is required to gain insight into their understanding and significance within Old Norse culture.[41] A dual aspect further complicates the interpretations of Old Norse *álfar*. Firstly, the absence of comparable archaeological artifacts to those found in the Jutland peninsula and Germany limits our understanding of local beliefs and practices surrounding the *álfar*. The lack of such material evidence hinders the acquisition of further insights into the cultural context and the specific roles and functions attributed to these supernatural beings. Secondly, the Old Norse references to *álfar* in literature present a contradictory picture, acquiring diverse roles and implications within Old Norse literary landscape.

Previous scholars have pointed out that occurrences of *álfar* in Old Norse tradition do not always adhere to the idea of a dangerous supernatural being.[42] Prior to the association of *álfar* as a being able to bring discomfort and torment upon men, such entities were regarded as mighty human-like creatures able to influence the world and were associated with the *Æsir*, the leading group of deities in Old Norse worldview. The idea of *álfar* as an otherworldly being, substantially neutral or benign, who deserves worshipping and sacrifices, just like the *Æsir*, lays on the interpretations of some references drawn from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sagas and Eddic poems, as well as in tenth-century skaldic poems.[43] Gunnell has proposed that this particular aspect underwent notable transformations between the high and late Middle Ages, resulting in the negative connotation of *álfar* in late medieval Scandinavia and

[41] Simek, 'On Elves', p. 196.
[42] Terry Gunnell, 'How Elvish were the Álfar?', in *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of T.A. Shippey,* ed. by Andrew Wawn et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 111–30 (p. 121).
[43] Gunnell, 'How Elvish were the Álfar?', pp.120–21.

Iceland. This is the semantic concept that underpins the remedy under examination. Therefore, how did *álfar* become associated with illness?

The occurrence of remedies against *álfavǫlkun* might be evidence of a change of medical paradigm in Old Norse due to the increasing cultural influence of Christianity. In a time when Christianity acted as a cultural hegemon and encouraged the demonisation of traditional beliefs, *álfar* might have come to play the same role as out-group threats such as trolls, ogresses and the undead in the Old Norse worldview. By associating *álfar* with monstrous otherworldly beings that pose a threat to the *heill* of humans, encompassing the notions of health, wealth, wholeness and physical integrity, *álfar* are depicted as external entities separate from the human body. The inclusion of *álfar* in medical manuscripts supports the notion of an intrusive model of illness, suggesting the possibility of otherworldly beings exerting a physical influence on the human body.

A comparable cultural shift can be observed in the late Old English period. Alaric Hall contends that the portrayal of *ælfe* in early Old English society was more aligned with the conception derived from earlier Old Norse sources. This portrayal depicted *ælfe* as a human-like, non-monstrous otherworldly being perceived by society as a member of the in-group.[44] Hall drew attention to compelling evidence, including the abundance of Old English manuscript glosses. He argues that up to the ninth century, Classical benevolent and charming supernatural creatures such as *múses* and *nýmphē* are rendered into Old English by using the feminine stem *æfen/elfen* in compound nouns.[45] However, towards the late Old English period, sometime between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, perhaps under further pressure from Christianity over local beliefs, *ælfe* acquired negative connotations and became a paradigm for illness.[46]

On one hand, the association of *ælfe* with illness appears to be part of a broader and older tradition rooted in Germanic languages, as evidenced by ninth-century Old English materials and twelfth-century Latin charms in Germanic areas. On the other hand, such an association in Old Norse is not attested before the late fifteenth century. Surviving written evidence suggests a unique connection between the usage of *ælfe/álfr* in medical miscellanies in both Old English and Old Norse traditions.

[44] Hall, *Elves*, pp. 32, 37.
[45] Simek, 'On Elves', pp. 196–98; Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 73.
[46] Hall, *Elves*, pp. 172–75.

Remedies found in both traditions against *ælfe/álfr* and night-walkers/riders, such as the Old Norse night riders discussed earlier, show a clear correlation. In Old English medical miscellanies, *ælfe* and night-walkers/riders are featured in the same remedy context and are identified as creatures that ride and attack men during the night. Similarly, in Old Norse medical miscellanies we witness the same underlying correlation. The Old Norse *álfr* and the night-riders (sorceresses and troll-riders) are featured in two distinct remedies within the same manuscript section devoted to banishment of hostile forces. Furthermore, in contemporary literary sources the Old Norse *álfr* is occasionally associated with an incubus-type attack, echoing the sensation of pressure and crushing described by Falk as valken in the compound *álfavǫlkun*. In the following sections, I will explore how, within the context of medical miscellanies, the Old Norse *álfr* acquired night-rider characteristics, similar to how the Old English *ælfe* can be associated with the *mære* and other night-rider creatures that assault their victims at night.

4. 1. 3 Ælf, Álfr and the Mara-type Creatures

The Old English medical tradition offers interesting parallels where an *ælf* is found as the cause of an illness, ailment or discomfort and in close association with 'night-riders'. As previously observed, *ælf* is found in a compound noun with *siden* (*wið ælfsidenne*), whose meaning, following Alaric Hall's suggestions, can be interpreted via a link between OE. *siden* and ON. *seiðr* based on linguistic evidence of the strong verb *siða* having cognates in other Indo-European languages with the meaning of 'magic' or 'prophecy'.[47] According to Hall, this would prove a widespread semantic meaning of the word in all Germanic languages, including Old English.[48] Subsequently, Hall suggests a new rendering for the remedy *wið ælfsidenne*, which he translates as 'against magic worked out by an elf'.[49] This new interpretation allows us to explore the idea of OE. *ælf* through all the perspectives that *siða* implied,

[47] Hall, *Elves*, p. 119, "seið", *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, ed. by Jan De Vries, accessed 20 October 2023, https://archive.org/details/nordischesetymologischesworterbuch/mode/2up; On the medieval association of binding with magic in the Germanic-speaking world see Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 226–31.
[48] Hall, *Elves*, p.119.
[49] Ibid.

including supernatural agency, divination and seduction and compare them with analogues motifs of magic in cognate languages such as Old Norse.

The *siða* root is traceable in the ON. word for *seiðr* but not strictly associated with *álfar* with pejorative connotations. *Seiðr* was practised by both men and women, but some evidence suggests that if the men were to practice *seiðr*, this implied that they transgressed gender boundaries.[50] On the other hand, *seiðr* in the Old Norse corpus is associated with seduction and prophecy. According to the thirteenth-century author Snorri Sturluson, *seiðr* is one of the main features of the *Vanir,* a second-rank group of gods in Old Norse mythology, to which sometimes but not consistently *álfar* are associated with in medieval mythological narratives.[51] The primary purpose of *seiðr*, whether it is practised by humankind or *Vanir,* seems to have been divination and the manipulation of humans' and gods' minds alike to cause them harm or to facilitate their seduction.[52]

Hall argued that seduction is also part of the Old English *ælfe*'s identity. This is evident from the compound *ælfscyne* as an adjective for 'beautiful' in Genesis A.[53] Similarly, the Old English poem *Judith* shares the exact usage of the adjective to denote the seducing approach of Judith towards Holofernes. Hall highlights that this seduction has a dangerous twist, leading the seduced men to disgrace or death.[54]

The dangerous seductiveness of OE. *ælfe* seems to have a semantic relationship with other Old English supernatural beings drawn to attack men in medical manuscripts. These creatures are the *nihtgengan* and the *mære*. In Bald's *Leechbook*, Book I, section 64, there is a remedy *Wiþ ælcre yfelre leodrunan 7 wið ælfsidenne þis gewrit* (Against each evil *leodrune* and against *ælfsiden*, this writing) which, as Meaney

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[50] Ibid.; Thomas A. DuBois, 'Seiðr, Sagas, and Saami: Religious Exchange in the Viking Age', in *Northern Peoples, Southern States: Maintaining Ethnicities in the Circumpolar World*, ed. by Robert P. Wheelersburg (Umeå: CERUM, 1996), pp. 43–66 ; Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) pp. 135–37; Sarah Higley, 'Dirty Magic: Seiðr, Science, and the Parturating Man in Medieval Norse and Welsh Literature', in *Figures of Speech: The Body in Medieval Art, History, and Literature*, ed. by Allen J. Frantzen and David A. Robertson, Essays in Medieval Studies 11 (Chicago: Illinois Medieval Association, 1994), pp. 137–49; Ármann Jakobsson, *'*Óðinn as Mother: The Old Norse Deviant Patriarch*'*, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi,* 126 (2011*),* 5–16; Ármann Jakobsson, 'Two Wise Women and Their Young Apprentice: A Miscarried Magic Class', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi,* 122 (2007), 43–57 (pp. 50-1); François-Xavier Dillmann, *Les magiciens dans l'Islande ancienne: Études sur la représentation de la magie islandaise et de ses agents dans les sources littéraires norroises* (Uppsala: Kungliga Gustav Adolfs Akademien för svensk folkkultur, 2006), p. 450; Neil Price, 'Sorcery and Circumpolar Traditions in Old Norse Belief', in *The Viking World*, ed. by Stefan Brink and Neil Price (London: Routledge, 2008) pp. 244–48 (p. 245).

[51] Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway,* ed. and trans. by Lee M. Hollander (Austin, Texas: University of Texas for the American-Scandinavian Foundation, 2007), p. 8; Hall, *Elves*, pp. 27, 36, 47.

[52] Dag Strömbäck, 'The Concept of the Soul in Nordic Tradition', *Arv: Journal of Folklore*, 31 (1975), 5–22 (pp. 19–20); Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd: Textstudier i nordisk religionshistoria* (Stockholm: Levin & Munksgaard, 1935), pp. 142–59; DuBois, 'Seiðr, Sagas, and Saami', pp. 44–50.

[53] Simek, 'On Elves', p. 195; Hall, *Elves*, pp. 89–90.

[54] Hall, *Elves*, p. 90.

pointed out, is textually very close to another remedy found in the section 54 of *Leechbook* III, f. 122v, but addressed to *nihtgengan*.[55] This similarity in the content might suggest that with a similar, if not the same, remedy, you could cure or warn away both *ælfsiden* (the magic worked by elves) and whatever was caused by *nihtgengan*. *Nightgengan*, which literarily means 'night walker', not only walks at night but has a physical impact on the human body, as remedy 61 in the *Leechbook* suggests:

> .LXI. Wiþ ælfcynne sealf 7 wiþ nihtgengan and þam mannum .e deofol mid hæmð. Genim eowohumelan. Wermoð bisceopwyrt, elehtre, æscþrote, beolone, harewyrt, haran sprecel. Hæþ bergean wisan, cropleac, garleac, hegerifan corn, gyþrife finul. Do þæs wyrta on an fæt; sete under weofod; sing over viiii mæssan. Awyl buteran ond on sceapes smerwe; do haliges sealtes fela on; aseoh þurh claþ. Weorp þa wyrta on rynende wæter. Gif man hwilc yfel costung weorþe oþþe ælf oþþe nihtgengan, smire his ondwlitan mid þisse sealfe ond on his eagan do ond þær him se lichoma sar sie ond recelsa hine ond sena gelomb. His þing biþ sona selra.[56]

> (61. Make a salve against *ælfcynn* and against *nihtgenga*, and for people whom the devil has sex with. Take the hops, wormwood, hibiscus, lupin, vervain, henbane, henbane, *hārewyrt*, viper's bugloss, stalk of whortleberry, crow garlic, garlic, seed of goose-grass, cockle and fennel. Put the plants in a vessel, place under the altar, sing 9 masses over them, boil in butter and sheep's fat; put in plenty of holy salt; strain through a cloth. Throw the plants into running water. If evil tribulation or *ælf* or *nihtgengan* happens to a person, smear his forehead with this salve and put it on his eyes and wherever his body is sore and burn incense about him and sign [with the cross] often; his problem will soon be better).[57]

This remedy gives further glimpses into the *nightgengan*, and *ælfe* agency linked it to the body's soreness, therefore probably injured by wounds, blows, or being pressed down. In a sexually binary society like the medieval one, this emphasis on remedies for man to recover from an attack provides the ground for establishing cause-effect connections between the soreness of the male body caused by *ælfcynne* and *nihtgenga* and the *mara*-type of attack, which implies a female being to assault a male victim.

Our interpretation of *mære* as a female nocturnal predator is supported not only by references found in medical remedies but also by a well-established tradition of Old English glosses within the medieval theological and natural philosophy tradition. A

[55] Meaney, 'Variant Versions of Old English Medical Remedies', p. 239.
[56] Cockayne, *Leechdoms,* p. 344.
[57] Hall, *Elves*, pp. 126–27.

well-known example is the survival of glosses for *mære*, indicating *incubus*-type creatures based upon the taxonomy given by Isidore's *Etymologiae*.[58] Symptoms of the *incubus* are nocturnal experiences of paralysis, suffocation and a more general feeling of being crushed down or pressed down. In the medieval mind, this was perceived as physical and metaphorical sexual violence on the body of a man from a *mære*, which was considered a female creature.

In addition to glosses, further evidence linking the *mære* to riding and sexual assault can be found in the Old English medical corpus, in *Bald's Leechbook* (ca. 925-950 AD), where the term *mære* is juxtaposed with compound nouns based on *ælf*-:

> LXIIII. Læcedomas wiþ ælcre leodrunana 7 ælfsidenne þæt is fefercynnes gealdor 7 dust 7 drencas 7 sealf 7 gif sio adl netnum sie. 7 gif sio adl wyrde mannan oððe mare ride wyrde seofon ealles cræfta.[59]

> (64. Remedies for every witch and elvish that is, an incantation for a kind of fever, and powder and drinks and salve, and if the disease is affecting livestock. And if a disease injures a person or a *mære* rides and injures [a person]; seven remedies in all).[60]

The remedy clearly indicates that *mære* injures and rides her victims, further strengthening the *mære*'s explicit designation as an *incuba* in the glosses. The co-existence of *ælfsidenne* and *mære* in the same remedy with an emphasis on riding strengthens the semantic association of these two creatures. Although denoted by different names, *ælf* and *mære* still share the same ground of dangerous seductiveness in the medical corpus. As Batten pointed out, in the Old English worldview, there are separate denominations for multiple concepts or identities of demons wandering at night-time and harassing their victims.[61] Remedies like this reveal that medical practices against the assault of a *mære* could work as well against *ælf* and *nihtgengan* attacks, suggesting that in Old English worldviews, these creatures were similar enough to share specific remedies and counterattacks.

Another remedy found in the *Leechbook III* f. 110v reinforces this connection, as it contains an explicit mention of *ælf/e* and *nihtgengan* in the context of unwanted

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[58] "Incuba", *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, ed. by Eduard Wölfflin and Robert Estienne, (Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1900); Alaric Hall, 'The Evidence for *Maran*, The Anglo-Saxon Nightmares', *Neophilologus,* 91 (2007), 299–317 (p. 302); Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. by Wallace Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), pp. 103–4.
[59] Cockayne, *Leechdoms,* 138. Original after Cockayne with my normalisations.
[60] Batten, 'Dark Riders', p. 361.
[61] Ibid., p. 362.

sexual encounters: *Wiþ ælfcynne sealf 7 wiþ nihtgengan 7 þam mannum .e deofol mid hæmð* (for elf-kind and night-walkers and those people the devil has intercourse with). The remedy recalls the association between *ælf, nihtgengan* and demonic rape to the extent to which it could be translated as *Wiþ ælfcynne sealf 7 [...] nihtgengan* (make a salve against elf-kind and night-walkers) and *7 wiþ [...] þam mannum .e deofol mid hæmð* (and for men whom the devil has intercourse with).[62] If *mannum* were to be translated as 'men' rather than 'people', as other translators have suggested, it would better agree with the second part of the remedy, which reads *Gif man hwilc yfel costung weorþe oþþe ælf oþþe nihtgengan* (If any evil temptation or elf or *nihtgenga* happens to a man). The remedy is, therefore, not against the men but for the men, and *Deofol* is the sexual predator;[63] and it continues featuring the same strong connection between *ælfe* and *nihtgengan*.

Having outlined that *ælfe* in the Old English corpus can also be associated with danger, seductiveness and magic, we can now move to an even more interesting connection between the semantics of OE. *ælfe* and the semantic of ON*. mara*-type creatures and ON*. álfr* in medical miscellanies. Such a dangerous seduction is comparable to the seduction suggested by the Old English *mara*-type creatures which Batten has recently explored. On the other hand, the dangerous seduction is further compared by the Old Norse concept of *trollriða*, in which a nocturnal assault is perpetrated by the night riders or by *flagdum* (sorceresses).

To sum up, the association of *ælf* and *mære* in Old English medical texts on the ground of nocturnal assaults and a metaphorical interpretation of sexual violence is comparable to the association of *álfr* and *trollriða* in Old Norse medical manuscripts from the late fifteenth century and in Old Norse literary texts.

In Old Norse worldview, the *mara*-type creatures, as discussed earlier, are believed to assault their victim during the night performing the act of *trollriða*, which involved the infliction of an unwanted physical or metaphorical sexual violence, thereby violating the holistic idea of the *heill* body. The remedy *wid traul-ridu*, previously discussed, interestingly precedes the *álfavǫlkun* remedy in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, affording us the possibility of an underlying analogy between the two different yet similar creatures also belonging to the Old Norse worldviews. Such an analogy is based on manuscript evidence and a broader semantic conception of *álfr*

[62] Hall, *Elves*, p. 127.
[63] Ibid.

in late medieval Iceland. As discussed earlier, the concept of *álfr* in Old Norse worldview developed from a possible human-like, non-monstrous otherworldly being and positioned within the mythological framework to an entity from the local folklore, which progressively acquires pejorative connotations.[64] Such pejorative connotations attributed to *álfar* is traceable in a number of literary depictions, which seem to draw inspiration from the well-known belief in demonic *incubus*, rooted in Isidore's *Etymologies* and exacerbated by demonology theories in the late Middle Ages.

The medieval *incubus* as a medical condition carries a dual interpretation: a strictly medical one fostered by learned physicians who refuse Isidore's suggestion of a sexual nocturnal predator and embrace a more naturalistic-based interpretation of the symptoms.[65] This interpretation is rooted in the Greco-Roman rational medicine, according to which nocturnal paralysis, the pressure on the chest and the feeling of suffocation is attributed to the physiological functions of the body (i.e., digestion and food-related causes, as well as humors). The second interpretation, the demonic *incubus*, relied on the supernatural framework of such phenomena, rooted in a widespread belief system.[66] Isidore of Seville, developing Augustine's theory of *incubus*, provides a very clear explanation of the word.[67] He linked the word's etymology to the *incumbendo* (lying upon), which he glosses as *stuprando* (raping).[68] Such type of *incubus* is the one that has informed the Old English *mære* glosses, Old English medical *Leechbooks*, as well as depictions of elves in courtly romance and late medieval Latin West. Within this conceptual framework, the feeling of pressure originating from the feet and crawling up to the chest was metaphorically equated to a nocturnal and sexual assault perpetrated by an external and demonic entity.

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[64] Simek, 'On Elves', pp. 196–98; Gunnell, 'How Elvish were the Álfar?', pp. 128–29.

[65] Peter C. van der Eerden, 'Incubus, Demon, Droom of Monster', in *De Betovering van het middeleeuwse christendom. Studies over ritueel en magie in de Middeleeuwen*, ed. by Marco M. Mostert Onbekend and A. Demyttenaere, Amsterdamse historische reeks: Grote serie 22 (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 1995), pp. 101–27; Maaike van der Lugt, *Le Ver, Le Demon Et La Vierge: Les Theories Medievales de la Generation Extraordinaire. Une Etude Sur Les Rapports Entre Theologie, Philosophie Naturelle Et Medecine*, L'Ane D'Or 20 (Paris: Les Belle Lettres, 2004), pp. 317–59; Claude Lecouteux, 'Mara-Ephialtes-Incubus: le cauchemar chez les peuples germaniques', *Études Germaniques*, 42 (1987), 1–24; Nicolas Kiessling, *The Incubus in English Literature: Provenance and Progeny* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1977), pp. 2, 11–12, 48–45.

[66] Maaike Van der Lugt, **'**The Incubus in Scholastic Debate, Medicine, Theology and Popular Belief**',** in *Medicine and Religion in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 177**–**83; William MacLehose, 'Fear, Fantasy and Sleep in Medieval Medicine', in *Emotions and Health: 1200-1700*, ed. by Elena Carrera, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 168 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 69**–**70.

[67] St. Augustine on *Incubus* see Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei. Books XV & XVI*, Patrick G. Walsh et als. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 15:23.

[68] Van der Lugt, 'The Incubus', p. 179; Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, pp. 103–4.

As a result of these semantic evolutions, a similar concept like the one postulated here of *álfr* in Old Norse medical miscellanies was drawn from the Latin West's demonic *incubus*. Consequently, corroborating evidence of an *incubus*-like sexually aggressive entity can be inferred from Old Norse literary sources, which are coeval to the manuscript in question. In chapter 274 of the thirteenth-century *Þiðreks saga*, a male *álfr* assumes *incubus*-like characteristics: the nocturnal entity assaults and impregnates King Aldrian's drunk daughter who then gives birth to a son.[69] Initially, the nocturnal assault appears to be carried out by a *maðr* (man); however, as a consequence of this attack, her son is given the nickname 'son of an elf', thereby highlighting the stigma associated with the creature. The subsequent nickname provides insight into the nature of the violence inflicted upon the princess and what sort of creature perpetrated it.

Similarly, another sexual attack is perpetrated by a female *álfr* in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. In this saga, which survives in a fifteenth-century manuscript but the saga is likely older, an *álfkona* slips into King Helgi's bed during the night, and from the enforced union, the *álfkona* gives birth to a daughter.[70] Later the daughter not only carries the burden of the stigma associated with the unholy union, but she also embodies the stigma by inheriting malevolent features from the *álf-kyn* (elf-kind). Both passages exploit another feature of the late medieval demonological conception of *incubus*-type creatures, which is the ability to disguise the demons as a human beings to achieve their malicious purposes.

According to scholastic theologians, demons were unable to procreate and therefore needed to temporarily borrow an artificial body made from the air or a human corpse. By taking on artificial corpses, either of women or men, demons could collect the sperm of men with whom they had slept in the shape of a woman and then use it to impregnate women during their second intercourse. By assuming the form of artificial corpses, whether female or male, demons were believed to have the ability to gather the semen of men with whom they had engaged in sexual intercourse while appearing as women. Subsequently, they would utilize this collected semen to impregnate women during their subsequent sexual encounters.[71]

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[69] *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, ch. 274, bindi I-II, ed. by Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1951).
[70] *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans*, ch. 15, *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, bindi II., ed. by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1944).
[71] Van der Lugt, 'The Incubus', p. 179.

As the above examples show, in the Old Icelandic sagas from the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, which are coeval to our manuscript, *álfr* acquires typical sexual demonic connotations with a specific emphasis on unwanted sexual intercourse. In light of this semantic evolution, we can perhaps re-assess the meaning of the second item of the compound *álfavǫlkun* to contextualise better what type of torment (*vǫlkun*) would be caused by an *álfr*. If the original meaning of the verb *valka* in Icelandic, from which *vǫlkun* derives, were 'to grip, to knead and to press', as Falk suggested, this would afford us the possibility to interpret such torment on the chest as the pressure experienced during sleep paralysis and therefore metaphorically encoded as a demonic assault.

The collocation of such remedy within the Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo interestingly points towards the same interpretation of *álfavǫlkun* as a torment carried out by a malevolent external agent assaulting their victims at night. The remedy is not only preceded by the *wid traul-rid* as previously noted but also by another entry which alludes again to the possibility of a nocturnal riding *Þesser hlutir ero vid ridu: G, Gi, Gina, Gisman, Gismand, Gismanda, Gismanndand* (Those tokens are against being ridden: *G, Gi, Gina, Gisman, Gismand, Gismanda, Gismanndand*). The concern here is again to be 'ridden'; however, the remedy does not offer further insights into the agent or the phenomena against which these tokens would be a remedy. The formula consists of a counting-up charm which was supposed to increase the healing powers of the token by adding letters each time to a given word root. Considering that this remedy follows the *wid traul-rid* remedy, we can perhaps postulate that 'being ridden', in this context, might express the same concern for nocturnal attacks and their physical violence on the body and a metaphorical corruption of an individual's health. By considering the remedies altogether, we can delineate a distinctive small section of remedies against a particular health concern regarding nocturnal onslaughts and malevolent otherworldly agents bringing upon both physical discomfort and metaphorical corruption of the *heill*.

It is worth noting here that this 'section' is followed by two groups of remedies, one of which concerns physical ailments such as headache, eye pain and haemorrhages. Another one focuses on stanching blood remedies. The pattern of sections devoted to a particular type of disease continues throughout the whole manuscript, providing further insight into how these materials were gathered. If clusters of remedies reveal a consistent topic throughout (i.e. blood-stanching

remedies or physical pains and discomfort), then also the cluster of remedies in which we find *Wid traul-ridu, Þesser hlutir ero vid ridu* and *Álfavǫlkun* can probably be considered a united group of entries devoted to a type of disease. This grouping of remedies was conceptualized as a distinct section intended to address a common health concern, which can be readily differentiated from the other remedies in the manuscript due to its specific emphasis on an invasive agent model of illness.

4. 1. 4 Preliminary Conclusions

In summarizing the key points of this chapter, the analysis of manuscript Copenhagen AM 434 a 12mo, reveals that the Old Norse language, literature, and society exhibited similarities with other medieval societies in their conceptualization and discourse regarding illness and disease through metaphorical language. Furthermore, it highlights the cognitive impact of this metaphorical discourse on the understanding of illness and disease, as well as their bodily agency. This metaphorical speech was underpinned by a belief in a spiritual realm capable of affecting the physical body through tangible and threatening actions.

Within this framework, various treatments emerged, which encompassed a wide spectrum of approaches. These treatments ranged from the consumption of substances, either orally or through inhalation, to sympathetic remedies that aimed to restore a state of health through physical interaction with specific materials such as ligatures, amulets, and talismans. Additionally, the recitation of specific formulas was employed to physically dislodge malevolent external entities from within or upon the human body. The banishment of hostile beings approach is particularly evidenced in Old Norse remedies against *álfr* and *trollriða*.

These rich and diverse remedies offer valuable insights into the emic conceptions of health and illness within Old Norse worldviews. Firstly, they illuminate a shared concern regarding a specific illness agent, namely the nocturnal attacks by various creatures that can be classified under the broader category of *incubus*. Secondly, they demonstrate a semantic connection between the anxiety surrounding *trollriða* attacks carried out by a multitude of night-riders and the concept of *álfr* creatures in late medieval Iceland. It becomes evident that *trollriða* attacks involve an inappropriate desire on the part of the perpetrator and result in physical harm, as seen in cases such

as Gunnlaugr's injuries in *Eyrbyggja saga* or Vanlandi's death in *Ynglinga saga* due to the crushing actions of a *seiðkona*. This latter example also aligns with the notion of being metaphorically 'crushed down', as exemplified by the concept of *álfavǫlkun* (the torment caused by elves). The metaphorical interpretation of the act of being pressed down and the occurrence of nocturnal assaults find a close parallel within these contexts.

In both instances, supported by literary evidence spanning one or possibly two centuries, we observe a clear association between concerns about nocturnal attacks and unwanted sexual encounters or desires. In the case of *álfavǫlkun*, although the attack may not result in the victim's death, as seen in the case of Vanlandi, or the severe injuries suffered by Gunnlaugr, it still carries an inherent connection to the notion of pressure and forced sexual intercourse, as suggested by contemporary literature. This provides a third insight into emic conceptions, whereby the narrative of illness, disease, and its symptoms can be understood as a symbolic story rooted in the external assault by supernatural entities.

As demonstrated by the presence of the *incubus*-type tormentor in Late Antiquity, the invasive model of illness extends beyond the Old Norse medical perspective and is a common characteristic found in early Germanic cultures and the broader pan-European medical framework. However, what distinguishes the Old Norse worldview, which it shares with Old English sources, is the specific representation of anxiety related to nocturnal phenomena as a night-rider or *álfr*. Within this symbolic narrative, we observe a metaphorical equation between physical, psychological, and emotional discomforts and a sexual violation of the body, resulting in a disruption of its integrity and well-being (*heill*).

Moreover, Old Norse medical metaphors utilize local motifs of supernatural and otherworldly beings to provide an explanation for various nocturnal attacks, such as sleep paralysis and the conception of unwanted offspring. Additionally, there is an apparent effort to incorporate elements of the Mediterranean and Continental models of *incubus*-type attacks by recontextualising them within local motifs and beliefs. On one hand, as suggested by Batten, it is possible to interpret a supernatural agent's assault on a man as an ideological manifestation of his failure to fulfil gender roles effectively. On the other hand, we can discern similar undertones of metaphorical disruption in bodily functions that apply to all individuals, as exemplified in the *álfr-incubus* remedy. The concept of *álfavǫlkun* still encompasses what Batten describes

as metaphorical erotic violence, but it extends beyond solely male bodies, encompassing a disease and demonic agent that can affect both women and men.

Batten's proposition regarding the Old Norse perception of an ailing male body as weakened, corrupted, defective, and subsequently feminized, subject to the invasive model of illness, may present challenges as it offers a one-sided perspective on the ill body. Batten's concept of the ill male body in Old Icelandic literature primarily relies on the interpretation of accounts of illness as the result of nocturnal attacks. In these nocturnal attacks, the man, on an ideological level, becomes subordinate to the disease, resulting in his body being ideologically feminized.

However, this viewpoint of the invasive model of illness risks promoting a monolithic understanding of the 'invasive' metaphor. The symbolic narrative of an invasive model of illness must also encompass the interpretation of the female body when afflicted with a disease referred to as *álfavǫlkun*. Within the context of sagas, women are likewise victims of similar nocturnal encounters, and as a consequence, their offspring, both sons and daughters, bear the burden of stigma associated with this ideological framework. Practically speaking, as evidenced by medical manuscripts, Old Norse worldviews accommodate multiple notions of nocturnal attacks that share certain characteristics:

- They were associated with otherworldly creatures
- They were somehow connected with unwanted sexual intercourse, or their attack was encoded as sexual aggression
- They all deal with the experience of being crushed down.

The fourth and last remark is the unique parallel of ideological association between *incubus*-type creatures and OE. *ælfe* on the one hand, and ON. *álfr*, on the other hand. As we have seen, *mære* and *nihtgengan* in ninth-eleventh *Leechbooks* often feature alongside *ælfe* in remedies implying nocturnal assaults or riding activities. This affords us a glimpse into the emic taxonomy of *ælfe* in the late Old English period, in which it appears clear that *ælfe* were regarded as ideologically close enough to *mære* and *nihtgengan* to be featured together and to be counteracted by the same remedy.

The analogous ideological parallel seems to emerge from Old Norse medical manuscripts in the context of *trollriða* and *álfr*, in the extent to which *trollriða* seems to

share the same kind of attack as the one perpetrated by the Old English *mære* and *nihtgegan*. As previously discussed, a section of remedies in the late fifteenth-century Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo features two remedies devoted to counteracting the *trollriða* and the *álfavǫlkun*. The two distinct remedies discussed above are included in a dedicated section within the medical manuscripts that specifically addresses nocturnal encounters with supernatural entities. Similarly, Old English medical miscellanies provide evidence of the same association of *ælfe, mære* and *nihtgengan* in the context of the same remedy, which is encompassed within larger sections that address supernatural assaults.

On the one hand, from the Old Norse medical and literary evidence, we can interpret the *trollriða* entry as a remedy against being violently attacked at night by female supernatural creatures (trolls, ogresses, demons, and sorceresses) based on literary accounts and linguistic features. On the other hand, we can expand such *modus operandi* to *álfr* and interpret the first part of the compound *álfavǫlkun* (*álfr*) as a nocturnal predator, which finds parallels in coeval sagas. Furthermore, the second part of the compound, *vǫlkun,* could be seen as the act of crushing, which represents a crucial feature of *the mara*-type of attack in Old Norse literature, in Old English *mære* and more broadly in Latin West *incubus*. This observation highlights a striking similarity in the association of local concepts in Old Norse, such as *álfr* and *mara*, and in Old English, such as *ælfe* and *mære*, with the Classical and Continental notion of *incubus* assaults within the medical discourses of both languages. This unique symbolic interpretation of bodily discomfort appears to be distinct from surviving Old Germanic languages on the Continent, which could be attributed to the lack of extant medical manuscripts in Old High and Low German, Frisian, and other Germanic languages. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy to emphasize the parallelism in conceptualising the same bodily discomfort within two distinct societies and languages. The metaphorical narrative surrounding the sensation of being crushed down undoubtedly stems from the influence of both Christianity and Classical and Late Antique literature originating from the Mediterranean region. However, it is no longer possible to discount the possibility that medieval English medical culture, which appears to have developed the association between *mære/ælfe* at an earlier stage, may have influenced the Norse notions of *mara* and *álfr* through the circulation of medical *compendia* and *leechbooks*.

The instances of *trollriða* and *álfavǫlkun* present a wider cultural and cognitive framework that is shared by Old Norse and Old English texts, indicating a common approach to the subject matter.

The convergence in the representation of specific illnesses and diseases through the incorporation of local beliefs, as evidenced by the inclusion of ON. *mara,* OE. *mære* and ON. *álfr,* OE. *ælfe* in parallel contexts, cannot be attributed solely to an independent response to the cultural and religious influence of Christianity. Instead, the growing similarities in remedies found in Old Norse, Old English, and Middle English medical manuscripts, which will be further examined in the following chapters, suggest a deeper connection between the two medical cultures. This shared symbolic narrative is not coincidental or solely influenced by Christianity, but rather indicates the possibility of an Old Norse exposure to Old English medical discourse.

In sum, this chapter has guided us on a trajectory that extends from an exploration of illness metaphors within the context of pan-European medieval medical traditions to a focused examination of a specific case study. This case study has illustrated how the prevailing worldview can significantly influence the cultural interpretation of illness and disease, thus shaping the usage of metaphoric language. Moreover, the chapter has demonstrated how these illness metaphors extend beyond the realm of abstract rhetoric to manifest as concrete, corporeal influences that transform both individual and collective perspectives concerning a particular ailment and its associated symptoms. In doing so, it has unveiled the intrinsic human quest for lucidity, systematic classification, and ultimately a deeper comprehension of the intricacies of the human body.

Chapter 5

Norse and English Remedies in Comparison

5.1 An Introduction to Norse and English Remedies

The medical remedies in the Old Norse medical manuscripts reveal that a diverse array of influences and sources likely inspired the scribes. As observed by previous scholars and expanded on in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the primary influence on Old Norse-Icelandic medical remedies and manuscripts appears to have arisen from direct contacts with medieval Norway and Denmark.[1] From a close survey of various intrinsic aspects of the language and the text variants, it becomes apparent that choice of words, translations, orthography, and textual parallels of substantial portions of the Old Norse-Icelandic medical corpus originated from Danish and Norwegian originals or intermediaries.[2]

The primary objective of this thesis is not to downplay the cultural and textual impact of certain Danish and Norwegian medical collections on Old Norse-Icelandic medicine. Rather, it aims to build upon this influence and pursue two main goals. Firstly, as we have previously seen, to uncover distinctive features of Old Norse-Icelandic medicine through an exploration of how medieval Icelanders adapted and integrated foreign remedies into their own medical framework and how local medical practices may surface from the combination of imported and local remedies. This investigation also involves analysing their approach to gathering medicinal materials, which provides insights into their understanding of effective treatments.

Secondly, the thesis seeks to contribute to the concept of the circulation of medical ideas within the Nordic regions. It endeavours to examine the extent to which we can incorporate elements from other medical traditions, especially of English origin, into the understanding of Old Norse-Icelandic medicine. By investigating and testing these connections, the research aims to enrich our comprehension of the exchange and assimilation of medical knowledge within the broader Nordic context.

[1] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, pp. 356–64; Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, pp. 16–21; Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 1–13.
[2] For a table of lemmas see Larsen, Ibid., pp. 28–29.

If there are other cultural and textual influences from the Continent and Insular Europe over Icelandic medical manuscripts alongside the Danish and Norwegian ones, it is probably towards medieval England that we need to turn our attention. Although of certainly minor prominence compared to Danish and Norwegian parallels in Old Icelandic medicine, the English textual parallels and cultural influence over Icelandic medical texts and medical paradigms exists and it is strong enough to surface in a comparative reading of medical traditions. As previously mentioned, it is evident that significant segments of Old Norse-Icelandic medical manuscripts, including the book of simples, the lapidary, and the cookbook found in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43, can be traced back to various Danish and Norwegian copies of Henrik Harpestræng's Danish *herbarium*.[3] Similarly, certain sections present in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo also align with this stream of circulation.[4] The influence of English medical tradition over Icelandic medicine may not exhibit an equivalent level of textual, linguistic, and palaeographical significance. However, during my investigation of comparable medical practices in Old English and Middle English texts with the Old Norse-Icelandic texts, I identified evidence of remedies shared by both English and Icelandic traditions which may indicate that the latter might have been exposed to medieval English medical collections and that have borrowed material, practices, motifs and ingredient preparation and administration into their medical culture.

As discussed in the chapter concerning the correlation between Old Norse *trollriða, mara* and *álfr* and the Old English *nihtgenga*, *mara* and *ælfe*, it is evident that textual parallels are not the sole element supporting cultural and textual contacts. The association of *trollriða* and other 'nocturnal riding creatures' with *álfr* in Old Norse-Icelandic medical texts, based on a supernatural and sexualised creature, presents a cognitive parallel that can also be found in Old English medical texts. This parallel suggests a shared conceptual framework or understanding of certain medical phenomena between the Old Norse and Old English traditions, further reinforcing the notion of cultural and textual interactions between the two realities.

The remedies featuring *trollriða* and *álfr* in Old Norse texts do not share direct textual parallels with those featuring *nihtgenga*, *mara* and *ælfe* in Old English texts.

[3] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, pp. 16–21; Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 1–13.
[4] Larsen, Ibid., pp. 15–49.

However, despite this absence, the presence of a shared understanding of this kind of entities suggests a shared conceptual framework between the two traditions. This similarity further highlights that the fifteenth-century Old Norse category of *álfr* and *trollriða* might have been influenced by the Old English ones, even though the textual evidence may not be explicit. This aptly shows that textual parallels are not the sole indicators of cultural interactions. Cognitive parallels and other contextual factors can also play a significant role in revealing the exchange and dissemination of medical knowledge between different traditions.

The survey of Old and Middle English medical texts has revealed an interesting trend. It appears that only a minority of entries in these texts demonstrate systematic textual parallels in Old Norse-Icelandic medical texts. However, a significant number of entries reveal a broader comparable use of ingredients or methodology for specific ailments or under certain circumstances.

This indicates that the major shared motifs and patterns with Old Norse remedies can be primarily found in Old English texts. This suggests a closer relationship and more significant influence between the Old Norse and Old English medical traditions, which could have been exerted towards the end of the Old English period. On the other hand, only a smaller subset of remedies can be traced back to Middle English texts, which might be indicating a lesser degree of shared elements with the Old Norse tradition.

The comparison of Old Norse and coeval Middle English medical texts has shown a more general, rather than specific, shared use of recurrent motifs in medieval healing. These analogies cannot be attributed to textual or cultural transmission but rather suggests that both medical traditions were drawing inspiration from a plethora of patterns and motifs common to all medical strata of societies across medieval Europe. Some illustrative examples might be, but are not limited to, the use of the *Sator* palindrome in the context of talismans or textual and verbal charms, which is featured in both traditions, but the evidence shows no specific textual relation between the remedies exploiting the palindrome in Old Norse and in Old and Middle English. Likewise, the use of *marie peperit* or other narrative charms such as the so-called *longinus miles* for staunching blood appear to be part of the Middle English and Old Norse healer toolkit alike, but surviving evidence shows no particular connections in terms of textual transmission or content. These charms, along with numerous other remedies that cannot be discussed exhaustively here, were integral components of a

broader popular medical tradition accessible to all segments of society engaging with healing. Due to the dissemination of various versions of these charms, it has become challenging to precisely map their textual correlations. Therefore, without a shared text or content, the presence of these remedies in both traditions only highlights their mutual familiarity with a broader medical background but not a textual and cultural influence of one textual culture to another.

The prevalence of shared medical motifs, practices and theories observed in Old Norse and Old English texts potentially indicates a substantial exchange of medical ideas during the early medieval period. This statement, however, pose a chronological challenge to historians and philologists. It is worth noting that Old Norse writing in the Latin script did not emerge until the early twelfth century, coinciding with the decline of the Old English language and literary period, which paved the way for the development of Middle English.[5] This temporal discrepancy poses a challenge to interpret any textual influence from Old English on Old Norse medical texts as a direct contact, due to the time differences in their literary periods.

Conversely, the limited influence of Middle English medicine on Old Norse medical texts could imply a more distinct development of medical practices in the two cultures, with less dialogue between their respective medical traditions. Before drawing any further conclusions, it is worth examining practical examples from a specific group of remedies found in Old Norse medical texts, which exhibit certain parallels with Old and Middle English medical texts.

From this survey it has emerged that there are two specific typologies of remedies in Old Norse and Old English texts that exhibit certain analogies: the textual genre of prognostics and the collection of remedies from herbs and animals and their derivatives and products. The herbal and animal-based remedies category is relatively straightforward, as it involves medical treatments that utilize one or more plants or parts of animals. Remedies in this category often combine both herbs and animal components, such as blood, internal organs like galls, liver, horns, or antlers. On the

[5] *The First Grammatical Treatise*, ed. and trans. by Hreinn Benediktsson (Reykjavík: Institute of Nordic Linguistics, 1972); *First Grammatical Treatise: The Earliest Germanic Phonology*, ed. and trans. by Einar Haugen, 2nd edition (London: Longman, 1972); Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Poetic Sources of the Old Icelandic Grammatical Treatises', in *La letteratura di istruzione nel medioevo germanico: studi in onore di Fabrizio D. Raschellà*, ed. by Marialuisa Caparrini, Maria Rita Digilio and Fulvio Ferrari (Barcelona: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, 2017), pp. 67–81; Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, vols. 1–3 (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1920–24); Stefán Karlsson, 'The Development of the Latin Script II: Iceland', in *The Nordic Language. An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, vol. 1, ed. by Oskar Bandle et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), pp. 832–41.

other hand, prognostics are codified texts foretelling the future of individuals or a group of people through the reading of natural phenomena, dreams, or instruments such as dice and alphabets.

In this chapter, we will review both categories of remedies in detail in order to illustrate the shared ideas, patterns, motifs and version of the text transmission with the Old and Middle English medical tradition.

5. 2 Birth Prognostics and Signs of Impending Death

Prognostics is a textual genre with origins in Antiquity and widespread circulation across medical and scientific manuscripts throughout the ages, eventually making its way to the Middle Ages, where it continued to be employed in medical compendia.[6] Prognostics, as Liuzza aptly described them, can be seen as precursors to modern almanacs.[7] They serve as predictive guides for future events, offering insights on how to deal with various everyday issues, including illness and childbirth outcomes, weather conditions, agricultural matters, and dream interpretations. Prognostics are based on the observation and interpretation of natural phenomena, signs, times, or mantic divination.[8] Examples of prognostics include the observation of thunders, phases of the moon, days of the week and month, moon colours, lucky and unlucky days, wind patterns, and yearly predictions, all of which contribute to foretelling the future. In this section we will explore only two typologies of prognostics dealing respectively with foretelling the future on the ground of lucky days and their marvellous births and the unlucky days and their prescribed activities. The second typology of prognostics comprises the foretelling of death or recovery based on bodily signs, which bears the name *Signa mortifera* (signs of impending death) or *Capsula eburnea* (Ivory Casket).

The corpus of Old Norse-Icelandic prognostics presents a notable disparity in comparison to its Continental counterpart. Texts involving the foretelling of future events and illness outcomes are limited to a few entries in two manuscripts: Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo and Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 d 43. In addition to the categories of ‘birth prognostics’ and ‘signs of impending death’, Old

[6] Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, pp. 59–75.
[7] Liuzza, ‘Forewords’, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*.
[8] Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: 900-110*, p. 8.

Norse medical manuscripts also encompass the documentation of 'lunaries', which are prognostications grounded in the lunar calendar solely present within Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, and 'month of the year prognostics' featured within both manuscripts. The latter category involves the anticipation of outcomes related to bloodletting and other health-related and human affairs, drawing upon the calendrical divisions of the months.

The categories 'birth prognostics' and the 'signs of impending death' emerge as the most relevant representatives of textual interconnections with the English medical tradition. In contrast, the categories of 'lunaries' and 'month of the year prognostics' merely exhibit a superficial resemblance, and any potential direct influence is difficult to firmly establish.

Shifting our focus towards some of the most noteworthy instances within this corpus of prognostics, we will look at some examples drawn from the medical miscellany Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, preserving one 'birth prognostic' concerning marvellous births and unlucky days, and some Old English parallels. The Old Norse manuscript wrongly attributes this prognostic to Bede the Venerable; however, if not Bede at least two eleventh-century English manuscripts share substantial elements with the Old Norse passage. The text in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo reads as follows:

> Svo seigir hinn heilagi Bedaa prestur, at iii ero þeir dagar aa xii manudum, ef kall-madr er þaa byriadr, at likamr þes manz mun eigi sundur leysazt fyrir domsdag, þat er nott eptir Birgittar mess ok ii nottum eptir Pals messo ok atta nottum eptir Augottu messo. En ero adrir iii dagar med micilli vandvirkt geymandi, þat er hinn næsti manuþdagur eptir Mariu messo i faustu ok ii adrir dagar eptir bandaþdagh Petur ok Pauli ok ii adrar nætur eptir Silvester messo; aa ollum þesum dogum þaa er eigi blod latanda manni ne fenadi, þaa mun annath-hvort þegar deyia edur i þeiri viku; ok þeirra manna æfi-lok mun þunglig verda, er aa þessum timum ero fæddir. Svo er ok ef menn eta gasa kiot aa þesum daugum, þaa mun þeir daudir adur enn lidnir ero xx dagar ok hundrath.[9]

> So said the holy priest Bede: there are three days in twelve months, such that if a man is conceived then, the body of this man will not be destroyed before the Judgment Day. They are the night after St. Brigit's Day, and two nights after St. Paul's Day, and eight nights after St. Agatha's Day. But there are three other days that must be very carefully observed; they are the 1st Monday after St. Mary's Day during the fast, and two days after the feast of St. Peter and Paul in Chains, and two nights after St. Sylvester's Day. On all these days, no blood is let from people or animals, because then all the veins are full. But if blood is let from people or animals anyway, then he will die either at once or during that week; and the

[9] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog,* p. 367.

> deaths of those men who are born at these times will be hard. So it is also, if men eat goose meat on these days; then they will be dead before one-hundred and twenty days have passed.[10]

This birth prognostic comprises two distinct sections. The first section focuses on lucky days associated with the birth of exceptional individuals, while the second section addresses unlucky days on which it is forbidden to practice bloodletting. It also details the unfortunate consequences that may befall those who dare to disregard this prohibition, along with other ill-fated outcomes that may result from certain activities. It is important to note that this version of the text is part of a well-established tradition of birth prognostics with a long history of use in monastic medical practices across both Continental and insular Europe.[11]

As Wallis has observed, while the rationale behind the selection of unlucky days remains unclear, this text genre is rooted in ancient Mediterranean sources and are not merely derived from popular medicine.[12] This indicates a deep-rooted and enduring connection between medical knowledge and practices from different regions and time periods.

The first section of our prognostic is structurally very similar to another birth prognostic based on lucky and unlucky days found in three eleventh-century English manuscripts. The first example is drawn from London British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A XV, fol. 131^{r}/5-11.

> Đreo dagas syndon on .xii. monðum mid þrim nihtum on þam ne bið nan wifmann akenned. 7 swa hwylc wæpnedmann on þam dagum akenned bið ne forrotað his lichama næfre on eorðan ne he ne fulað ær domesdæge. nu is an þara daga on æftewyrdne decembre. 7 þa twegen on foreweardan Ianuarie þam monðe. 7 feawe synd þe þas geryne cunnan oþþe witan. [13]
>
> There are three days in the twelvemonth, with three nights, on which no woman is born; and whatever man is born on those days never putrefies in body in the earth, nor turns foul till the Judgment Day. Now one of those days is in the latter part of December, and the remaining two are in the early part of January, and few there are who know or understand these mysteries.

[10] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 3.
[11] Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: 900-110*, pp. 230–35; Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context', pp. 181–230.
[12] Faith Wallis, 2. Computus Related Materials fols 3^{r}-7^{v}, Overview: The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford - St. John's College MS 17, https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/folio.php?p=3v&showitem=3v_2ComputusRelated_3ThreeCriticalDays, accessed on 10 August 2023.
[13] Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: 900-110*, p. 234.

Another version of the same type of prognostics is found in London, British Library, Cotton Titus D. xxvi, fol. 4^{r}/13-4^{v}/1:

> Tres dies sunt in anno cum totidem noctibus ut fertur in quibus mulier nunquam nascitur. & uir qui natus fuerit in ipsis. nunquam corpus illius putredine soluetur usque ad diem iudicii. id est nouissimus de thebet. & duo primi de sabath.[14]
>
> (There are three days in the year, with an equal number of nights, as it is said, on which a woman is never born, and a man who is born on those days will never have his body decay until the Day of Judgment. That is, the last three days of Tebet and the first two of Shebat).

And a third one from a manuscript we have already discussed and from which Larsen had identified another parallel with Old Norse medical manuscripts, Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17, fol. 3va/36-41:

> Tres dies sunt in quoque anno cum tribus noctibus ut ferunt in quibus mulierum nunquam nascitur. & uir si natus fuerit in ipsis nunquam corpus eius putredine sol- 3 uetur. sed perdurabit usque ad diem iudicii. id est nouissimus de thebeth. & duo primi de sabath.[15]
>
> (There are three days in each year, with three nights as they say, on which a woman is never born, and if a man is born on those days, his body will never decay but will endure until the Day of Judgment. That is, the last three days of February, and the first two days of March).

In the Latin prognostic preserved in MS Cotton Titus D. xxvi, the text says 'id est nouissimus de thebet. & duo primi de sabath'. These are days in the Jewish calendar: the last day of the month of Tebet and the first two of Shebat, which correspond to the months of February and March respectively. Therefore, the translation is: 'that is, the last three days of February, and the first two days of March'. In her study of Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17, Wallis observed that the scribe rendered the Jewish months in Roman calendar days by consulting the conversion table in the same manuscript, Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17, thus resulting in February and March.[16] This is not the most common version of the birth prognostic, as the most usual one in

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Faith Wallis, 2. Computus Related Materials: 4. Three Marvellous Days, fol. 3v. The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford - St. John's College MS 17, https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/folio.php?p=3v&showitem=3v_2ComputusRelated_4ThreeMarvellousDays, accessed on 30 November, 2023; Cockayne, Leechdoms, vol. 3, pp. 154–55; Liuzza, Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, p. 185; see also the description of Hauksbók and the calendar and computistic sections in manuscript Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM GKS 1812 4to, in Kristian Kålund and Natanael Beckman, *Alfræði Islenzk. Islandsk Encyklopaedisk Litteratur*, vol. 3 (København: S.L. Møllers bogtrykkeri, 1908-18), pp. 73, 469.

Old English medical texts features the dates concerning the last day of December and first two of January, as exemplified by Cotton Caligula A XV fol. 131^{r}. The text version reporting February and March dates is less common but still features within Old English texts and it is rooted in the textual tradition utilising the Jewish calendar.

In our Old Norse text, the prognostic revolves around February days rather than the end of December and early January, adhering better with the minor Old English textual tradition featured in the Oxonian manuscript and MS Cotton Titus D. As Waggoner has pointed out, St. Brigit's Day mentioned in the text can be identified with Brigid of Kildare, and therefore the date referred to 1st February; similarly, he suggests that St. Paul's Day might be referring to the Conversion of St. Paul canonically set on 25th January or 10th February, and lastly the eight nights after St. Agatha's Day might be counted from St. Agatha's feast on 5th February.[17]

The origin of the February days tradition may be intertwined with the pseudo-Bede text known as *De Nativitate Infantium Libellus* that was familiar in the Old English tradition and might have also influenced the Old Norse scribe.[18] Within a pseudo-Bede text, there exists another birth prognostic related to remarkable dates in February.

> Three days and three nights there are, during which, if a man abstains from intercourse, his body undoubtedly remains intact (his flesh will remain uncorrupted) until the day of judgment. This happens on the 6th day before the Calends of February and the third day before the Calends and the Ides of February; and its mystery is truly marvellous.[19]

A further resemblance between the Old English textual tradition of this birth prognostic and the Old Norse version lays on the presence of prognostics based on unlucky days, either preceding or succeeding them. In the Old Norse version, the unlucky days are the first Monday after St. Mary's Day, which falls on 25th March, and two days after the feast of 'St. Peter and Paul' which Waggoner suggests being a scribe's mistake for 'St. Peter and Paul in Chains', occurring on 1st August, and two nights after St. Sylvester's Day on 31st December.[20] From the Old English version of the unlucky days text, which accompanies the birth prognostic in the Oxonian manuscript, a number of content and lexical parallels with the Old Norse version of the unlucky days prognostic emerges. For instance, the Oxonian manuscript indicates the

[17] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 79.
[18] Ibid.
[19] *De Nativitate Infantium Libellus*, 960B, *Patrologia cursus completus. Series Latina*, vol. 90, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Apud Garnier, 1841-1880).
[20] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 79.

existence of three treacherous Mondays: the first Monday in August, the last in December, and the Monday following seven days before the kalends of April, namely 26th March. The similarities in the calculation of these days between the Old Norse and the Old English texts are remarkably close in this case.

The text in the Oxonian manuscript exhibits further parallels with the Old Norse text, such as the prohibition of bloodletting for both humans and animals due to the fullness of veins, and it warns that failure to adhere to this prescription would result in death for those who have been bled. Lastly, a third common element is the reference in both texts to the fate of men born during these times, foretelling an unfortunate death.

A shorter and older version of this prognostic based on unlucky days is also traceable back to the *Lacnunga*, a tenth-century Old English medical collection, in which the three treacherous Mondays are called *Ægyptiaci* (Egyptian days) or dangerous days.[21] The text in the *Lacnunga* is relatively less elaborate compared to the ones found in Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17 and the Old Norse version. Nonetheless, it does conform to the Monday traditions in both the earliest Mondays in August and January, in line with what our Old Norse manuscript indicates. Specifically, one of the three Mondays mentioned in the Old Norse text occurs after 31st December and consequently falls within early January.

Shifting our attention to another text, we will now examine one of the prognostic sections attributed to Galen in the manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo and its corresponding parallel in Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17. At the end of the Old Norse manuscript, we read the following text which deals with reading bodily signs to foretell illness outcomes and impending death:

> Galienus mælti sva: þessi ero daudlig tacn i manligum likam, ef enni rodnar, brynn fallaa, vinstra auga dregr samann, naser aundverdar dregr saman edur hvitnna, fætur kolna, kvidur fellr til hryggiar. Smyr þu med fleski fætur siuks manz ok kastaa fyrir hund, ok ef etur, þaa mun batnna, en nef hafnar, þaa er haska vonn.[22]
>
> (Thus, spoke Galienus: these are signs of death in human bodies: if the forehead reddens, brows fall, the left eye contracts, opposite nostrils draw together or turn white, feet are cold, stomach sinks down to the spine. Smear the feet of a sick man with meat and throw it to a dog and if he eats

[21] See Cockayne, *Leechdoms,* pp. 76–77.
[22] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 394; Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, f. 40r.

it, then the man will recover; but if he abandons it, then peril is to be expected).[23]

The text preserved in the Oxonian manuscript is more detailed than the Old Norse one, however they still share considerable degree of information and style to assume that the Old Norse version might have been based to later copies of the version found in Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17. The Old English text reads:

> Prognostica uera e libro galieni. Mortiferum signum est. cum in corpore humano frons ruit. supercilia declinantur. oculus sinister minuitur. nasi summitas albescit. mentum cadit pulsus ante currit. pedes frigescunt. uenter defugit; Iuuenem uigilantem. et senem dormientem. si uideris: hec sunt mortifera signa. Prognostica ad omnem egritudinem. ut intelligas si ui- uere habet homo aut mori. Si testiculi infrigidauerint. et contraxerit natura. uel testiculi ambo absconditi fuerint: signum est mortis. Ad malum malannum. Accipe dolsam radicis da ei bibere in aqua benedicta. Si ei anus indoluerit: morituri sunt. Si non. uiuere. Vt scias si possit uiuere infirmus. Fermento manus eius illimas. primo ea da cani manducare. Si manducauerit: uiuet. Si non. morietur.[24]
>
> (True prognostications from Galen's book. A deadly sign is when the forehead collapses in a human body, the eyebrows droop, the left eye diminishes, the tip of the nose turns white, the chin falls, the pulse runs ahead, the feet grow cold, and the stomach withdraws. If you see a young person awake and an old person asleep, these are deadly signs. Prognostications for all illnesses, to understand whether a person is truly alive or destined to die. If the testicles have become cold and nature contracts or if both testicles are hidden, it is a sign of death. To counteract evil malady, take a bag of roots and give it to him to drink in blessed water. If his breath remains unaffected, he will die. If not, he will live. To determine if a sick person can survive, moisten his hands with yeast and give it [the yeast] to a dog to eat first. If the dog eats it, the person will live. If not, they will die).

The level of detail in the Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17 version is noticeably more pronounced in the central part of the text, which is missing in the Old Norse counterpart. However, both the initial segment and the concluding part show remarkable similarities to the version preserved in the Old Norse medical miscellany. As demonstrated in the previous example taken from another birth prognostic in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, finding precise correspondence in content and style between multiple versions of the same text is rather uncommon. This is due to the fact

[23] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 30.
[24] Faith Wallis, 1. Medicine, 1. 8 Prognosis Transcription, fol. 2va: Overview: The Calendar and the Cloister: Oxford - St. John's College MS 17, https://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/folio.php?p=2v&showitem=Transcription_Prognosis accessed on 28 November 2023.

that these texts circulated through oral transmission as well as written forms, making them subject to frequent and substantial revisions over time.

The text under consideration is commonly referred to as *signa mortifera* (Signs of impending death). At certain points in its written transmission during the early Middle Ages, it was erroneously attributed to Galen, leading to its alternative designation as 'pseudo-Galen'.[25] This text enjoyed wide circulation across medieval Europe since the Carolingian period, appearing in various forms, including medical manuscripts, prayer books, and clerical compendia.[26] In some instances, it may be transmitted alongside other lists of signs of death ascribed to Hippocrates, as observed in our Old Norse manuscript, which are known to scholars as *Capsula Eburnea* (Ivory Casket) or 'The Secrets of Hippocrates'. In a minority of cases, the text may also be titled 'Prognostics of Democritus' or 'The Indications of Illness'.[27]

The origin of these types of prognostics concerning with signs of impending death is quite intricate, with their paths often intersecting one another. In the original Hippocratic *Prognosis*, Hippocrates urges physicians to master the art of reading bodily signs to foretell the illness' outcomes. By correctly reading bodily signs the physician is able to make a prognosis on the state and development of an illness. During the fifth or sixth century, an unidentified translator in southern Italy translated Hippocrates' *Prognosis* from Greek into Latin. While this early translation was prevalent at the time, it gradually vanished from the manuscript tradition in the following centuries. However, at a later period, either Constantinus Africanus († 1087 AD) or Gerard of Cremona († 1187 AD) translated the text from the Arabic version, which also included a Galenic commentary.[28] This new translation of the *Prognosis* gained significant prominence and became a central component of the high and late medieval medical curriculum.[29] The dual authoritative endorsement from both

[25] Frederick S. Paxton, '*Signa Mortifera:* Death and Prognostication in Early Medieval Monastic Medicine', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 67:4 (1993) 631–50 (p. 637).
[26] Ibid.
[27] Chiara Benati, 'The Ever-Lasting Rules of Death? The Reception and Adaptation of the Pseudo-Hippocratic Capsula Eburnea in German Medical Literature', *Brathair,* 13:1 (2013), 5–18; Valeria Di Clemente, 'Vicende della letteratura medico-prognostica pseudoippocratea nell'Europa medievale: la cosiddetta Capsula eburnea', *Itineurari. Quaderni di studi di etica e politica*, 2 (2011), 49–74; Isabel de la Cruz-Cabanillas and Irene Diego-Rodríguez, 'The Capsula Eburnea in Several Middle English Witnesses', *Token: A Journal of English Linguistics*, 13 (2021), 5–26.
[28] Paxton, '*Signa Mortifera*', p. 634.
[29] Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, pp. 58, 71; Augusto Beccaria, 'Sulle tracce di un antico canone latino di Ippocrate e di Galeno. I', *Italia medioevale e umanistica,* 2 (1959), 1–75 (pp.11–12); Innocenzo Mazzini, 'Le traduzioni latine di Ippocrate eseguite nei secoli V et VI: Limiti e caratteristiche della sopravvivenza del corpus ippocratico fra tardo antico ed alto medioevo', in *Formes de pensée dans la Collection hippocratique: Actes du IV' Colloque international hippocratique* (Lausanne, 21-26 Septembre 1981), ed. by François Lasserre

Hippocrates and Galen, regarding the significance of prognostication based on bodily signs, played a crucial role in the widespread dissemination of these texts. Consequently, many of these texts came to be mistakenly attributed either to Hippocrates or Galen, which enhanced their credibility and further contributed to their proliferation.

The Old Norse text represents a late medieval and abridged version of the widespread textual tradition of pseudo-Galenic *signa mortifera*. This text shares crucial elements with an older version found in a twelfth-century medical manuscript from England, which may suggest that the Old Norse text could have drawn material either from this very manuscript or from later copies in which this version of the *signa mortifera* featured.

5. 3 The Pseudo-Texts: *Capsula Eburnea* and the *Gynaecia*

Turning to additional examples of interconnections between the Old Norse and the English medical texts, this section will explore a further piece of evidence supporting the idea that a late English copy might have acted as a source of inspiration. This new evidence can be inferred from linguistic features.

In the Old Norse manuscript, there is one additional prognostic text attributed to *Ypocras* (Hippocrates) and an anatomy text also wrongly attributed to *Ysodorus* (Isidore).[30] The first text aligns with the aforementioned tradition of *Signa Mortifera* and more precisely with the prognostics wrongly ascribed to Hippocrates (pseudo-Hippocratic texts) commonly known as the *Capsula Eburnea* or 'Ivory Casket'. The *Capsula Eburnea* text is essentially a list of diseases and their clinical signs, along with instructions on how to interpret them. This compilation is introduced by an account of how the list was discovered.

Numerous versions of this introduction are extant today, but the central plot always revolves around the death of Hippocrates. Prior to his demise, Hippocrates imparts instructions to his close friends and students, directing them to inter his books (alternatively referred to as letters or tokens sometimes) alongside his remains. Many

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and Philippe Mudry, Université de Lausanne, Publications de la Faculté des lettres, no. 26 (Geneva: Droz, 1983), pp. 483–92 (pp. 485–86); Paxton, '*Signa Mortifera*', pp. 633–34.

[30] Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 434 a 12mo, fol. 7^{ra}–7^{rb}, 35^{rb}–35^{va}.

years after these events, an emperor, often named *Caesar* albeit his identity is occasionally left unspecified, approaches the grave and orders his soldiers to excavate the tomb to ascertain the potential presence of treasures interred therein. The outcome of this excavation reveals exclusively medical volumes (or letters or tokens) preserving Hippocrates' teachings, thereby preserving his knowledge for the benefit of forthcoming generations. The Old Norse version found in manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, is presented as follows:

> Ypocras heit madr, hann var spekingur ok spakaztur læknnaa, hann baud virktaa vinum sinum aa anndlazt degi hans, ath þeir skylldi leggia unndir hofut honum i graufina bækr hans, er leyndar lækningar voro aa. Enn launngu eptir þat kom þar farandi keisari einn ok saa aa hans grauf, ath þar la saa vissazti lækner, er verit hafdi ok hugdi þar vera mundi fe nocud i þeiri grauf ok baud hirdmonnum sinum at rann-sakaa graufinna, en þeir funndu þar ecki anars enn leyndar lækningar-bækur hans þesar.[31]
>
> There was a man named Ypocras; he was a wise man and the wisest of all healers. He told his dearest friends, on the day of his own death, that they should lay his books, in which were the secrets of healing, under his head in the grave. A long time after his death, an emperor came by, and saw on the grave that the wisest healer that had ever lived lay there. he supposed that there was some money in the grave, and ordered his men to ransack it - but they found nothing there but these hidden medical books of his.[32]

The second text is not a prognostic, but rather an excerpt from an anatomy treatise focussing on the development of the foetus, originally written by Vindicianus in his *Gynaecia* and circulated in various forms and versions:

> Svo seigir meistari Ysodorus; at mynd manligs likama formeraz I modur kvide. Aa fyrsta manadi samteingiaz blod ok hold. Aa audrum manadi giorez til lidaa ok limaa til allz likama. Aa iii. manadi styrkiaz bein ok sinar. Aa einum manadi vagxa negll ok har. Aa einum manadi kviknnar barn at til-komandi aundinne. Aa einum manadi hræriz barnet, af þvi er þaa konnunne þunglifth ok kvellinngaa-samt. A einum tecr barn at hafa liking faudur ok modur. Aa einum manadi vex þat et einns ok þroazt. Aa einum manadi bidur þat burdar at gudligri fyrirætllann. A einum manadi kemur þat I heim med gudligri skipan.[33]
>
> (So said Ysodorus: the shape of a human body is formed in its mother's womb. In the first month, blood and flesh are joined together. In the second month, the joints and limbs for all the body come into existence. In the third month, the bones and sinews are strengthened. In the next month, nails and hair grow. In the next month, the baby stirs, from which the woman then feels heavy in her body and ailing. in the next month, the

[31] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog,* p. 369.
[32] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing,* p. 6.
[33] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 390.

> baby begins to have the likeness of its mother and father. in the next month, it only grows and develops. in the next month, the fetus awaits the divine design. in the next month, it enters the world as God has ordained).

The passage attributed to Isidore of Seville († 636 AD) in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo is an abridged version of the chapter on embryology in Vindicianus'. Written at the end of the fourth century, this text represented a collection of the most advanced medical theories on human body of the time, written probably as a manual or reference book.[34] Scholars have highlighted that the title is erroneous, given that a mere minority of chapters are concerned with gynaecological subjects; instead, the comprehensive content of the work encompasses a broader anatomical scope.[35] The incorrect attribution to Isidore of Seville does not originate from the Old Norse scribe, but rather has an older root.

The text was widely copied throughout the early Middle Ages and represented one of the main medical texts in the period preceding the *Schola Medica Salernitana*. Scholars of Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages medicine have observed that, throughout the course of textual transmission, there have been instances where individual scribes have incorporated certain etymological concepts and passages from Isidore's *Etymologiae* onto the *Gynaecia*.[36] Conversely, copyists of the *Etymologiae* have, in separate instances, integrated passages from the *Gynaecia* into their renditions of Isidore's composition.[37] Consequently, the misattribution of authorship could plausibly have emerged as a consequence of this phenomenon.

However, the most relevant element to our discussion is a linguistic phenomenon occurring in the author's names. The names 'Hippocrates' and 'Isidore' exhibit indications of probable derivation from Middle English manuscripts, evident in their respective spellings as *Ypocras* and *Ysodorus*. In late medieval Iceland (1200-1500 AD) the Icelandic variant of Old Norse language borrowed a variety of loanwords from other Germanic languages: Latin, Greek (via Latin), Old French, Old Irish and even Arabic.[38] This attests to a greatly receptive environment to language and

[34] Louise Cilliers, *Roman North Africa: Environment, Society and Medical Contribution*, Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages 3 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), pp. 117–40.
[35] Louise Cilliers, 'The Contribution of the 4th Century AD North African Physician, Helvius Vindicianus', in *Medicine and Healing in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. by Demetrios Michaelides (Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2014) pp. 122–28; Manuel Vázquez Buján, 'Vindiciano y el tratado 'De natura generis humani'', *Dynamis: Acta Hispanica ad Medicinae Scientiarumque Historiam Illustrandam*, 2 (1982), 25–56.
[36] Cilliers, 'Vindicianus's "Gynaecia"', p. 158.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Tarsi, *Loanwords and Native words*, p. 29; Erik Simensen, 'The Old Nordic lexicon', in *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the North Germanic Language*, vol. 1, eds by Oskar Bandle et al. (Berlin/Boston: De

literature in the period under examination. If Latin language and culture exerted an enduring and everlasting influence over Iceland, on the other hand other languages such as Middle Low German and Middle English also played a pivotal role in language innovation. The fifteenth century was a period of great contact between Iceland and England, both from a mercantile viewpoint and in relation to the administration of the Church.[39] Scholars have pointed out that Middle English loans in this period are fewer than one might expect from the ongoing contacts; however, a number of Middle English words still shaped the Old Icelandic lexicon.[40]

The names of the alleged authors of these two passages, *Ypocras* and *Ysodorus*, reveal distinctive Middle English morphological traits that are ultimately rooted in the Old French versions of the names Hippocrates and Isidore and more widely the medieval Latin orthography. I propose that the scribes of the manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo transcribed these remedies from an alternate Old Icelandic manuscript that has not survived, and which transmitted materials originating from the Middle English medical tradition also transmitting the spelling of Old French and Middle English names for Hippocrates and Isidore. Should a medieval Icelandic scribe have sought to incorporate the names 'Hippocrates' and 'Isidore' from a Latin source preserving the Greek spelling of 'Hippocrates', it is plausible that the scribe would have either preserved the foreign orthographic forms, or it would have adapted some phonemes to the Icelandic orthography. For instance, in the case of the Greek word 'Hippocrates', also commonly used in Classical Latin texts, although not fully adhering to Icelandic phonological conventions, bears a phonological convention that would have had reasoning with medieval Icelandic speakers. The front unrounded vowel /i:/ in 'Hippocrates' is a linguistic feature that can be evidenced in other native lemmas (e.g., ON. *Ísland*, ModE. Iceland), thus suggesting that if the scribe had encountered the name of 'Hippocrates' in the Greek or Classical Latin spelling, it is possible to assume that he would have kept the front unrounded vowel sound and orthograph. However, the process by which the Greek term 'Hippocrates', mediated through Latin, could have become integrated into the realm of the Old Icelandic lexicon

Gruyter, 2002), pp. 951–963; Erik Simensen, 'Lexical Developments in the Late Middle Ages', in *The Nordic Languages*, vol. 2, pp. 1161–171.

[39] Wendy Childs, 'England's Icelandic Trade in the Fifteenth Century: The Role of the Port of Hull', in *Northern Seas Yearbook 1995: Association for the History of the Northern Seas*, ed. by Poul Holm et al. (Esbjerg: Fiskeri- og Søfartsmuseet, 1995), pp. 11–31; Evan Jones, 'England's Icelandic Fishery in the Early Modern Period', in *England's Sea Fisheries: The Commercial Sea Fisheries of England and Wales since 1300*, ed. by David J. Starkey, Chris Reid and Neil Ashcroft (London: Chatham Publishing, 200), pp. 105–10.

[40] Tarsi, *Loanwords and Native words*, p. 30.

remains a subject of speculative inquiry. Nevertheless, it is evident that the linguistic transformations would have not entailed a drastic reduction of the word 'Hippocrates' to 'Ypocras', with the elision of the front /h:/ and the palatalization of the /i:/ close front unrounded vowel. The 'Ypocras' version of the Greek physician's name has probably another root.

Our text presents a /y:/ close front rounded vowel at the beginning of the word, a feature that could be elucidated through the interaction with Middle English texts. The Middle English word 'ypocras' derives from the Old and Middle French 'hippocras/hypocras', a simplified version of the Greek physician's name 'Hippocrates'.[41] This term was assimilated through contact with Franconian speakers into the realm of Anglo-Norman and Middle English.[42] When 'hippocras' was adopted into Middle English, around the fourteenth century, it underwent phonological adaptation to harmonise with the sonorous and phonetic nuances of the contemporary English linguistic milieu.[43] The earliest attestation, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, dates to the fourteenth century, although it is plausible that the term had been integrated into the English language milieu since the Anglo-Norman period.[44]

In summary, upon introduction of 'hippocras' to Middle English, the word relinquished its initial 'h' to emerge as 'ipocras/ypocras'. Both variants of the name *Ipocras* or *Ypocras* are recurrently used in Middle English medical texts to refer to Hippocrates.[45] Subsequently, the retention of this orthographical variant may be due to the linguistic milieu from which this version of the *capsula eburnea* originated, which can probably be traced back to Middle English.

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[41] "Ipocrās", Middle English Compedium, accessed on 7 July 2023 https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED23284; "hippocras, n. Etymology" Oxford English Dictionary, accessed on 7 July 2023 https://www.oed.com/dictionary/hippocras_n?tab=etymology

[42] Ibid.

[43] See for instance, London, BL, MS Sloane 405, f.123. More *Tokens of Ipocras or Signa mortis* can be found in Wellcome Library, MS5650, 58v–61v, where we also have the mention to 'Ysidore' as a noble physician "seth ye autorite of Ypocras, ye noble physician Ysoder"; see more in Francisco Alonso-Almeida, 'A Middle English Text on Phlebotomy', *Revista Canaria De Estudios Ingleses,* 80 (April 2020), 29–50; Teresa M. Tavormina, 'The Middle English *Letter of Ipocras* ', *English Studies*, 88:6 (2007), 632–52.

[44] "hippocras, n., Etymology", Oxford English Dictionary, accessed on 7 July 2023 https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1094056885

[45] "Ipocrās" Middle English Compedium, accessed on 7 July 2023 https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED23284; "hippocras, n. Etymology" Oxford English Dictionary, accessed on 7 July 2023 https://www.oed.com/dictionary/hippocras_n?tab=etymology; see also Tavormina, 'The Middle English *Letter of Ipocras*', pp. 632–52; Juhani Norri, *Dictionary of Medical Vocabulary in English, 1375-1550. Body Parts, Sicknesses, Instruments, and Medicinal Preparations* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 556.

5. 4 Remedies from Herbs and Animals

Turning to our second textual genre within medieval medical literature that can provide insights into the transmission and the circulation of remedies, we will now take a close look at remedies made from herbs, plants, and animals.

Since Antiquity, remedies from herbs and animal and their derivatives and products constituted a crucial inventory of the healer's medical practices. This phenomenon holds broader global significance, occurring in many human societies, yet for the scope of this thesis, I will exclusively engage with the origins and evolution of this practice within the context of Western Latin Europe and the Mediterranean region.

During the early Middle Ages, an extensive array of remedies founded on natural substances was inherited from Antiquity. A number of these remedies were derived from the teachings of Hippocrates (fifth-fourth century BCE), who advocated for the utilisation of animal-derived elements like bovine milk and chicken eggs, along with anatomical components such as horns, as therapeutic agents for treating various ailments.[46] Similarly, other remedies were sourced from Dioscorides' *materia medica* (first century AD) and Pliny's *pharmacopoeia* (fourth century AD), among many other medical *compendia* that disseminated such type of treatments across the Mediterranean region and Continental Europe. Even figures such as St. Augustine (354–430 AD) were proponents of using medicinal herbs due to their perceived curative attributes, which he attributed to the Creator. However, he also deemed the act of binding herbs onto oneself as a form of magic, consequently forbidding it.[47]

Remedies based on herbal and other natural substances found their way into the Middle Ages predominantly through the medium of two types of medical compilation: herbals and remedy books. These medieval herbals, alternatively referred to as *herbaria*, serve as medico-pharmaceutical texts encompassing inventories of plants and providing detailed descriptions of their physical, natural, and medical attributes.[48] Conversely, the realm of remedy books consists of collections of

[46] John M. Riddle, 'Folk Tradition and Folk Medicine: Recognition of Drugs in Classical Antiquity', in *Folklore and Folk Medicine*, ed. by John Scarboroough (Madison, WI: American Institute of the History of Pharmacy, 1987), pp. 33–61 (pp.47-61).
[47] Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, *Liber Secundus*, Oxford Early Christian Texts, ed. by R. P. H. Green (Clarendon Press; Oxford: 1995) ch. 59, 149. For more examples, please see also Catherine Rider, 'Medical Magic and the Church in Thirteenth-Century England', pp. 92–107; Lynn Thorndike, 'The Attitude of Origen and Augustine Toward Magic', *The Monist*, 18:1 (1908), 46–66.
[48] For a review of herbaria and their dissemination please see Minta Collins, *Medieval Herbals: The Illustrative Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Hubert Jan De Vriend, ed., *The Old English Herbarium*

medical treatments frequently centred on herbs, plants, and animal-derived components or products. The principal distinction between these two textual genres lays on the internal structure: *herbaria* typically list plants and herbs as individual chapters, followed by their respective physical descriptions, and uses, while remedy books tend to present an enumeration of medical conditions, often following a head-to-toe arrangement, followed by corresponding remedies designed to address each specific ailment.[49] Contamination between the two genres was often happening, so that treatments from herbals might have inspired remedies in remedy books and vice versa.

Herbaria and remedy books, along with other scientific texts, were copied and preserved in monasteries throughout the early and late Middle Ages. Monasteries had a significant impact on the medieval practice of herbalism, as archaeological finds show that preservation of such texts was not merely concerned with erudition, but also with a practical usage.[50] Excavations have revealed that many medieval European monasteries owned medical gardens where monks cultivated officinal plants for use within the cloisters. Some monasteries went even beyond the cultivation, as Park observed, as some religious centres engaged in the import of medicinal plants and seeds, if not locally available, and their herbals and antidotaries may contain evidence of direct botanical observations.[51]

Iceland appears to have aligned with Continental monasteries' trends in relation to the cultivation and applications of medical plants. This is evident in the pollen analysis conducted on samples retrieved from the *Skriðuklaustur* (cloister of Skriða) located in eastern Iceland, which was established by the Augustine order in the mid-fifteenth century.[52] The findings of this analysis reveal that the monastery undertook gardening activities, cultivating both medicinal plants and vegetables throughout its

and Medicina de quadrupedibus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Karen Reeds, *Botany in Medieval and Renaissance Universities* (New York: Garland, 1991); Jerry Stannard, *Herbs and Herbalism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Katherine E. Stannard and Richard Kay (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999); John M. Riddle, *Dioscorides on Pharmacy and Medicine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Alain Touwaide, 'The West', in *Medieval Science, Technology and Medicine: An Encyclopaedia*, Routledge Revivals, ed. by Thomas Glick et al. (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 218–20.

[49] Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine*, p. 112.

[50] Martin Huggon, 'Medieval Medicine, Public Health, and the Medieval Hospital', in *The Oxford Handbook of Later Medieval Archaeology in Britain*, ed. by Christopher Gerrard and Alejandra Gutiérrez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 836–55.

[51] Katherine Park, 'Medical Practices', in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. by David Lindberg and Michael Shank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 611–29 (p. 617).

[52] Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, 'Skriðuklaustur Monastery: Medical Centre of Medieval East Iceland?', *Acta Archaeologica,* 79 (2008), 208–15 (p. 208).

monastic era.[53] Furthermore, the skeletal remains recovered from the site, bearing indications of disease, surgical implements, and the cultivation of therapeutic flora, suggest the possibility that the monastery might have operated as a hospice, in the same fashion as Continental monasteries participated in events of life and death of many in medieval Europe.[54]

In Old Norse-Icelandic medical manuscripts, both textual genres (*herbaria* and remedy books) and the practical applications of herbs and animal parts and products find representation. In the Old Norse-Icelandic medical manuscripts there exist a number of herbal and animal remedies preserved in learned and empirical compilations, which diverge from each other for structure, content and purpose.

The herbal and animal remedies preserved in the *herbarium* section in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo and more prominently in the book of simples in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43, fols. 5^{v}-41^{r}, are traceable to later editions of Henrik Harpestræng's Old Danish herbal book and Macer Floridus' *Herbarium*. Consequently, we encounter an internal structure where plant classifications are succeeded by detailed descriptions, intrinsic properties, and utilitarian applications. Sometimes the plant description may involve the combination of part of the plant (e.g. root, leaves, juice) with animal parts. In contrast to the trajectory observed in *herbaria* predating the Salernitan period,[55] those circulating in the early Middle Ages and up to the end of the first millennium, this learned subdivision of *herbaria* comprises categorisations of herbal properties and qualities that align with the humoral theories. To better illustrate the deep learned engagement of these texts let us turn to one example drawn from the book of simples in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43, f. 5^{r}:

> Arum er gull ok er hæfiligateprat I sinne nature. Enn nockur annar malmur. Ok fyrir þvi helpur þat vel þeim maga er vareskiu hefir ok miog er krankur. Gull sturkir ok þann sem kallda ok þurra natturu hefir. Hvertt eitt sar er halnaz vid gull þat rotnar eigi I þeim stad sem gullit verdr gotetþ ok a stendur sem froda. Þat er gott vid augna verk ok dregur hirno af augum ok þurkar aaugna vatz ras. Gull styrkir ok bras ok þær sinar sem fyrir innan branar eru.[56]

[53] Kristjánsdóttir, 'Skriðuklaustur Monastery', p. 212.
[54] Ibid.
[55] For a catalogue of medical manuscripts predating the Salernitan school, please see Beccaria, *I codici di medicina del periodo presalernitano (secoli IX, X e XI)* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1956).
[56] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 53.

> (Arum is gold and is more fitly tempered in this nature than any other metal. And therefore, it helps well the stomach which has a weakness and is very ill. Gold strengthens, too, him who has a cold and dry nature. Any sore treated with gold will not rot, where the gold was poured on and remains like a froth. it is good for eye trouble and draws a membrane from the eyes and dries their flow of water. Gold also strengthens the eyelids and the sinews that are within the eyelids).[57]

This passage illustrates how learned medical texts explore the causes of illnesses and health establishing intrinsic connections between the inherent characteristics of ingredients and specific ailments. For instance, it highlights the benefits of gold for individuals with a cold and dry constitution, as this particular metal possesses more balanced degrees of natural temperament, hence making it more efficient than other metals.

Searching for inherited connections to explain efficacy was a deviation from the approach revealed in early medieval *herbaria*, and it can be attributed to the emphasis placed on identifying the causes of maladies during the post-Salernitan era. Consequently, there was a collective effort to ascertain both the 'what' and 'why' behind potential remedies for healing purposes.

In contrast, a significant onset of remedies preserved in the Old Norse-Icelandic medical corpus do not exhibit such a degree of information and engagement with the learned knowledge available at the time. Instead, these remedies tend to adopt a more pragmatic and experiential approach to medical practice. The surviving remedies are situated within all four extant manuscripts: firstly, in the leechbook sections of Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43, fols. 9^{r}-12^{v}; 14r-27^{v}. Secondly, they further manifest within the fragmented text Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, sometimes in concentrated form within comprehensive lists of remedies, while at other times interlacing with different types of remedies. Moreover, herbal and animal-based remedies also emerge within the smaller Icelandic fragments, namely Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to, and the medical section in Copenhagen, AM 194, 8vo.

Their origin has raised scholarly interest as the content of the manuscripts can be partially attributed to the Danish medical book Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 187, 8vo.[58] However, a large number of entries have not been traced back to the Danish medical culture and therefore new routes of transmissions are now under consideration.

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 7–8.

What I will argue in the following sections is that, alongside all the areas of influence of medieval English medical culture over Iceland that we have seen so far, Old and Middle English medical texts exert their influence also onto the realm of pharmacopoeias, *herbaria*, and animal remedies.

The remedies that are of most significance to our discussion are those preserved in the four extant manuscripts and that were probably circulating unitary in an earlier Icelandic remedy book (leechbook) before being mixed with other medical texts. The fragment Copenhagen, AM 655 XXX, 4to, and the treatise contained within the encyclopaedia Copenhagen, AM 194, 8vo, are entirely copied within Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo. This latter manuscript is more recent and completed source compared to the former two manuscripts, thus examples will predominantly be drawn from this latter fragment, supplemented by references to Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43 when deemed necessary.

5.4 Old Icelandic and Old English Herbal Remedies

The analysis of remedies rooted in officinal herbs and animal sources across the extant Icelandic medical manuscripts reveals a pronounced resemblance to the curative recipes and formulas documented in the Old English *Herbarium*, which serves as the principal corpus for comparative study. Furthermore, supplementary yet less prevalent parallels have been identified in the following texts, which will be reviewed here briefly to provide an insight into the methodology applied.

In the tenth-century compilation of Old English remedies and prayers, *Lacnunga*, we can read of a remedy for eye ailments: ‘if the eyes water: take fresh rue, pound finely and soak with bumble-bee honey or with mountain honey, strain through a linen cloth into the eye for as long as he needs it’.[59] In the Old Norse manuscript we have a more concise remedy addressing the same type of problem and administering the cure in the same manner: *Enn ef augunn renna, þaa tac þu ii sponu af ruta ok einn hunangs ok blanndaa saman ok rid þvi aa augun, en surþblinnd augun smyr þu med*

[59] XIII. Gif eagan tyran: genim grene redan, cnuca smale 7 wes mid doran hunige oððe mid dunhuige; wring þurh linenne clað on þæt eage swa lange / swa him ðearf sy. Edward Pettit, ed. and trans, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga. Introduction, Text, Translation, and Appendices, vol.1* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter US: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001) pp. 8–9.

refs istri (If the eyes run, take two spoonfuls of rue and one of honey and blend them together and rub on the eye).[60]

A further parallel can be found in the tenth-eleventh century medical miscellany *Lacnunga* in London, British Library, MS Harley MS 585 which addresses headache. The way in which the ailment is treated in both medical traditions has once more emphasised their resemblance. The Old English version of this remedy says: 'For headache - Pollege - that is in English 'pennyroyal'. Boil in oil or in pure butter, and apply to the head'.[61] In the Old Norse we read: *Vid haufud-verk siod pulegium in oleo ok rid aa enne enns siuka manz ok þunnvanga ok hiassa* (For headache, boil pennyroyal in oil and rub it on the sick man's forehead and temples and crown).[62]Although these are only sporadic resemblances between a late Norse medical compendia and a tenth-century English medical collection, it is unequivocally clear that they draw from the same medical background.

Turning to the more substantial comparative body of texts, the Old English *Herbarium* is a late tenth-century English translation of four separate Latin texts consisting of *De herba vettonica liber*, attributed to Antonius Musa, the pseudo-Apuleian *herbarius*, the pseudo-Dioscorides *Liber medicina ex herbis femininis* and a another pseudo-Dioscorides treatise, *Curae herbarum*. These four texts converge for the first time within the Old English *Herbarium*.[63]

An additional distinctive trait lays on the partial adherence of the *Herbarium* to the internal structure commonly found in medieval herbals. This structure entails an initial mention of the plant's name, accompanied by a brief introduction detailing its attributes and beneficial properties. Nevertheless, this introductory section is succeeded by a compilation of remedies categorised according to specific ailments, mirroring the arrangement observed in remedy books. This division consequently facilitates the comparative analysis of simples and remedies between the Old English *herbarium* and the Old Norse herbal remedies.

In contrast, the arrangement of herbal remedies within the Old Norse medical fragment Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, does not exhibit a well-organised structure.

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[60] Old Norse version from Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 371; Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, AM 434 a 12mo, 9r; Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 7.
[61] Cockayne, *Leechdoms,* p. 380.
[62] Old Norse version from Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 371; translation from Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 7.
[63] John D. Niles and Maria A. D'Aronco, ed. and trans., *Medieval Writing from Early Medieval England: The Old English Herbal, Lacnunga and Other texts*, vol. 1, Dumbarton Oaks medieval library 81 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2023), pp. xv–xvi.

While certain herbal recipes are grouped within the list, others are situated in distinct sections of the compilation. Despite this apparent structural deviation in the herbal remedies, it is important not to overlook the parallels between the two collections of remedies, despite their disparate historical and geographical origins. As underscored by Meaney, the Old English *Herbarium* played a central role in the landscape of medieval English medicine. Being emblematic of European medical practices during the latter half of the first millennium, the *Herbarium*'s influence endured through multiple copies, some of which persisted into the seventeenth century.[64]

The remedies found within the *Herbarium* are pragmatic in nature, concentrating primarily on a concise introduction to the source and attributes of a particular plant. It subsequently delves into a list of remedies detailing how to employ and combine the plant with other ingredients, and subsequently administer it to the afflicted individual. This practical orientation, often coupled with succinct directives, aligns with the traits commonly associated with empirical medical compilations. Such compilations prioritised addressing patient symptoms through curative methods rather than delving into the underlying rationale.

These distinctive characteristics are also evident in the herbal remedies of the Old Norse tradition. However, the parallels in structure are not the sole outcomes emerging from this comparative analysis. The ingredients employed in conjunction with the plant, alongside the plant itself and the specific ailments targeted, provide valuable insights for comprehending the circulation of remedies across diverse textual traditions.

The herbal remedies documented in the medical fragment Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, unlikely derived from any of the extant versions of the *Herbarium*. As previously noted, a substantial alteration in structure between the two traditions is evident. It is more likely that during a particular stage of the transmission of the *Herbarium*, certain remedies were transcribed by Icelandic or Norwegian scribes into their medical manuscripts, subsequently becoming integrated into a distinct medical written tradition. These remedies were likely circulating in an Icelandic medical compendium between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries and that was copied in different stages in our extant manuscripts.

[64] Meaney, 'The Practice of Medicine in England', p. 228.

The Old Norse herbal remedies are often an abridged version of those found in the *Herbarium*, nevertheless there are some other striking resemblances that allow us to establish parallels between the two texts.

Alternative forms of correspondence, such as the alignment of specific plants with the healing of ailments, as well as their modes of utilisation and application, should provide glimpses into what sort of medical background Icelandic scribes were taking as an inspirational model. Given the extensive dissemination of the *Herbarium*, it remains plausible that many of these remedies circulated across various manuscripts and versions to which Icelandic scribes might have been exposed during the transmission. Although identifying the precise ancestral source that served as inspiration for the scribes of Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo may not be possible, it is reasonable to assume that the Icelandic manuscript preserved knowledge with roots traceable to the Old English *Herbarium*.

To explore these analogies, we shall now turn our attention to select excerpts sourced from both the Old Norse medical miscellany and the *Herbarium.* The herbal remedies presented within the fifteenth-century Old Norse medical miscellany resonate with the medical treatises and prevailing medical milieu of the final centuries of the first millennium. These insights entail a wider spectrum of empirical medical methodologies practiced by local healers, as well as various tiers of minor practitioners within the professional hierarchy.

These texts are practical in nature, rather succinct in description but nonetheless rich in content. Taking as example some remedies concerning the herb called *millefolium* or *greni* (common yarrow), we have the following entries:

> *Millefolium / Greni* (Common yarrow)
>
> Við tanna verk tygg fastandi rot mellefolii.[65]
> (For a toothache, chew the root of yarrow while fasting.)
>
> Laugur þes gras, er mellifolium heitir, með vine druckinn þat skirir hlannd mannzt, þott áður sé ogiort eður o-skirt.[66]
> (The juice of this herb called yarrow, drunk with wine, clears a Man's urine, even though it was undone or unclear before.)
>
> Enn mellefolium stappat ok við sár lagt þat græðir unndarliga vel hvert sár.[67]
> (Also, yarrow, crushed and laid on a wound, heals every wound

[65] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 373.
[66] Ibid., p. 376.
[67] Ibid.

remarkably well.)

Chapter 90 of the Old English *Herbarium* is entirely dedicated to yarrow's properties, origin, and medical efficiency. In this section we have a larger group of remedies devoted to the plant, and some of the remedies employ the yarrow plant for the same ailments and applied in a similar manner as observed in the Old Norse text.

> 90.2 For toothache: take the roots of this plant that we have called yarrow, give to the patient to eat while fasting.
>
> 90.5 if a person has difficulty urinating: take the juice of this same plant, along with vinegar; give to drink. It will cure it wonderfully.
>
> 90.5 if a person has difficulty urinating: take the juice of this same plant, along with vinegar; give to drink. It will cure it wonderfully.
>
> 90.8 Again for the same: take this same plant; work it into powder; put it on the wound. it will soon grow warm.
>
> 90.3 For wounds that have been inflicted by an iron weapon: take this same plant, pounded in fat, apply it to the wounds. It will cleanse and heal the wounds.[68]

Despite the conciseness characterising the Old Norse textual version in comparison to the version contained within the *Herbarium*, a discernible analogy of afflictions and botanical specimens exploited in the remedies becomes evident. This attestation precludes the possibility of a direct influence stemming from the existing *Herbarium*. However, it suggests that certain subsequent copies of the *Herbarium* might have contributed to the evolution of Old Norse herbal remedies. Below is provided an inventory of supplementary remedies that potentially exhibit resemblances to those presented within the *Herbarium*:

> *Betonica* (Betony)
>
> Dreck betonicam árla með vatni, þat birtir augun.[69]
>
> (Drink betony with water early, that brightens the eyes.)
>
> 1.3 For eye pain: take the roots of this same plant; simmer in water reducing it by two-thirds and bathe the eyes with this liquid.[70]
>
> 1.5 For dimness of the eyes, take one coin's weight of this same plant, *betonica* [betony], and boil gently in water. Give it to a person to drink on an empty stomach, because it dilutes the part of the

[68] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, pp. 207–10.
[69] Old Norse version from Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 373.
[70] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 55.

blood from which the dimness arises.[71]

Enn við olyfians dryck: tak gras þat, er heitir betonica, ok stappa við fornt vin ok oleum ok dreck, þat hrindur eitri út.[72]

(Also against poison drink, take the herb called betony and grind it in old wine and olive oil and drink it; that drives out the poison.)

1.22 If a person should ingest poison, then have him take three tremiss-weights of this same plant (betony) and four cupfuls of wine, boil them together and have him drink it. Then he will vomit up the poison.[73]

Centauree (Centaury)

Enn við augum: laug centauree ok hunang-tar blandit saman.[74]

(Also for the eyes: blended together the juice of centaury and drop of honey.)

36.2 For eye pain: take the juice of this same plant [centaury]: apply it to the eyes. It heals weakness of vision. Mix it with honey too. Likewise, it will certainly help failing eyesight so much that clarity is restored.[75]

Skogar-gras þat, er centauree heitir, blanndit við hunang, þat tekr af augum, ef á er dregit. [76]

(The forest herb that is called centaury, blended with honey, takes [darkness] from the eyes, if it has drawn over them.)

36.2 For eye pain: take the juice of this same plant [centaury]: apply it to the eyes. It heals weakness of vision. Mix it with honey too. Likewise, it will certainly help failing eyesight so much that clarity is restored.[77]

Ruta (Rue)

Enn við augum: tak daugg af ruta heima vaxinne ok lath i gler-kerit, blannda við surt vinn ok berr i. [78]

(Also for the eyes, take the drew from rue grown at home, and place it in a glass vessel and blend it with sour wine and put it into [the eye].)

117.1 For dimness of the eyes and for seer ulcer: take the leaves of this plant (rue) that have called wild rue, cooked in old wine, then put it in a glass vessel after this smear it on.[79]

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[71] Ibid., p. 57.
[72] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 386.
[73] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 61.
[74] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 371.
[75] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 129.
[76] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 376.
[77] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 129.
[78] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 371
[79] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 251.

Við haufud-verck tak rutam ok stappa við oleum ok rid um enni, þat tekr af verk ok bætir augun; þetta er opt reyntt.

(For a headache, take rue and grind it in olive oil and rub it on the forehead. That takes away the pain and improves the eyes. This has often been tested.)

91.4 for pain and swelling of the eyes: take this same plant rye, pounded well; lay it on the sore area. Also, the root, pounded and smeared around the area, will cure the pain well.

91.6 for dimness of the eyes: take the leaves of this same plant, give them to the patient to eat while fasting and give them to be drunk in wine.

91.7 For headache: take this same plant, give to drink in wine. afterward pound this same plant and press out the juice into vinegar, then smear the head with it this plant is also good for carbuncles.[80]

Pollegium / gletunarium (Pennyroyal)

Við hiart-verk: tak marubium ok pulegium ok siod i vatnni ok lat við salt ok dreck fastandi.[81]

(For a pain in the heart: take horehound and pennyroyal and boil in water and mix salt and drink it, fasting.)

94.9 If a person should suffer pain around the heart or in the chest, then he should eat this same plant pennyroyal and drink it while fasting.[82]

Við kvid-bolgu tak gras þat, er glietnarium (gletunarium) heitir, ok siod i vine eður i auldre ok gef honum at dreckaa um kvellð varmth ok kallt um morgnna, þaa mun hann sveingiazt.[83]

(For swelling of the belly: take the herb called pennyroyal and boil it in wine or in ale and give it to him to drink, warm in the evening and cold in the morning, then it will go down.)

94.11 For swelling of the stomach and the abdomen: take this same plant pennyroyal, pounded and simmered in water or in wine, or by itself; give to the patient to consume. The disease will soon go into remission.[84]

Marrubium (Horehound)

Gras þat, er marubium heitir, hreinnsar allt þat illt, er i lungun ferr, ef þat er opt druckit.[85]

[80] Ibid., p. 213.
[81] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 372.
[82] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 221.
[83] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 379.
[84] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 221.
[85] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 385.

(The herb called horehound cleanses everything bad that enters the lungs, if it is drunk often.)

46. 1 For a cold in the head and fore sever coughing; take this plant, which the Greeks call *prasion* and the Romans *marrubium*, and which in addition the English call horehound, simmer it in water, give it to drink to those who are coughing violently. it will heal the person wonderfully.[86]

Læknes-grase (Plaintain)

Enn við riðu ok allar sottir manna ok bu-fiar: tak rot af læknes-grase ok stappa vit kallt vatnn ok gef manni ath dreckaa eður bu-fe; þegar mun batnna.[87]

(For fever and all sicknesses of men and cows, take the root of plantain and grind it in cold water and give it to a man or cow to drink; he will get better right away.)

2.12 If the fever that comes on a person every fourth day affects a person: take the juice of this plant [plantain]; crush it in water; give it to him to drink two hours before he expects the fever to arrive. Then there is hope that it will do him much good.[88]

In 1931, Larsen identified similarities between the bloodletting section found in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43 f. 24^{v} and the corresponding section in Oxford, St. John's College MS 17 f. 1^{vb}, based on a conspicuous resemblance between the two texts—although not a direct translation. Building on this observation, I argue that a portion of the herbal remedies conserved within Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, can be traced back to the textual tradition of the Old English *Herbarium*. The parallels include the methods of ingredient preparation and administration, the alignment in the targeted ailments for these remedies, along with instances of shared wording, are all striking features and notably indicative of a viable pathway for interpreting these texts as interconnected.

As previously discussed, internal structure of the two extant texts differs considerably, thereby precluding the assumption that any existing rendition of the Old English *Herbarium* could be definitively identified as the direct precursor to the Old Norse manuscript. Nevertheless, it remains likely that pragmatic remedies of this nature were prone to widespread circulation, both in written and oral formats. Consequently, it is plausible that, over the course of the *Herbarium*'s transmission,

[86] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 145.
[87] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 385.
[88] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 67.

specific remedies were transcribed into other compilations that Icelandic or Norwegian scribes may have been more familiar with.

Shifting our focus to another aspect of the survey, the study of Old Norse herbal remedies in the context of a broader botanical knowledge has brought to light further results. Within the Old Norse herbal remedies there is evidence of scribes' attempts to amalgamate a diverse array of texts originating from the Continental and Mediterranean medical context, thus seamlessly incorporating them into the linguistic and cultural framework of Old Norse. This is particularly evidenced in two phenomena: the first one is the choice to translate some of the names of the plants (but also animals and other natural substances) to Old Icelandic to make them more recognisable to users of these texts (e.g., ON. *Læknes-grase* - Plantain). And secondly, we witness to an ability to combine knowledge of imported plants and practices with a local cultural framework.

The collection of surviving Old Norse remedies goes well beyond the boundaries initially outlined in the early sections of this chapter, namely the comparison with English medical practices. The notable aspect of Old Norse remedies is their adaptability in incorporating imported elements in a creative manner, often integrating local ingredients or techniques to formulate new recipes. These remedies continue to align with the overarching practices of medieval medicine, sharing common methodologies with various other written medical traditions across Europe (i.e., collecting herbs on a specific day of the year, signing upon herbs or utilising sigils, among other practices). Yet, they manage to stand out due to their distinct approach in applying these methodologies, which sets them apart from any direct parallels I could identify elsewhere.

The scarcity of comparative material evokes two plausible scenarios: either a substantial loss of historical materials over time has hindered the reconstruction of philological connections for each individual remedy; or alternatively, and which I am inclined to consider more likely, Icelandic scribes and healers deliberately nurtured a distinct and autonomous character for these remedies, which are firmly rooted within the pan-European healing system. Norse scribes and healers developed new remedies from the large array of practices and techniques originated in the Mediterranean, continental and insular Europe.

This impulse to mix imported practices that have not been mingled before represents a unique feature of Old Norse medicine, which will be explored in detail in

the following examples. We can discuss this latter hypothesis in context by examining magical practices found in the magical-medical miscellany Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo which shows a unique elaboration of new practices based on local and imported influences. These magical rituals are located in folios 4v-5r of the manuscript:

> Ef maðr vill vitaa, hverr et tace fra honum, rist staf þenna aa botnnenum aa aski ok haf i vatnn hreint ok meli sem smærst mellifolium i vatnnit ok mæli þetta: þat æski ec fyrir grasins natturu ok stafsins mattugleik, at ec siae skugga þess, sem tecid hefir fra mier ok audrum.

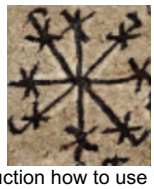

Figure 3. Magic sign followed by instruction how to use it in a ritual in Copenhagen AM 434 a 12mo f. 4^{v}

> Þetta er bezt vid stuld. In nomine domini amen.[89]

> If a man wants to know who has stolen from him, carve this sign on the bottom of a box and grind up yarrow in the water as small as possible, and speak these words: “I desire, by the nature of the herb and the power of the sing, that I may see the shadow of the one who has stolen from me and others”.

> This is best against theft. *In nomine domini amen.*[90]

> Tak gras þat er mellifolium heitir aa lons messo biskups ok lat eigi sol aa skina ok tac med aullum rotum ok les þessi ord yfir enu saumu, þaa er sol er i landz-sudri midiu, ok faa þeir keralld með fiorum giordum: Qui te creauit qui perte latronem vel furenntem. Ef þu villt, ath ovin þinn hrædiz þic, þaa berr þessa stafi i vinstri hendi þeir RR t. F. a. a. q. F. o. q. q. b. g. K. v.[91]

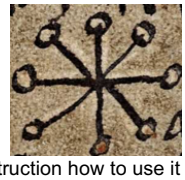

Figure 4. Magic sign followed by instruction how to use it in a ritual in Copenhagen AM 434 a 12mo f. 5^{r}

[89] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 367.
[90] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 4.
[91] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 367.

Take the herb called yarrow on the feast day of Bishop John, and do not let the sun shines on it, and take it with all the roots, and read these words over it when the sun is in the centre of the southeast, and get yourself a cask with four hoops *Qui te creauit qui perte latronem vel furenntem*. If you want your enemy to fear you, carry this sign in your left hand. RR t. F. a. a. q. F. o. q. q. b. g. K. v.[92]

Ef þu villt fordazt haufdinngia reidi, gac fyrir solar-rod ok mæl við aungvann mann heimann gangandi ok heim ok tak gras þat, er mellifolium heitir, ok vek þeir bloð ok doggva með grasit allt ok rist sidann i enni þeir með grasinu cros ok gac svo fyrir herra þinn.[93]

Figure 5. Magic sign follows a ritual in Copenhagen AM 434 a 12mo f. 5^{v}

If you want to avoid rulers' anger, go out before sunrise, and speak with no man going home or at home, and take the herb called yarrow, and make your blood flow and sprinkle it all over the herb, and then draw a cross on your forehead with the herb, and thus go before your lord.[94]

These rituals are not concerned with addressing ailments or illnesses; instead, they focus on addressing mundane and everyday human concerns. This emphasis on everyday matters is a feature found occasionally in a few surviving medieval medical collections. When medical and mundane concerns are combined in a medical manuscript, this is likely due to the specific expertise attributed to medical practitioners and what sort of interests their clients pursued.[95] For instance, medical practitioners were not only called upon to treat an illness, but for their knowledge of herbal, animal and other natural components, they could have been asked to perform other types of rituals addressing a broad range of daily concerns.

[92] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 4.
[93] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 368.
[94] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 5.
[95] For more information about image magic between medical and mundane nature please see Page, 'Medieval Magic Figures', pp. 432–57.

The rituals revolve around the use of yarrow (*millefolium*) which we have previously seen in another context. On this occasion, the herb is utilised in a more complex type of rituals comprising actions, objects and formulas drawn from imported medical tradition. The first example that we come across utilises the apposition of an *innsigli* (sigil) on a box, combined with the grinding of the yarrow; then the performer is instructed to reading a charm and a liturgical phase (*in nomine domini amen*) concludes the ritual. Similarly, the second remedy also makes use of the yarrow as well as the practice of reciting over the herb. Although specific parallels of these remedies in other traditions have not been found, it is notable how the charm represents a unique collated version of imported elements such as the conclusive liturgical formula, with the preparation of herbs, and most importantly conjures the intrinsic powers of both herb and the sign.

In the medieval period, it was common to associate herbs with specific powers and virtues in the realm of medicine.[96] This practice was rooted in the Classical system of classification of herbal properties (hot, cold, moist and dry) and their beneficial effect to re-establish a balance in bodily humours. This framework was further supported by the belief in plants being part of God's creation and therefore this very ability to re-establish the inner balance was due to the plants serving as conduits for divine healing abilities and being infused with God's power. In a number of medieval *herbaria* and medical texts there seem to have been a prevailing notion that reciting prayers or singing certain words or even entire masses over plants whilst picking or preparing them, and administering to the patient, was a common practice that could have increased the agency of their medicinal properties.[97]

In medieval Continental and Insular medical texts, there exist comparable rituals in which specific words or Masses are expected to be sung over the herb to enhance their virtues or to call upon their powers. For instance, in the tenth-century *Lacnunga*, the remedy *Sealf wið fleogendum attre færspryngum* (A salve for flying venom and for sudden rashes):

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[96] Susan Francia and Anne Stobart, 'Introduction', in *Critical Approaches to the History of Western Herbal Medicine From Classical Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Susan Francia and Anne Stobart (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 23; on the relationship between Phamaka and the universe please see Alain Touwaide, 'Therapeutic Strategies: Drugs', in *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mirko D. Grmek (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 241–72 (p. 264–65).

[97] See for instance the fifteenth-century Middle English manuscript Takamiya MS 46, fol. 25^{r}: Tak in somere and gadere margoulde 7 herbe John 7 lat a prest say over þis herbes In principio 7 drynk þe jus thereof iii. dayes fastynge; Storm Hindley, *Textual Amulets*, p. 38. Similarly, the 'Nine Herbs charm in the *Lacnunga* London, British Library, ms Harley 585, fols 160^{r}-163^{v}; furthermore, *Bald's Leechbook* recommends for seven masses to be sung over a mixture of herbs and holy water, London, British Library, Royal MS 12 Dxvii, fols 51^{v}–52^{r}.

> Take a handful of hammerwort and handful of chamomile and a handful of common plantain, and some water-lily roots look for the kind that floats, though this should be the smallest ingredient – and one eggshell of pure honey. Then take some pure butter. Whoever is to make the salve should melt the butter three times. Have a Mass sung over the plants before you put them together and make the salve.[98]

The enduring practice of reciting important words or phrases, and even entire Masses, over plants, herbs, beverages, and wounds is extensively documented in texts like the *Lacnunga* and other medical collections from that time and afterwards. A further example drawn from this collection will additionally show the practice of calling upon the herb' inherited virtues against a given ailment. One notable example is the 'Nine Herbs Charm', which has been traditionally associated with ancient 'Germanic' knowledge.[99] However, more recent research by Karel Fraaje has rightly contextualised this charm within the realm of Christian charms and liturgy.[100]

> The Nine Herbs Charm
> + Remember, Mugwort, what you made known,
> What you determined at the Place of Proclamation.
> You are called "Una", the oldest of plants.
> You have power against three and against thirty,
> You have power against venom and against infection,
> You have power against the enemy who journeys
> throughout the land.
>
> […]
>
> Sing this incantation on each of the plants, three times before they are worked into a powder, and sing it on the apple in like manner; and sign into the person's mouth and into both ears, and sign the same spell onto the wound before the healer applies the salve.[101]

In this instance, as observed previously in the context of Old Norse remedies, the significance lays on entrusting the inherited properties of herbs and to sing words over the herbs to facilitate the process of achieving therapeutic outcomes. While, on the one hand it is evident that the Old Norse remedy and those documented in the *Lacnunga* represent distinct forms of remedies without a common philological origin, on the other hand an insightful understanding emerges. It appears clear that the Old

[98] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, pp. 426–27.
[99] Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 334–40.
[100] K. Fraaje, 'Magical Verse from Early Medieval England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2020), pp. 65–82.
[101] I render here only the sections of the charms most significant for the argument; see full rendition with original text in Niles and D'Aronco, *Medieval Writing from Early Medieval England*, pp. 468–75.

Norse remedy draws upon a practice firmly grounded in a broader European medical context and mixes it with other practices commonly used in medieval medicine creating a new and distinctive remedy which does not find exact parallels elsewhere. The practice of signing or reading upon herbs exhibits parallels in diverse European written traditions: as Van Arsdall reminds us, the practice of signing prayers or songs over herbs and mixture of ingredients might not only indicate the practice of blessing the plant, but more specifically to calculate the period of time for the properties of the medical simples to take effect.[102] Hence, this reveals the remarkably receptive medical environment prevalent in medieval Iceland, which demonstrated the capacity to not only assimilate knowledge from a diverse array of sources, but also to employ them in a meaningful way and individually develop new remedies and recipes based on the imported materials.

From a broader perspective, the Old Norse herbal remedies could be of interest to medical historians, as they mirror the empirical methodologies, ingredients, and approaches that garnered significant recognition on the Continent in the late Middle Ages. These approaches are deeply ingrained in earlier collections of remedies and herbals developed and disseminated throughout the first millennium. As posited by Larsen and then Schwabe, during the textual transmission, a portion of these remedies arrived in Iceland through the Danish medical book Copenhagen, AM 187, 8vo.[103] Nonetheless, another considerable portion of these remedies, as demonstrated in this section, exhibit an empirical and practical quality that is attributable to the influence of written English texts.

Shifting our focus to other insights derived from the process of adaptation, let us now examine another shared feature within the three examples. Among the imported practices and elements featured within these remedies, the texts also reveal three iconographic signs that potentially signify a local elaboration of imported inspiration.

The symbols found within these remedies are commonly referred in scholarship as *galdrastafir* or magic staves.[104] These are magic symbols that became more popular in Icelandic *grimoires* (magic books) especially after the Reformation, during

[102] Van Arsdall, 'Reading Medieval Medical Texts with an Open Mind', pp. 21–22.
[103] Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 7–9; Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellan*y, pp. 31–33.
[104] Flowers, *The Galdrabók*, pp. 15, 46.

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[105] However, the oldest evidence and least elaborated version of these symbols is extant in the manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo dated to the end of the fifteenth century. Old Norse scholarship is divided in respect to how interpret these signs. The predominant view upheld until recently and also extended to popular culture is that these sorts of signs are regarded as bindrunes, hence a combination of two or multiple runes bound together to form a standalone symbol to which magic powers are ascribed.[106]

However, binding runes is an orthographic and phonetic phenomenon occurring in runic inscriptions since the earliest epigraphic runic attestation in the Old Norse speaking regions,[107] and there it is a phenomenon which is evidence prior to the codification of such circular signs in the Old Norse medical miscellany. The binding of runes is a quintessential orthographic ligature between two or more graphic signs to form a specific sound. For instance, Looijenga observed that in sequences of texts containing the sound 'ing' the two runes ᛁ and ᛜ are always represented as a headstaff ᛝ.[108] Likewise, Williams noted that most runes feature minor or major variants, including being reversed or inverted, and they could present ligatures ᚾ + ᛚ becomes ᛋ.[109] Therefore, 'bindrune' upholds a specific meaning and utilisation within Old Norse scholarship concerning the orthographic rendering of sounds and orthographic developments in an epigraphic setting. If we utilise the concept of 'binding runes' to interpret such circular symbols, it would imply adding to runes an unnecessary esoteric meaning at a time where other esoteric graphic and theoretical materials were circulating on the Continent and in the northern regions of Europe. From a strictly iconographic perspective, these symbols demonstrate that medieval Icelanders would have come into contact with additional influence from the Continent and the Mediterranean regions in relation to effective symbols to utilise in challenging circumstances.

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[105] Ibid., p. 46.
[106] Ibid.; Mindy MacLeod, 'Bandrúnir in Icelandic Sagas', in *Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference 2-7 July 2000*, *University of Sydney,* ed. by Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies - University of Sydney), pp. 252–62 (p. 253). MacLeod also appreciates the variety of influences from which the *Galdrastafir* might draw on, especially Latin letters.
[107] Mindy MacLeod, *Binding-Runes. An Investigation of Ligatures in Runic Epigraphy* (Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk – Uppsala universitet, 2002) pp. 44–48; Mindy MacLeod and Bernard Mees, 'On the T-like Symbols, Rune-rows and other Amuletic Features of the Early Runic Inscriptions', *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis,* 9 (2004), 249–99; Mindy MacLeod, 'The Triple Binds of Kragehul and Undley', *NOWELE,* 38 (2001), 17–35.
[108] Tineke Looijenga, *Texts & Contexts of the Oldest Runic Inscriptions* (Leiden: BRILL, 2003), p. 102.
[109] Henrik Williams, 'Runes', in *The Viking World*, ed. by Stefan Brink and Neil Price, The Routledge Worlds 10 (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 281–90 (p. 282).

The circular or cross-like signs preserved in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo are not expressions of bindrunes, which means that they can no longer be attributed the value of runic ligatures, nor they should be subjected to one of the late medieval frameworks of utilising runes in an occult way. Despite the advent of literacy, runes did not undergo complete abandonment. They persisted in usage for inscribed artifacts and manuscripts, as illustrated by the example of the remedy to manipulate dice found in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo. In this context, runes are employed to inscribe the names of Norwegian kings.[110] Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that runes are not employed or juxtaposed in a manner associated with magical practices any more than Latin letters are.

Conversely, these circular symbols possess a distinct iconographic style that distinguishes them from runic engravings, thus displaying a stronger affinity with the tradition of magic linked to Solomonic sigils.[111] *Galdrastafir* make their appearance in Iceland during a particular historical juncture - the fifteenth century, possibly even slightly preceding it; thus, envisioning these symbols as originating from an earlier runic tradition is rather challenging.

To better elucidate this argument, we now turn to some examples preserved in the manuscript London, British Library, MS Harley 5596 31r. The manuscript dates to the fifteenth century and it preserves miscellaneous texts on magic and divination, including two renderings of the magical treatise of Solomon in Greek. The magical treatise was one of the most renowned and influential works attributed to Solomon, which circulated under different titles including 'Clavicule' or 'Key of Solomon'. The earliest version of this text is written in Greek and dates to the fifteenth century.[112] In folio 31r of London, British Library, MS Harley 5596, one of the multiple versions of this text shows twenty-eight circular signs to counteract a number of daily challenges and circumstances.

[110] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog,* p. 367.
[111] For an introduction to the Solomonic tradition, see Pablo A.Torijano, *Solomon, The Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Julien Véronèse, 'La transmission groupée des textes de magie 'salomonienne' de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge. Bilan historiographique, inconnues et pistes de recherche', in *L'Antiquité tardive dans les collections médiévales: textes et représentations, VI^{e}-XIV^{e} siècle*, ed. by Stéphane Gioanni and Benoît Grévin (Rome: École française de Rome, 2008), 193–223.
[112] Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 15.

Figure 6. London, British Library, MS Harley 5596, fol. 31r

Figure 7. Particular of three magic signs in London, British Library, MS Harley 5596, fol. 31r

Tracing the Solomonic origin of *galdrastafir* is beyond the scope of this present work. However, the discussion will be limited here to the implication of these signs and possible origin within Icelandic medical manuscripts. Three of the symbols found in the Greek manuscript bear striking resemblances to the *galdrastafir* utilised in the Icelandic medical miscellany to counteract a series of mundane problems. Given that Solomonic magic was in circulation in Continental Europe since the thirteenth century,[113] it is possible that such a body of knowledge reached Iceland before the Reformation and provided the basis for developing *galdrastafir* and their utilisation within Icelandic medical manuscripts.

The striking resemblance between *galdrastafir* and Solomonic sigils paves the way to understand the Icelandic circular signs as an imported material, subsequently integrated into the Icelandic iconographic and manuscript tradition. Within this context, these symbols assume new designations and functions. In the process of adapting such sigils, scribes and healing practitioners in Iceland demonstrate local innovation by dissociating the sigils from the various renditions of the 'Key of Solomon' text and applying them to novel contexts, such as the medical compilation Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo. Moreover, these sigils are amalgamated with herbal knowledge and other medical practices, including the act of invoking blessings over herbs, reflecting a distinct merging of traditions.

[113] Julien Véronèse, 'Solomonic Magic', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider, (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 190.

Consequently, one can deduce that the Old Norse society adeptly incorporated novel practices spanning from herbal to rituals and graphic signs, seamlessly integrating them into various contexts and objectives. This integration often entailed merging these practices with existing ones, aiming to formulate innovative remedies and recipes to address a wide array of everyday challenges.

To conclude this comparative analysis of Old Norse herbal remedies, it becomes evident that the herbal knowledge presented in the manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo originates from a diverse range of sources. As previously illustrated, a significant portion of these herbal remedies showcases an empirical and pragmatic nature, influenced by written English texts. On the other hand, certain remedies centred around herbs could be interpreted as products of local creation, amalgamating herbal wisdom from ancient Mediterranean traditions—such as the utilization of yarrow—with the incorporation of other imported elements like the act of invoking blessings over herbs. Additionally, these remedies integrate more contemporary practices within their repertoire, exemplified by the inclusion of magical staves, which were contemporary to the period under discussion.

5. 5 Old Norse and Old English Animal Remedies

Old Norse remedies based on animals and their products are also rooted in the empirical medicine. These remedies are typified by their keen attention to detailing symptoms and offering succinct directives for the appropriate application of remedies. Animal remedies are mostly documented in the leechbook Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43 and among the collection of empirical remedies in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo.

While animal-derived substances and products may occasionally assume a supplementary role in certain remedies found in distinct sections of both manuscripts, their consideration in this context is secondary. This is due to the fact that these recipes do not focus on the animal or its derivatives; rather, these components function as ancillary ingredients. For instance, within the Dublin manuscript, one encounters the book of simples, a compilation of remedies founded upon the descriptions of individual ‘simples’ (herbs) rather than predicated on specific ailments. In the section dedicated to *Porrum,* an extensive depiction of the plant and its inherent virtues is

presented, particularly when employed in conjunction with other constituents, including the gall of a goat. The amalgamation of goat's gall and leeks, for example, is advocated as efficacious for alleviating earaches: *Porus porlaukur hann er godur j lækisdom […] Blandar madur geitar gall vid. þat er gott vid eyrns verck* (Porrum, leek is good for medicine […] if one mixes goat's gall and leeks, that is good for earache.[114] Nevertheless, the overarching emphasis of this compilation does not lie upon the attributes of the animal's gall; rather, it is centred upon the accurate administration of *Porrum* or other botanical elements.

On the contrary, the remedies that will be discussed in this section evince a significant predilection for regarding the animal in question and its derived substances or products as the principal therapeutic agents. When manipulated, administered, or synergistically combined with other components, these agents are posited to engender the process of healing.

In my examination of Old Norse animal remedies, I have observed a departure from a consistent internal structural arrangement of remedies, analogous to the divergences encountered within herbal remedies. On occasion, specific sections of the leechbook within the manuscript Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43, and the catalogues of remedies contained within the manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo, exhibit an organisational framework based on ailment classifications. This arrangement juxtaposes animal-based remedies alongside herbal treatments or bloodletting, contingent upon their perceived efficacy against ailments. This phenomenon is particularly evident within clusters of remedies attributed to specific maladies, such as headaches, earaches, and excessive blood flow, among other ailments. In these instances, the emphasis does not primarily revolve around the principal ingredient itself and what recipes can be used for. Instead, the focal point lays on devising strategies to effectively address a given affliction by harnessing a diverse array of ingredients and constituents.

Simultaneously, the presence of condensed clusters of remedies, focussing on the utilisation of distinct animals and products and physical parts, suggests the possibility that these intricately delimited segments could have originated from a former text that employed an alternative classification predicated on animal properties, and with an encyclopaedic oriented interest. This evidences a plurality of sources and

[114] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, pp. 83, 167.

perspective employed in the compilation and circulation of animal remedies in Old Norse manuscripts.

Another indicator that underscores the receptive medical environment in medieval Iceland is the resemblance evident in the selection of ingredients, preparation methods, and administration techniques found in animal-based remedies. These characteristics bear notable similarity to those identified in medical compendia originating from the broader Continental context. The manipulation of both animal and herbal components within these remedies mirrors the practices observed in early medieval compilations. In that respect, the Old Norse animal remedies make use of animal's internal organs and blood, such as the galls of goat, eel, ox, hare and fox, or deer's antlers and cow's horns, as well as physical parts of cats and hare's hair. These approaches can be traced back to the body of medical knowledge developed and disseminated during Late Antiquity.[115] Consequently, this congruence highlights the interconnectedness between medieval Iceland's medical practices and the wider Continental medical landscape. It not only emphasises the adherence to established medical norms but also underscores the continuity of therapeutic traditions across temporal and geographical boundaries.

The encyclopaedic order of animals and the combination of their utilisation and purpose are of particular interest to my thesis as one specific cluster of remedies made from the hare in the Old Norse medical miscellany bears striking resemblances to the hare section in the *Old English Remedies from Animals*. The *Old English Remedies from Animals* are a group of texts based on a learned and classified organisation of plants and animals which have survived in four manuscripts dated between 975 and 1200, which are housed at the British Library in London and at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.[116] These texts are preserved alongside the *Herbarium* and they consist of Late Antique treatises on animals and their derivatives collected in the so-called *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*. These treatises are the *Anonymi De taxone liber,* which deals with

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[115] On animal and herbal based medicine in the early medieval period, please see Linda E. Voigts, 'Anglo-Saxon Plant Remedies and the Anglo-Saxons', *Isis*, 70:2 (1979) 250–68; Debby Banham, 'Dun, Oxa and Pliny the Great Physician: Attribution and Authority in Old English Medical Texts', *Social History of Medicine*, 24:1 (2011) pp. 57–73; Maria A. D'Aronco, 'The Botanical Lexicon of the Old English 'Herbarium' ', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 17 (1988) 15–33; John M. Riddle, *Dioscorides on Pharmacy and Medicine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Iolanda Ventura, 'The curae ex animalibus in the Medical Literature of the Middle Ages: The Example of the Illustrated Herbals', in *Bestiaires médiévaux: Nouvelles perpectives sur les manuscrits et les traditions* textuelles (Turhnout: Brepols, 2005) pp. 213–48.

[116] London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius C.iii; London, British Library MS. Harley 585; Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writing from Early Medieval England*, pp. xv–xx.

the medicinal uses of the badger; the second treatise discusses the virtues and feature of the mulberry plant, and the third one is the *Sexti Placiti Liber medicinae ex animalibus,* which lists four domesticated (goat, ram, bull, dog), and eight wild or exotic animals (hart, fox, hare, wild goat, boar, wolf, lion, and elephant) and gives remedies based upon each animal.[117]

The Old English version of the Sexto Placitus' *Liber medicinae ex animalibus* has a more encyclopaedic-oriented order, in which remedies are allocated and listed under each animal's names and properties. The section pertaining to hares in this context comprises a compilation of 20 remedies, drawing upon various elements derived from the hare's internal organs, blood, and external features such as its hair. The Old Norse counterpart documents four remedies listed consecutively, constituting a discernible grouping of remedies from the *heri* (hare). Within this cluster of remedies, the Old Norse version occasionally demonstrates a verbatim correspondence to the Old English version of the *Liber medicinae ex animalibus,* while at other times, the parallelism extends beyond word choices to encompass both content and stylistic attributes.

The shared pattern observed in terms of content, wording, and style, alongside the discernible encyclopaedic arrangement, raises the possibility that the Old Norse texts might have originated from coeval or subsequent Old English version of the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*. This correspondence invites speculation regarding the potential relationship between these Old Norse manuscripts and the earlier English compendium, suggesting a potential lineage of derivation or influence. To better contextualise the correspondence let us now turn to the practical examples drawn from Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo and the Hare's section in the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*:

Old Norse Remedies from Hare

> Tac enn hiera gall ok berr i augun, þaa mun skirazt ok myrka af taca.[118]
> (Also take hare's gall and put it into the eye. Then it will be cleared, and the darkness will be lifted.)[119]

Old English Remedies from the Hare

[117] Meaney, 'The Practice of Medicine in England', p. 228.
[118] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 371.
[119] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 8.

5.7 For dimness of the eyes: hare's gall, mixed with honey, and smeared around the eyes. The eyesight will improve.[120]

Old Norse Remedies from Hare

Vid augnna verk edur fota verk: tac lungu hiera ok bitt vid augun edr fætur, ef verkr er i, þaa mun linna ok skiott batnna.[121]
(For pain in the eyes or pain in the feet: take a hare's lung and bind it on the eye or feet if there is a pain in them. It will cease and soon heal.)[122]

Old English Medicine from the Hare

5.2 For sore eyes: hare's lungs, put on them and fastened there. The soreness will be healed.

5.3 For swollen feet and foot injuries: hare's lungs, tied onto the top and bottom of the foot. One's footsteps will be wonderfully relieved.[123]

Old Norse Remedies from Hare

Enn at briota stein i blaudru manz: tac nytt blod hiera ok skinn nydrepit af honum ok bren, tac ausku þaa ok lat i fornt vin ok gef fastandi manni at hafa iii sponu um dag, þaa mun bresta stein i manni, ok þat mun græda. Enn ef um villt reyna þat, þaa tac einn stein ok legg i dryck þann, enn hann mun bradnna innann þriggia daga.[124]

(To break up a stone in a man's bladder, take fresh hare's blood and the hare's freshly flayed skin and burn them. Take the ashes and place them in old wine and give 3 spoonfuls to the fasting man each day. Then the stone in the man will break up, and it will heal him. if you want to test it, take a stone and lay it in this drink, and it will melt within 3 days.)[125]

Old English Medicine from the Hare

5.9 For bladder pain: hare's kidneys, dried and roasted with salad and fried, scrape into the patient's beverage. It will heal wondrously.[126]

Old Norse Remedies from Hare

Vid har-voxt tac heira kvid sodinn i oleo, þat fægir har ok færir i voxt.[127]

(To grow hair, take hare's belly, boiled in oil. That makes the hair shiny and makes it grow.)[128]

Old English Medicine from the Hare

5.11 For hair loss: simmer or roast a hare's belly in a pan with good oil, smear it on the hair and the head. The hair will stay in place, and the ointment will induce it to grow.[129]

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[120] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 387.
[121] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 377.
[122] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 13
[123] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 385.
[124] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 377.
[125] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 14.
[126] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 387.
[127] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog*, p. 377.
[128] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 14.
[129] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 387.

This concise yet rich group of remedies in the Old Norse medical miscellany shows that the knowledge about the hare's properties, preparation and administration of its parts could have philological roots in the Old English remedies from animals in the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*. Verbatim correspondence often emerges from the comparison between parallels; nevertheless, deviations between the Old Norse and English counterparts can be also revealed, especially encompassing word choices and stylistic forms. Notwithstanding such deviations, it remains noteworthy that pronounced analogies persist, both in terms of the method of preparation and the ingredients employed. This shared approach further gains significance due to the presentation of these texts within a cohesive section in the Old Norse manuscript, suggesting that the body of work from which these remedies originated must also have featured within the same united cluster.

Turning our attention to additional corroborative evidence in support of the potential English origin of select Old Norse remedies, a suitable avenue for exploration lays on the examination of the leechbook section contained within the manuscript Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43.

The leechbook, as Schwabe observed, emerges as a composite work, drawing upon a diverse range of influences. These include Danish medical treatises, early versions of the Macer Floridus *Herbarium* before it was translated into Danish and incorporated into Henrik Harpestræng's works, and lastly sources heretofore not documented.[130] It is within the context of the leechbook's reliance on previously unattested sources that my focus is directed, specifically towards the instances where sources are lacking for certain remedies present within the leechbook. This absence of established sources has constituted the focal point for my investigation, forming the basis upon which a comparative analysis is to be conducted against Old English medical texts.

As elucidated in earlier sections, specifically within chapter one, it has been previously demonstrated that certain segments within the leechbook, as preserved within the Dublin manuscript, bear striking resemblance to a broad range of remedies found within the medical miscellany housed in Copenhagen. This degree of proximity is of such a nature that both Schwabe and Larsen have advanced the hypothesis that

[130] Schwabe, 'Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen', pp. 7–9.

these two manuscripts might, in fact, trace their origins back to a shared source. It is upon this foundational premise that I am constructing my argument, with the intention of delving further into the examination of mutually shared texts that might have influenced the composition and the gathering of materials that has been transmitted.

The survey of animal remedies in the leechbook section has demonstrated that a number of the animal remedies in the manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo also parallel their counterpart in the leechbook, and more importantly there are five additional remedies which adhere to those found in the Old English *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*. Correspondence is again based upon the shared ingredients and ailment, as well as methodology of preparation and administration, and ultimately on word choice and stylistic forms. The remedies are given below for comparison:

Old Norse remedies from animals
Item tak herra kvid ok siod med oleo. Þat fregrar har ok færir voxtt.[131]
([if hair or beard is lacking] Item the stomach of a hare and boil with oil. That makes the hair beautiful and brings growth.)[132]

Old English remedies from animals
5.11 for hair loss: simmer or roast a hare's belly in a pan with good oil, smear it on the hair and the head. The hair will stay in place, and the ointment will induce it to grow.[133]

Old Norse remedies from animals
Item vid þvi. Villi svins eista sodit stappat j vini æda vatni.[134]
(Item for that [epilepsy], the testicles of a wild boar boiled and crushed in wine or water.)[135]

Old English remedies from animals
9.9 For person with falling sickness: boar's testicles, make a drink out of them in wine or in water. This drink will heal him.[136]

Old Norse remedies from animals
Item vid augum tak ræfurs gall med hunang. Þat tekur myrkva af augum manni.[137]
(Item for the eyes take fox's gall with honey, that takes dimness from a man's eyes.)[138]

Old English remedies from animals

[131] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 118.
[132] Ibid., p. 202.
[133] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 387.
[134] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany,* p. 120.
[135] Ibid., p. 204.
[136] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 403.
[137] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 112.
[138] Ibid., p. 205.

4.13 For dimness of the eyes: use fox's gall mixed with honey from wild honeybees and applied to the eyes. It works.[139]

Old Norse remedies from animals

Tak refs gall æda feiti hans ok lat j eyrum. Þat grædir vel.[140]
(For the earache. Take fox's gall and fat and put in the ears; that heals well.)[141]

Old English remedies from animals

4.14 For earache: take fox's fat, melted, drip into the ears. It will bring him good health.[142]

Old Norse remedies from animals

Vid andvoku tak geitar horn. ok legg undir hofuth þer. þa snyr þer j svefn.[143]
(For sleeplessness, take goat's horn and place under your head, then you will fall asleep.)[144]

Old English remedies from animals

7.2 For sleep: a goat's horn laid under the head. The horn will turn waking into sleep.[145]

The remedies analysed here are featured in the *experimenta* sub-section of the leechbook of the Dublin manuscript. The section begins with *hjer hefir svo… hjer hefir morg experimenta* (here begins so…Here begins many experiments) which underscores the different nature of these remedies if compared to those preceding the subsection. As we have seen in the chapter about learned and empirical medicine, *experimenta* was another word to identify empirical remedies and marking the beginning of a limited section within a learned medical compilation in such a way may suggest a need for the scribe to draw a line between the more reliable remedies drawing from learned theories and the new group of remedies with a more pragmatical orientation.

This subsection exhibits a notable compositional complexity, primarily due to the absence of a consistent structural arrangement in the listing of remedies. The order of presentation varies, ranging from instances where remedies are catalogued according to the specific ailment they are intended to address, to others where they are grouped under the name of the herb or principal ingredient involved. This lack of uniformity in organization engenders a heterogeneous composition, contributing to our

[139] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 385.
[140] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 127.
[141] Ibid., p. 207.
[142] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 385.
[143] Larsen, *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany*, p. 129.
[144] Ibid., pp. 213.
[145] Niles and D'Aronco, *Medical Writings from Early Medieval England*, p. 395.

knowledge of the diverse textual landscape that Icelandic scribes might have been involved with.

What this comparative survey shows is the potential relationships and exchanges of medical theories and practices between geographical and cultural borders, enhancing our comprehension of the intricate web of cross-cultural medical transmission in the Middle Ages. However, an inherent chronological challenge persists, stemming from the temporal disjunction between Old English medical texts, which span from the tenth to the twelfth century, and our Old Norse medical texts, which are situated within a later timeframe, ranging from the mid-thirteenth to the late fifteenth century. Consequently, there exists a clear lack of temporal overlap between these two sets of texts which apparently does not allow for explaining these shared materials as being directly in contact.

Nonetheless, there are many points of contacts through which remedies from Old English medicine could have been transmitted and assimilated in the Old Norse medical milieu. In the first instance, as we have briefly outlined in the introductory chapter, economic, cultural, and mercantile relationships between Iceland and England were repristinated upon the weakening of the Kalmar Union and the Danish rule over Iceland during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. This period partially overlaps with the flourishing of Middle English literature and medical texts in England. Curiously, within our Old Norse medical compendium, an intriguing occurrence emerges that resonates with familiarity subsequent to our discourse on Old English animal-based remedies. This resemblance is particularly evident in terms of the employed ingredients, especially animal-derived substances. The usage of animals, as well as herbs, for therapeutic purposes did not end with the passage from Old to Middle English, but rather these texts were included in later English texts and were used as a basis to experiment with new ones. Hence it is not unusual to find remedies working around the familiar combination of animal and herbal ingredients in Middle English medical texts.

The Old Norse manuscript Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo f 18r preserves a remedy designed to address nosebleeds which remarkably bears a similarity to another counterpart found within the Middle English manuscript Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.14.32.

> Vid nef-dreya tac skurnir þær, er ungar voru ur klacktir, ok mel ok blas i nasraufar, þa mun staudvaz.[146]
>
> (For a nosebleed, take the shells of eggs that young birds have hatched out of, and powder them and blow them into the nostrils. Then it will be stanched.)[147]
>
> For nose bledenge. Brenn egge schelles that bryddes hath ben jnn and with a penne blowe it into his nose.[148]
>
> (For nose bleeding. Burn eggshells that birds have been in and with a feather blow it into his nose.)

This fifteenth-century English medical compendium assumes a pivotal role in fostering a nuanced perspective. It serves as an opportunity to view the reconnection between Icelandic and English realms, transcending the confines of mere mercantile and financial interactions. This juncture in history presents a valuable opportunity to perceive this rekindled relationship as a gateway for more than economic transactions—a conduit that also facilitated the dissemination of new ideas and textual resources.

The reopening of commercial relationships and the developing of Church administration affairs with England and the Continent may have allowed for other types of material, including medical remedies, to circulate and trespass geographical borders. The establishment of new contacts with England and the Continent in the latter centuries of the Middle Ages is not the only viable path through which these remedies might have travelled across the sea. As previously outlined in the introductory chapter, prior to the fall of the Icelandic Commonwealth (1262-64 AD), England and other areas of the Continent exerted an influential agency over Icelandic pedagogical institutions and works, as well religious education.[149] The cultural influence that especially England exerted over Iceland can be observed in the group of extant texts spanning from the vernacular grammars to computistic and religious matters, hagiographical and chivalric literature and even scientific literature.[150]

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[146] Kålund, *Den Islandske Lægebog,* p. 378.
[147] Waggoner, *Norse Magical and Herbal Healing*, p. 15.
[148] Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.32: f. 119^{r}.
[149] Grønlie, 'Conversion Narrative and Christian Identity', pp. 135–37; Etheridge, 'Manuscript Culture and Intellectual Connections between Iceland and Lincoln', p. 29.
[150] Patzuk-Russell, *The Development of Education in Medieval Iceland*, p. 200; Reykjavík, AM 732 a VII 4to, *Thómas saga erkibyskups*), chivalry matters (such as *Merlínússpá*), and scientific literature (such as a bestiary, also known as Physiologus, in AM 673 a I 4to and 673 a II 4to, as well as early astronomy texts in Reykjavík, AM GKS 1812 4to.

The diverse collection of texts sourced from England in the High Middle Ages illuminates the potential for significant knowledge exchange between England and Iceland. This collection offers insights into the preferences of Icelandic travellers and scribes regarding the intellectual content they sought to acquire from England. Interestingly, among these early borrowed texts there are at least two versions of the Greek *Physiologus*, which are extant in two Icelandic versions (A and B) that were copied from two Latin versions in Lincoln or from a manuscript housed in Lincoln.[151] This textual genre transcends the boundaries between mystical and natural history genres, as it encompasses descriptive enumerations of animals, delineating their inherent attributes, symbolic significances, and moral values. This exemplifies the inclination of thirteenth-century Icelanders to acquire content related to Natural History and medical literature and underscores the central role played by England in disseminating such material.

5. 5. 1 Preliminary Conclusions

It is evident that within Old Norse medical miscellanies, two primary medical text genres exhibit significant parallels with the collections of remedies found in Old English sources. The first genre comprises, broadly speaking, prognostic texts. In this context, we encounter birth prognostics, which rely on the lucky or unlucky nature of calendar days to foretell the outcome of a newborn's life, as well as the *Signa mortifera* (signs of impending death), which prognosticate the outcome of an illness based on the observation of bodily symptoms exhibited by the patient. One of the most salient commonalities among these text genres in Old Norse and Old English corpora lays on the calculation of days based on the same time of the year and the inclusion of verbatim sentences. This suggests a strong overlap in the methods and content employed in both traditions.

Moreover, the influence of England on Old Norse medical practices becomes apparent through certain linguistic aspects in two prognostic texts. One such remedy, known as the *Capsula Eburnea* (Ivory Casket), was erroneously attributed to

[151] MS AM 673 a I, 4°, f.1^{r}-1^{v} preserves the five paragraphs of Physiologus A: 1. The Phœnix, 2. The Hoopoe, 3. The Siren, 4. The Fly, 5. The Onocentaur.// MS. AM 673 a II, 4°, preserves in its first six folios the nineteen exempla of Physiologus B: 1. The Hydra, 2. The Goat, 3. The Wild Ass, 4. The Monkey, 5. The Heron, 6. The Coot, 7. The Panther, 8. The Whale, 9. The Partridge, 10. The Onocentaur, 11. The Weasel, 12. The Asp, 13. The Turtle-dove, 14. The Deer, 15. The Salamander, 16. The Kite, 17. The Boar, 18. The Owl, 19. The Elephant.

Hippocrates and similarly, another remedy was incorrectly attributed to Isidore of Seville in its textual tradition. In both cases, the names ‘Hippocrates’ and ‘Isidore’ in the Old Norse versions of these two prognostics exhibit an Anglo-Norman and Middle English spelling, such as ‘Ypocras’ and ‘Ysodorus’, indicating a textual connection between the two regions.

Furthermore, an examination of Old Norse remedies reveals additional insights into the textual parallels with Old English sources, particularly in the collection of remedies derived from herbs and animals. Echoes of the Old English medical tradition are traceable in the Old Norse remedies based on animals and their products, especially remedies based on hare, fox and goat, which are best evidenced in the only completed medical miscellany from Iceland: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 43 D 23. On the other hand, the fifteenth-century medical fragment housed in the Copenhagen Arnamagnaean Institute, shelf mark AM 434 a 12mo, preserves a substantial group of herbal remedies that closely align with those found in the Old English *Herbarium*. Among the herbs employed, we can identify Lat. *Millefolium* (ON. *Greni* - Common yarrow), Lat. *Betonica* (Betony), Lat. *Centauree* (Centaury), Lat. *Ruta* (Rue), Lat. *Pollegium* (ON. *Gletunarium* - Pennyroyal), *Marrubium* (Horehound), and ON. *Læknes-grase* (Plantain). This merge of the use of herbal remedies underscores the interchange of medical knowledge and practices between Old Norse and Old English traditions.

This fifteenth-century medical fragment not only provides evidence of the exchange of medical knowledge and practices with medieval England but also demonstrates how Icelandic medical practitioners were able to assimilate imported influences and craft new remedies to adapt the imported material to their cultural frame. These remedies not only exhibit a resonance with diverse medical treatments known in the Latin West, such as the custom of gathering herbs on specific days of the year, singing upon herbs, or combining herbs with the utilization of sigils; but they also reveal usage of local practices such as *galdrastafir* (Icelandic magic sigils). It becomes evident that Old Norse remedies draw upon practices firmly rooted in a broader European medical context and use them to elaborate unique remedies in a new medical context.

Conclusions

This study has sought to achieve dual objectives. First and foremost, from a methodological perspective, it aims to bridge the gap between two distinct scholarly disciplines, namely the history of medieval medicine and Old Norse studies, which hitherto have remained largely isolated from each other. By placing these two fields in dialogue, this work examines Old Norse medical evidence by employing the theoretical frameworks, research inquiries, and analytical approaches inherent to the field of medieval medical history. By doing so, it seeks to underscore the valuable insights that can be gained from investigating the Old Norse medical corpus, shedding light on the medieval medical paradigms, treatment methods, and underlying rationale. This research represents a step towards fostering a more holistic understanding of both the historical context of medieval medicine and the unique contributions of Old Norse sources to this field of study.

This study demonstrates that analysing Old Norse medicine with a rigid separation of healing, religion, and magic imposes limitations, reflecting an inherent etic perspective in which these aspects are viewed in a dichotomous relationship. A more advantageous approach involves conceiving the relationship between healing, religion, and magic in Old Norse medicine as fluid, marked by the dynamic interplay among these elements and an overarching pursuit of efficacy. Within the framework of efficacy and power, all means employed to achieve healing were deemed valuable options.

This research has shown how medieval Icelandic healers and scribes were seeking medical efficacy in the combination of practices such as charms, prayers, ritualistic actions and performance, liturgical gestures, ligatures, textual amulets in Latin and runic script, as well as the use of herbal and animal-based remedies. All these devices were deemed efficient and therefore they were understood within the healing rationale.

Another crucial aspect involved analysing existing remedies in the context of local or imported medical practices, aiming to differentiate, whenever possible, local concepts and approaches to healing such as the use of healing runes and *galdrastafir* (magic staves). In doing so, this thesis explored how medical practices depicted in literary contexts or discovered through archaeological findings can be utilized to

enhance the interpretation and contextualization of medical treatments within the manuscript corpus.

This thesis shed light on the intricate interplay between magic, religion and medicine, seeking to discern which practices can be attributed to an older tradition and which were influenced by emerging medical paradigms and cultural references. Of particular interest was the distinction made by medieval Icelanders between the acts of carving and writing in the context of medical interventions. Additionally, the thesis examined how the categorization of certain rituals as magic (*galdra, gørningar, fiolkyngi* – as magic, and *fordsskapr* - with the meaning of harmful magic and witchcraft) in thirteenth-century sources such as *Grágás* and Eddic poems can be understood. The examination focussed on how verbal healing such as *galdra* (charms) preserved in Eddaic verses, probably elaborated in a period pre-Conversion but still circulated in written form in medieval Iceland, found acceptances in fifteenth-century medical manuscripts and were re-elaborated within Christian liturgy and rituals framework. This analysis has shed light on the interpretation of the therapeutic power of words in late medieval Iceland.

Within the category of 'verbal healing' and the power of the word in medieval Iceland, the examination provided an overview of practices such as the invocation of otherworldly forces, sympathetic associations, apotropaic rituals and objects that were considered unorthodox by clerical and medical authorities between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries when not employed for medical purposes. However, in a medical context, these same practices were legitimised based on their perceived efficacy and occult properties. As noted by Anders Winroth, the process of conversion in real life is much more complex and nuanced than the portrayals found in medieval narratives, with many shades of grey.[1] These shades of grey emerge from a plethora of evidence in medical manuscripts, literary and archaeological sources in order to unearth a more realistic picture of lived experience of medical practices.

The second aim of this research pertains to the demonstration of the diverse range of influences and textual parallels, both from external sources and local contexts, discernible within the contents of medieval Icelandic medical manuscripts. In this context, the study reveals that those Icelandic medical practitioners did not merely replicate remedies verbatim from imported texts; rather, they exhibited a capacity for

[1] Anders Winroth, *Conversion of Scandinavia: Vikings, Merchants and Missionaries in the Remaking of Northern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 128.

critical interpretation and adaptation of this medical knowledge to align with their specific cultural framework, ingredient availability, and practices, rituals and performances that resonated with their own understanding. This observation underscores the dynamic and active nature of medieval Icelandic medicine, as it was not merely a passive recipient of foreign medical knowledge, but rather a vibrant and lively tradition capable of innovating novel treatments and generating new ideas to promote the preservation of health.

While other scholars have demonstrated the more evident Danish and Norwegian textual parallels, especially in relation to language calques and loan words, as well as textual sources (e.g. medical treatises, collection of remedies, manuscripts), this research has focussed on the underlying influence of medieval England and its textual and cognitive parallels.

Within the scope of assessing foreign influences over Icelandic medical theories and practices, this research has shown how medieval English medical texts, especially those dated to the late Old English period (eleventh and twelfth centuries), have exerted a significant influence over Old Norse-Icelandic medicine. This was due to prolific direct contacts between medieval Icelanders and the British Isles before the fall of the Icelandic free-state (1262-64 AD) and to indirect contacts with the English medical and manuscript milieu through the Norwegian intermediary (1262-1380 AD). Icelandic high-ranking priests and bishops travelled to Continental and Insular Europe to important seats of learning (e.g. Lincoln, Paris, Bologna) where they acquired further education and were exposed to the most current literature and advanced knowledge of the time. Upon conclusions of their studies, Icelanders must have brought back all these new materials to their island, integrated them in their cathedral schools and educational curricula, as well as utilised these new materials to write new texts. The integration of remedies coming from the English medical miscellanies demonstrates that Icelandic scribes and healers were highly receptive of imported materials and that they were able to integrate them to their own cultural frame.

English influences run not only within the textual parallels, as demonstrated in the last chapter, but they have also a deeper inherited influence over the construction of metaphoric speech around certain illness and symptoms, such as the remedies against *álfavǫlkun* and the *trollriða,* as explored in chapter 4.

This part of the research elucidates the presence of cognitive parallels between Old English and Old Norse, wherein the entities OE. *ælfe* and ON. *álfr* are situated

within a shared interpretative framework. These beings are juxtaposed with *incubus*-type entities found in literary and medical sources, such as OE. *mære* and *nihtgengan*, and ON. *mara* and *trollriða*. The analysis reveals that during the transmission of medical texts from the late Old English and early Anglo-Norman period to Old Norse, the interpretative framework established for OE. *ælfe* creatures exerted a deep influence over the semantic meaning of the ON. *álfr*. This influence led to the association of ON. *álfr* with other *incubus*-type creatures already present in both Old English and Old Norse literature.

Furthermore, my survey has revealed that two distinct typologies of remedies within Norse and English remedies texts exhibit notable analogies: firstly, the prognostic texts and secondly herbal and animal remedies. The initial phase of my analysis focussed on an in-depth exploration of prognostic texts found within Norse and English collections, particularly those addressing miraculous births and auspicious as well as inauspicious days of the year. Additionally, the examination encompassed the *Signa mortifera* or signs of impending death, a sub-genre of prognostics wrongly attributed to Galen, which enumerates the bodily signs that a healer should scrutinise in their patients to determine their prospects of recovery or death.

The comparative exploration in this study further extended to the examination of other prognostic texts that have been inaccurately ascribed to Hippocrates and Isidore of Seville, particularly the pseudo-Hippocratic composition known as the *Capsula Eburnea* (Ivory Casket) as well as an excerpt from Vindicianus's *Gynaecia*. It is worth noting that both Old Norse versions of the *Capsula Eburnea* and the *Gynaecia* manifest orthographic features that exhibit a closer alignment with Middle English linguistic conventions rather than adhering strictly to the linguistic norms of Old Norse.

Shifting the focus to the second genre of texts of this comparative analysis, the latter part of this thesis delved into the remedies sourced from herbs and animals as documented in Old Norse and Old English medical texts. This investigation uncovered the textual parallels between the Old Norse herbal remedies in Copenhagen, AM 434 a 12mo and the corresponding remedies in the Old English *Herbarium*. This inquiry elucidated compelling evidence of intertextual borrowing from the Old English medical tradition to the Old Norse one and the localised appropriation of imported medical practices, including herbs and magical symbols to create innovative and personalised remedies devoted to address everyday issues.

Similarly, with regard to animal-derived remedies, the thesis demonstrated that there exists a number of textual parallels between Old Norse animal remedies in the Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 D 43 and their counterparts found in the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*. This scrutiny revealed the extent to which a cluster of remedies was either directly borrowed from the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* or, at the very least, intermediated through another textual source.

The incorporation of textual and cognitive elements from the English medical tradition, as evidenced in the Old Norse medical manuscripts, should be interpreted within the context of the historical and geopolitical framework of the medieval period. Contrary to the often-oversimplified perception of medieval isolation and localised circumstances, the medieval world was considerably more dynamic than is often acknowledged today. The existence of intertextual and cognitive parallels underscores that medieval Icelandic society actively engaged in the exchange of ideas and knowledge with various regions across Europe, including Insular, Continental, and Scandinavian areas either with direct contacts or through indirect contacts and the mediation of Norway (1262-1380 AD).

Even when freedom of establishing direct contact with some mainland regions was restricted, due to Norwegian control, the flow of influences from Europe and the British Isles persisted, often mediated through the agency of Norwegian scribes. This research has revealed the integral role of medicine in facilitating this cultural dialogue between medieval Iceland, the British Isles, Scandinavian peninsula, and Continental Europe. It highlights how medical knowledge and practices played a pivotal role in the cross-cultural exchange of ideas and the transmission of knowledge during the High and late Middle Ages.

This thesis has laid the foundations for future research into the medical practices and theories emerging from Old Norse sources, as well as on how insights into Old Norse medicine can facilitate research into the global Middle Ages, the History of Ideas and the History of Medicine fields. It would be particularly interesting to continue surveying other medieval Scandinavian scientific manuscripts within a comparative methodology to set them in dialogue with other medieval European medical miscellanies. Similarly, my observations pertaining the intertwined relationship between magic, medicine and religion could be beneficial to further studies into the cultural dimension of sainthood in the North and how these three aspects played a

pivotal role in developing figures of saints, holy men and thaumaturgic kings in Norse narratives.

The final remark of my thesis is devoted to furthering studies into the social and cultural understanding of the body, illness and health. By revealing a change of medical paradigm in Old Norse culture as well as connecting Old Norse conceptual models of illness and health to broader medieval medical framework, my thesis has paved the way to promote studies into the exchange of medical theories and practices across geographical and temporal borders. This approach can provide a tool to future scholars to examine medical corpora through the lens of a comparative method.

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