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**NEGOTIATING SPACES OF POWER AND CULT IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC, 500-1200AD**

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<b>Ár:</b>	2012
<b>Umsóknarleið:</b>	Leið A - Sameiginleg umsókn leiðbeinanda og stúdents
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**Part 1: The Project**

<b>1.1.1 Heiti Verkefnis</b> (á íslensku): Mest 60 stafir.	Rými valdatengsla og átrúnaðar á Norður-Atlantshafi, 500–1200 e. Kr.
<b>1.1.2 Heiti Verkefnis</b> (á ensku): Mest 60 stafir.	Negotiating Spaces of Power and Cult in the North Atlantic, 500-1200AD
<b>1.2.1 Lykilorð</b> (á íslensku): Ekki fleiri en fimm. Íslensku lykilorðin eiga að vera í nefnifalli, eintölu.	Félagslegt rými, forkristin trúarbrögð, átrúnaður, helgisiðir, þingstaðir
<b>1.2.2 Lykilorð</b> (á ensku): Ekki fleiri en fimm.	Social Space, Pre-Christian Religions, Cult Practice, Ritual, Ping Sites
<b>1.3.1 Útdráttur</b> (á íslensku): Hámark 200 orð.	
<p>Verkefnið sem reifað er í þessari umsókn er rannsókn á mótun þess félagslega rýmis sem var vettvangur samskipta og valdatengsla manna við annan heim og þau yfirnátúrlegu öfl sem hann byggðu, á Íslandi, Hjaltlandseyjum, Orkneyjum, Færeyjum og í Vestur-Noregi á forkristnum tíma og fram um kristnitöku (um 500 – 1200 e. Kr.). Rannsóknin mun taka til athafna, helgisiða og þeirra aðferða og áhalda sem notuð voru til að skapa hin mismunandi félagslegu rými þar sem slíku sambandi var komið á, annars vegar á þingum og hins vegar heima á bæjum: tvenns konar rými sem gefa mismunandi mynd af átrúnaði almennings. Einnig verða skoðuð samskipti manna við yfirnátúrlegar verur – guði, landvættir, álfa, fylgjur og framliðna – ásamt þeim mismunandi tengslum og rýmum sem til þessara samskipta heyrðu. Loks verða dregnar ályktanir um áhrif yfirnátúrlegra vera á rými manna, einkum í tengslum við landnám. Á grundvelli textafræði, fornleifafræði, rúnafræði og örnefnafræði mun þessi þverfaglega rannsókn setja fram líkön af þeim gagnkvæmu valdatengslum milli þessa heims og hins yfirnátúrlegra sem fram fóru á mismunandi tíma og í mismunandi félaglegu og landfræðilegu samhengi á tímabilinu, og leitast við að draga ályktanir um eðli þessara rými út frá hugmyndum þeirra manna sem notuðu þau.</p>	

**1.3.2 Útdráttur** (á ensku): Hámark 200 orð.

The thesis outlined in this proposal seeks to examine the construction of social spaces in which power relationships were negotiated between human and supernatural/otherworld parties in Iceland, Western Norway, Orkney, Shetland and the Faroe Isles during the pre-Christian and Christianisation periods of the Early Medieval Ages (c. 500-1200AD). It will study the actions, rituals and discourses through which variant social spaces were constructed at þing sites and farmsteads—two distinct types of location which represent different levels of public exposure. Human interaction with a variety of supernatural beings – including gods, land spirits, elves, familial spirits, and human dead – and the various relationships and spaces created thereby will also be considered, and conclusions regarding these beings’ influence on human spaces, particularly during the process of *landnám* (‘settlement’), put forward. Thus on the basis of textual, archaeological, runic and toponymic evidence, this multidisciplinary thesis will propose models of the mutually-constitutive relationships between power negotiations and social spaces in different social, geographic and temporal contexts, seeking to understand how these spaces were regarded by those that used them.

**1.4 Staða þekkingar og vísindalegt gildi:** Hámark 1200 orð. ATH: Netútgáfan ræður aðeins við texta. Ef um myndir eða töflur er að ræða þá er hægt að senda allan lið 1.4 sem viðhengi (pdf eða word) til [sverrirg@hi.is](mailto:sverrirg@hi.is)

As an examination of the use of þing sites and the farm/hall complex as locations for the negotiation of power with the supernatural Other, the thesis proposed here must naturally engage with research from several different academic disciplines, including historical, literary and archaeological studies of pre-Christian ‘religions’ and worldview; the nature of the supernatural; the various forms of pre-Christian cultic sites; as well as the type, distribution and nature of þing, farmstead and hall sites across the study area.

The study of the pre-Christian religious systems of the Nordic region can be said to have begun as early as the thirteenth century, with the composition of the Icelandic poet/statesman Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*. Ostensibly an *ars poetica*, Snorri’s work presents an overview of the gods, spirits and worlds of pre-Christian belief, albeit one heavily rationalised and filtered through the lens of Snorri’s own Christianity. Early twentieth-century examinations of Nordic beliefs, such as volumes ten and eleven of Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1906-15), were similarly philological in nature and uncritical of their source material, focusing heavily on extant mythological narratives rather than religious practice, a trend continued by the two major mid-twentieth century scholarly studies: de Vries’ German-language *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (1937) and Turville-Petre’s shorter overview *Myth and Religion of the North* (1964). It is only relatively recently that scholarship has rejected the view of pre-Christian religious beliefs as a single reconstructable “Germanic” religion (e.g. DuBois 1999; McKinnell 1994), an attitude borne out by studies showing tremendous local variation in social phenomena across even relatively small areas of the Nordic region (e.g. Björk 2003 and Callmer 1992 on burial customs; Brink 2007 on theophoric toponymy). This thesis will build on this by establishing local models of social practice in the North Atlantic periphery, which it will then be possible to apply to wider regions on an experimental basis.

In recent decades there has also been a renewed interest in beliefs in lesser spirits and beings (e.g. Acker 2002; Bek-Pedersen 2011; Gunnell 2007; Price 2002; Raudvere 2008) and the cultic practices behind the extant mythology (e.g. Andrén 1993, 2004, 2005; Gräslund 1992, 2008; Hultgård 2008;

Kaliff 2001; Price 2002), driven partly by the progress made in archaeological process and methodology, and the subsequent boom in excavated material. Of particular relevance to this thesis are studies which have examined relations between humanity and the otherworld (e.g. Andrén 2005; DuBois 1999; McKinnell 2005; Price 2002), particularly those that focus on the rituals and actions through which these relations were mediated (Andrén 1993; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1997, 1998, 1999; Kaliff 2001; Schjødt 2000, 2005, 2008). The issue of power negotiation between human and otherworld agencies has also received some attention, almost entirely limited to the study of sacral kingship (e.g. McTurk 1975, 1994; Schjødt 2010; Steinsland 2008; Sundqvist 2002, 2008), which this thesis seeks to expand on.

Running parallel to the study of such social phenomena has been a steady interest in what might be called the ‘architecture’ of the early medieval period: the physical nature of halls, farms, and, most controversially, cultic sites. In the early twentieth century, Magnus Olsen (1926, 1928) produced a detailed study of possible cultic sites in Norway, only for later scholars – principally Oalf Olsen (e.g. 1966) – to reject the idea of architecturally developed cultic sites. However, archaeological excavations soon confirmed earlier ideas regarding cult continuity by finding pre-Christian constructions, initially interpreted as dedicated “temples” under the remains of early medieval churches (e.g. Lidén 1969). Later scholarship has focused less on identifying different types of cultic building, and more on interpretations of individual cult sites (e.g. on Hofstaðir, Iceland, see Lucas 2009, and McGovern 2009; on Borg in the Lofoten Islands, Norway, see Munch *et al.* 2003; Nielsen 1997, and Lindeblad 1998; on the “cult house” at Uppåkra, Skåne, Sweden, see Hårdh 2008; Helgesson 2004; Larsson 2001a, 2001b, 2004, 2006, and Hårdh 2006, and Lenntorp 2004), although work has also been done on the position of such sites within the landscape (e.g. Brink 1996, 1997, 1998, 2001; Fabech 1994; Fallgren 2008).

Þing sites across the Nordic region have received relatively little attention, either as archaeological sites or as social phenomena. Brink has examined some cultural aspects of the þing in his work on early law codes (2002, 2003, 2004), but almost no research has been published on North-Atlantic þing sites since before the mid-twentieth century (with some exceptions, e.g. Gössler 1938). There is a small but steadily growing body of material on Norwegian centres of political power (Iversen 2004, 2005; Skre 2007, 2008a, 2008b) and Swedish and Anglo-Saxon þing sites (Pantos 2003; Meaney 1995; Norr and Sanmark 2008; Sanmark 2009, and Semple 2008; Semple 2004), a trend consolidated with the establishment of the EU-funded *Assembly Project* in 2010. While this umbrella project will doubtless produce a great deal of worthwhile scholarship, at no point does it plan to conduct any research into the cultic or supernatural aspects of þing sites (TAP 2010) of the sort outlined in this thesis.

Scholarship has also considered the social and cultural role of such sites, although this has tended to focus much more on halls and possible *hof*-sites, as an extension of research already occurring on the hall itself (e.g. Enright 1996; Herschend 1993). Of particular relevance to the study outlined in this proposal is Gunnell’s work on the use of halls as spaces for the performance of ritual drama (particularly 2001, but see also 1995, 2006a, 2006b, and 2008). These examinations of dramatic and ritual spaces are based on the concept of spaces as social constructions, as proposed by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French scholars such as Durkheim (see Buttimer 1969 and references therein), and later developed by scholars including Foucault (1986), Feldman and Tilly (1960), and Murdoch (2006). The application of spatial theory in archaeological studies (particularly Bradley 2000 and Tilley 1994, but also site-based articles such as Card and Downes 2003) will be of great relevance to this thesis, as explored in my previous research (Murphy 2010, forthcoming).

The scientific value of the research proposed in this application lies in its innovative multidisciplinary study of a range of spaces and places across a specific region. The lack of previous research on the use of pre-Christian and Christianisation-era þing sites as cultic spaces will make the results of the relevant chapters of this study particularly worthwhile, as will the planned comparison with the better-studied farmstead- and hall-spaces. The regional focus of the study outlined here will also be highly relevant, allowing the contextualisation of Icelandic material and spaces (e.g. Adolf Friðriksson 2004), power and landscape (e.g. Helgi Þorláksson 1989) and possible cultic sites (Lucas 2009, and McGovern 2009) within a wider, North-Atlantic framework. Thus it is envisaged that this doctoral thesis will not only contribute to Icelandic and European scholarship through the presentation of original findings regarding the nature of human/otherworld power negotiations and the social spaces of þing sites and farm/hall complexes, but will also provide both links and contrast between geographic and temporal regions within the North-Atlantic study area, and the wider Northern-European periphery more generally.

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**1.6 Markmið:** Hámark 200 orð.

- To identify the various methods of power negotiation between human parties (on individual, group and regional levels) and supernatural/otherworld parties in the Early-Medieval North Atlantic;
- To categorise different methods of such negotiation according to the parties they were used to mediate between (on both human and supernatural scales), their apparent geographic and temporal regions of use, and their perceived efficacy as regarded by both their practitioners and later observers;
- To examine the locations at which these negotiations took place, and the social spaces engendered thereby, with particular reference to the social spaces of þing sites and the farmstead;
- To compare the spaces of North Atlantic þing sites with þing sites elsewhere in the Nordic region, examining the divergences and commonalities between them;
- To draw comparisons between the social spaces created by power negotiations at different types of site;
- To attempt to draw conclusions regarding the nature of these spaces, as perceived by those who used them, across the study region;
- To propose a model for the way in which power negotiations affected the social spaces around them in the Early Medieval Period.

**1.7 Rannsóknaráætlun:** Hámark 1000 orð. ATH: Netútgáfan ræður aðeins við texta. Ef um myndir eða töflur er að ræða þá er hægt að senda allan lið 1.7 sem viðhengi (pdf eða word) til [sverrirg@hi.is](mailto:sverrirg@hi.is)

The study of social phenomena such as relations with the otherworld or the engendering of social spaces is difficult in any society, but even more so in one that is arguably prehistoric. Although there is evidence for these practices in pre-Christian North Atlantic culture(s) preserved in a range of different sources – from medieval manuscripts to material culture – much of it is fragmentary, difficult to interpret, and inconsistent. As such, the thesis outlined here is envisaged as multidisciplinary from the outset, drawing upon textual, archaeological, toponymic and runic evidence, while displaying a critical awareness of the difficulties inherent in each of these corpora incorporated throughout the study, in a manner established in my previous work on social spaces (Murphy 2010; forthcoming). The core data is expected to be drawn from textual and archaeological sources, particularly Icelandic manuscripts and excavation-based and landscape archaeology from North-Atlantic sites. However, due to the relatively small amount of attention þing sites have received from archaeological studies to date (see above, §1.4) comparative material from elsewhere in the Norse cultural sphere will also be examined and interrogated, and I will actively foster links with scholars working on and in other regions through research trips and the frequent presentation of this study's ongoing findings at international conferences, both in Iceland and abroad.

The thesis will be structured as follows:

1. Introduction
  - 1.1. Preface
  - 1.2. The Field of Study
  - 1.3. Survey of Source Material
  - 1.4. *Stand der Forschung*
  - 1.5. Definition of Terms

- 1.6. The Structure of this Study
  2. Spatial Theory
    - 2.1. Origins of Spatial Studies
    - 2.2. Use in Historical Studies of the North Atlantic
    - 2.3. Use in Studies of 'Religious' Cultures
    - 2.4. A Methodology of Spatial Studies
  3. Power Negotiation at Farmsteads and Halls in the North Atlantic
    - 3.1. Human-Human Negotiation and its Spaces
      - 3.1.1. Legislative and Political Negotiation: Halls as Centres of Political and Royal Power
      - 3.1.2. Duels and Violence: Military Space on the Farmstead
      - 3.1.3. Trade and Economic Negotiation: Gift Giving and Private Trade
    - 3.2. Human-Other Negotiation and its Spaces
      - 3.2.1. Sacrifice and *Blót*
      - 3.2.2. Feasts and Royal Ritual: Sacral Kingship
      - 3.2.3. Visiting *Völur*
      - 3.2.4. Land Usage on the Farmstead
      - 3.2.5. *Hofar* and *Hörgar*: Cultic Buildings on the Farmstead?
    - 3.3. Models of Power at Farmsteads and Halls
  4. Power Negotiation at Þing Sites across the North Atlantic
    - 4.1. Human-Human Negotiation and its Spaces
      - 4.1.1. Legislative and Political Negotiation: The Role of the Þing in Governance
      - 4.1.2. Duels and Violence at the Þing
      - 4.1.3. Trade and Economic Negotiation at the Þing
    - 4.2. Human-Other Negotiation and its Spaces
      - 4.2.1. The Quest for Knowledge, Prophecy, and the Casting of Lots
      - 4.2.2. The Negotiation of Land Usage
      - 4.2.3. Seeking Supernatural Patronage
      - 4.2.4. Political Rulers and the Supernatural: Election, Enthroning and other Rituals
      - 4.2.5. Supernatural Protection: Sanctuary and the *Vé*
    - 4.3. Models of Power and Space at Þing Sites
    - 4.4. Testing Models of Power and Space
      - 4.4.1. Survey of Þing Sites outside the North Atlantic Region
      - 4.4.2. Testing Models: Do Other Nordic Þing Sites Resemble their North-Atlantic Counterparts?
  5. Conclusions
    - 5.1. Power Negotiations in Pre-Christian Society: Public and/or Private? Comparing the Spaces of Farms and Þing Sites
    - 5.2. The Space of Negotiating with the Otherworld: Sacral and/or Multivalent Spaces?
    - 5.3. Directions for Further Research
    - 5.4. Final Reflections on Space and Power in the Early-Medieval North Atlantic
- Appendices:
- Appendix 1: Summary in Icelandic
  - Appendix 2: Summary in German
  - Appendix 3: Bibliography

The proposed timeline for the work is as follows:

<p><b>Year One (2012-3):</b>                  October-December: Initial gathering of primary and secondary sources                  January-March: Drafting of Chapters 1-2                  April-September: Drafting of Chapters 3.1-3.2                  June-July: Research trip to examine the landscapes of archaeologically known sites of interest around Iceland, e.g. Þingvellir; Hofstaðir; Helgafell (on Breiðafjörður); etc.                  Throughout: Presentation of initial findings and anticipated developments at academic conferences                  September: End-of-year review with supervisors (Terry Gunnell and Jens Peter Schjødt)</p> <p><b>Year Two (2013-4):</b>                  October-December: Drafting of Chapters 3.2-3.3                  January-September: Drafting of Chapter 4                  June-July: Research trip to Norway/Orkney/Shetland/the Faroe Isles to examine the landscapes surrounding archaeologically known sites of interest, e.g. Borg, Lofoten Islands, Norway; Tingwall, Shetland; the Gulating, Norway; etc.                  Throughout: Presentation of findings as work-in-progress at academic conferences                  September: End-of-year review with supervisors (Terry Gunnell and Jens Peter Schjødt)</p> <p><b>Year Three (2014-5):</b>                  October-December: Drafting of Chapter 5                  January-April: Review and editing of Chapters 1-4                  May: Editing of Chapter 5                  June-July: Final preparations for submission (including proof-reading, formatting, compilation of bibliography, translation of Icelandic and German summaries, preparation of images)                  August: Final review with supervisors (Terry Gunnell and Jens Peter Schjødt)                  September: Submission                  Post-Submission: Viva/Defence                  Post-Submission: Editing of findings for publication as a monograph                  Throughout: Presentation of findings at academic conferences</p> <p><b>Years Following (2015-):</b>                  Throughout: Publication of findings as a monograph                  Throughout: Presentation of findings at academic conferences</p>	
<p><b>1.8 Samstarfsaðilar:</b>                  Ef við á. Doktorsnefnd skal skrá í lið 4.</p>	<p><b>1.8.1 Stofnun/fyrirtæki:</b> Department of Culture and Society, Århus Universitet, Denmark  <b>1.8.2 Tengiliðir:</b> Prof. Jens Peter Schjødt  <b>1.8.3 Eðli samstarfs:</b> Advisory Supervisor</p>
<p><b>1.9.1 Aðrir Styrkir:</b>                  Hafa leiðbeinandi og/eða nemandi hlotið aðra styrki til þessa verkefnis?</p>	<p>No.</p>
<p><b>1.9.2 Frá hverjum og til hvaða þátta?:</b></p>	<p>N/A</p>