

# **The Self in Social Spaces: Conceptualizations and Representations in the Textual and Material Culture of Medieval Scandinavia**

## **Proposal Summary**

A central concern of the humanities is to understand how the self relates to its world and to history, and consequently how this relationship is conceptualized and represented in textual and material culture. This project will contribute to the discussion by conceptualizing the self as the cognitive process of self-awareness, without neglecting the significance of the self's embodiment and surrounding culture. The project will be interdisciplinary and will search to investigate textual and material culture of Medieval Scandinavia.

Old Norse textual culture contains traditional medieval genres in translation, as well as highly distinct genres, such as the Icelandic family sagas. These sagas are individual and family biographies from the period of settlement of Iceland, stories about social feuds and honor, pagan past and Christian identity. The sagas exhibit significant debts to foreign cultural impulses while simultaneously being unique compared to other medieval, and modern, literatures. In a similar way, archaeological, architectural, and art-historical material from medieval Scandinavia demonstrates common European stylistic features in combination with unique Scandinavian characteristics. Thus, Scandinavian textual and material culture has great, but as yet unexploited, potential to elucidate (1) the significance of self-awareness for one's own agency in literature and other texts, depending on the linguistic, discourse, and cultural context; and (2) the link between individual cognition and agency and contemporary social and cultural spaces, as demonstrated by material culture.

The first of these questions will be investigated by the principal investigator of the project, who is a philologist and literary historian, together with a medieval historian who will study medieval diplomas. The second question will be discussed by a PhD student.<sup>1</sup>

This investigation will utilize theories of 'distributed cognition' (cognitive sciences) and 'artefactual textuality' (philology), both of which foreground human agency and the cognitive processes that underlie the production of textual culture. The two main questions will be studied based on different types of textual and material culture material (manuscripts, documents, archeology, architecture, art-historical material) and by systematically combining methods that previously have only been used independently. This theoretically and methodologically innovative study of unique material will contribute fresh perspectives to discussions of the medieval and modern self, in Scandinavia and in Europe.

## **The State of the Art and Objectives**

The project contributes to and, therefore, needs to be positioned within three fields of studies. The most immediately relevant field is Old Norse studies; the second is studies of the medieval self; the last is theories of the self within the fields of literature and history generally. I will start with the broadest contextualization of the project in order to best explain its timeliness and actuality:

The definition of the self has been a major discussion for many historians and literary scholars. However, emphasis has most often been placed on the exceptional male individual (not the self as such), or the conditioning factors of class, social relations or power (Marxist theory), or the mess and tangle between agency and structure, or discourse and language (post-modernism, for example Foucault). Scholars have also discussed the availability of multiple selves, or roles, within one and the same individual, and the inner and social conflicts that may arise because of the availability of such multiple, and often conflicting, selves. Such observations have led to debates of the corelessness of self, i.e., that the self is undefinable on its own, but is either imposed on us, or is borrowed, mirrored, or reflected. Recently, it has been argued, however, that the self, defined as agency and cognitive change, comes prior to expression (texts, discourses, languages, and social

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<sup>1</sup> The rest of the project description is mainly concerned with the literary/textual part of the project. The PhD who will investigate material culture will define their own research questions, theory and method, in relation to the projects framework, as described here.

structures). The self has also been conceptualized more as *a sense* rather than something that *is* (for example Miller 2003). **Combining the latter two perspectives leads to an explicit distinction between the self and concepts like ‘individual’ or ‘role’ and promotes a new conceptualization of the self as the cognitive process of self-awareness.** This is the most reasonable definition based on the state of the art of the field and will be used as a starting point here, emphasizing that the way we think and feel about ourselves (and not only what we do) is a major factor that conditions the way we define ourselves, our relationships, and the way we act and react to the culture around us. Eventually, the project will reveal whether this conceptualization is useful, or whether it needs to be reconsidered.

By conceptualizing the self as the cognitive process of self-awareness, the significance of the self’s historical roots becomes more apparent. Self-awareness may encompass awareness of own ‘origin’ and historical development and thus accentuates the need to look back in history. In this project the focus will fall on **the Middle Ages**. This is a period characterized by major intellectual, social, and cultural milestones, such as the twelfth-century ‘Renaissance’, the flowering of vernacular literature, urbanization and the establishment of universities in Europe, which are of central significance for the conceptualization of the medieval, and modern, self.

The self has been discussed by literary scholars and historians of the Middle Ages as well and numerous aspects of the inner and social self have been promoted as primary and defining (see the work of, among others, Bynum, Carruthers, Jaeger, Stock, Gurevich, le Goff, Morris, Hanning, Crane, Rosenwein). The contention among medievalists today is that complexity – for example, inner *and* social, religious *and* intellectual, rational *and* emotional – is a prime feature of the medieval self, which needs to be studied within a specific temporal and socio-cultural context. The significance of self-awareness for the conceptualization of the self is not, however, always recognized in medieval studies. This ensures that its acknowledgement in this project will have an impact on the field. Further, due to the increasing emphasis on the significance of the social space for the formation of complex selves, there are few comparative studies of the conceptualization of the self in various social contexts, or over a period of time. Comparison, just as awareness of historical development, is central, however, when the self is conceptualized as a cognitive process, as self-perception encompasses mirroring and reflecting against a cultural or temporal ‘other’. **The comparative aspect, synchronically across linguistic and cultural boundaries and diachronically over time within the same culture, will be central to the proposed project.**

All work with medieval material, including comparison, demands a solid grasp on the material complexities of medieval manuscript culture. A main characteristic of medieval manuscript culture, which distinguishes it from printed culture, is its variance: i.e., each time a text is copied or rewritten, it is inevitably changed according to the creative agents’ writing strategies. Each new version of a text needs therefore to be taken into consideration independently, with all its textual, material, and social parameters (Nichols 1990). Therefore, studies of the self, conceptualized as self-reflection and self-awareness, will be pursued based on **specific manuscript versions**, and not based on a reconstructed text-work, as is done in all of the studies referred to above; the relevant context will be defined by the **dating and provenance of the studied manuscripts; the creative agents behind the specific manuscripts** will be drawn to the fore and not the traditional idea of an author. Therefore, this project not only re-conceptualizes the self, but it also repositions it in new and numerous social spaces, which is necessitated by the nature of medieval manuscript culture.

The field that this project most immediately engages is the self as represented in the **textual culture of medieval Scandinavia**, which has unrealized potential with regard to the topic, as it is unique compared to other medieval literatures for several reasons. First, Old Norse literature includes many of the traditional medieval genres in translations, such as romances, *chansons de geste*, and saints’ lives, but when these started to be translated into Old Norse, there existed already **a strong indigenous narrative tradition**, in prose and verse, as nowhere else in Europe: the Icelandic family sagas, which include skaldic verse, are thus highly distinct and independent from other medieval vernacular literatures (Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2012). Second, the Icelandic sagas are unique also due to their **content**, which concerns the settlement of Iceland during the Viking

period, the development of a unique law system, and social feuds fueled by honor, loyalty, and love; the elements they contain from Old Norse mythology and Scandinavia's pagan past; their **sober narratological style** (in stark contrast to the style of learned and romantic literature, for example); their **prosimetric form**, including complex skaldic poetry; and the **textual community** in which they participate (runic and Latin alphabet), among other features. It has been suggested that the Icelandic family sagas have an oral origin, conveying the grandeur of the Vikings. In their written form, the stories are reflected through the lenses of Christian writers and scribes. They started to be written down in the thirteenth century, a period characterized as a major cultural pinnacle and a golden age of medieval Scandinavia, and remained popular, i.e., they were recopied again and again, well into the nineteenth century. **The main question that triggers and legitimates this project is: what kinds of selves were responsible for the creation and the long continuous transmission of such a different and unique literary (and material) culture, and did the medieval Scandinavians' own self-awareness and self-perception have anything to do with it?**

As in the field of medieval studies, psychoanalysis (Miller 1992, Poole 2004, Ármann Jakobsson 2008) and studies of the social roles of the characters (Bagge 1989, 1998; Wanner 2008; Torfi Tulinius 2009, Sverrir Jakobsson 2007) have dominated the field at the expense of the characters' own cognition and thoughts of self. Scholars have recently become concerned with the work of various creative agents (not just the author), such as the scribe, translator, illuminator, etc. (for example Quinn and Lethbridge eds. 2010, Rankovic ed. 2012), but these studies are seldom, if ever, combined with studies of the variance of such content-aspects as the self. The focus here will be on passages revealing the characters' self-perception, such as famous one-liners and skaldic verses,<sup>2</sup> and how these passages are transmitted in various textual versions.

To recapitulate: the present project develops new perspectives in several fields of study by conceptualizing the self as the cognitive process of self-awareness, which is, nonetheless, always formed under the influence of language and culture, social relationships, and type of discourse. This emphasis on self-awareness and self-evaluation necessitates a look back to the Middle Ages, when many of the social institutions that define the modern self developed, and it demands diachronic and synchronic comparison. The main focus in the project will be on textual and material culture of medieval Scandinavia, which is both indebted to traditional pan-European medieval genres, and are also unique, stylistically and thematically. Consequently, the main questions that will be addressed concern: **(1)** the significance of self-awareness and self-reflection for the realization of the self in textual material, depending on linguistic, discourse- and cultural context; and **(2)** the link between individual cognition and agency and contemporary social and cultural spaces, as demonstrated by material culture.

Based on the provenance of the material to be studied – medieval Iceland, Norway, and Sweden – the project will span these areas geographically and seek to foreground the cultural links between them. Due to the significance of the social context for the conceptualization of the self, the historical development of the area from the end of thirteenth century to the fifteenth century and beyond – incorporating the gradual distancing of Iceland from the political center, which moved from Norway to Sweden, and then to Denmark – will be an essential element in the investigation. **A main goal of the project as a whole is to investigate whether, and how, this political development influenced the conceptualization of the self as represented in textual and material culture of medieval Scandinavia.**

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<sup>2</sup> Gunnar's famous words at the end of the first part of *Njáls saga* may be seen as an example: 'Fögr er hlíðin, **svá at mér hefir hon aldri jafnfögr sýnzik**, bleikir akrar ok slegin tún, **ok mun ek riða heim aptr ok fara hvergi**' (So lovely is the hillside **that it has never before seemed to me as lovely as now**, with its pale fields and mown meadows; **and I will ride back home and not go anywhere at all**) (Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed), *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ch 75, p. 182). Gunnar is about to leave his homeland, when he notices his surroundings, as if for the first time, and instinctively contemplates on the newness of his emotions. This strike of surprise, and Gunnar's own awareness of it, makes him change his mind and remain home, even though this will cost him his life. This and a few other examples are treated in a short preliminary study, thus confirming the richness of the material with regard to the motif of self-awareness and self-perception (Eriksen 2015); however, the overall approach of this project has not yet been tested.

### Theoretical Concept

The main theoretical axis of the project is defined through deployment of cognitive literary theory in tandem with ‘artefactual textuality’. (1) All cultural expressions that represent the self are results of ‘distributed cognition’, i.e., of an individual cognitive process within a certain social space (Clark and Chalmers 1998, Giere and Moffatt 2003, Adler and Gross 2002). Cognitive theory emphasizes that it is the individual who is the agent, who produces or interprets a cultural expression at the same time as he/she is undividable from the social system. The idea of distributed cognition is highly compatible with the second theoretical premise; (2) The materiality or ‘artefactuality’ of medieval manuscripts is of primary significance for understanding medieval culture and the self, as a manuscript is most significantly ‘an object made or modified by human workmanship’ (Driscoll 2010:92). The awareness that it was people, who shaped and reshaped the manuscripts, and the texts within them, promotes the equal significance of the textual, material *and* social aspects of a medieval text. Furthermore, foregrounding the ‘artefactuality’ of medieval texts equalizes them with other cultural expressions produced by people in the same social communities. This theoretical perspective which may be referred to as ‘artefactual textuality’, not only inspires, but demands the interdisciplinary study of literary and documentary textualities. **Both of these theories promote cognitive agency in cultural production and interpretation, and they offer a potential for a decisive shift when discussing the two main questions of the project.**

### Approach and Sub-projects

The project will be structured in four main sub-projects: (1) PI’s literary project, (2) a historical investigation, (3) a phd project on material culture from medieval Scandinavia, and (4) a theoretical and methodological investigation. They will complement each other and collectively address the main objectives of the project, thus responding to the needs in the fields of Old Norse studies, studies of the medieval self, and the humanities. **Sub-project 1:** The first and main sub-project will be literary and will address the two main questions by studying two texts that were popular in medieval Scandinavia, *Njáls saga* and *Barlaams saga ok Josaphats*. *Njáls saga* is the longest and most complex of all Icelandic family sagas and therefore most suitable to be studied in this project. It is believed to have been written about 1280, and is extant in around sixty manuscripts, twenty-one of which are parchment manuscripts from the period 1300–1600; only six of these contain the bulk of the saga. The legend about Barlaam was a very popular text in the whole of medieval Europe and goes back to the story of Buddha; its Christian version tells of Josaphat, the son of King Avenier, who meets the hermit Barlaam and converts to Christianity. Questions about the core of the self and the processes of inner development, simultaneous with the social negotiation of identity, and specifically Christian identity, are central in this text. The two texts will be studied in the same manner, which will allow comparison between them. They complement each other perfectly and collectively address the two main questions of the project from different perspectives: one represents the Icelandic uniqueness and the other is one of the most popular pan-European medieval legends. The two works represent different genres: one is a classical family saga, the other a hybrid learned text, full of Christian knowledge. They employ different narrative strategies: *Njáls saga*, is a biographical narrative, *Barlaams saga* progresses in the form of a discourse. The two works have different lines of transmissions in different social contexts, including all the cultural areas of interest in this project: Norway, Sweden, and Iceland. They represent both interlingual (Latin and the vernaculars) and intralingual translations and may thus illustrate the significance of language for the conceptualization of the self. The main result of this sub-project will be a monograph, which will incorporate analysis of two texts as well as a comparative discussion (see Gantt chart below). In addition, side-discussions that emerge during work with the monograph will be published in separate articles as the project progresses (at least one article, see Dissemination Plan).

The core genre that will be treated in the monograph is that of the Icelandic family sagas as representatives of the unique Icelandic medieval literature (Torfi Tulinius 2009, Bagge 2009). A detailed study of this genre is a prerequisite for the achievement of the main objectives of the project, and the prime canonical representative, *Njáls saga*, will serve as the ‘red thread’ throughout

the study. Not surprisingly, the saga has been the subject of extensive studies over the years. However, little, if any, attention is given to the self in the major monographs on the saga: Lars Lönnroth (1976) focuses on the structure, style and meaning of the text, Einar Pálsson (1998) analyzes the symbolism and allegory in the saga, and Jón Karl Helgason (1999) studies of the work's post-medieval rewriting. Very recently, William Ian Miller (2014) has published on the fascinating symbiosis between individuals' actions and the Icelandic legal norms, which is a major topic in the saga, and Andrew Joseph Hamer (2014) accounts for the saga's binary nature as a traditional, conventional, formulaic text, which at the same time incorporates elements characteristic of ecclesiastical literature.

The psychology of the self is dealt with in individual articles, and MA and PhD dissertations; one Norwegian PhD dissertation (2000) studies the text from the perspective of modern psychoanalytic theory and notions such as 'normality' and 'deviation'. The great saga individuals and their ethical and social universe have been discussed in relation to other sagas (Miller 1990, Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, Guevich 1995). Such earlier studies will certainly be relevant, but this project proposes an innovative turn in *Njáls saga* scholarship with regard to two aspects: first, none of the studies which are concerned with the characters' psychology, are especially interested in the characters' self-awareness; and second, none of the studies, not even the two recent monographs from 2014, take into consideration the manuscript variation of the saga. They position the saga within a presumed context of origin and fail to deploy the variance of the material in order to comment on its development and adaptation to new cultural contexts. This will be done on this project, since all analyses will be pursued based on different manuscript versions, thus giving new, and previously unstudied, social contexts to old texts.

The creative agents behind the Icelandic sagas, including *Njáls saga*, have been a much-loved and much-debated topic. The field has gradually moved away from the strong grip of the 'Icelandic school' that dominated for much of the twentieth century, and which promoted exclusively the secular Icelandic material and the 'genius Icelandic author', and downplayed the significance of religious texts, translations, or European influence. In recent years, in addition to the acknowledgement of Icelandic culture as an active participant in medieval Europe, the specificity of the manuscripts has also come to the fore, under the influence of New or material philology, which is here expanded to 'artefactual textuality'. Studies of the textual producer are more nuanced and take interest not only in notions of traditional authorship, but also in the nature of the work of other creative agents, such as translators, scribes, rubricators, or illuminators (recent publications on the subject include Quinn and Lethbridge 2010, Rankovic 2012, Eriksen 2014). Nonetheless, studies of the materiality of Old Norse manuscripts and the creative agents behind the manuscripts are seldom, if ever, combined with studies of the variance of such content-aspects as the self.

The philological variance of *Njáls saga* itself has been the main topic of a recent project at the University of Iceland.<sup>3</sup> The project has resulted in the transcription of all manuscript versions of *Njáls saga* and thus provides new, previously unstudied data. In addition, there are a few analytical studies of the manuscript variance of the text and its implications (Lethbridge 2014, Guðrún Nordal 2008). As important as these are for my study of *Njáls saga*, none of these discusses the implications of the manuscript variance for the conceptualization of the self in medieval Iceland. The present project will make use of the new transcriptions. In the first phase of the work I will go through the different versions and choose three suitable versions: ideally, one version used in existing editions, and for the purpose of comparisons, two versions never used in existing editions, and thus never commented on in the scholarship. Even if somewhat fragmentary, the three versions that will be chosen need to be of adequate quality and state of preservation, and to represent the whole timespan of this project – one from the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth century – and thus provide contexts for the saga in different mental, literary and social spaces. Comparing a studied version to rare and unstudied versions guarantees new insight in the material and the novelty of

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<sup>3</sup> <http://njallssaga.wordpress.com/> [last accessed 06.01.2015].

project. Each of the three versions will form a separate case study (chapter 2, 3, and 4; see Gantt chart for a detailed progression-plan).

The analysis of each version of *Njáls saga* will consistently incorporate four different analyses which separately have been applied to different sources, but have never consistently been combined, as will be done here. The four levels of analysis are directly relatable to the conceptualization of the self as self-awareness and the theoretical frameworks of ‘distributed cognition’ and ‘artefactual textuality’. **First**, the motif of self-awareness and self-reflection of the literary characters will be studied in the various versions of the text.<sup>4</sup> Here, I will be interested specifically in passages where the characters demonstrate self-awareness and self-reflection over their own feelings and actions in the narrative. These are of central significance according to the definition of the self and the cognitive theoretical starting point of the project, as opposed to psychological analysis which explains one’s behavior and feelings by tracing the history and background of the individual. As mentioned, such passages are traditionally regarded as few and have not been paid much attention; they do, however, exist (see fn. 1), and appear often in famous one-liners and the skaldic poetry, which is typically part of the prose. The stylistic form of the self-reflective passages, as well as their positioning within the prose, vary from one version to another (Guðrún Nordal 2008), and are thus central factors that shed light on the literary agency of the scribe of any given version.

In the **second** level of analysis, my attention will move from the literary character to the voice of the narrator, as a central meta-textual characteristic which has a double nature: it is both created by the creative agent of any given version and functions as the creator of the literary character. Reading each text-version of the saga, I will investigate whether the narrator has a significant role in the narrative: how the narrator relates to the various characters; whether the narrator’s voice offers specific reflections and awareness on the narrative; and whether these reflections are in opposition to the rest of the narrative discourse.<sup>5</sup> This level of analysis will convey whether the creative agent (the scribe of the specific version) uses the narrator in order to communicate literary views different from his own, or in order to emphasize sides of the characters that are not emphasized by the rest of the discourse. Thus, the narrator functions as a literary filter that is ultimately instructive of the scribe’s own sense of self and freedom of agency.

**Third**, my attention will turn to the manuscript as a cultural artefact and I will chart the content of the manuscript containing each of the three versions. *Njáls saga* distinguishes itself from the other family sagas, since it appears in manuscripts on its own more often than the other sagas.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, each of the versions needs to be situated in a context of contemporary background manuscripts. At this stage of the analysis, I will also study the content of these background manuscripts and note whether these contain one or multiple texts, or texts from one and the same genre, or various genres. This analysis will demonstrate the literary-social context in which the saga acts as an individual narrative<sup>7</sup> and reflects the thoughts of the creative agents with regard to how the story fits in various literary and social spaces.

In the **fourth**, and last, level of analysis, I will focus on the ‘creative agents’ behind the different version, as demanded by the theoretical emphasis of the artefactuality of the textual material. As suggested by concepts like ‘distributed cognition’, this will most often be a production group, which has grown and developed during the transmission of the text; the main role in this group is played by the scribe(s) of each version, but the work of past creative agents lingers in the background (the original author or previous scribes or translators).<sup>8</sup> Most of these individuals are unfortunately unknown to us. However, if the creative agents behind any of the chosen manuscript

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<sup>4</sup> See Eriksen (forthcoming), Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 2012. On the role of poetry, which often contains self-reflective elements, in Icelandic family sagas and legendary sagas see for example Guðrún Nordal 2001, 2012, Clunies Ross 2010, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> There are many studies of the function and role of the narrator, but again, these are not related to the theme of the agency of the individual, as is the aim of this project. See for example O’Connor 2005, Johansson 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Lethbridge 2014.

<sup>7</sup> For a similar approach to other texts, but without a discussion of the self, see Eriksen 2014, Lethbridge 2012.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the issue with regard to the family sagas, see Clover 2005:245–46. For a similar method pursued with regard to other texts see Sverrir Thomasson 1977, Eriksen 2012, Sverrir Jakobsson 2007, Rankovic 2007, 2012.

versions are identifiable in any way (based on paleographical aspects of their work or other indications), it will be relevant to trace whether they were responsible for the production of other texts, and to discuss the nature of their social roles (e.g., chieftain, bishop, king's poet, etc.). In this way, I will map the individuals behind the manuscripts containing each text-version, their literary and social agency, as defined by the literary material they produced.

To repeat: I will conduct this four-stage analysis on three different versions of *Njáls saga*, one from the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth century, which will correspond respectively to chapters 2, 3 and 4 in volume I of the two-volume monograph (see Gantt chart below). In chapter 5, which will conclude the first volume, I will compare the development of these four selves through time and social space, and in relation to the general 'movement' of Iceland away from the political center. Differences between the versions may reveal how the conceptualization of the self is adapted to the new target-contexts. Lack of substantial differences between the versions is, however, equally interesting as it opens up for a debate on why it may be that an Old Norse text as *Njáls saga* withstood *variance*, the main characteristic of medieval textual culture.

The monograph will address the question of the significance of language and cultural context for the conceptualization of the self, by focusing on a translation, in addition to an indigenous saga. The legend of Barlaam and Josaphat was one of the most popular stories in medieval Europe; it was translated into many vernaculars and rewritten in new narratives.<sup>9</sup> The transmission of the text in medieval Scandinavia provides ideal material with regard to the geographical and temporal parameters of this project, unparalleled by other Norse translations. There is an Old Norse version of the legend, dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century and allegedly commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarsson 'the young' (1232–1257), son of Hákon Hákonarsson, whose reign is known as a cultural Golden Age. Scholars have discussed whether the saga was translated into Old Norse exclusively from Latin, or via French or German. This version is preserved in the Norwegian manuscript Holm Perg 6 fol., now in the National Library of Sweden. The legend was known in medieval Sweden as well, in two versions. The longer version, preserved in Holm A 49, also called *Nådendals klosterbok* (National Library of Sweden), was supposedly based on the Norwegian version, and will be of central interest in this sub-project. A 49 may be the very manuscript produced by the translator, which is very rare in the medieval material and of central significance in this project. The legend was known in Iceland as well: one version, Holm Perg 3 fol. (1525), known as *Reykjahólabók* (National Library of Sweden), is based on a Low German *Passionael*, a translation of the Latin *Legenda aurea*, from the end of fifteenth century. The scribe of the manuscript, and the translator of the text, may have been Björn Þorleifsson (c. 1474–1550), which once again allows a contextualization in a clearly defined social space.

Previous research on the medieval Scandinavian versions of the legend is extremely limited. The most recent publication is an anthology of articles (in Norwegian and Swedish) from 2009, edited by Karl G. Johansson and Maria Arvidsson. The articles treat questions of intertextuality with other European and some Old Norse texts, such as *Konungs Skuggsjá*. There is also a PhD project in-progress by Maria Arvidsson at the University of Copenhagen that considers the philological aspects of Holm A 49. The only publications prior to these studies are editions and translations of various versions of the texts. Thus, the material is ripe for new research.

The structure of the analysis of *Barlaams saga* will correspond to the structure of the analysis of *Njáls saga*. I will conduct the same four-level analysis and investigate the literary topos of self-awareness; the voice of the narrator; manuscript and literary context of the different versions; and the nature of the creative production group behind the specific version. The studies of the Norwegian, Swedish and Icelandic version of the text will be treated respectively in chapters 6, 7, and 8, and compared in chapter 9. I aim to pose the same questions, from the same theoretical and methodological perspectives in the two sub-projects, and in the same time remain open for necessary adaptation of methodology due to the differences between the two texts.

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<sup>9</sup> On the transmission and translation of the legend in medieval Europe, see Haugen and Johansson 2009:13.

The last chapter of the book, chapter 10, will be dedicated to an overreaching comparison, which would not be possible if the two texts were studied separately. I will be interested in discerning existing patterns of changes, as well as lack of changes, in the representation of the self in the various versions of the two texts. The traditional contention is that texts based on Latin-Christian authority are more stable in their manuscript tradition, compared to vernacular texts, which are more fluid. The results of this sub-project will have implications relevant for this contention. Returning back to the starting point and the conceptualization of the self as the cognitive processes of self-awareness, I will conclusively evaluate (1) the significance of self-awareness for one's own behavior and agency in literature, (2) the development of the link between cognition of literary characters and attitudes towards cognition and the self in medieval Scandinavia.

The main objective of **sub-project 2** will be to bring the type of textual discourse into the discussion, by studying the representation of the self in documentary texts, i.e., Norwegian and Icelandic charters (*Diplomatarium Norvegicum* and *Diplomatarium Islandicum*). This sub-project will be carried out by Associate Professor in medieval history Bjørn Bandlien (BB) and will result in a series of four scholarly articles, complementing the analysis of the self based on different manuscript versions of *Njáls saga* and *Barlaams saga*. BB will study charters which recount of the people behind the relevant manuscripts and their participation in various social spaces. Social spaces will here be defined as constituting a system of overarching communities, which share common cultural norms, overlap with other overarching communities, and which may include smaller social spaces.

While the first sub-projects focus on textual material from medieval Scandinavia, a phd (**sub-project 3**) will study the self, based on material culture from medieval Scandinavia, by studying archaeological, architectural or art-historical sources. Sub-project 2 has to commit to the theme, theory, and method of the project as a whole, and in addition complement the work of the other project members with regard to the sources chosen. Projects that discuss material culture in connection or juxtaposition to literary and textual sources will be considered as highly relevant. The project will result with a phd-dissertation.

**Sub-project 4** will consist of an ongoing discourse about **the theory and methodology** of studying the self, between the PI and the team members mentioned so far, and a group of international specialists studying the self from Scandinavian and European perspectives. The scholars are invited to participate in a project-based seminar, 'The Self Seminar', which will consist of a series of lectures, taking place twice each semester and focusing on the theory and methodology of the self from interdisciplinary and comparative perspectives. This seminar-based-discourse will result in an anthology. These experts are chosen because they have produced some of the main publications on the topic and have thus defined the research field as it stands today (see bibliography). Some of them are text/ manuscript oriented: **Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir** (University of Iceland), **Torfi Tulinius** (University of Iceland), **Ármann Jakobsson** (University of Iceland), **Rita Copeland** (University of Pennsylvania), **Kathryn A. Smith** (New York University), while others are history specialists: **William Ian Miller** (University of Michigan Law School), **Sverrir Jakobsson** (University of Iceland), **Ian P. Wei** (University of Bristol), **David Gary Shaw** (Wesleyan University), **John Arnold** (Birkbeck).

To recapitulate, the four sub-projects will collectively address the two main questions of the project, about the conceptualization of the self in textual and material culture from medieval Scandinavia and the link between literary selves and historical creative selves, in a new theoretical and methodological manner. The purpose of the project is not to discuss every aspect of the self, but rather to investigate the self, conceptualized as self-awareness, as systematically and thoroughly as possible, based on the proposed material, which is chosen because of its suitability with regard to the main questions. We aim, thus, to bring the discussion as far as possible, without claiming exclusiveness, and thereafter, to discuss the implications of our results for broader fields such as literary and historical studies of the medieval and modern self.

### **The Team and Networks**

I, Dr. Stefka G. Eriksen, will be the PI of the project and will dedicate 60% of my time to the project. I have the necessary competence to lead the project based on my intellectual mobility within the field of medieval studies, my linguistic competence based on work with medieval material from Norway, Sweden, and Iceland, and my experience from managing, administrating, and successfully concluding international and interdisciplinary research projects (see CV). In addition, Associate Professor Bjørn Bandlien will perform individually designed tasks, which are necessary for the achievement of one of the main objectives of the project. The phd position will be announced, in order to attract the best possible candidate.

In addition to these core team-members, the project will include an advisory board, which will comprise the literary scholars, historians and art-historians mentioned above and for the reasons mentioned above. Each member of the advisory board will be invited for a fortnight-long research-stay in Oslo, when they will give a paper at the open Self Seminar; they will also participate in a closed seminar for the project's members only, where they would appraise of the project's progress and discuss work-in-progress. Such regular visits by members of the advisory board will provide a continuous evaluation and feedback with regard to the progress of the project and constantly develop the project's potential for international and wide impact.

From a broader perspective, the project is very well situated with regard to the on-going research activities in national and international institutions. The host institution of the PI, Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research, provides excellent social and academic conditions for the project as it has an active and productive medievalists milieu. The PI also participates in various national and international networks that will form part of our broader contact-net (see CV). The expertise of the local team (2 senior scholars and one phd), the advisory board, and the contacts with other national and international projects and networks, provide an excellent foundation for the realization of the project's planned activities and publications.

### **Project activities and dissemination of results**

The project is to span four years (11.2016 – 10.2019). It will result in the publication of two books in total: one monograph (PI) and one anthology; one article-based phd dissertation, and at least six scholarly articles. All of these will be published open-access, with prestigious international publishers and peer-reviewed journals, and thus potentially reach a wide readership of medievalists.

Research-visits by the international contributors, which will constitute 'The Self Seminar', will be on-going from the second half of the first year through the first half of the fourth year, and will be open to all. On a more day-to-day basis, the local team will have regular seminars, potentially together with members of other related projects, in order to establish an arena for common discussions, oral presentations of work-in-progress, and collective reading of drafts of chapters/articles.

In addition to our own activities, the project members plan to present their work at the following major International Conferences: The Medieval Translator Conference (July 2016); International Arthurian Congress (July 2017); The Saga Conference (July 2018 in Reykjavik); and/or the International Congresses in Leeds (UK), Kalamazoo, MI (USA), and the Medieval Academy of America conference (annual). The PI will participate in four of these major conferences (one per year) and BB will participate in two conferences. In addition, the PI and BB will make field trips to relevant libraries in Stockholm, Uppsala and Reykjavik, in order to work with the manuscripts and charters on site. The phd will have one trip per year, either participation in a conference or a field trip, depending on what is most relevant for his/her work.

### **Impact and Utility**

This project proposes a new conceptualization of the self (as the cognitive process of self-awareness), and will approach the material from new theoretical perspectives ('distributed cognition' and 'artefactual textuality'), in new interdisciplinary ways, and based on sources with unique potential (*Njáls saga* and *Barlaams saga*, and appropriate material sources). The project will thus not only expand the field of medieval Scandinavian textual culture by treating a topic that has

only barely been touched upon so far, but also will potentially inspire new discussions and scholarship on the self based on other European material, medieval and modern.

The project complies well with the national responsibilities of the host institution, to provide research-based knowledge about Nordic Middle Ages. It will provide excellent arena for cooperation with other disciplines, such as history, art-history, and archeology, as well as psychology and sociology, as is planned in this project.

In addition, the project follows some of the main recommendations formulated in the national strategy of the Norwegian Research Council with regard to the development of the humanities. The individual and the self are here studied on their own and not only as support the development of technology, economy, or medicine. Overt specialization is avoided by the projects interdisciplinary, comparative and co-operative nature. Last but not least, the project elucidates contemporary socio-cultural debates such as modes of negotiation of agency and identity in an increasingly multilingual and multifaceted society. The Middle Ages gave birth to many of the institutions that define the self today. Studying the conceptualization of the self during this crucial period in an innovative and interdisciplinary way has the potential to raise awareness of our own position and agency in various social spaces today.

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