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Pain, Fear, and the Emotional Regime of Hell

Chieftains and the Church in Thirteenth-Century Iceland

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The period between c. 1170 and 1300 saw the most intense political conflict and change in Iceland's history as bishops, chieftains, and the Norwegian king vied for control. In their campaign to secure a dominant and autonomous position, the Church used Christian vision literature to address the sinfulness of the male elite and to attack the foundation of their power, threatening them with the ultimate punishment – everlasting pain in Hell. This message of pain and terror worked to shape an emotional regime of fear, providing the Church with a persuasive tool to use in their struggle against Iceland's chieftains.

Conflict in Thirteenth-Century Iceland

While thirteenth-century Iceland and its political power game has received considerable scholarly attention, the role of vision literature in the Church's efforts to influence and intimidate the social elite has not yet been discussed.[1] The following article will investigate the way in which the Church used visionary experiences as a weapon in their conflict with the chieftains, specifically how an emotional regime of fear, created by visions of the painful punishments of Hell, was intended to terrify the secular elite into submission. Utilising vision literature, represented here by *Rannveigar leizla*, *Sólarljóð*, and *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*, to capture and convey an emotional experience helped the Church to convert, coerce, and compel Iceland's chieftains.

To understand the importance of this literature, it may be helpful to preface this discussion with some background on the conflict between the Church and the lay elite. The Church's ultimate goal was autonomy. It strove to claim authority over the clergy, control of property, legislative power in ecclesiastical affairs and judicial power

[1] Jón Jóhannesson 1974; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1987, 1999, 2008; 2013a: 53; Karlsson 1975, 2004; Líndal 1978; Miller 1990.

in Church and clergy affairs, and to affirm their exemption from state tax. As will be demonstrated, the Church's struggle for power over people, property, and incomes was one of institutional life or death. Perhaps even more starkly evident in Iceland, where resources were more limited than elsewhere in Europe, it was clear that it would not be possible for the Church and the chieftains to share power.

Christianity was legislated in Iceland in the year 1000, and an accompanying Church organisation was slowly built up, with the creation of the bishoprics of Skálholt in the south (1056) and Hólar in the north (1106), the introduction of a tithe (1096), and the foundation of several monasteries over the following two centuries. The Icelandic Church was challenged by a lack of qualified priests and the complications of enforcing new societal norms. Still, Christianity was supported by many chieftains, and the Church structure naturally began to mirror and merge with the existing social framework (Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 152). The early Church was controlled by the elite, and it provided them with new opportunities to increase their influence and incomes; in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, many became priests and deacons, built churches and endowed them with land, creating the *staðir* which they used as their residences and bestowed on their heirs (Auður Magnúsdóttir 2001: 29; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2017: 77–79).

An archdiocese was founded in Niðarós in 1152/53, initiating a programme of reform in Norway which reached Iceland in the 1170s when the Norwegian Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson (1161–1180) addressed its bishops and its people for the first time. He expressed his displeasure with the Icelanders' promiscuity, the lack of Church privileges, and the clerics who involved themselves in secular disputes.[2] The Church had begun its campaign for dominance; however, its efforts were met by growing resistance from the social elite, who were reluctant to comply with its moral code or demands for independence. The Church's aspirations threatened lay control of valuable property, priests, and incomes, and led to increasingly bitter conflict. This dispute is perhaps best characterised by the campaign for Church ownership of the *staðir* which was first taken up in 1178 by Þorlákr Þórhallsson, bishop of Skálholt (1178–1193) (Magnús Stefánsson 1978, 2000). He had some initial success, but was opposed by powerful chieftains and eventually had to concede defeat. At the same

[2] Three late twelfth-century letters issued by Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson highlight some of the issues at hand. In the first, he scolds the chieftains for their sinful lives, in particular for committing murder, and threatens eternal suffering and damnation. In the second, he admonishes the chieftains Jón Loftsson and Gizurr Hallsson specifically for their sexual misconduct which not only harms them but sets a bad example. And, in the third, he forbids everyone who has taken Holy Orders from acting in secular disputes or carrying weapons. (Diplomatarium Islandicum, [1173], [1180], [1190]).

time, other more successful measures were being taken to separate chieftains and the Church, for instance, when secular leaders were forbidden from being ordained as priests in 1190. By banning chieftain-priests and attacking *staðir* ownership, the Church was challenging chieftains at a local level. Bishop Þorlákr also made it his mission to reform sexual relationships, and condemned concubinage, as will be discussed more thoroughly in the section on *Rannveigar leizla* below. In doing so, Þorlákr was undermining vital connections between chieftains and prominent local families.

The battle continued under Bishop Guðmundr Arason (1203–1237). Guðmundr repeatedly challenged Iceland's most powerful men and was eventually ousted from his see by a host of chieftains; he never regained enough influence to enact serious change. Still, the Church found other ways to advance its position. Until 1237, four powerful Icelandic clans had selected almost all of the bishops, usually from among their own families, thereby maintaining a strong bond between the secular and ecclesial elite. This connection could have important consequences. For instance, during the early years of Archbishop Eysteinn's power, both Icelandic bishops belonged to powerful chieftain families and were not particularly interested in fighting for Church reform.[3] In the thirteenth century, however, foreign influence began to increase through the appointment of a growing number of Norwegian, rather than local, bishops. As will be explored below, personal connections were essential to the Icelandic elite who depended heavily upon their friends, including family members, for political support. Just like the attempts to claim *staðir* incomes or to forbid extra-marital relationships, both of which were used to make and maintain friendships, removing this connection between religious and secular leaders threatened the foundation of the social networks which were the source of the chieftains' power.

There was another shift in the structure of secular politics when the Norwegian king incorporated Iceland into his realm in 1262/1264. The Church leaders gained a new source of support as well as competition, and the success or failure of Church reforms would often come to rely on royal backing. This is seen, for example, in the career of Bishop Árni Þorláksson (1269–1298). Almost a century after Bishop Þorlákr's failed attempt, he was determined to take control of the *staðir*. Árni prevailed against the powerful owners of the largest and most prosperous properties with the help of the archbishop, Jón *rauði*, supported by the Norwegian King Magnús. When Magnús died the agreements made during his reign were annulled, and the Icelandic elite began to regain the *staðir*.[4] Still, Bishop Árni did not give up, and in 1297 he fi-

[3] Brandr Sæmundsson (1163–1201) and Klængr Torsteinsson (1152–1176).

[4] "Seventeen staðir are named in *Árna saga*, all in the diocese of Skálholt, as being seized

nally re-secured royal support in the Treaty of Ögvaldsnes, an agreement which settled the wealthiest and most important *staðir* on the bishop, who then granted them to powerful clerics, but allowed lay owners to maintain possession of the smaller farmers' churches (*bœndarkirkjur*). Not only had he succeeded in boosting the Church's economy, Árni also developed its network by replacing chieftains with loyal clergymen in local positions. Although the Church officials were (mostly) triumphant in this case, the considerable time and great effort it took to secure victory is indicative of the fierce and protracted opposition they faced.

These years of political and economic conflict were also accompanied by moral struggle. Just as the chieftains clung to their properties and positions, so were they reluctant to set aside some cultural practices which did not fit the Christian norm, including those related to marriage or which opposed the masculine ideals of their honour culture. As will be discussed below, this reluctance led to clashes between the social elite and the Church officials who were attempting to moralise the population. It is significant that an attack on their sinfulness could also weaken the chieftains' political or social positions.

An Emotional Regime

In the effort to advance its aims, the Church made use of the horror inspired by depictions of pain in Hell to manipulate the chieftains, encouraging an emotional regime based on the fear of pain or the memory of pain experiences. When an emotional regime is employed with a specific purpose it may also be said to become an emotional tool, and I will argue that the depictions of powerful men and hellish punishments in the literature were deliberately used as such by Iceland's Church.

In the 1980s, Peter and Carol Stearns pioneered the idea of "emotionology"; they were interested in differences between the way people truly felt and standards of emotional expression. Since these standards could be seen to change over time, their work made way for investigation into the history of emotions (Stearns & Stearns 1985). As this field of study grew in popularity, two theories came to dominate the literature. The first is that of William Reddy's "emotional regime", which he defines as "The set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them..." (2001: 129). There is an element of control inherent in the notion of a regime, and Reddy believes that a failure to conform or perform enthusiastically enough will lead to punishment ranging from the physical to the social. The second is Barbara Rosenwein's concept of "emotional communities", which she describes as social groups with shared modes of emotional expression (2002:

by their original lay owners in 1284." (Sigurdson 2011: 35)

842–843). It is possible for several emotional regimes or communities to overlap, and for these smaller groups to exist within a broader, overarching regime – here, society's emotional response to a belief in pain in Hell.[5]

The Church's imposition of this new regime had serious implications for existing emotional communities. Although the Church tailored its message to fit the circumstances in Iceland, the idealisation of chastity and humility was directly at odds with traditional values and emotional norms which were aligned and interwoven with Iceland's social structure. As will be seen in this article, the introduction of a new emotional regime sparked changes within the community. Thus, the more tangible, material conflict between the Church and the chieftains was also occurring between opposing emotional discourses. Evidence that Iceland's elite could be influenced by this type of emotional tool is found in saga descriptions of their pilgrimages,[6] their practice of founding or retiring to monasteries,[7] their anxieties surrounding burial and excommunication,[8] and, finally, their deathbed confessions.

[5] Similarly, Rosenwein (2009) identifies the emotional community of the clerical elite, and discusses emotions as a tool of inclusion and exclusion used to influence Christians, with a focus on the efficacy of sadness and fear of exclusion for strengthening moral resolve.

[6] For example, the chieftain Gizurr Þorvaldsson's pilgrimage to Rome in 1247. The thirteenth-century chieftain Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson travelled to Canterbury, Santiago de Compostela, and Rome, and his rival Þorvaldr Snorrason was absolved in Rome.

[7] Powerful men established and made donations to monasteries, and most monastic clergy had an elite background (Orri Vésteinsson: 2000, 133). For instance, it seems that Þingeyrar Abbey was founded by chieftains, and a patron, Þorgils Oddsson, was a monk there in 1151, as was the chieftain Guðmundr dýri (Haki Antonsson: 2018: 127). The monastery at Viðey was founded by Þorvaldr Gizurarson in 1225 or 1226. He and four others became canons, and Þorvaldr was prior until his death in 1235. Even Jón Loftsson founded Keldur monastery in 1193 with the intention of becoming a monk (Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 197–198).

[8] See, for example, Cormack 1993. In *Íslendinga saga*, Hrani weeps as he confesses his sins, filled with fear of his uncertain fate after death. In the same text, the chieftain Oddr Þórarinsson asks to see a priest before he dies in 1255. Bishop Henrik had excommunicated Oddr, and his men therefore had to bury him directly outside the cemetery walls. When a payment was later made to lift his excommunication, Oddr was reburied in consecrated ground. Similarly, although he was not baptised, Egil Skallagrímsson's daughter moved his remains to the borders of Mosfell churchyard. For a discussion of these examples, amongst others, see Boyer: 1994 and Haki Antonsson: 2018. Similar examples are also found in Norway. For instance, in 1225, Jarl Skúli sent instructions to the korsbrødrene at Nidaros asking them to pray for him, to burn candles, ring the bell, and give money to priests. (Wellendorf: 2009: 17–18) In the Christian laws of Grágás, a focus on baptism and burial also shows anxieties regarding life after death. (Dennis, Foote & Perkins 1980)

Reddy' classic regime assumes that prescribed emotional responses can create suffering by forcing individuals to act in a way which does not feel natural to them, and it is accepted that many expressions in emotional communities are meant to convey a message through their performance alone. One could argue that a religious regime based in fear is more "genuine" than the ones envisioned by Reddy, and less performative than Rosenwein's communities. Further, it is important to remember that these communities had very different attitudes towards pain than most people do today, particularly regarding its potentially positive aspects (Cohen 2000; Mills 2005; Trembinski 2012). Nonetheless, this dread of the pain in Hell should not necessarily to be tied to a fear of pain on Earth. Its affirmative role in Christianity may have made a rejection of pain objectionable under certain emotional regimes, however, it seems to have been more acceptable, and encouraged, to react with "natural" horror or fear when faced with the torments of the afterlife – the response observed within the visions.[9] As the angel of the translated vision *Duggals leizla* asks: "…if God were to forgive everything, to what end should men be righteous? Or why should he repent and confess his sins, if he did not fear God?" (Cahill 1983: 123).

Visions and *Leizlur*

By the thirteenth century, the Icelandic Church had begun to expect more than simple baptism from its followers, and *exempla*, such as visions, were employed to encourage sincere emotional engagement with religion. Successful *exempla* should be believable and confirmed by witnesses, connect with the emotions, deliver a clear message, and leave a strong impression (Menache & Horowitz 1996: 324).

Christian vision literature was popular throughout medieval Europe, where it spread and was read in Latin as well as a great many vernacular translations. These morally instructive tales describe the otherworldly journeys of individual souls and their spiritual guides to observe or experience the afterlife before returning to their bodies. In Old Norse, works within this genre began to be translated before 1200 (Wellendorf 2009: 157, 199), and were called *leizla*, believed to stem from the verb *leiða* (to guide).[10] The most detailed Old Norse vision is *Duggals leizla*, a translation

[9] Menache & Horowitz 1996: 341. Invoking fear of pain was a suitable method of moral control in the thirteenth century. Esther Cohen provides examples of this belief, including a handbook for preachers with a section on "How to Terrify Listeners". (Cohen 2009: 41). Fear was also seen as positive in the journey towards repentance. (Snyder 1965) For more on the fear of pain see, Boddice 2017: 15–20; Cohen 2009: 25–42; Morris 1993: 125–126. On fear of Hell in Old Norse society specifically, see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2008: 75–77, and in visions more generally, Gurevich & Shukman 1984: 52–53 and Konshuh 2010: 23–24.

[10] On the origin and meaning of the name *leizla* see Heide 2016; Wellendorf 2009: 43–61.

of *Visio Tnugdali*. Although its influence on other visions must be noted, this text, as well the other translated visions of *Gundelinus leizla* and *Páls leizla*, are not the focus of this article. Nor will the fragmentary Old Norse adaptations of Furseus's and Drycelm's *leizlur*, or the younger records of *Draumkvedet* be included in the following discussion.

As indicated by its title, *Rannveigar leizla* tells of a guided journey to the afterlife, however, *Sólarljóð* and *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* do not fall strictly under the *leizla* definition. Nevertheless, they do centre on messages from, or travel to, the next world, and contain many of the elements found in traditional visionary texts – and most importantly they clearly share the same goals. Moreover, as original Icelandic compositions they represent a unique opportunity to explore the cultivation of the local influence of visionary narratives. All these stories are intended to impress the reader with accounts of the risks and rewards which await them after death, paying special attention to punishment, Hell, and the danger of sin. Visions are well suited to the dissemination of an emotional regime as they focus on the individual and their pain experience, and draw upon aspects of life familiar to ordinary people.[11]

The Icelandic visions are directly influenced and inspired by the European tradition, and are primarily distinguished from the translated material by more references to a pagan past, most notably through protagonists that are still learning about the basics of Christianity. Visions address moral issues such as the sexual misconduct of both secular and ecclesial leaders, the breaking of vows to God, and, more generally, behaviours which disrupted a peaceful and well-functioning society. Although the secular elite were a strong focus of these texts in both Europe and Iceland, visions should hold meaning for everyone.[12] Thus, I do not wish to argue that the experiences discussed below were only significant to the elite, nor that the sins they are condemned for were committed by this group alone. The intention of this paper is to demonstrate how these manuscripts and their contents were utilised by the Church in its campaign against the chieftains, not to preclude the presence of other messages and motives within this literature or the existence of a broader audience.

As we no longer possess any of the "original" manuscripts, determining the age of these texts can be somewhat challenging, however, they can all be dated with vary-

[11] "The "internalisation" of the punishment suffered for past misdemeanours and the movement of the spiritual centre of gravity from the fate of the human race in general to the fate of an individual in particular are characteristic of medieval vision literature….in tales of the hereafter the individualistic aspect of man's subjection to death and punishment comes to the fore." Gurevich 1992: 77; Menache & Horowitz 1996: 324.

[12] On determining the intended audiences of visions, see Konshuh 2010.

ing degrees of certainty to the thirteenth century.[13] A more specific time frame for each vision will be considered as they are introduced, but it must be acknowledged that it is not possible to be exact. The visions will be presented in their established chronological order alongside relevant political and historical issues and events. The discussion begins with the journey of a priest's mistress in *Rannveigar leizla*, before turning to matters of malice and murder in *Sólarljóð*, and finally the inherently moral heathen hero of the conversion narrative *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*.

Rannveigar leizla: A message on sexual morality

The only surviving original Icelandic contribution to the *leizla* genre, *Rannveigar leizla* is a brief description of an otherworldly journey taken during the winter of 1198 by Rannveig, an ordinary woman living in the eastern fjords of Iceland. Rannveig's vision is found in *Guðmundar saga biskups*, which survives in several manuscripts, the first dated to c. 1330–1350.[14] However, Stéfan Karlsson has argued that the vision was included in earlier accounts of the bishop's life composed shortly after his death in 1237, and it is within this context that I will be discussing its contents (Stéfan Karlsson 1983: clii; 1985). It is no coincidence that this vision should take place when it does – 1198 was an important year for the Icelandic Church as it was then that permission was given at the Alþing to make vows to Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson. St Þorlákr was especially interested in the prevention of sexual sins, the focus of this vision, and famously refused to marry although it was common practice amongst his peers. Nor is it strange that it is found in the life of Guðmundr Arason, who was bishop of Hólar from 1203 until his death in 1237. He was known as an especially pious man who followed and built upon Þorlákr's example in his aggressive confrontation of Iceland's chieftains in a campaign for Church autonomy. This may be the most historically engaged of the texts presented here, and it draws on many of the Church's concerns despite its brevity, most prominently the conduct and duties of powerful men and the admonition of those involved in illicit romantic affairs. Although powerful laymen constitute a primary focus, *Rannveigar leizla* also contains a broader perspective on priests and women. As will be seen, this is rather unique; in the other visions discussed below, individuals who do not belong to the male secular elite are barely mentioned, and even the clerical elite are not featured. Still, it is im-

[13] Jonas Wellendorf (2004) argues that the European translations would have been considered more or less contemporary during their transmission into Old Norse society.

[14] The version considered here is from *Guðmundar saga* A (MS AM 399, 4to), dated to the first half of the fourteenth century. Rannveig's vision is found in all four of the bishop's vitae, gaining particular prominence in *Guðmundar saga* D where it was moved to the beginning of the text alongside evidence of his miracles.

portant to consider that while the warnings implicit in Rannveig's journey are undoubtedly valuable to those they directly discuss, in attacking women and clergy this *leizla* is still indirectly confronting the chieftains, as it is they who usually controlled the other groups. For instance, at the time of Rannveig's vision, chieftains had recently been barred from the priesthood, but they maintained power as the employers or friends of priests as the role was frequently filled by their sons or allied farmers. Thus, these secular leaders continued to oppose the bishops' authority over the clergy. As for women such as Rannveig, it appears that they often had little or no say in marital or concubinage arrangements with chieftains, these matters often being decided by the male parties with a vested interest in the agreement.

Rannveig's journey begins when she suddenly falls into an unconscious state. There is an immediate indication that she is physically distressed, as "she would jerk her limbs violently from time to time, as if she were in great agony."[15] Meanwhile, her soul is brutally dragged across lava fields overgrown with briars, past various undescribed scenes of torture. It is significant that the pain she endures in Hell seems to be translated into her living body, highlighting suffering as the sensory focus from the vision's outset. Finally, she reaches the edge of a fiery pit:

> …she saw in front of her something in the nature of a huge cauldron or a deep, wide pit; it was filled with boiling pitch and round it were blazing fires. Inside she saw many men, both those who were living at that time and those who were deceased, and she recognised some of them. There she saw nearly all the lay chieftains who had misused their authority.[16]

The prison-like pit traps those within, and the painful purpose of the boiling pitch and blazing fires seem fairly self-explanatory. Together, these elements create an atmosphere of continuous suffering, and, as Rannveig has not yet been subjected to them, the threat of pain to come. The laymen found here are specifically described as *høfðingia olérða*, uneducated chieftains, meaning those who had not been trained as priests. This detail may be meant to emphasise the distinction created by the official prohibition against the ordainment of chieftains in 1190. But more importantly, there is a sense of separation between them and the religious men associated with Ran-

[15] *hon kiptiz við hart. stundum. sem henne yrðe mioc sart.* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 93; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 32).

[16] *hon sa firi ser þui likast sem uére ketill mikill e(ða) pyttr diupr ok uiðr. ok ibik uellanda. en um huerfis elldr brennande. Þar sa hon marga menn béðe lifendr ok dauða. ok hon kende suma þar. Hon sa þar /nér\ alla høfðingia olérða. þa er illa foro með þui uallde er þeir høfðo*. (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 93–94; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 33).

nveig, thus broadening the group of sinners to more deliberately include priests, chieftains, and perhaps chieftain-priests, since those who were already ordained maintained their positions and others continued to take on lesser clerical roles, even after the archbishop's ban. Further, it is important that some of these men are still alive as their presence demonstrates that their sins represent ongoing problems, increasing the urgency of this warning and the fear of punishment. This is also the point where Rannveig's Hell begins to be fleshed out, the previous torments and sinners going unnamed. Already it appears that the punishment of chieftains is being prioritised, however, they are not destined to suffer alone:

> Then the demons addressed her, saying: 'Down into this pit you shall be cast, for such are your deserts. You have shared in the same sin as those who are down there, namely loathsome lechery, which you committed when you lay with two priests and so defiled their office. To this you have added vanity and avarice. Now here you shall remain, since you would never abandon our service, and in many ways we shall torment you.' After this they dragged her to the edge of the pit, and it was boiling so fiercely that her legs were splashed, and every part of her body that was not covered by her clothes was burnt when she recovered consciousness.[17]

Once again, there is a connection between the torture Rannveig experiences in Hell and the suffering of her physical body on earth. Not only do her burns act as testimony to the veracity of her experience, they are an unmistakable reminder to herself and others that Hell is very real and very painful. Rannveig will be joining a group of male sufferers, and they are said to share three very chieftain-oriented sins: *ofmetnaðr* (pride, arrogance), *fégirni* (covetousness, avarice), and *hórdómr* (fornication, adultery). The accusation of *hórdómr* is justified by Rannveig's sexual relationships; she has been the mistress of two priests, and is therefore guilty of trespassing against moral restrictions which the Church was seeking to impose in Iceland.[18] The devils'

[17] *Þa toko fiandrnir til orða. uið hana. ok méltu. Her skaltu fara iofan. þui ‹at þat› er leiðiligr hordomr. er þu hefir framit til þessa hefir þu þer uerket. þui at þess ins sama ertu hluttakare. sem þeir er her ero iniðre. er þu hafir lagz undir .ij. presta. ok saurgat sva þeira þionosto. ok þar með ofmetnaðr ok fegirne. Nu skaltu her uera er þu uilldir alldri af lata at þiona oss. Nu skulo vér þic marga uega kuelea. Siþan draga þeir hana fram at pyttenum. eɴ þar var sua ogurlig uella. at støcc or upp a fétr henne ok allt þar er hon var ber. þa var hon brunniɴ er hon racnaðe uið.* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 94; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 33).

[18] Although the specific mention of two priests, rather than just one, is not dealt with in detail, Rannveig's transgressions are perhaps more intentional, and therefore more serious,

allegation comes in addition to her character's introduction at the beginning of the story, in which she is defined by her relationships: "A woman called Rannveig fell into a trance; she was the mistress of a priest called Audun and had lived with another priest before that."[19] However, she is an otherwise pious woman, and the sins of pride and avarice are not as clearly explained. *Ofmetnaðr* may refer to her later punishment for taking too much pride in her appearance, and *fégirni* may also be meant to relate to the fine clothing she is said to wear, nevertheless, it could also be argued that these crimes might be pinned much more easily upon the *høfðingia olérða* in the pit below. The Church's critique of the chieftain's attachment to wealth and property will be taken up in the following discussion of *Sólarljóð*, but it is still worthwhile to draw attention to the suggestive use of vocabulary here, as it subtly broadens the range of concerns being raised and strengthens the focus on a chieftain audience.

Returning once more to Rannveig's primary fault, her sexual sin, we find a strong relationship between the nature of her crime and contemporary Church anxieties. At this time, the Church was, rather unsuccessfully, attempting to impose new standards for sexual conduct, including clerical celibacy. It was common for priests to be married or to enter into *fylgilag* (companionship), a sort of common-law arrangement.[20] The term *fylgikonur* (concubine, companion) came to be used primarily for the mistresses of priests, some of whom believed they had found a loophole in Church doctrine by taking a concubine rather than a wife. It seems that this may have been the nature of Rannveig and Auðun's relationship as she is said to *fylgja* (follow after) him. Although it seems that people were aware of the Church's beliefs regarding celibacy, *Grágás* (the Icelandic law collection) mentioning bishops' heirs and the inclusion of priests in instructions concerning betrothal and marriage has been taken as proof that they were not legally prohibited from marrying (Jochens 1980: 379). Indeed, ecclesiastical celibacy was not enforced by law until 1275. Jenny Jochens was unable to find evidence of a single celibate Icelandic priest in this period, in fact, there is every indication that they married regularly, or at least had concubines, and produced many children. However, she does concede that the issue is complicated by the number of important chieftains who became acolytes, deacons, priests, and monks while maintaining their secular roles and relationships (Jochens 1980: 383). Even prominent religious leaders failed to conform. Despite their attempts to improve the

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for having occurred on two separate occasions.

[19] *Hon het Rannueig. Hon fylgðe preste þeim er Auðun het. Hon hafðe fylgt øðrum preste aðr.* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 92, transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 32).

[20] *Fylgilag* resembled official marriage in the couple's responsibilities to each other and in that it required a divorce to be dissolved (Auður Magnúsdóttir 2008: 214).

sexual habits of others, they did not always follow their own advice; for instance, Bishop Jón Ögmundarson was married twice despite suggestions of his being influenced by the monastic order of Cluny which had clear views on ecclesiastic celibacy (Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 155), and his saga does not conceal that Bishop Laurentius had a son outside of marriage (Nedkvitne 2009: 50). Further, of the thirteen native bishops in Iceland between 1156 and 1237, seven are known to have been married (Jochens 1980: 382). Only two local bishops were particularly concerned with celibacy – Þorlákr Þórhallsson and Guðmundr Arason. Although Guðmundr did not campaign for chastity and celibacy quite as fiercely as the sainted Þorlákr, he did lead by example; as mentioned, unlike his contemporaries, Guðmundr was not married (Jochens 1980: 383). It is clear that the vision is addressing the Church's worries regarding celibacy, but some of its underlying consequences are not as obvious. Encouraging celibacy also worked to separate Iceland's priests and bishops from secular society, and to make them more dependent upon and loyal to the Church. Further, in promoting priestly obedience, the Church is challenging the chieftains, who, as the priests' employers, often had more direct control over this group.

Rannveig's history raises the matter of sexual depravity more generally. It has been argued that the lack of clauses referring to sexual behaviour such as adultery or incest in the Code of Church Law included in *Grágás* is a sign that the Church had little authority in this area when the ecclesiastical law was recorded around 1123 (Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 161–162), but this is not to say that they did not take issue with it. In Christian law, *einfaldr hórdómr* refers to fornication (between a married and an unmarried person), and *tvífaldr hórdómr* to adultery (between two married people) (Keyser & Munch 1848: 371). The use of the term *hórdómr* here is interesting as it points directly to the sexual iniquity of the chieftains – failing to conform to the norms of Christian marriage. It also represents an idea of punishment in this world and the next, with adultery having both legal and spiritual consequences. Rannveig's promiscuity, and its connected pain experience, can be linked to problems of chastity, which seem to have been considerably more offensive to the Church than a disregard for celibacy.

Most serious of all was the practice of concubinage among powerful, married men. As mentioned, Bishop Þorlákr was the first to seriously address this, and he faced opposition in his attempts to convince chieftains to give up their mistresses. Orri Vésteinsson suggests that Þorlákr's directive to regulate marital relationships may have been generally accepted, only strongly resisted by the elite who were used to living by different norms than ordinary people (2000: 172). That he often clashed with powerful men is evidenced in his saga:

> He was not wholly in agreement with some men, even chieftains, because he agreed only with what was fitting. It seemed to him that it was an even greater downfall of God's Church if noble men erred greatly. He also deemed it no more excusable that they, who had previously had great credit from God both in wealth and in honour, should not restrain themselves from unlawful things.[21]

It seems reasonable to assume that chieftains were the worst offenders as their social position and resources would have created opportunities, and motivations, unavailable to the average person. However, there is legal evidence that suggests illegitimate sexual intercourse was a bigger problem. Extensive material in *Grágás* addresses crimes ranging from kissing to impregnating women, and punishments from fines to outlawry, with some indication that adultery was considered to be more serious than fornication. Nonetheless, a related critique Þorlákr received from the Norwegian archbishop, who pointed out the sexual failings of specific chieftains, does show that it was the behaviour of the socially elite which was most urgently in need of reform due to the influence they had on others – seeming to confirm that sexual sinning was not limited to this group, but that it was most detrimental when found there. Archbishop Eysteinn worried that as long as the chieftains failed to respect the bond of marriage, the Icelanders would never change their ways, as nothing better could be expected from the common people. Despite his best efforts, Þorlákr had very limited success in changing Icelandic culture; even his own sister, Ragnheiðr Þórhallsdóttir lived for many years as a concubine to Jón Loftsson.[22] Although he was an ordained

[21] *Þorlákr byskup rauf þau ráð ǫll á sínum dǫgum sem hann vissi at ólǫgum ráðin vera, hvárt sem hlut áttu í meiri vissi at ólǫgum ráðin vera, hvárt sem hlut áttu í meiri menn eða minni. Eigi varð hann við suma menn né hǫfðingja með ǫllu samhuga, því at hann samþykkði þat eitt við þá er vel samði. Þótti honum þat miklu meira niðrfall Guðs kristni ef gǫfgum mǫnnum gáfusk stórir hlutir yfir. Virði hann ok við þá eigi meiri várkunn at hepta sik eigi at óleyfðum hlutum er áðr hǫfðu bæði mikit lán af Guði í auðœfum ok mannvirðingum."* (ÍF XVI 2002, 75 transl. Ármann Jakobsson & D. Clark 2013: 16–17) The translaters also suggest that Jón Loftsson may have been a specific target of this message, but that it was better to write more generally in the saga and remain applicable to a broader audience.

[22] "In one of his letters Archbishop Eysteinn addressed himself to five of the most prominent chieftains in south and east Iceland at the beginning of Bishop Thórlakr's episcopy and stated that in their intimate affairs they 'conducted themselves like the beasts of the barnyard'. This message was directed chiefly towards Jón Loftsson of Oddi and Gizurr Hallsson of Haukadalur who, despite their marriages, fathered children on concubines. Jón Loftsson, for example, kept Ragnheiđr, Bishop Thórlak's sister, who bore him two sons, Bishop Páll and Ormr Breiðbælingr. Bishop Thórlakr tried to separate them, but Jón was completely unyielding to his persuasions." (Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 187) Bishop Þorlákr also introduced a penitential for the clergy of his diocese. This guide covers a variety of subjects but there is an emphasis on sexual transgressions (Haki Antonsson 2018: 24).

deacon, Jón was married and had two legitimate children with his wife, Halldóra, thus technically breaking the laws of celibacy. But far worse, he had another two children with Ragnheiðr, and three more with various other women. In his time, Jón was the most powerful chieftain in Iceland, and it was not difficult for him to defy the Church. Jón's only legitimate son, Sæmundr, carried on his father's legacy, with even less respect for Church law – he had eleven children with four different women, including one who was related to him in the third degree.[23] It seems that concubinage was also an important part of Icelandic honour culture. Having many women and the capacity to care for them was a way for men to display their power and masculinity (Auður Magnúsdóttir 2001: 90–91). A look at *Sturlunga saga* will quickly show that these men and their mistresses are just two examples of many similar situations.

The system of concubinage was firmly integrated into Icelandic culture and society. It was useful for the priests, such as Rannveig's Auðun, as these women contributed to their households and helped to create a supportive family structure. These relationships could also result in children who were able to learn from their father, and eventually take up his profession. In a country which was severely lacking in priests this could be seen as advantageous. Among the chieftains, the practice was much more political, and it came to play a critical role in the creation and maintenance of their powerbases. Men took mistresses in order to build connections with them and their families that could outlive the romantic relationships themselves, possibly for generations to come. Concubines were usually of lower, although still significant, status than the chieftains. This alliance was valuable to both parties as the woman's family would be connected to the social elite, and the chieftain gained a new ally who was likely to be more loyal than one of his peers. One example is found in the life of Sturla Sighvatsson. His marriage to Solveig Sæmundardóttir tied Sturla to the powerful Sæmundr Jónsson of Oddi, but he did not receive much political support from his wife's brothers as they were too concerned with their own troubles. Sturla also had a concubine, Vigdís, whose father, Gísl Bergsson, was a prominent farmer. Through this relationship Sturla profited not only from Gísl's support, but also that of his social network, which included the leading famers in Miðfjörðr, as well as that of Gísl's own sons (at least two of which were at the Battle of Örlygsstaðir, where Sturla and Sighvatr were killed), his nephew, and the husband of his niece. As explored by Auður Magnúsdottir, this case demonstrates the value of the vertical nature of concubinage. Gísl and his family did not have the resources to act independently of Sturla, and were therefore much more reliant on him than his official in-laws were (2001: 44–45). Still, they were powerful enough to provide support. Further, she ar-

[23] This constitutes an incestuous relationship, something which the Church frowned upon.

gues that one reason this practice continued despite the Church's protests was that the bonds created by extramarital relationships were vital in the political strife of 1180–1264, and especially during the escalating conflict of the final forty years before the end of the Free State (Auður Magnúsdóttir 2001: 213, 216).

Just as the Church needed to use all its resources in its battle against the chieftains, the chieftains had to exploit every opportunity in their struggles against one another. Alongside friendship and fosterage, concubinage provided an opportunity to expand one's social network, the most important element of a chieftain's powerbase. Further, beyond these immediate advantages, it was beneficial for chieftains to have a number of children, both to position or marry off in ways that created more connections and support, and to provide several male heirs to choose from, allowing them to select the most promising candidate.[24] Political success depended strongly upon the individual, and uncertain inheritance or poor leaders could cost a family its position. In criticizing the practice of concubinage, the Church was threatening chieftains at a local level by limiting their prospects for creating support networks and friendships with wealthy householders. It also demonstrates the Church's desire and ability to assault the chieftains on many fronts. Taking aim at concubinage may appear to be a purely moral issue, but there are many other social and political factors at play.

As will be seen in the following discussion on *Sólarljóð*, which attacks the chieftains' economic foundation through its critique of their competition for property, *Rannveigar leizla* confronts not only the chieftains' sexual immorality, but the aspects of their powerbase to which their adulterous relationships were essential. If the chieftains had submitted to the demands of the Church, what would have become of them and their families? It is difficult to imagine how they would have been able to maintain their positions without exploiting every available resource, including the opportunities created by concubinage. None of the elements of the chieftains' bases could operate alone. For instance, through his concubine, Guðrún Hreinsdóttir, Snorre Sturluson fostered a relationship with her stepfather, Þórðr Böðvarsson, from whom Snorre received half of the Lundamanna chieftaincy in 1202. Through his connection to Guðrun's mother, Snælaug Högnadóttir, Snorre gained possession of Stafaholt, probably as part of the same agreement which made Guðrun his mistress (Auður Magnúsdóttir 2001: 68). This is a good example of how friendship, property, and concubinage interacted and depended upon one another – in condemning any one aspect of this system, the Church was effectively censuring all of them, or, at the very least, threatening their ability to function. The chieftains were interested and invested

[24] For example, Snorre Sturluson married his three daughters, only one of which was legitimate, into some of the most powerful families in Iceland, significantly increasing his influence thereby.

in the Church as long as it benefitted them, but were far less eager to support it when it undermined their very existence (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2019).

Now, if male chieftains are meant to take note of the punishments described in this *leizla*, why is the protagonist a woman? One reason may be that Rannveig's vision is intended to glorify Guðmundr. The decision to include the account of a female visionary may have been influenced by the story of another woman's vision, said to have occurred in 1200, which promoted the sanctity of Bishop Jón Ögmundsson. In keeping with the intentions of this article, we can also focus on the didactic qualities of this choice. Her gender may be an important part of this role, as Carolyne Larrington argues that accounts of female visionaries are often a vehicle for social comment (1995: 241). Women could also have numerous sexual partners during their lives, but this was most often in the form of consecutive relationships. For instance, the abovementioned Ragnheiðr Þórhallsdóttir had children before she became Jón Loftsson's mistress, and went on to marry another man after he sent her away (of his own volition, not at Bishop Þorlákr's behest). Although this behaviour may be being critiqued by the detail that Rannveig's current relationship is, at least, her second, the real problem is that it is with a priest. Auður Magnúsdottir argues that guilt was shifted from priests to their women during the thirteenth century, accompanied by a belief that women's sexuality posed a threat to male celibacy (2001: 149). Jenny Jochens' work on concubines and wives supports Auður's theory. She maintains that it was typical for women to be blamed in matters of sexual misconduct at this time, and suggests that, having made so little progress with men, the Icelandic Church may have tried to convince women to reform instead.[25] It is certainly reasonable to think that a new tact was being taken in addressing female sinners due to a lack of success; despite the Church's efforts, it is clear that concubinage among lay and ecclesial leaders continued well into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Even Jón Arason (1484–1550), the last Catholic bishop in Iceland, had six children with his *fylgikona* (Jochens 1995: 31). Jochens uses the example of *Rannveigar leizla* to demonstrate that women were assigned sole responsibility in such cases. This may have been true for relationships with the clergy, however, the lack of other women in the vision and the clear punishment of men means that this strict statement does not necessarily apply to the chieftains Rannveig is joining. Nonetheless, that she is being held responsible for her lovers' transgressions is stressed by the connections between her sins and female vanity in her efforts to attract male attention. This is emphasised further in an episode where the devils attack her with a red-hot whip, beating and burning her

[25] Jochens 1995: 78. Women also became the subject of harsher legal punishments for infidelity, suffering heavier fines, and even risking their inheritance (Jochens 1995: 42).

shoulders, back, and loins. Afterwards, it is explained how the punishment is related to her sins:

> Now you have been shown what you and many others merit, for the present way of life of many men is not as it should be. It is your duty now to tell each one what you have seen of his fate. The reason why your legs were burnt was that you have worn hose of costly material and black shoes, decking yourself out to please men. Your hands were burnt because you stitched up sleeves for yourself and others on Feast Days, and your back and shoulders because you arrayed yourself in fine cloth and linen, adorning yourself for men in your vanity and moral weakness.[26]

Rannveig is forced to suffer for her vanity and moral weakness, and her pain and distress may have given other women pause for thought. If women really were to blame for male misbehaviour, then it was beneficial for the Church to frighten them away from extra-marital relationships. This scene of torture is the most detailed section of the text, and it is the only punishment which is fully explained, however, this is not to say that the spiritual fate of women was being prioritised. The souls of her priestly lovers are presumably in danger as well, and it could be that this message is relevant to the clergy – even simply as a warning to beware of women. It could also be extended to chieftains who take concubines; it is, after all, only men in the pit intended for those who have shared Rannveig's sins. This is an important detail, and it should be stressed that no other women are represented in this Hell. Rannveig sees what she and many others deserve, specifically many men who do not live as they should. Although this explanation does not necessarily exclude the possibility of other women, their absence elsewhere does not strongly imply their inclusion. It is also important to recognise that in relationships with concubines it was the male party who had the most control. As discussed, elite men usually chose women of lower social standing, and it was within their power to bring these women into their homes and to dismiss them. In a

[26] *Nu er þer syndr uerþleikr þinn ok margra annaʀa at eigi matte sua buit lyða um margra manna rað. En þess skaltu skylld at segia þat hverium manni. sem þu hefir sét um hans mal. Nu braɴtu þui afotum at þu hafðir skruðsocka ok suarta skúa. ok skreyttiz sua uið kørlum. eɴ þui a hondum at þu hefir saumat at høndum þer ok oðrum a hatiþum. enn þui a bake ok herðum at þu hefir borit a þic skruð ok lerept. ok skreytz við kørlum af metnaðe ok ostyrct* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 95–96, transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 34) Auður Magnúsdóttir (2001: 149) also speculates that the positioning of her injuries is meant to prevent her from posing sexual danger: "Här skulle en annan symbolik kunna tillföras, nämligen den som rör den fysiska intimiteten, för med brännskador på rygg och höfter kunde kvinnan inte ligga på rygg och hennes roll som erotisk, farlig förförerska är därmed förbi."

way, this is hinted at here, in that the sins which lead to Rannveig's torture can all be connected to the endangerment of a male audience; she is guilty of tempting men but not openly propositioning them or forcing them into relationships.

The Church's stance on sexual morality is undoubtedly the primary focus of this *leizla*, but it also explores the way that leaders' integrity affected their followers. Besides the sin of *hórdómr*, the men found in the bubbling pit are guilty of misusing their authority. Elite men were responsible for protecting their families, households, and communities. Not only are depraved leaders themselves damned, they also pose a spiritual danger to those who follow them, or who follow their example. A chieftain's choice to oppose the Church and its teachings would unavoidably impact on the lives of his supporters. For instance, those who did not comply with the Church's demands could deprive their householders of attending a consecrated church, of receiving visits from bishops, or even put them at risk of having their entire district excommunicated.[27]

This idea of interconnectedness and obligation amongst the population is taken one step further to include the island in its entirety. Rannveig is rescued from Hell by a trio of saints, Óláfr, Magnús, and Hallvarðr, and whisked away to Heaven:

> "And now you will be permitted to see the rewards of the righteous men of your country, both the living and the deceased, for in no other country is there a greater proportion of holy men than in Iceland; it is their prayers and ours which uphold the land, for otherwise it would perish."[28]

[27] A bishop was able to excommunicate a district, and presumably this drastic step would have been taken to punish or intimidate a prominent figure rather than an ordinary person. Technically, this excommunication had to be enforced by the pope, something which is not known to have occurred. Nonetheless, in 1245 it is recorded that the archbishop imposed this kind of ban on northern Iceland for unknown reasons (Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 164). Similar, better documented, lengths were gone to in Europe. Beyond the implied spiritual danger of following a leader banned from the Catholic Church, these punishments could also extend to the population in more tangible ways, for instance when Pope Innocent III placed an interdict on all of England in 1208 to chastise King John for opposing his appointment of archbishop. The actions of a leader had serious consequences for the everyday lives, and even the souls, of their subjects. That this type of redress was even an option highlights the communal nature of religion as well as the responsibilities of the elite.

[28] *ok skaltu na at sea uerðleik heilagra manna. er her ero a yðro landi béðe lifendr ok andaðir. þui at eigi ero a øðrom løndum at iafn muclum maɴ fiolða. fleire heil(agir) menn enn aIslandi. ok hallda bénir þeira ok uarar landino upp. eɴ ella munde firi faraz landit ‹.›* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 96; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 34).

As in Hell, Rannveig is presented with a vision which reveals the fate of living and dead individuals, but this time it is to promote their saintliness. We learn that the prayers of saints Óláfr, Magnús, and Hallvarðr sustain Norway and the Orkneys, while those of Guðmundr assist Iceland. Although the protection these men offer is reliant on their holiness, it is not just the souls of their countrymen which are preserved, but the country – the society – itself. Even this detail may be taken as a threat referring to the potential earthly consequence of sin – the perishing of the Icelandic people. Supporting this terrifying notion, Rannveig also learns that these religious men are sorely tried by the waywardness of their congregations: "Likewise, those bishops now living are holy men, on account of the trials they undergo and their patience with the disobedience of their flock, for the holier is each man, the greater his endurance in God's name."[29] Once again, the reference to living people brings an immediacy and localisation to the problem at hand, demonstrating that the Church's struggles are ongoing and that they will affect Rannveig's fellow Icelanders. Although the living bishops suffer this insubordination with patience, its existence acts as a reminder that even though Iceland apparently abounds with holy men, there are still many who need to reform, and that their presence poses a threat to the community. Moreover, the dependence of all Icelanders on this devout group makes the wickedness of the disobedient even more condemnable, as through their evil actions they both offend those who protect them and put others at risk. Finally, it is significant that the saints who tell Rannveig all this, the same ones who intercede for her, are all native to the North, and thus represent an even broader network of social assistance, accountability, and potential friendship. They have been sent to aid Rannveig on behalf of Mary and Peter the Apostle, who they then introduce her to, demonstrating that these local men act as a connecting point between the Icelandic people and the most prominent saints in Heaven. This relationship is brought another step closer to Earth, in that the named residents of Heaven are Iceland's bishops, past and present:

> Here do your bishops dwell, for they have all been saintly men, yet the most saintly are Bishop Jon and Bishop Thorlak the Younger, and next to them Bishop Bjorn, Bishop Isleif and Bishop Thorlak the Elder.... The house you see over there, which is fair and lofty and from which no sound comes, for there silence reigns, that is the abode of Bjorn, the hermit of Thingeyrar. Beside it stands an-

[29] *Sva ero ok þessir helgir menn er nu lifa af skapraunum simun ok þolinméðe. ok ohlyðne lyðs(ins) uið sic. þui at þui helgare er hverr maðr er hann hefir meire þolinméðe. firi guðs nafne.* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 98; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 34).

> other dwelling, lofty and magnificent, from which-you can hear fair song and loud and glorious music, and that is the abode of Gudmund, the son of Ari…[30]

This passage serves to emphasise the bishops' power and the respect they, and thereby the Icelandic Church, deserve, as well as to include them within the social network of Heaven.[31] As will be discussed in the sections on *Sólarljóð* and *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* below, the social relationships of chieftains are utilised as both a warning and an invitation. The friendship between the bishops, the saints, and thus God, is a relationship that the chieftains are sure to recognise and respect – it is valuable to befriend the friends of God (the bishops) and perhaps unwise to cross them. Cooperation with Church leaders may then represent new possibilities for expanding one's network, both in this world and the next, an attractive prospect for chieftains caught up in the period's power game. However, in this depiction of Heaven and its inhabitants, the chieftains are conspicuously absent. By excluding the secular elite from the landscape of Heaven, they are not only deprived of an opportunity to increase their influence through a connection with God, the value of their earthly relationships is also called into question. One advantage of friendship was that it also created connections with a friend's friends. If Rannveig's vision is to be believed, friendship with the bishops would grant access to a more desirable network than the chieftains could offer. Although it was possible for men to maintain relationships with conflicting parties, there were times when choices of loyalty needed to be made. As expressed in the wisdom poem *Hávamál*: "Be a friend to your friend and also to his friend, but never be a friend to the enemy of your friend."[32] At this time, friendship was based on practicality, not sentimentality, and the chieftains risked losing their connections if their rival the Church had more to give.

[30] *Nu ser þu her staðe þa er eigu helgir menn. béðe lifendr ok dauðir. en her ero hus eigi øll iafn føgr. þui at þeir ero helgir menn allir ok ero þo helgazstir af þeim Jon byskup ok Thorl(akr) byskup enn yngri. en þa nést Biørn byskup ok Isleifr byskup ok Thorl(akr) byskup enn ellre…En hus þat er þu matt sea fagrt ok hátt. ok heyrir ecke þangat. þui at þar er hliott. þat a Biørn einseto maðr at Þingeyrom. En annat hus þar | hea hat ok gøfuglict. þangat mantu heyru søng fagran ok hlioð mikit. ok dyrðlict. Þat á G(uðmundr) prestr A(ra) s(on).* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 97–98; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 35).

[31] Once again, we are reminded of the connection between this *leizla* and the veneration of Þorlákr Þórhallsson, here through support of other local saints. Naturally, this practice would have lent the bishops and their demands legitimacy, but Jón Jóhannesson (1974: 190–192) also points out the economic benefits of creating an industry of gifts and donations within the country itself, and from other northern nations.

[32] Verse 43: *Vin sínum skal maðr vinr vera, þeim ok þess vin, en óvinar síns skyli engi maðr vinar vinr vera*. (Faulkes 1986: 47).

The theme of responsibility is also tied to Rannveig herself in her role as messenger. Her saintly saviours have told her: “Now you have been shown what you and many others merit, for the present way of life of many men is not as it should be. It is your duty now to tell each one what you have seen of his fate.”[33] Building upon the many references to the reward or punishment of living men, the reader is reminded once more than many individuals need to change, and, more hopefully, that, like Rannveig, they have the opportunity to do so. As well, Rannveig is charged with delivering this message to sinful men, and the lack of women is, again, noteworthy and revealing. It seems that Rannveig takes her social duty seriously, but that her message is received with varying degrees of success: “Many men to whom she told hidden matters in their way of life benefited greatly by her vision, but others were resentful because they were despised for their faults and yet were unwilling to renounce them by making atonement for their sins.”[34] The fate of these unwilling men is not elaborated upon, but it seems safe to assume that their imagined place in Hell is soon to become a reality.

It is also in the conveyance of her message that the reader gains some insight into Rannveig’s emotional condition. When she first awakes, she expresses a desire to fulfil her duty of relaying the events of Hell to those they concern, although it appears to be a sacrifice: “She said she would relate to everyone those things which concerned them in her vision, unpleasant though the task might.”[35] Rannveig sees her vision as a kind of burden, and simply discussing it weighs heavily on her; talking about her experience is *þungr* (heavy, oppressive), a term with connotations of suffering or feeling unwell, as well as the more directly somatic suggestion of a mental and physical weight.[36] Her story is concluded with a return to the effect that Rannveig’s experience and the associated responsibility has on her: “Rannveig saw and heard many remarkable things there, but when she regained consciousness she was so much afraid that she could hardly speak of them, and likewise ever afterwards she used to tremble if

[33] *Nu er þer syndr uerþleikr þinn ok margra annaʀa at eigi matte sua buit lyða um margra manna rað. Eɴ þess skaltu skylld at segia þat hverium manni*. (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 95–96; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 34).

[34] *Eɴ af uitron þesse toko margir menn. micla bot. er leyndir lutir voro sagðir ifare þeira sealfra. Enn þo lagðo sumir menn øfund a þat er firi litnir voro. fire sina andmarka. eɴ nento þo eigi við at skileazt ‹eða yfir› at béta sina misverka.* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 98–99; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 35).

[35] *ok þat at segia hverium þeira sem til kom. þott þungt þétte.”* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 93; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 33).

[36] Thanks to Sif Ríkharðsdóttir for informing me of the somatic implications.

she had to make any mention of them."[37] Although she carries out her task, her time in Hell seems to have damaged her both physically and emotionally. Her body is burned, but her reactions in life all focus on the inspiration of emotional torment which finds physical expression in her difficulty speaking and bodily shaking in fear. While in Hell, Rannveig is said to be "…more terrified than can be described…".[38] Naturally, her sheer horror contributes to the overall sense of distress in this vision, but it is her continued, and apparently unending, signalling of fright after she returns to life which drives this message home and makes it palpable to others.

This insight into Rannveig's emotions is an important part of her *leizla*, but, as is typical of Old Norse texts, the emotional elements are not much embellished. Nevertheless, the details that can be found draw a certain power from this scarcity, in that their inclusion can feel much more deliberate and meaningful. It is this emotional engagement, alongside other themes of social responsibility, and even female sexuality, which will be developed further in the following examination of the visionary poem *Sólarljóð*. Although their forms are very different, one being a true *leizla* and the other a type of advice-giving poem which takes the vision genre as its inspiration, the contents of these texts share other similarities. Like *Rannveigar leizla*, *Sólarljóð* manages to address a chieftainly sin, this time greed and the pursuit of property, and a fundamental element of secular power in the same stroke.

Sólarljóð: Property, power, and pain

The age of *Sólarljóð*, or *The Song of the Sun*, is uncertain as it only survives in paper copies from the seventeenth century onwards, however, it is generally assumed to date to the second half of the thirteenth century.[39] The text is presented as a message from a dead man, presumably to his son, and combines the characteristics of wisdom poetry, such as the traditional Eddic metre (*ljóðaháttr*), with themes found in Christian visions of the afterlife, and, curiously, elements of pre-Christian mythology. *Sólarljóð* is notable for its somewhat unusual structure which combines two genres. The first section presents moralising tales in a manner which has frequently been compared to *Hávamál*, before the poem shifts in style, expanding its scope to include the personal thoughts and sensations of the visionary narrator.[40] The reader is first presented with the deaths and afterlife experiences of various men, before following

[37] *Marge lute sa hon þar merkilega ok heyrðe. En er hon racnaðe við. þa var hon orðin sua rédd at hon matta uarla s(egia). ok ‹var› sua auallt siþan at hon skalf iafnan er hon skyllde nockut um réða.* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 98; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 35).

[38] *Þa var un hréddare enn fra mege s(egia).* (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 95; transl. Turville-Petre & Olszewska 1942: 33).

[39] For an overview of various opinions on this date see Larrington & Robinson 2007.

the poet on his own journey into death, through Hell, and into Heaven. The poem's tone is one of fear, sadness, and acceptance, but there is also a glimmer of hope that those who heed its warning will be spared the tortures of Hell. Here, the sin of murder, and the way it challenges communal norms and trusting relationships, is treated extensively. As well, elite readers are forced to question their misplaced aspiration for the fleeting rewards of worldly power and riches, instead considering the ways that their pursuit could create social conflict. As in other visions, this journey is presented as a lesson to be shared, first by the poet himself, who is relaying the experience to his heir (*arfi*), and then passed on more broadly as a responsibility to recite this poem to others in order to provide valuable instruction.[41]

Sólarljóð begins with the murder of a fearsome robber. This rather detailed story addresses the themes of aggression and social discord. Interestingly, it presents the unique idea that a murderer takes on the sins of their victim. In this case, the dead man, despite being a wicked thief, is instantly ferried to Paradise when he is killed:

> He asked God of the heavens to help him when he awoke slain, and the one [the guest] who had betrayed him without cause took on his sins./Holy angels came down from the heavens above, and gathered his soul to themselves; it will live in a pure existence forever with almighty God.[42]

This episode is the first of several which act as warnings, each representing a crime with a strong emphasis on social wrongdoing; many of the sins of *Sólarljóð* refer to

[40] For further information on its possible literary influences, as well as ideas on how the various elements in *Sólarljóð* fit together, see Amory 1990; Larrington 2002; Haki Antonsson 2018: 36–43; Schorn 2011.

[41] Stanza 81: "This poem which I have taught you, you must recite before living people, 'Sólarljóð' which will appear in many ways to be least untruthful [lit. lying]." (*Kvæði þetta, er þér kent hefi, skaltu fyr kvikum kveða, Sólarljóð, er sýnaz munu minst at mörgu login*.) (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 356). The importance of learning by example is also suggested in stanza 19: "Never trust your enemies, though they speak fair words to you; promise good things; it is good to have another's punishment as a warning." (*Óvinum þínum trú þú aldrigi, þótt fagrt mæli fyr þér; góðu þú heit; gótt er annars víti hafa at varnaði.*) (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 308).

[42] Stanzas 6-7: *Himna guð/bað hann hjálpa sér,/þá er hann/veginn vaknaði,/en sá gat/við syndum taka,/er hann hafði saklausan svikit. Helgir englar/kómu ór himnum ofan/ok tóku sál hans til sín;/í hreinu lífi/hon skal lifa/æ með almátkum guði.* (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 299–300). A similar idea is repeated in stanza 74: "I saw tall wagons journeying along the heavens; they have paths to God; men drive them who are murdered for no cause [lit. causes] at all." (*Hávar reiðir sá ek með himnum fara; þær eigu götur til guðs; menn þeim stýra, er myrðir eru alls fyrir öngvar sakir*.) (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 348).

a breakdown in important personal ties and trust within community relationships. This first victim is killed by a wandering stranger whom he has given food and shelter. Aside from the obvious offence of murder, there is also a deplorable breach of trust between guest and host. That a fierce killer is himself slain reminds us that a man's fate can change in the blink of an eye, and this apparently groundless murder creates a sense of unease which is carried through the text. There is also an emphasis on themes of wealth and death, indicated already in the poem's first line, describing the robber: "The fierce man stole property and life from the offspring of men". This focus is even clearer in the Old Norse which literally starts with *fé* (property) and *fjörvi* (life): *Fé ok fjörvi rænti fyrða kind sá inn grimmi greppr*.[43] As will be seen, the sins of greed and violence are returned to again and again alongside the poet's own increasingly painful personal experiences, as well as descriptions of the suffering of others.

Next, we read of two close companions who kill one another in a duel, both committing murder and breaking the powerful bond of male friendship, the cultural importance of which will be discussed in detail in the section on *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* below: "Sváfaðr and Skartheðinn were on good terms; neither could be without the other, until they went mad over a single woman; she was destined to bring disgrace to them."[44] Returning briefly to the themes of *Rannveigar leizla*, this story includes a warning against the love of pernicious women. Here, the male perspective is elaborated upon as their lovesickness is itself a source of sadness and suffering, described with the same vocabulary as the tortures of Hell: "The power of desire has brought many a man to grief; torment often stems from women…"[45] This detail builds upon the idea that women were blamed for tempting men, with strange and harmful consequences. Not only does a woman create a rift between these firm friends, their enjoyment of sport and beautiful days is destroyed by thoughts of her radiant body, and they are unable even to sleep.[46] Their lust is presented as a sin which disrupts both

[43] Stanza 1: "The fierce man stole property and life from the offspring of men; no one might pass alive over that road which he guarded." (*Fé ok fjörvi rænti fyrða kind sá inn grimmi greppr; yfir þá götu, er hann varðaði, mátti enginn kvikr komaz*.) (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 296).

[44] Stanza 11: *Sáttir þeir urðu Sváfaðr ok Skartheðinn; hvárgi mátti annars án vera, fyrr en þeir æddusz fyr einni konu; hon var þeim til lýta lagin*. (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 303).

[45] Stanza 10: *Munaðar ríki hefr margan tregat; opt verðr kvalræði af konum…* (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 302).

[46] Stanzas 12–13: "They paid no heed to anything, neither sport nor the radiant days, because of the shining girl; they could think about no other thing than that radiant body. The dark nights became gloomy for them; they could sleep no sweet [sleep]; but enmity sprang up

social and natural order. The situation is described as *fádæmi* (abnormal or exceptional events), for which the feuding friends are harshly repaid with death.[47] More dangerous women are found throughout the poem. Later, treacherous and dark women (*svipvísar konur, dökku konur*)[48] are introduced by an unnatural event as the wind falls silent and the waters stand still (*vindr þagði*; *vötn stöðvaði*). Two more evil, and possibly trollish, women are seen sitting outside a certain Herðir's doorway, with Herðir being variously interpreted as "the hardener" (of hearts), i.e., the devil, or Lævíss, another name for Lóki.[49] These women are charged with inspiring animosity between men. A Norse goddess is next to appear: "Óðinn's wife, mighty in desire, rows on the ship of the earth; her sails will be late furled, those which hang on the ropes of longing." "*Óðins kván*" refers to Frigg, or possibly Freyja, with both women being associated with Venus in Old Norse and Old English writing. Although it is suggested that the phrase *móðug á munað* (mighty in desire) is the result of mistranscription, there can be no mistaking the negative sexual connotations of these lines.[50] Building upon the representation of Rannveig's guilt, the women of *Sólarljóð* are shown to be

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from that grief between those affectionate friends." (*Hvárskis þeir gáðu fyr þá hvítu mey leiks né ljóssa daga; engan hlut máttu þeir annan muna en þat ljósa lík. Daprar þeim urðu inar dimmu nætr; engan máttu þeir sætan sofa; en af þeim harmi rann heipt saman millum virktavina*.) (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 303–304). For the connection between pain and lack of sleep, see Buntrock 2003.

[47] Stanza 14: Abnormal events are repaid fiercely in most places; they went to duel for the wise lady, and both were killed. (*Fádæmi verða goldin grimliga í flestum stöðum; þeir gengu á hólm fyr it horska víf, ok báðir fengu bana*.) (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 305).

[48] Stanzas 57–58: "The wind fell silent; the waters stood still; then I heard a terrible din; treacherous women were crushing earth into food for their men. Those dark women were sorrowfully dragging gory stones; bloody hearts hung outside their breasts, exhausted by great grief." (*Vindr þagði; vötn stöðvaði; þá heyrða ek grimligan gný; sínum mönnum svipvísar konur moluðu mold til matar. Dreyrga steina þær inar dökku konur drógu daprliga; blóðug hjörtu hengu þeim fyr brjóst utan mædd við miklum trega*.) (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 337–338). There is also a suggestion that these women are meant to be practicing witchcraft and should be connected to the "ogress's blood" (*ýgjar blóði*) that smears the maimed men who tread red-hot paths in the following stanza 59, but this is not entirely clear.

[49] Stanza 76: "Bjúgvör and Listvör sit on an organ stool in Herðir's doorway; iron blood falls from their nostrils; that awakens hatred among men." (*Bjúgvör ok Listvör sitja í Herðis dyrum organs stóli á; járnadreyri fellr ór nösum þeim; sá vekr fjón með firum*.) (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 349–350).

[50] Stanza 77: *Óðins kván rær á jarðar skipi móðug á munað; seglum hennar verðr síð hlaðit, þeim er á þráreipum þruma*. (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 351) Further, Freyja is presented as Freyja portkona 'Freyja the whore' in *Heilagra manna søgur*.

almost supernaturally untrustworthy.[51] However, readers are cautioned to be just as wary of the treachery of their fellow men.

A following episode describes how, Sörli, an innocent man, trustingly accepts compensation from his brother's killer, only to be secretly murdered by the same perpetrator:

> So it turned out for Sörli the well-meaning, when he put the matter in Vígolfr's power; he trusted securely in his brother's killer, but that man engaged in deceit./He offered them a truce with a good intention, and they promised him gold in exchange; they pretended to be reconciled while they drank together, but yet falsehoods emerged.[52]

Again, we are presented with a scene of hospitality and faith, which is marred by deceit. The term *grið* (truce) is often used in prose texts to describe elite conflict and sometimes takes on the positive, and quasi-sacred, connotations of safe conduct, sanctuary, and even sanctity. *Grið* also refers to periods of peace or amnesty guaranteed by the Church or a monarch. Although this was usually a temporary arrangement, in this case the promise of gold suggests that the truce may have been supported by a more permanent legal agreement. However, it quickly becomes clear that it is not to be upheld:

> And then afterwards on the second day, when they had ridden into Rýgjardalr, they maimed with swords the man who was innocent and deprived him of life./They dragged his body along a secret path and dismembered it [putting it] down into a well; they wanted to conceal it, but the holy Lord saw it from heaven./The true God commanded his soul to journey into his joy; but I think that his enemies will be summoned late from torments.[53]

[51] The text also contains a positive reference to women in the dísir of the Lord in stanza 25, as well as the holy virgins of Paradise: Stanza 73: "Holy maidens had washed clean [lit. cleanly] of sin the souls of those men who on many a day mortify themselves." (*Helgar meyjar höfðu hreinliga sál af synðum þvegit manna þeira, er á mörgum degi pína sjálfa sik*. However, neither example is discussed in any detail. (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 311–312, 347–348).

[52] Stanzas 20–21: *Svá honum gafz/Sörla inum góðráða,/þá er hann lagði á vald hans Vígolfs;/tryggliga hann trúði,/en hinn at tálum varð,/sínum bróðurbana. Grið hann þeim seldi/af góðum hug,/en þeir hétu honum gulli í gegn;/sáttir létuz,/meðan saman drukku,/en þó kómu flærðir fram*. (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 309–310).

[53] Stanzas 22–24: *En þá eptir á öðrum degi, er þeir höfðu í Rýgjardal riðit, sverðum þeir meiddu, þann er saklauss var, ok létu hans fjörvi farit./Lík hans þeir drógu á leynigötu ok brytjuðu í brunn niðr; dylja þeir vildu, en dróttinn sá heilagr himni af./Sál hans bað inn sanni guð í sinn fögnuð fara; en sökudólgar/hygg ek síðla myni kallaðir frá kvölum*. (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 310–311).

Once more, murder is the sin which is being examined and the soul of the victim is ferried directly to Heaven while it is presumed that his killers will be tortured in the afterlife. It is also important to remember that although they may have attempted to disguise their evil actions, nothing is hidden from the eyes of God. In concealing the body, these men also break the secular law of *Grágás* which demands that killers confess to their crime, and defines murder as a hidden killing: "It is prescribed that if a man murders a man the penalty is outlawry (full outlawry). And it is murder if a man hides it or conceals the corpse or does not admit it." (Dennis, Foote, & Perkins 1980: 146) As in the condemnation of *hórdómr* in *Rannveigar leizla*, there is a parallel being drawn between spiritual and secular crimes. Further, there is a strong social undertone in this denunciation of those who would flout a truce. If elaborated upon, these examples can be taken as a warning against engaging in violent feuds or taking revenge more generally. A primary aim for the Church was to advance an agenda which supported social stability, something which the violent aspects of honour culture could make difficult. Although not explicitly stated, it may be argued that the poem's lessons on murder would be most pertinent to the elite men whose active competition could lead to slaughter. In attempting to end a conflict and reach a peaceful agreement, Sörli has done what is right. According to *Sólarljóð*, the contrasting route of revenge was not only socially wrong, it was spiritually dangerous; in the end, killing a killer would really only assist them by speeding them on their way to Heaven, and, with the same act, paving the murderer's own path to Hell. There is a clear and specific interest in this most detailed section of the poem on those sins which break both Christian and social or cultural laws, highlighting the Church's goal of promoting peacefulness and humility among Iceland's chieftains. Episodes such as this could also have led to a reorganisation of priorities – what is to be feared more, defeat or dishonour in an earthly conflict or an eternity of spiritual punishment?

These introductory tales are followed by an emotional sequence in which the poet is unwillingly drawn into the afterlife, although he remains "very eager to live."[54] It is here that pain becomes a personal experience. *Sólarljóð* is known for being a uniquely expressive text, and the father-poet's narrative introduces an opportunity to explore the emotions. The ability of vision literature to evoke emotional responses was one of the reasons it became a powerful teaching tool. Here the reader is engaged by a painful sensory example of reactions to the mental and physical torture of Hell: "The ropes of Hell came around my sides, powerfully twisted; I wanted to tear them

[54] Stanza 36: "I sat bowed; I was leaning over for a long time; I was then very eager to live; but he prevailed, who was powerful; the doomed man's roads are at an end." (*Lútr ek sat; lengi ek hölluðumz; mjök var ek þá lystr at lifa; en sá réð, sem ríkr var; frammi eru feigs götur*.) (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 319–320).

but they were tough; it is easy to move unbound./I alone knew how agonies surged over me in all directions; Hell's maidens dealt shivers home to me every evening."[55] A fear of death and damnation is conveyed more strongly in *Sólarljóð* than the other visions discussed here, and the emotional distress of the narrative is an expressive outcry entwined with the painful sensations of a failing body. There is suffering in the powerful and inexorable twisting of Hell's ropes, and a sense of frantic fear in the futile attempt to tear free. The emotional distress is compounded by the solitary experience of a final illness as the poet suffers *sút* (sickness, sorrow, agony), and it is suggested that the *hrolla* (shivers) visited upon him are the symptom of a fever. In the following passages, the repetition of the phrase "*sól ek sá*" (I saw the sun) creates a feeling of the poet's inexorable progress towards and through death, as well as crafting a growing sense of overwhelming fear and torment.

> I saw the sun, the true day-star, bow down in the noisy world; and in the other direction I heard the gate of Hell roaring weightily./I saw the sun, set with bloody staves; I was then forcefully tilting out of this world; it appeared mighty in many ways compared with how it was before./I saw the sun; it seemed to me as if I were looking at worshipful God; I bowed to it for the last time in the world of men./I saw the sun; it dazzled so much that I seemed to know nothing; but the currents of the sea roared in the other direction, greatly mingled with blood./Terrified and cowed, I saw the sun, trembling in my eyes, for my heart had completely turned to shreds./I saw the sun, [I was] seldom more grief-stricken; I was then forcefully tilting out of this world; my tongue was as if turned to wood and it was chilled on the outside./I saw the sun never again after that gloomy day, for the waters of the mountains closed together in front of me, and I turned away cold from the torments.[56]

[55] Stanzas 37–38: *Heljar reip kómu harðliga sveigð at síðum mér; slíta ek vilda, en þau seig váru; létt er lauss at fara. Einn ek vissa, hvé alla vegu sullu sútir mér; heljar meyjar mér hrolla buðu heim á hverju kveldi*. (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 320–321).

[56] Stanzas 39–45: *Sól ek sá sanna dagstjörnu drjúpa dynheimum í; en heljar grind heyrða ek annan veg þjóta þungliga./Sól ek sá setta dreyrstöfum; mjök var ek þá ór heimi hallr; máttug hon leiz á marga vegu frá því, sem fyrri var./Sól ek sá; svá þótti mér, sem ek sæja á göfgan guð; henni ek laut hinzta sinni aldaheimi í./Sól ek sá; svá hon geislaði, at ek þóttumz vætki vita; en gylfar straumar grenjuðu annan veg blandnir mjök við blóð./Sól ek sá á sjónum skjálfandi hræzlufullr ok hnipinn, þvít hjarta mitt var harðla mjök runnit sundr í sega./Sól ek sá sjaldan hryggvari; mjök var ek þá ór heimi hallr; tunga mín var til trés metin ok kólnat at fyrir utan./Sól ek sá síðan aldri eptir þann dapra dag, þvít fjalla vötn lukðuz fyrir mér saman, en ek hvarf kaldr frá kvölum*. (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 322–327).

The interpretation and symbolic meaning of devices such as the bloody staves, the mountain waters, and even the sun itself, have been the subject of much debate (Björn Magnússon 1915; Falk 1914; Fidjestøl 1979; Schorn 2011). However, for the purposes of this article, it may be enough to consider their overall effect. We are being presented with a sensory experience as, in addition to direct physical pain, the poet's ears are disturbed by the sound of the roaring gate of Hell, his eyes are dazzled by the sun, and he loses the power of speech as his tongue becomes cold and wooden. The vision's connection to the living body is indicated by blood, and to the geography of the living by the waters and mountains that seem to seal his entrance into the earth. Further, this is an expression of powerful emotions of dread and grief. As he nears his death, the poet is terrified and dejected (*hræzlufullr ok hnipinn*), while the sun appears to tremble in his eyes – are they full of tears? – as his heart turns to shreds, he reveals that he has seldom been so grief-stricken (*hryggvari*). The poem thus conveys an atmosphere of all-consuming and inextricably linked physical and emotional torture, as well as one of regret and contrition.[57] These emotionally evocative stanzas focus upon the individual and the pain experience of Hell, first through personal torture and, later, as an observer of the suffering of others. Just as the presence of an angelic guide in more conventional visions ensures that the visionary (and the reader) will interpret their surroundings correctly, the reaction of the traveller themselves can act as an emotional guide to their audience. In this case, the poem might have been particularly meaningful for an elite audience, as it seems that the poet himself may be counted among them. The text contains various clues as to the identity of the anonymous poet. We learn that he lived in error, like those chieftains who jostled for property and income, in his desire for wealth, enjoying the pleasures of life, and thinking little of what was to come. Besides the allusion to his love of riches, he has the authority to impart good advice, a trait of chieftains and kings, and he is especially concerned with passing this information on to his heir, a relationship which is usually discussed in the context of powerful men.

Having firmly established a fear of the torture in Hell, the poem returns to its original subject matter – the wrongdoings of men – in which non-violence remains a central component. Just as the repetition of "*sól ek sá*" created a sense of unity within the segment on the poet's passage into death, these verses, each presenting a crime and its gory punishment, are bound together by their shared introduction of "*menn sá ek þá*" (I saw men):

[57] The poet's heart is ripped to shreds. This detail has been related to contritio cordis "contrition of the heart" or sorrow for sin, the first stage of the sacrament of penance (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 325–326).

> I saw men then who greatly nourish envy of another's affairs; bloody runes were painfully marked on their breasts [lit. breast]./I saw many unhappy men then; they had gone astray [lit. were erring with regard to ways]; he purchases that [unhappiness], who fools himself into the misfortunes of this world./I saw men then, who had defrauded another of property in many things; they travelled in crowds to Fégjarn's fortress, and carried burdens of lead./I saw men then who had robbed many a one of property and life; mighty poisonous dragons ran through the breasts of those men./I saw men then who least wished to observe holy days; their hands were nailed painfully onto hot stones./I saw men then who from pride esteemed themselves beyond expectation; their clothes were amusingly set on fire./I saw men then who had greatly slandered another; Hell's ravens violently tore the eyes out of their heads.[58]

The references to holy days and slander make an interesting addition to the conversation on respect for the Church and conflict avoidance. However, the overwhelming emphasis here is on subjects relating to wealth and property. Pain is also a focus of these lines, with a variety of associated vocabulary, such as *meinliga* (painful), *ófegna* (unhappy), *nauðliga* (painfully), *harðliga* (hard, severe), being employed, with equal stress on sins and their associated torments. To understand the significance of these verses, it is important to remember that Iceland's chieftains were not especially well-off. They did not have many personal possessions, and they accumulated wealth through agreements to control the revenue from chieftaincies and their associated estates or, later, the *staðir*. At this time, control of property was achieved through either a *heimildir á* (warranty, proof of authority) or *handsal* (formal handshake agreement) (Poulsen, Vogt, & Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2019: 279–280). Their incomes allowed chieftains to fund the other activities that supported their positions – gift-giving, feasting, paying compensation, etc. – and were therefore an important element of the power game. However, resources were limited and the gains of one chieftain usually came at the expense of another. Thus, it is fitting that this passage begins by addressing the sin of envying another's *hagr*, their affairs, but also their wealth, gains,

[58] Stanzas 61–67: *Menn sá ek þá, er mjök ala öfund um annars hagi; blóðgar rúnir váru á brjósti þeim merkðar meinliga./Menn sá ek þá marga ófegna; þeir váru villir vega; þat kaupir sá, er þessa heims apaz at óheillum./Menn sá ek þá, er mörgum hlutum véltu um annars eign; flokkum þeir fóru til Fégjarns borgar ok höfðu byrðar af blýi./Menn sá ek þá, er margan höfðu fé ok fjörvi rænt; brjóst í gegnum rendu brögnum þeim öflgir eitrdrekar./Menn sá ek þá, er minst vildu halda helga daga; hendr þeira váru á heitum steinum negldar nauðliga./Menn sá ek þá, er af mikillæti virðuz vánum framar; klæði þeira váru kýmiliga eldi um slegin./Menn sá ek þá, er margt höfðu orð á annan logit; heljar hrafnar ór höfði þeim harðliga sjónir slitu.* (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 339–344).

or advantages, and the accompanying painful punishment. Tapping into a more emotional suffering, economy and trade are referenced in the second stanza in which men *kaupa* (purchase) their unhappiness, by fooling themselves into cherishing wealth or property. This association is supported by the context, as well as the repetition of *apa* (to fool, to make a monkey of), a term which is also used earlier to condemn greed: "Desire and delusion trap the sons of men, those who are greedy for wealth; shining pieces of silver turn to grief in the long run; riches have made a monkey of many a man."[59] The poem continues by addressing the aggressive nature of the chieftains' economy with its inventive use of the fictive Fégjarn's fortress, the stronghold of avarice itself: "I saw men then, who had defrauded another of property in many things; they travelled in crowds to Fégjarn's fortress, and carried burdens of lead." The imagery of *fégjarn* (eager for money), conjures up a vivid picture of men weighed down by their greed – having sought riches they are now burdened by worthless lead. This torture shows how their struggle for property was in itself a futile and misguided pursuit, ultimately bringing suffering rather than prosperity. Furthermore, they gained their worldly wealth through deception, by defrauding others. The imagery here creates an association between a common elite goal and a pain experience.

A similarity between *Sólarljóð* and *Rannveigar leizla* can be seen in the vocabulary. The three sins for which Rannveig deserves to join the chieftains in their fiery pit are *ofmetnaðr*, *fégirni*, and *hórdómr*, and the connection in this instance is, of course, with *fégirni* (avarice). Again, this helps to strengthen the argument that much of Rannveig's experience was more relevant to elite men than women like herself. It also underscores the persistence of the Church's preoccupation with chieftains and their property. The term *flokkr* (company, host) is also worth drawing attention to, as it is frequently used to refer to the groups of men called upon to support chieftains in conflict (*reisa flokk*). Could it be that the bands of elite men who supported greedy chieftains now find themselves together again in Hell? This may indicate the use of a tactic similar to the frightening of women in *Rannveigar leizla*, this time of a more political variety. By instilling terror into the chieftains' followers, the Church might have hoped to scare them away from relationships with chieftains. The poem is also suggestive of the tactics employed by chieftains who could aggressively persecute others in disputes over property: "I saw men then who had robbed many a one of property and life; mighty poisonous dragons ran through the breasts of those men."

Chieftains used their existing positions to increase their power. For instance, in 1232 the chieftain Sighvatr Sturluson got *heimildir á* over Grenjaðarstaðir, one of Ice-

[59] Stanza 34: *Vil ok dul tælir virða sonu, þá er fíkjaz á fé; ljósir aurar verða at löngum trega; margan hefr auðr apat.* (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 318–319).

land's wealthiest churches, from Jón Eyjolfsson in Möðruvellir and installed his son Kolbeinn there. As Sighvatr was the only chieftain in northeast Iceland, Jón would have been unable to refuse him.[60] This also demonstrates how strategic control of property helped to create networks for leading chieftains. However, not every case was as clear cut as the straightforward dominance of one man over another – the struggle for property could create more serious conflict. Disputes could erupt if a chieftain laid claim to a farmer's land, before clashing with other chieftains who took up the farmer's cause or perhaps that of his relatives. By becoming involved, "defending" chieftains created an opportunity to gain property for themselves, or, at the very least, to keep it out of their enemy's hands.[61] An example is found in the disagreement between Sturla Þórðarson and Einar Þorgilsson of Staðarhóll over the farmer Birning Steinarsson's valuable seal-hunting grounds. Einar's attempt to frighten Birning into ceding his property by killing his livestock forced the farmer to seek Sturla's support. Sturla was happy to oblige as this was a chance for him to check the power of his rival, Einar, and to take advantage of Birning's desperate situation to improve his own economic position; in exchange for his protection, Birning had to give Sturla *handsal* over all his property. Eventually Einar was killed for trying to take possession of the land after Sturla's death, and this episode ends without a clear resolution.

These verses may also reflect contemporary concerns regarding the accumulation of wealth among fewer, increasingly powerful, families (Jón Jóhannesson 1974: 23). They continue: "I saw men then who from pride esteemed themselves beyond expectation; their clothes were amusingly set on fire." When read in the context of the other verses, the classic Christian warnings against pride may take on a more direct meaning. The torture of blazing clothing can be seen as a symbol of worldly pride expressed through displays of wealth and vanity, and it contributes to the poem's other threats to chieftains who feel secure in the power of their property. Taken together, these "*menn sá ek þá*" verses attack the chieftains' economic and political foundation as well as their aspirations and the ways that they established dominance over others. They relate to the causes underlying and sustaining competition and disagreements between the chieftain families – envy, the desire for wealth and control of property, and pride – and each sin is paired with imaginative pain experiences. In line with the text's overall atmosphere, these punishments are intended to inspire fear and foreboding. This series is supported by references to the folly of arrogance or a belief that prosperity will last forever which are interspersed throughout the

[60] Bjørn Poulsen et al. 2019: 251. See more generally, a chapter in the same volume: "Social Elites and Incomes from Churches c. 1050-1250" by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Jan Brendalsmo.

[61] For example, the struggle to control Helgastaðir in *Guðmundar saga dýra*.

poem. There are many concrete examples of the fickleness of fate, for instance, in the torment of Unnarr and Sævaldi:

> No man has control over riches or health, though it may go smoothly for him; what he least expects comes upon many a man; no one can set his own terms./Unnarr and Sævaldi did not think that their good fortune would tumble down; they became naked and deprived everywhere, and ran like wolves to the woods.[62]

Verses such as these demonstrate that no one has the power to control or predict their future (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2013). Here, more specifically, that no one can determine their own *sætt* (terms, agreement, reconciliation). This vocabulary is interesting as it strengthens the general focus on a male elite by drawing on themes related to the settlement process, the domain of the chieftains. Now, for the unfortunate Unnarr and Sævaldi, a change in circumstances has deprived them of shelter and protection. Their story can be compared to the more detailed account of two other mighty but overconfident men who, despite the best intentions, failed to use their positions for good:

> Ráðný and Véboði became powerful and thought to do only good; now they sit and turn now one, now another wound towards the fires./They trusted in themselves and thought that they alone were above all people, but yet their condition seemed quite different to almighty God./They experienced sensuality in many ways and had gold for pleasure; now they are repaid, since they have to walk between frost and fire.[63]

These luckless souls are now travelling through Hell, enduring the twin tortures of fire and frost and toasting their various wounds. The cause of their demise is not entirely clear, but, as in the "*menn sá ek þá*" sequence above, their abrupt and agonising fall serves as a message to chieftains who think that earthly power will protect them after death, or even that it is worth cultivating in the first place. The warnings against

[62] Stanzas 8–9: *Auði né heilsu ræðr enginn maðr, þótt honum gangi greitt; margan þat sækir, er minst of varir; enginn ræðr sættum sjálfr./Ekki þeir hugðu Unnarr ok Sævaldi, at þeim mundi heill hrapa; nöktir þeir urðu ok næmðir hvervetna ok runnu sem vargar til viðar*. (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 300–301).

[63] Stanzas 16–18: *Þau Ráðný ok Véboði urðu rík ok hugðuz gótt eitt gera; nú sitja þau ok snúa ýmsum sárum til elda./Þau trúðu á sik ok þóttuz vera ein yfir allri þjóð, en þó leiz hagr þeira annan veg almátkum guði./Munað þau drýgðu á marga vegu ok höfðu gull fyrir gaman; nú er þeim goldit, er þau ganga skulu meðal frosts ok funa.* (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 306–307).

placing one's faith in these transient and unpredictable symbols of worldly wealth are ones that the Icelandic chieftains should heed.

Sólarljóð addresses the importance of maintaining a peaceful community and upholding social relationships, primarily enforced through the threat of punishment. Of course, these relationships include friendship. This connection was central in many property arrangements, as well as murderous quarrels, such as that between Sváfaðr and Skartheðinn. However, it is perhaps most poignantly referenced in the sorrowful stanza: "May the precious God, who created earth and heaven, value and know that, how many journey loveless, though they part from their kin."[64] Some copies have *einmana* (solitary, lonely) in place of *munaðarlausir* (loveless), although the meaning remains unchanged: it is sad and difficult to be separated from the companionship and security of close friends. This loss leaves the journeying soul feeling very alone and, if not for God, unprotected. This construction hints at the importance of positive earthly relationships, and the possibility of forming a friendship with God, both central elements of our next vision, *Eiríks saga viðfǫrla*.

Eiríks saga viðfǫrla: Fear and friendship

Perhaps the most unconventional text examined here, its protagonist, Eiríkr does not journey to Hell, and the saga lacks the intense focus on suffering which is a hallmark of vision literature. Further, Eiríkr travels to the afterlife in his physical body, not in spirit, although the discussion with his angelic guide occurs within a dream. However, *Eiríks saga viðfǫrla* and its tale of tutelage, friendship, and conversion still makes a valuable contribution to this investigation into Icelandic visions. The story survives in five manuscripts. The earliest can be dated to c. 1340–1390 and the latest to c. 1450[65], with the most complete version found in *Flateyjarbók*, however, it is believed to have been first recorded c. 1300 (Pulsiano & Wolf 1993). *Eiríks saga* follows a Norwegian prince who travels to Miklagarðr, where he learns about Christianity from a Greek king and is baptised at his court. He later sets out to find Ódáinsakr, the Deathless Acre to heathens or Paradise to Christians. This story is set in the distant past, and although the discussion of conversion may not seem entirely relevant to its contemporary audience, its underlying messages concerning traditionally prioritised friendships, and the social and spiritual responsibilities of chieftains, as referred to in both visions discussed above, are vital to Eiríkr's tale. In this journey to the Oth-

[64] Stanza 48: *Virði þat ok viti inn virki guð, sá er skóp hauðr ok himin, hversu munaðarlausir margir fara, þótt við skylda skili.* (Larrington & Robinson 2007: 329).

[65] AM 657 c4to (c. 1340-1390), GKS 1005 fol (1387-1394), AM 720 aVIII 4to5 (c.1400-1450), AM 557 4to (c.1420-1450), and GKS 2845 4to (c.1450).

erworld, the priorities of elite males and honour culture are played upon and used both to admonish and to entice.

In *Sólarljóð* and *Rannveigar leizla* the treatment of interpersonal relationships, including friendship, is primarily negative, focusing on their breakdown and loss, the exclusion of chieftains, or the consequences of a failure to uphold social responsibilities. Here, the positive aspects of friendship and loyalty come to the fore. When, having reached Ódáinsakr and conversed with his angelic guide, Eiríkr is asked whether he would like to remain in Paradise, our hero is determined to return home. He wants everyone to know he is alive, and to deliver his message of conversion:

> The angel asked Eiríkr, "Would you rather stay here, or return to your own lands?" Eiríkr answers, "I want to return." The angel said, "Why do you want to go?" Eiríkr says, "Because I want to tell those I know about these glorious demonstrations of the Lord's power, and if I do not come back, everyone will believe I died an awful death." The angel said, "Although there is now worship of heathen gods in the northern lands, the time will come when those people will be released from heresy, and God will call them to his faith. Now I give you leave to return to your own land and tell your friends about God's mercy, that which you saw and heard, because they will more quickly believe in God's word and his commandments when they hear such tales".[66]

As in other vision literature, there is a strong sense of the traveller's responsibility to instruct others – in this case Eiríkr is especially concerned with helping his friends. He expresses a desire to tell his *kunningjar* (acquaintances) of God's power, and is given permission to assist in hastening the conversion of his *vinir* (friends). A focus on friendship is also found in the Greek king's assurance that through baptism and faith Eiríkr could become a friend of God (*vinr guðs*) and feel assured of everlasting life.[67] This may be seen as a more straightforward take on the network of heavenly friendship explored in *Rannveigar leizla*. It seems that others may be given the same

[66] *Eingillinn spurde Æirak. huort uilltu her vera efter edr uilltu aftr huerfa til þinna att jarda. Æirekr suarar. aftr vil ek huerfa. æingillinn mællti. hui uilltu þat. Æirekr s(egir). þuiat ek vil segia kunningium minum fra slikum dyrdar verkum drottinsligs mattar. en ef ek kem æigi aftr þa munu þeir þui trua at ek hafui illum dauda dait. Æingillinn mællti. þo at nu se goda blot a nordr/londum þa mun þo koma su tid at þat folk mun leysazst fra villu ok man gud kalla þat til sinnar truar. Nu gef ek þer leyfui til aftr at fara til þinna ættiarda ok at segia þinum vinum fra guds miskunn þeire sem þu sætt ok heyrdir. þui skiotara munu þeir trua guds eyrende ok ollum hans bodorum er þeir heyra þuilikar sogr.* (Jensen 1983: 96–102) All English translations of *Eiríks saga viðfǫrla* are my own.

[67] For a discussion of friendship with God see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2017: 90–102.

opportunity as Eiríkr, as the king explains that it is God's plan to replace his rebellious angels with people who lived pure lives, making them his *riddarar ok hirðsveitum* (knights and retainers)[68], essentially including them in his community of friends. In this way, the text draws attention to the possibility, and importance, of friendship in both this world and the next. Eiríkr's decision to share his visionary knowledge is already familiar, however, the vocabulary used here is especially meaningful as it draws on concepts recognisable, and exclusively applicable, to the masculine elite, particularly in reference to *hirðsmenn*, the king's retainers, a group which included some Icelandic chieftains. Thus, the saga's message to the elite is one of the prospects that friendship with God could provide, as well as the addition of a spiritual element to the existing responsibilities towards earthly friends.[69]

Friendship's prominence in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*, and the way it is represented as spanning the border into death, is demonstrative of an awareness of its cultural impact and its potential as a persuasive emotional tool. To fully understand the significance of these references, as well as those discussed above, one must be aware of the importance of personal relationships in the small and often vulnerable and disordered society of Iceland in this period. As described by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, friendship was "the net that held society together" (2017: 130). As well as supporting individual identities created by social position in relation to others, vertical friendships between chieftains and householders offered security for the client and political support and power for the patron. The importance of personal relationships is also reflected in the formulation of the most serious secular punishment, outlawry, the rejection it prescribed, and the danger that the outlaw found themselves in without hope of assistance. The political advantages of pragmatic friendships were primarily available to elite men as they had the resources to maintain them, and it is for this reason that mentions of friendship are particularly intriguing in the visionary messages directed towards chieftains (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2017: 26–28).

Eiríkr is a king's son, is hosted by both a Danish and a Greek king, and forms a friendship of equals with another prince. It is clear that the friends and acquaintances whose spiritual welfare so concerns him are other elite men. Eiríkr further appeals to and represents the typical Scandinavian chieftain in that he is brave, physically

[68] *En a fertuganda dege steig hann upp til himna ʀikis er ollum uoldum dugs er firir / buit ʀiddarum ok hirdsueitum ok þar er ollum skyllt til at stunda ok fylla þat skard er þa vard er einglarnnir spilltuzst. en gud mun þa tólu fylla med hreinlifis monnum.* (Jensen 1983: 26).

[69] *Eiríks saga*, particularly the emphasis on male friendship, can be compared with a similar vision experienced by Óláfr Trygvasson in which he sees his friends in peril (Oddr 2003: 54–55).

strong, and wins favour through feats of valour.[70] Conversely, the honour culture which celebrates Eiríkr's best traits is also strongly criticised, with the focus on a male elite audience becoming more apparent than ever. The author warns that heathen men who concern themselves with fame and the praise of others in this temporary life on earth will find nothing but punishment after death:

> Because, although heathen men may obtain much fame from their valiant deeds, there is a great difference, when this transitory life is at an end, they have been rewarded by men's praise for their courage, but they are punished for their sins and lack of faith, as they did not recognise their maker. But those who have loved God and put all their faith in Him and fought for the freedom of holy Christianity, receive more praise from the wisest men, as well, and more importantly, when they have gone through the common door of death, from which no flesh may save itself, then they will have their reward. Here is the division: an everlasting kingdom with Almighty God without end, like Eiríkr, of whom we have just spoken.[71]

The details of this passage, which revolves around courage and reputation (which can be maintained, and even increased, through conversion), highlights the aim of reaching chieftains with ideals more firmly based in honour culture than Christianity. Yet, it remains relatable to this group, in that the perils of Hell are contrasted with the promise of rewards which appeal to the same culture that is viewed as a source of sin. There is even the assurance of winning worldly praise, although naturally only from the wisest of men. As well, it is shown that Eiríkr is able to maintain the positive characteristics expected of an Icelandic leader while conforming to Christian ideals and saving his soul, presenting an opportunity for other men to do the same. In another, subtler, reference to both friendship and traditional masculine ideals, an example is made of the false Norse gods who now face the torments of Hell: "Eiríkr said, 'Is that not God, who we worship?' The king says, 'That is not God, for wretched things are said of them, how badly they died and what wicked lives they lived. Their

[70] *hann var vinsæll madr þegar a vnga alldri hann var ʀamr at afli fræknn ok framr at óllu. dreingiligr j vexsti.* (Jensen 1983: 3–4).

[71] *... þuiat þo at heidnir menn fai frægd mykla af sinum af reks verkum þa er þat mikill munr þa er þeir enda þetta hit stundliga lijf at þeir hafa þa tekit sitt uerdkaup af ordlofui manna firir sinn frama en æigu þa von hegningar firir sin broth ok tru leyse er þeir kunnu æigi skapara sinn. en hinir sem gude hafa vnnat ok þat allt traust haft ok barizst firir frelse heilagrar kristne hafa þo af hinum vitrazstum monnum fæingit meira lof en þat at auk at mest er at þa er þeir hafa fram geingit vm almenniligar dyr daudans sem ekki holld ma fordazst hafa þeir tekit sitt verdkaup þat er at skilia eilijft ʀiki med allzualldanda gude vtan enda sem þesse Æirekr sem nu var fra sagt.* (Jensen 1983: 114).

souls are now in eternal fire and unquenchable torments.'"[72] There was a time when chieftains strove to forge friendships with these fallen deities, and it is perhaps fitting that one of the saga's few references to pain should be found here in their condemnation. Connections may also be drawn between this depiction of the Norse gods suffering and the saintly social networks of *Rannveigar leizla*. In Rannveig's experience, friendship with chieftains is devalued by their exclusion from Heaven, here an even more negative consequence of making the wrong alliances is shown. If friendship can span from this world to the next, then friends in Heaven may be of assistance to their living allies; what support could friends in Hell offer anyone?

Beyond its more direct portrayal of punishment and reward, *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* provides an opportunity to present a more general discussion of some of the ideas which made visions effective. For this text, and the others presented here, it is important to keep in mind that the threats and promises of the afterlife were very real to their medieval audience. In this saga, the quest for Paradise is prefaced by a discussion between Eiríkr and his teacher, the Greek king who introduces him to Christianity. The question and answer dialogue within which Eiríkr learns about his new faith provides a firm foundation for the saga's educational function. Further, it represents the keen interest of an individual who wishes to understand and engage with his religion. Eiríkr freely admits his ignorance, saying, for instance, "Never have I heard such things said of them."[73] When he is told that the Norse gods are wicked, and even surprises the king with the strange specificity of his questions regarding the precise nature of Heaven and Hell: "You are curious, Eiríkr, and you want to know many things which are unnecessary, unusual, and quite unknowable."[74] Eiríkr's lack of knowledge and his willingness to learn mirror real developments in the growing centrality of personal belief, understanding, and responsibility that accompanied the spread of Christianity, and with it the recognition of new practices and principles which highlighted the significance of individual emotions and concerns regarding the afterlife. Previously, religious belief in Iceland had not centred on the next world, but primarily on what could be gained on Earth. It was accepted that most people would go to Hel, an underworld ruled over by a goddess of the same name. The idea that the dead were either rewarded or punished for the morality of their actions did not exist and Hel is represented neither as a place of eternal torment nor of bliss. With

[72] *Æirekr mællti. er æigi þat gud er ver gófgum. æigi er þat gud þuiat fra þeim ‹er› sagt uesolum hue illa þeir fram læiddu medan þeir lifdu. þeira andir eru nu j eilijfum ellde ok o slokkuanligum kuolum.* (Jensen 1983: 31–32).

[73] *Æirekr mællti þa. alldri heyrda ek slika hluti fyr fra þeim sagda.* (Jensen 1983: 32).

[74] *foruitinn ertu Æirekr ok margra hluta uilltu uiss verda þeira sem o naudsynligir eru ok fa hyrdir ok miog okunnir.* (Jensen 1983: 40).

Christianity came the concept of salvation and a reconsideration of the hereafter. Originally, this meant preparing for the day of judgement and eternal life; later, the focus on Doomsday began to recede, to be eclipsed, although not entirely contradicted, by the idea that judgement took place individually and immediately after death.[75] These developments are particularly relevant to this paper in that they would have contributed to a sense of urgency and personal responsibility for one's fate, thereby creating a strong emotional element associated with the extreme binary of fear of Hell or a hope of Heaven. The focus on pain and the afterlife, as well as private emotional engagement, was supported by themes found within church imagery of a suffering Jesus or Mary[76], and religious rituals, the majority of which focused on the internalisation of a need for moral purification in preparation for death.[77] Such practices are represented in the saga by, for example, Eiríkr's baptism, and the mention of his later rising early to pray alone.[78] The emphasis on the individual in these rituals became stronger in the thirteenth century as the practice of private confession grew and acts of penance were prescribed (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2008: 76–77). These actions required not only personal motivation but a real emotional connection, for example, true repentance was often accompanied by an emotive expression such as tears, something which could also enhance its sincerity in the eyes of others (Nedkvitne 2009: 218). The shifts created by Christian thought emphasised the importance of the individual, yet they also introduced new ideas about community and

[75] Nedkvitne 2009: 62. This difference is found in a comparison of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew's promises final judgement at the end of time after the second coming of Christ, while Luke's has Lazarus ascending directly to Heaven and Dives descending to Hell. This may have felt less contradictory to a medieval audience who were anticipating the Apocalypse. (Gurevich 1992: 67).

[76] Nedkvitne 2009: 62. Church decoration signalled changes in belief and highlights a growing focus on suffering. For instance, Jesus was most commonly depicted as a victorious figure who has defeated death until c. 1200 when gothic crosses holding a suffering Christ with hanging head and crown of thorns became the norm. (National Museum of Iceland, Christ from Ufsir statue of Christ as a Victor).

[77] Nedkvitne 2009: 157–158. This includes baptism, divine service, the last rights, the Eucharist, confession, fasting, private prayers, pilgrimage, the purchase of masses, and gifts to churches. These rituals prepared people for death and their results would not be seen until then.

[78] In the sagas private prayers are performed by a housewife in *Laxdœla saga* and a farmer and a chieftain in *Sturlunga saga* (Nedkvitne 2009: 126–127) Bishop Jón prescribed daily habits such as praying at the beginning and end of each day, keeping a symbol of the cross in one's room, crossing oneself before eating and sleeping, and upon waking etc. (Orri Vésteinsson 2000: 60).

expanded upon existing social relationships. An essential part of being Christian was the sense of belonging to something greater than oneself and to a group which was connected through their beliefs and identical rituals and routines. Familiar social hierarchies were recreated within the Church structure, and the communities of households, families, and friend groups remained a vital part of Icelandic society both before and after its adoption of Christianity.

Fear and belief: Iceland's Chieftans in Hell

The emotional regime of fear created by visionary literature would have been powerless if it were not supported by a strong belief in Hell. When looking at these texts, it is important to be conscious of the worldview held by their intended audience.

Descriptions of the visionary underworld draw on, and are strengthened by, other established literature and ideas known in Europe and in Iceland at this time. For instance, threats of pain and punishment are found throughout the sermons of the *Gamal Norsk Homiliebok*, which portrays Hell as a terrifying, and final, destination.[79] *Íslensk Hómilíubók* presents the idea of *hreinsunareldur*, the cleansing fire of purgatory and the potential for redemption.[80] Nevertheless, pain remains in focus. Sins must be burned away, and no one but Jesus himself is pure enough to be spared the torturous purgatorial flames.

The reality of Hell, and the veracity of the vision literature, was further supported by its connection to our earthly landscape, particularly that of the Northern world

[79] The afterlife is described in 'Sermo neceſſaria': *Sæler ero þæir menn er við ſlict ſculu vera. en hinir ero veſler er til hælvitiſ ſculu rapa. þar ſculu þæir vera með dioflum. þar er ei ok ei myrcr ok mæin ok ſut ok ſorg. hungr ok þorſte. firna froſt ok ofhiti ok hinar męſto piningar. ok allar endi-lauſar. þæir menn aller er í þann illa ſtað coma. þa æigu þæir alldrigi voen miſcunnar ſiðan*. (Indrebø 1931: 88–89) "They are wretched, however, who are bound for Hell. In that place they will be among the devils; and in that place there is perpetual darkness and agony, ailment and grief, hunger and thirst, horrendous frost and heat, and the severest torments everlasting. None of the people who go to that place may ever thereafter hope for mercy." (transl. Carlsen 2015: 15).

[80] *En svo er sem hverjum komi dómadagur, þegar er hann andast, fyr því að veit hver þá þegar sinn hluta, hvort hann skal helvítis kvalar hafa, þær er aldregi skal þrjóta, eða skal hann hafa hreinsunareld nekkverja stund og þau meinlæti, er af honum brenni inar smærri syndir, þær er hann hefir óbættar, áður hann andist. Af því nefni eg heldur inar smærri, til þess að hreinsunareldurinn megi af brenna, en inar stærri, að þær einar má hreinsunareldurinn af taka, er hinar smærri syndir eru kallaðar, en hinar öngar, er höfuðsyndir eru*. (de Leeuw van Weenen: 1993, 14–21) "...it is as if judgment day comes to each when he dies. For then, everyone will know his works, whether he shall suffer the Hell-punishment which never ends, or purgatorial fire for a while. And the wrongdoings which will be purged from him are the lesser sins, those which he has not made restitution for by the time of death. I mention the lesser sins because these may be burnt away by purgatorial fire; the other are the cardinal sins." (transl. Carlsen 2015: 17).

(Haki Antonsson 2018: 139–182). Although its exact whereabouts are uncertain, it is clear that the realm of the dead is both nearby and, in many ways, recognisable. The other world is sometimes represented as existing on the surface of the earth, to be found in some remote valley, or, more frequently, under the ground, where it nevertheless remains accessible to the living. More locally, in the Old Norse *Elucidarius*, Hell is presented as a pit of death within the dungeon that is earth. It is a "…place is full of darkness and diseases, fire and frost, hunger and thirst, and other pains of the body, such as fighting, grief and fear…" (Honorius 1992: 81). *Konungs skuggsjá* also presents an examination of the afterlife in which Upper Hell is the lower part of the world of the living. Here, the physical aspects of Hell infiltrate and entwine with the natural landscape of the real world. We learn that the volcanic fires of Iceland feed solely upon dead matter such as stone, indicating Hell as their source. The same lifeless nature is ascribed to certain Icelandic bodies of water which boil all year long; when the boiling is fierce, it petrifies everything it touches. Further, the island's dangerous glacial streams mirror the frost of Hell. These places of torment do more than torture the living, they make men more vigilant by serving as a constant reminder of the suffering to come (*Konungs skuggsjá* 1917: 126–133). It was even believed that the Icelandic volcano Hekla was itself an entrance to Hell, and that the souls tormented in its fires were also subjected to freezing cold in the pack ice off the coast (Sigurður Þórarinsson 1970). The contrast between hot and cold tortures, which renew the victim's suffering with each change in temperature, may be recognised in the fate of the damned Ráðný and Véboði who walk between frost and fire in *Sólarljóð*. In *Rannveigar leizla*, the volcanic landscape of Iceland can be recognised, and the physical connection between the soul and the body is revealed by the burn marks which, having been received in Hell, cover her living body when she awakes.[81] And in *Eiríks saga viðfǫrla*, our hero is able to make the journey to Ódáinsakr by travelling across the real world. This material association with Hell not only contributes to a sense of reality, and therefore fear, it blurs the lines between experiences in and after life, including that of pain.

The thirteenth century was a time of fundamental cultural change and intense political struggle in Iceland. This article has examined the role of vision literature in

[81] Nedkvitne (2009: 74) argues that elements of her vision are probably based on common knowledge about the afterlife: "To her heaven and hell were as tangible and concrete as the geography of Iceland…Her journey existed in time and space, the punishments were real and physical, and not symbolic representations of moral punishments." A similar argument is made by Haki Antonsson (2018: 170). Carolyne Larrington (1995: 525) contributes to this discussion by noting references folk beliefs surrounding the liminal space of thresholds, the area where Rannveig's journey begins.

the power game, and shown how it was used by the Church both to address its grievances with the chieftains and as an emotional tool to terrify this stubborn group into submission. Thus, it is able to both demonstrate and investigate the Church's need to exploit every available opportunity to increase control over the beliefs and behaviour of the social elite. The relatable, expressive aspects of the Icelandic visions support the internalisation of individual suffering and punishment, thereby strengthening the Church's emotional regime of Hell as well as the notion of personal responsibility for one's fate in the afterlife. The spiritual journeys discussed here also relate to historical disagreements between the Icelandic Church and the secular elite, most specifically opinions on sexual morality, social relationships and responsibilities, and the ideals of honour culture. More broadly, the literature can be referenced in disputes such as the *staðamál*, in that it supports an overarching goal to humble and intimidate the proud, worldly chieftains and force them to accept the Church's demands. However, we can also see that the conflict between secular and religious powers was a protracted one. It took almost a century from the time the visions were experienced for the ideals preached by their angelic guides to find secure footing among Iceland's chieftains.

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