Seeing Colour: Racial "blackness" in *Ectors saga*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of black identity in the 15th century Icelandic text *Ectors saga* using a critical race approach and utilising the concepts of subalternity, marginality, and intersectionality. By taking this approach this research reveals how connotations of blackness are used in this saga as a basis for exclusion and racial thinking. Moreover, this thesis underscores how the author of *Ectors saga* utilises geography to incorporate Iceland into a broader European narrative of migration and shared descent, whilst simultaneously presenting black characters as unassimilable to this narrative.

This research also addresses the intersection of blackness with other categories of differentiation, highlighting the racial undertones of religious groupings and the Norse categories of "berserker" and "troll." Therefore, this thesis offers insight into the implications of blackness as well as other categories of differentiation, thus suggesting possible avenues for future research into race in Old Norse literature.

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Introduction

Objectives and Theoretical Approach

The primary aim of this thesis is to determine to what extent the representation of black characters in the 15th century text *Ectors saga*, is indicative of racial thinking.[1] To this end, this thesis takes a critical-race approach inspired by that of Gerladine Heng, who describes race as a 'structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences' and highlights its role in constructing a 'hierarchy of peoples for differential treatment.'[2] Following Heng's approach, this thesis will focus on the ways in which race is constructed and to what extent these processes are evident in *Ectors saga*. Given that there are two terms for the colour black in Old Norse, this thesis will consider how both *svartr* and *blár* characters are depicted, using the Norse terms to refer to these colours specifically and the English terms "black" and "blackness" to refer to them collectively.[3]

Foundational to this approach is an understanding of race as a social construct and an appreciation of the hierarchical nature of 'racial-thinking.'[4] In her book *The Invention of Race*, Heng uses various case studies to explore the tendencies, patterns, and strategies which are utilised in 'race-making,' as well as examining what societal dynamics are conducive to 'the production of racial form and raced behaviour.'[5]

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[1] Agnete Loth (ed.), *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, vol. 1, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, series B, vol. 20. (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1962), IX.

[2] Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27, 3.

[3] Kirsten Wolf, "The Colour Blue in Old Norse Icelandic Literature," *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006), 55-78.

[4] Heng, *The Invention of Race*, xii; See also: Richard Cole, "Racial thinking in Old Norse literature," *Saga-Book* 39 (2015), 21.

[5] Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 5.
One of the case studies which Heng discusses are the *Skræling* of North America who appear in the Vinland sagas and will be discussed in chapter three of this thesis as an example of a racial or ethnic group which is characterised as exhibiting a trollish nature and behaviour. Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 257-86.

In her approach, Heng builds on the work of earlier scholars such as Ann Stoler who affirms that "the concept of race is an 'empty vacuum' – an image both conveying [the] 'chameleonic' quality [of race] and [its] ability to ingest other ways of distinguishing social categories."[6] Like Stoler, Heng emphasises the malleability of race as a tool of social categorisation which may intersect and subsume other social categories such as gender, religion, and language. Through appreciation of this interconnectedness of different social categories they express the 'intersectionality' of race which is a central concept of critical-race theory. Critics of Heng have suggested that there exists within her work a tension between the intersectionality of race and the ability of race to subsume other social categories. Thus, it has been argued that Heng assigns to race a greater importance than other social categories and that this may reflect the focus of her work or a political agenda, rather than a historical reality.

On the other hand, a notable strength of Heng's concept is that it allows for the greater or lesser importance of different facets of race-making in different contexts. Such facets of race-making may include somatic difference, language, religion, and culture. This is clear in the recent racial analysis of Bede's *Historia* by W. Trent Foley which relies significantly on Heng's concept and concludes that the *Historia* 'typically distinguishes the races of Britain by means of moral character rather than superficial appearance,' but that this distinction can nevertheless be considered racial.[7]

Heng's ideas about the structural nature of race and its key role in demarcating human difference in a way which is socially and politically salient serve as a vital framework for the consideration of race in this thesis.[8] Although, this thesis will also seek to addressing the primary criticism of Heng's work: that her definition of race is too broad and so subsumes

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[6] Ann L. Stoler, "Racial Histories and their Regimes of Truth," *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 (1997), 191.
[7] Foley, *Bede*, 28, 187.
[8] Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 27.

other strategies of differentiation such as religion and language which other scholars consider to be more important than race in the construction of medieval identities.[9] To address this criticism this thesis considers race to be one of several intersecting categories of differentiation which contribute to identity, rather than one all-encompassing strategy of differentiation. By not ascribing primacy to either race or religion this approach allows their relative importance to be dictated by the primary source literature.

The understanding of race in this thesis will also draw on the work of Richard Cole, which looks specifically at racial thought in Old Norse literature. Cole notes that 'supposed hereditary characteristics' and 'shaping environments' are especially important in this context and suggests a practical division of racial characteristics into the categories of physical, intellectual, and moral traits.[10] By considering the ideas of race and its construction set out by Heng and Cole one can arrive at single definition of race which considers both the broader phenomenon and the specific Old Norse context, a definition of race as:

> A socially constructed category of differentiation which utilises differences in supposed hereditary characteristics and/or shaping environments to assume certain shared physical, intellectual, and moral qualities which may be used to justify a hierarchical relationship.[11]

Within scholarship there remains significant discussion as to the relationship between race and ethnicity, both of which are important terms used in this thesis. Robert Bartlett largely conflates the two, arguing that race, ethnicity, and nation were almost indistinguishable in the

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[9] Bartlett, "Race and Ethnicity," 53-4.
[10] Cole, "Racial thinking," 21.
[11] Cole, "Racial thinking," 21.

context of the Middle Ages.[12] Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus regarding the distinction between race and ethnicity. Race, which was previously assumed to represent differences in a logical or even scientific manner, has in the past century been shown to fundamentally lack any basis in empirical reality.[13] Now scholars generally view race as a 'dangerous myth,' grounded in prejudice, and possessing a propensity for causing strife and human misery.[14] Although, the term retains utility as a convenient term, an 'expedient fiction,' for categorising the peoples of the world.[15]

Ethnicity is regarded to be more fluid and to allow for the greater agency of individuals to self-identify.[16] Within ethnicity the boundaries between groups are also regarded to be more permeable since it is understood that most ethnic groups do not exist in a cultural vacuum, rather they are organic groupings which may be influenced by interaction with other ethnic groups or by other circumstances.[17] Recent scholarship on ethnicity also demonstrates a strong awareness of the allusivity of ethnicity, and its limitation as a mode of differentiation, and this awareness serves to prevent anachronisms which might derive from the use of ethnicity as a blanket term for all human difference.[18]

Given these distinctions, divides drawn between racial groups tend to be starker than those between ethnic groups, since they purport to reflect innate characteristics and

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[12] Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 1, 41-2, 53.

[13] Montagu, *The Fallacy of Race*, 121-44.

[14] Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (London: Altamira Press 1998), 41; Cole, "Racial thinking," 21; Lancelot Hogben, *Genetic Principles in Medicine and Social Science*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), 122-44; See also Lancelot
Hogben, *Nature and Nurture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1933); Susan Reynolds, "Medieval Origins Gentium and the Community of the Realm," *History* 68 (1983): 224, 379.

[15] Montagu, *The Fallacy of Race*, 41-43.

[16] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), 9-38; Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 14-5; Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), 21.

[17] Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 9-38.

[18] Walter Pohl, "Comparing Communities – the Limits of Typology," *History and Anthropology* 25 (2014), 1-18; Patrick Geary, "Power and Ethnicity," *History and Anthropology* 26 (2015): 1, 8-17; Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities 300-800* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

immutable mental or physical qualities which a particular race groups are imagined to possess.[19] These ideas of race are primarily formed in the imagination of those outside of the group and imposed on those judged to be inside the group. Thus, in Western thinking and writing, racial categorisations are primarily produced by a dominant (white) discourse and imposed on minority groups and serve as a basis for inequality and exclusion within a hierarchy of power.[20] Since whites have historically dominated racial discourse there are no racial traits which or characteristic of being white.[21] As W. Trent Foley puts it: 'to be white is not anything in particular. It is to be the non-raced race.'[22] Thus within the idea of race there is an inherent imbalance of power favouring the white or non-raced perspective, which is treated as the 'human norm.'[23]

As the above comparisons demonstrate, ethnicity carries less baggage and is most often the more appropriate term to use in a modern context where individuals are being asked to self-identify. Nonetheless, for purpose of this thesis the biological and hierarchical pretences of the term race are useful for communicating the representation of black characters in the primary source literature, since the differences in their representation often build on understandings of biology and inheritance which held sway at the time of composition. Furthermore, as Bartlett notes, race and its associated terms *racial*, and *racism*, are more conducive to the writing of a clear and understandable argument on this topic; compared to the equivalent terms of ethnicity, ethnic, and ethnicism, the latter of which is not in common

[19] Claire Weeda, *Ethnicity in Medieval Europe, 950-1250: Medicine, Power and Religion* (York: York Medieval Press, 2021), 14-5; Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 23, 33-4; Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations* (London: SAGE publications, 2008), 77-85; George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (London: Princeton University Press, 2002). For the meaning of race in modernity see also Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (New York: Routledge, 1977); Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge, 1987).
[20] Karen E. Fields and B. J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2012).
[21] Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997) 1.
[22] W. Trent Foley, *Bede and the Beginnings of English Racism*, Studia Traditionis Theologiae, Explorations in Early & Medieval Theology, no. 49 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 68.
[23] Richard Dyer observes the inability of whiteness to see itself: 'As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people.' Dyer, *White*, 1.

usage and carries an archaic and possibly confusing association with paganism.[24] The book *The Origins of Racism in the West*, especially demonstrates the usefulness of considering the development of racial and racist discourses in conjunction.[25] Therefore, this thesis will also prefer the language of race partly for the sake of clarity but mostly since its negative associations with racism and misunderstood biology find expression in a Medieval context. Nevertheless, it will sometimes still be useful to use the term 'racial thinking,' to differentiate the medieval and less structured ideas of race from modern notions of race.[26]

The relevance of ethnicity and race to medieval identity is also a matter of some debate. Some scholars such as Bartlett assigns a rather minor role to race/ethnicity/nation as 'only one strand in the formation of political consciousness and the construction of political units.'[27] Meanwhile, other scholars have opposed the use of the term "race" in a medieval context on the basis that ideas about race are not sufficiently consistent in pre-modern periods to allow us to talk about races and their representation.[28] This objection is founded on the notion of race as a part of a universalising system of categorising people. However, modern scholarship on race shows that this is often not how racial thinking presents, or how it is experienced. Racial thinking is not necessarily the product of an organised and conscious effort to "other" certain people. It may equally take the form of many 'micro-aggressions' – subtle 'put downs' which reinforce negative stereotypes.[29] The term micro-aggression was

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[24] Bartlett, "Race and Ethnicity," 39-40.
[25] Within this volume see especially Denise Kimber Buell, "Early Christian universalism and modern forms of racism," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. M. Eliav-Feldon, B. Isaac, and J. Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109-131.
[26] Cole, "Racial thinking," 21-40.
[27] Bartlett, "Race and Ethnicity," 54.
[28] Geraldine Heng, "The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages," *Literature Compass* 8 (2011): 5, 315.
[29] Kevin L. Nadal, *Microaggressions and traumatic stress: Theory, research, and clinical treatment* (Washington D.C., American Psychological Association, 2018), 39. Heng uses the related term 'micropower' to describe incremental changes in the rules and regulations of medieval institutions which had the cumulative effect of excluding Jews from many areas of medieval society. The idea of 'micropowers' and micro-aggressions' are similar in that they denote small actions which may appear insignificant in isolation, but when taken together make up a larger system of discrimination. Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 75.

first introduced in the 1970s and was used to describe the stereotypical portrayal of black Americans in media and how these portrayals perpetuated negative racial stereotypes.[30] This thesis argues that black characters in *Ectors saga* are similarly presented according to negative stereotypes of black race.

Method and Structure

Three concepts from post-colonial and critical race theory will be central to this thesis' consideration of race: subalternity, marginality, and intersectionality. Each of the three chapters of this thesis will consider the construction of race in *Ectors saga* in light of one of these terms.

The first chapter of this thesis considers the link between subalternity and blackness in *Ectors saga*. Here a subaltern is understood as an individual (or group) who is socially and politically excluded from hierarchies of power, and whose identity is defined by their difference from a dominant group.[31] The concept of subalternity is important in understanding race, since one of its functions is to justify a view that one ethnic group is superior to others. Thus, the exclusion entailed by subalternity is symptomatic of racial thinking.[32]

In the context of *Kjalnesinga saga*, an *Islandinga sögur*, Basil Arnould Price has suggested that *blámenn* ("black men") can be thought of as a 'subaltern race' and that their lack of language is an important factor in the construction of this subalternity.[33] This chapter

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[30] Nadal, *Microaggressions*, 39.
[31] Gayatri C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 272.
[32] Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London/New York: Routledge, 1990), 157-61.
[33] Price, "Búi and the blámaðr," 448. On the importance of language in defining groups, see also: Bartlett, "Race and Ethnicity," 39-56.

will consider if the same subalternity of *blámenn* is evident in the *riddarasögur Ectors saga*, and if a similar subalternity is exhibited by *svartr* characters. This chapter will therefore focus on the relationships of black characters to hierarchies of power and how these relationship structures are justified by classical climate theory, the idea that difference between peoples can be attributed to differences in climate.

The second chapter will explore the role of geography in the racialisation of black characters in *Ectors saga*, through the concept of marginality. In Western discourse ethnic groups are marginalised when they are consigned to areas regarded as peripheral and unimportant.[34] In classical and medieval literature, as well as in medieval *mappae mundi*, these peripheral areas are largely populated by monstrous beings, contributing to the dehumanisation of the ethnic groups which share this space.[35] This dehumanisation of non-white ethic groups is an important part of the construction of race in which white European identity is treated as the racial and human norm.[36] Such marginalisation has a strong racial undertone in that it justifies 'Western hegemony over the non-European peripheral world.'[37] Black characters in *Ectors saga* often occupy or originate from these peripheral areas and their attempts to leave these areas are frustrated by the protagonists of the saga, leading to their isolation and marginalisation. The discussion of these spatial aspects will make use Glauser's idea of an inside space aligned with the protagonists and an outside space aligned with the antagonists, whilst also considering where this binary might be deconstructed in the saga.[38]

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[34] On the meaning of marginality in sagas see: Bandlien Bjørn, "Marginality," in *The Routledge research companion to the medieval Icelandic sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London/New York: Routledge, 2017), 253.

[35] David Woodward, "Medieval Mappaemundi," in *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, 286-370, The History of Cartography, vol. 1, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward. (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 331.

[36] Dyer, *White*, 1.

[37] Young, *White Mythologies*, 10-1.

[38] Hendrik Lambertus, "Mirrors of the Self – Deconstructing Bipolarity in the Late Icelandic Romances," in *Á austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala,*

Table 1: Glauser's binary of space

<innen-heimisch-höfisch-gut> – <außen-fremd-nicht-höfisch-bös>
<inside-native-courtly-good> – <outside-foreign-not-courtly-evil>[39]

This second chapter will also consider how the author of *Ectors saga* negotiates the peripheral location of Iceland on the edge of Europe by demarginalising Icelanders whilst marginalising black characters.

The third chapter examines intersectionality's role in the creation of black identities in *Ectors saga*. Black characters in sagas are often linked to various groups from Scandinavian literature (like trolls and berserkers) and Christian literature (such as demons and Saracens).[40] Therefore, it is important to consider how race intersects with these other strands of identity.[41] This chapter will consider if these strands may be considered as part of a process of 'race-making,' as per Geraldine Heng, or if they are distinct but intersecting aspects of identity.[42]

9th–15th August 2009, vol. 2, ed. Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams, and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), 552.

[39] Jürg Glauser, *Märchensagas: Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1983), 196.

[40] Arngrímur Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions: The Semantic History of Blámenn from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century," in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland, 1150-1500*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 203-26.

[41] Rebecca Merkelbach and Gwendolyne Knight, "Introduction: Old Norse Alterities in Contemporary Context," in *Margins, Monsters, Deviants: Alterities in Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. Rebecca Merkelbach and Gwendolyne Knight (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 9.

[42] Many of the other categories used to identify *blamenn* are mentioned in Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling-Champions."

The term 'intersectionality' was coined by the black feminist activist and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and originated in a legal context where it was used to considered how the intersection of gender and race contributed to the marginalisation of black women.[43] Crenshaw argues that both feminist and black liberation movements previously tended to view discrimination as specifically based on a singular cause, either gender or race, meaning that discrimination based on the two was not sufficiently addressed by either movement.[44] By considering intersectionality this chapter seeks to present a nuanced view of the identity of black characters, and explore the links between race and other categories of differentiation.[45]

Sources

As narrative sources, sagas are especially useful for examining the social construction of race since they allow researchers to interrogate the depiction of black characters and their interactions with non-black characters. Furthermore, preliminary research using the Skaldic Project database and the University of Copenhagen's Dictionary of Old Norse Prose (ONP) indicates that term *blámaðr* ("black man") is found quite abundantly across many genres of Scandinavian medieval sagas.[46] Other sources also mention *blámenn*, these include encyclopaedic sources such as *Alfræði íslenzk I*, biblical narratives such as *Stjórn I*, Latin histories such as *Historia Norwegie*, or the learned text *Hauksbók* which amongst other things describes the *blemmyes* of Africa and the *panfagi* ("those who eat everything") of *Bláland*

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[43] Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* (University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989).

[44] Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection*, 166-7.

[45] Katy P. Sian, *Conversations in Postcolonial Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 134.

[46] For the list of *blámaðr/blámenn* provided by the Skaldic Project database, accessed 22/07/23, see: https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/m.php?p=onwword&i=9065; For the list provided by the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose, accessed 22/07/23, see: https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o8935. Neither of these databases are complete and so the true number of sagas which mention *blámenn* is most likely higher. In a recent lecture Arngrímur Vídalín, one of the foremost scholars on the topic, suggested that there were between 40 and 50 sagas which mention a *blámaðr*.

(literally "black land").[47] However, given the diversity of source types, and in order to render the scope of research manageable, this thesis will primarily address the saga material. Although, non-saga texts will also serve as vital sources for comparison which will allow consideration of the wider Scandinavian literary context. A focus on Old Norse language texts also allows for the demarcation of this paper's scope and crucially allows for the exploration of texts which are understudied due to their lacking a modern language translation.

As indicated by the Skaldic Project and ONP databases, around half of the sagas in which *blámenn* appear are *riddarasögur*. These sagas generally have a relatively later date of composition and demonstrate greater influenced from continental literature and ideas relative to other genres of saga.[48] This suggests, as has been posited by Arngrímur Vídalín, that the use of the term *blámenn* was influenced by Scandinavian contact with continental literature.[49] *Riddarasögur* are also amongst the genres which have attracted the least scholarly attention since they have traditionally been viewed as less interesting and authentic given their continental influences – especially vis-à-vis the *Íslendingasögur* which are regarded as more realistic and therefore more historically authentic and valuable.[50] Much of the criticism of *riddarasögur* can be traced to the binary structures which have traditionally dominated the study of Old Norse literature and divided texts along lines of historical authenticity or fantasy, Christianity or paganism, and indigenous or foreign origin. This negative perception has been applied to both the indigenous *riddarasögur* – those originally composed in Old Norse – and the translated *riddarasögur* which were translated into Old Norse from texts in

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[47] On *Historia Norwegie* see: Bandlien, "Trading with Muslims and the Sámi," 39; On *Alfræði íslenzk I, Stjórn I,* and *Hauksbók* see: Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 214.

[48] Matthew Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction (*lygisögur*)," in *A companion to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 190.

[49] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling-Champions," 212.

[50] Lambertus, "Mirrors of the Self," 551; Jürg Glauser, "Romance (Translated *riddarasögur*)," in *A companion to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 372.

other language (predominantly Old French, Anglo-Norman, or Latin).[51] The translated

riddarasögur have even been held responsible for the decline of the Old Norse narrative

tradition.[52]

The indigenous *riddarasögur*, of which *Ectors saga* is an example, have fared little

better, having been labelled disparagingly as *lygisögur* ("lie-sagas").[53] This term originates in

medieval saga texts but has gained additional meaning through its use in modern scholarship.

In *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* it is related that the term *lygisögur* was used by King Sverrir

Sigurðarson to describe a lost version of the *fornaldarsaga Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*. The

author of *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* explains that King Sverrir "called such lie-sagas most

entertaining" (*kallaði . . . slíkar lygisǫgur skemtiligastar*).[54] This comment has been taken to

mean that the saga was only appreciated for its entertainment value. However, the saga later

comments that people could trace their ancestry to the protagonist Hrómundar Gripssonar,

suggesting that he was a historical figure and that the saga also contained information which

was regarded as historically reliable.[55] Nevertheless, the term *lygisögur* has since been

applied by modern scholars to other sagas which they judge to be a 'literature of escape with

little significant social value.'[56] Such judgements are made from a modern perspective and

do not necessarily reflect medieval thoughts of these sagas, nor does this use of the term

appear to be consistent with its original medieval meaning in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*.[57] As a

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[51] The distinction between indigenous and translated *riddarasögur* is far from clear-cut since many sagas which are based on an original in another language were significantly adapted when they were translated. Therefore, in many cases it is a subject of scholarly debate as to whether these should be considered as translations or adaptations. For an example of such a discussion see: Suzanne Marti, "Translation or Adaptation?: Parcevals saga as a Result of Cultural Transformation," *Arthuriana* 22 (2012): 1, 39-52. On the divide between indigenous and translated *riddarasögur* see also: Glauser, "Romance," 373.

[52] Glauser, "Romance," 372.

[53] Geraldine Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur: Writing Romance in Late Mediaeval Iceland* (Viborg: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2014), 9.

[54] Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction," 190.

[55] Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction," 190.

[56] Stefka G. Eriksen, "Courtly Literature," in *The Routledge research companion to the medieval Icelandic sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London/New York: Routledge, 2017), 65. Amongst others, the argument that these sagas are a 'literature of escape' is made in: Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1934).

[57] Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction," 190-1.

result, this use of the term has been criticised by a number of scholars.[58] In German scholarship the modern term *märchensaga* ("folktale saga") has been used similarly by scholars such as Glauser and Schier, although this has also been criticised on the grounds that it misleadingly implies a link with a separate tradition of Icelandic folktales.[59] Nevertheless, the terms *lygisaga* and *märchensaga*, have coloured the way these sagas are viewed and contributed to their being understudied.[60]

In contrast, other genres of sagas, especially the *íslendingasögur*, have benefitted from the penchant of 19th and 20th century scholars for sagas judged to be most authentically Icelandic and therefore most valuable for the construction of Icelandic national identity at a time when the country sought its independence from Denmark.[61] This scholarly preference has been termed, somewhat controversially, as "Icelandic national romanticism."[62]

The greater scholarly attention received by *íslendingasögur* demonstrates the importance of contemporary trends and interests in deciding which primary sources receive scholarly attention. As such current political trends, and especially a preoccupation with diversity and inclusivity, may now encourage a deeper consideration of the 'rampant diversity' present in *riddarasögur*.[63] Compared to other genres, these texts operate in a broader 'temporal, social and geographical framework outside the experiential knowledge of

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[58] Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1920), 98; Sigurður Nordal, "Sagalitteraturen," in *Litteraturhistorie B: Norge og Island*, Nordisk kultur no. 8, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1953), 180.

[59] Kurt Schier, *Sagaliteratur* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1970), 105-15; Glauser, *Märchensagas*; Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction," 191.

[60] Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction," 191; Martina Ceolin, "Paranormal Tendencies in the Sagas: A Discussion about Genre," in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland, 1150-1500*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 348.

[61] Viðar Pálsson, "Heroism," in *The Routledge research companion to the medieval Icelandic sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London/New York: Routledge, 2017), 218-22; Gísli Sigurðsson, "Icelandic National Identity: From Romanticism to Tourism," in *Making Europe in Nordic Contexts*, ed. Pertti J. Anttonen (Turku: Nordic Institute of Folklore, 1996), 43.

[62] Martin Arnold, *The Post-Classical Icelandic Family Saga* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 87-90; Ceolin, "Paranormal Tendencies," 348, 359 (note 6). On the link between romanticism and nationalism see: Gunnar Karlsson, "Spjall um rómantík og þjóðernisstefnu," *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 46 (1985): 4, 449-457; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Hvað gerir íslendinga að þjóð? Nokkrar hugleiðingar um uppruna og eðli þjóðernis," *Skírnir* 170 (1996), 7-31.

[63] Lambertus, "Mirrors of the Self," 551

its audience,' outside of these constraints these sagas are especially valuable 'as a medium for the exploration of human realities, problems, and anxieties'.[64] Indeed, more recent reconsideration of the indigenous *riddarasögur* (or *lygisögur*) genre has led to the re-examination of the binaries of textual quality against which *riddarasögur* were previously judged. On this subject, Geraldine Barnes convincingly argues for the value of the 'bi-culturalism' of the 'textual landscape' of what she terms the 'bookish *riddarasögur*,' suggesting that the composers and audiences of these texts were familiar with both 'learned tradition' and 'traditional lore' and were accustomed to moving between these milieu in a single literary narrative.[65] In such bookish *riddarasögur* giants, dwarves, and trolls, may appear alongside dog-headed *cenoefali*, Blemmyae, Cyclopes, and Epiphagi, and *blámenn* ("black men") are especially prevalent.[66]

Geraldine Barnes argues that what makes these bookish *riddarasögur* (including *Ectors saga*) distinct is their 'creative engagement with the world of books and learning.'[67] The use of 'bookish' material in *Ectors saga* has also been noted by other scholars such as Rudolf Simek who argues that the author of the saga uses encyclopaedic material is proven in their mention of a dromedary and a detailed excerpt about precious stones taken from a lapidary.[68] The inclusion of such learned encyclopaedic information in *Ectors saga*, and its repeated references to the knowledge of "masters" suggests that the text was not purely

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[64] Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, 10, 22; Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Katheryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (London: Methuen, 1984).
[65] Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, 10-11.
[66] Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, 10-11; For a descriptive list of Plinian monsters see: John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000).
[67] Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, 17.
[68] Rudolf Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie: Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruter, 1990), 362; Agnete Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, vol. 1, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, series B, vol. 20, ed. Agnete Loth (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1962), 85-6.

considered to be fantasy but that at some level it contained information held to be learned and reliable.[69]

Barnes also points to the value placed on learning in these sagas, in which most of the protagonists are described as being tutored according to a medieval curriculum of liberal arts.[70] Marianne Kalinke, makes a similar observation regarding the particular emphasis placed on the acquisition of foreign languages in these sagas.[71] Both observations are evident in the character of Ector who studies the *liberals artes* and learns all of the languages of the known-world.[72] The focus on education in these 'bookish *riddarasögur,*' as well as their use of classical literature reveals the workings of a unique Icelandic 'textual community' which identified with a shared pan-European heritage.[73]

Within this category of bookish *riddarasögur, Ectors saga* is especially conducive to the examination of racial thinking due to the emphasis it places on inheritable traits and the diversity of characters in the saga. The author's focus on inherited traits is evident in the characterisation of the protagonist Ector whose social position and positive character traits are attributable to his heritage since his purported ancestor, the Trojan hero Hector appears in a dream to Ectors' mother, to affirm that the two men are alike in both appearance and virtue.[74] Ector's identity is also influenced by his acquisition of Achille's legendary shield at the beginning of the saga, which, as Barnes has pointed out, inverts the account of Achille's receiving the shield in *Trójumanna saga*.[75] In *Trójumanna saga* this shield is forged by Vulcan for Achilles to take vengeance on Hector, whom he kills. The victorious Achilles then drags Hector's body around Troy three times, a scene of anguish and insult for Troy and

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[69] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 134.
[70] Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur*, 19.
[71] Marianne E. Kalinke, "The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance," *Modern Language Review* 78 (1983), 850-61.
[72] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 83, ll. 11-17.
[73] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
[74] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 81-3.
[75] Barnes, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, 88-90.

elation for the Greeks. In contrast in *Ectors saga*, Ector receives the shield in a context of Trojan 'prosperity and power' when Ector proves his knightly valour in a tournament and is dubbed a knight.[76] Thus, in *Ectors saga*, the shield is an indicator of an inherited Trojan glory restored. A great diversity of characters in this saga is also evident in the enemies faced by Ector and his knights which include, shapeshifters, wolves, giants, trolls, *blámenn*, berserkers, trolls, other knights, a dark elf, and both flying and flightless dragons. In many cases the identity of these enemies reflects intersections of these categories which do not appear to be mutually exclusive. As such even characters who are not black serve as useful comparisons since they present some of the features elsewhere attributed to black characters.

    Ectors saga dates from the late 14th to early 15th centuries and is preserved in 45 manuscripts. The oldest and significant of these are the fragmentary manuscript Cod. Stock. Perg. Fol. No. 7 (15th century) and AM 152 fol. 125v, col. 2 - fol. 139v, col. 2 (c. 1510) in which the entire saga is preserved.[77] This thesis uses the sole edition of this text, published by Agnete Loth, which is printed from this complete manuscript and supplemented by notes from four other manuscripts: AM 579, 4to (15th century, fragment); AM 584, 4to (first half of 16th century, complete saga); AM 589d, 4to (15th c, fragment); Perg. fol. Nr 7 (c. 1450-1475, fragment).[78]

    The story of *Ectors saga* begins at the court of King Karnotius, the king of Tyrkland, and Ector's father. Here the protagonist and his knights – many of whom are also princes – are introduced at a tournament in which they each prove their valour, with Ectors proving himself to be the foremost of the knights. Ector and his knights then agree to go adventuring alone to prove their skill further and agree to reconvene in a years' time. From this point, the

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[76] Barnes, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, 88-90.
[77] Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, *Routledge Revivals: Medieval Scandinavia, An Encyclopaedia* (New York/London: Routledge 1993), 147; Loth (ed.), *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, IX; Marianne E. Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, Islandica series, no. 44 (Ithaca/London: Cornell university press, 1985), 51.
[78] Loth (ed.), *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, IX-X.

saga has an unusual, mostly episodic format where the knights' tales are related in sequence: Vernacius, Florencius, Fenacius, Alanus, Trancival, Aprival, and Ector.[79] The first five knights and Ector compete their individual adventures, defeating a diverse array of enemies before returning at the appointed time. However, the knight Aprival is captured during his adventures, by King Troilis of Syria – another king of Trojan descent. In response, Ector leads an army to free Aprival. His campaign is successful and as part of the peace deal between the two kingdoms Ector marries the daughter of King Troilis. At the close of the saga Ector's knights are also rewarded with princesses and kingdoms.

Existing Scholarship

Neither *Ectors saga*, nor race in Old Norse literature have received much scholarly attention although many different ethnic groups, including the Sámi, Bjarmians, Karelians, *Skrælingar*, and *blámenn*, are also found in Old Norse saga literature, although this diversity is rarely addressed in scholarship.[80] However, more general studies on race and ethnicity in the Middle Ages have shown that it was not unusual for medieval European writers to pass comment on the relative moral, intellectual or martial qualities of different peoples, and often these judgements were related to the physiological characteristics of these groups and might therefore be considered as ethnic or racial markers.[81] The monographs of Geraldine Heng, on race, and Claire Weeda, on ethnicity, are especially foundational in establishing the significance of race and ethnicity in the Middle Ages. This significance also merits

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[79] Marianne E. Kalinke, "Ectors saga: An Arthurian Pastiche in Classical Guise" *Arthuriana* 22 (2012): 1, 64-90.
[80] On the Sámi see Bjørn Bandlien, "Trading with Muslims and the Sámi in Medieval Norway," in *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*, ed. by Cordelia Heß and Jonathan Adams (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 33; On the *Skrælingar* see Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 257-286; On the understudy of *blámaðr* see Basil A. Price, "Búi and the blámaðr: Comprehending racial others in Kjalnesinga Saga," *Postmedieval* 11 (2020): 4, 442.
[81] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 1.

consideration in the context of Old Norse literature in order to address this gap in academic research and in to respond positively to the political and social concerns surrounding race in contemporary society.[82] Thanks especially to several recent volumes, there is a growing corpus of secondary literature on the broader topic of alterity in Old Norse literature, although race also warrants specific treatment.[83]

This thesis will build especially on the work of three scholars working on blackness in Old Norse literature. The first of these is Basil Arnould Price who uses postcolonial theory in his analysis of the representation of a *blámaðr* character in the family saga *Kjalnesinga Saga*. Through this methodology Price understands race to operate as a 'spectrum of comprehensibility,' and he posits that the *blámaðr* is shown to be both subordinate and incomprehensible in comparison to non-*blámaðr* characters.[84] He asserts that the *blámaðr* 'is subaltern: inaccessible outside Iceland's subordinating narrative, bestializing rhetoric, or [the protagonist] Búi's interpretation.'[85]

The second scholar who is central to my specific topic is Arngrímur Vídalín who has analysed a similar wrestler-*blámaðr* narrative in *Sturlaugs saga* and similarly compares the *blámaðr* to modern subalterns in his conclusion that the *blámaðr* 'resembles a colonial slave.'[86] Unlike Price, Vídalín also considers the relationship between different roles played by *blámaðr* in saga narratives such as when they appear as demons, berserkers, or Muslim

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[82] The importance of scholarly engagement in social justice and conversely the effects of ignoring race are discussed in Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (et al.), *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

[83] Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd (eds.), *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland, 1150-1500* (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020); Rebecca Merkelback, *Monsters in Society: Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland* (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); Arngrímur Vídalín, *The Supernatural in Íslendingasögur a theoretical approach to definition and analysis* (Reykjavík/Copenhagen: Tower Press, 2012); Cordelia Heß and Jonathan Adams, *Fear and Loathing: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region* (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

[84] Price, "Búi and the blámaðr," 442-8.

[85] Price, "Búi and the blámaðr," 442.

[86] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 212.

Saracens.[87] Such consideration of the intersectional identity of black characters will also be central to this thesis.

The third scholar is Kirsten Wolf who has investigated the overlap between the colour terms from black in Old Norse: *blár* and *svartr*. Wolf's analysis mostly addresses the application of these colour terms to objects and animals; however, she does note that the term *blár* is used to refer to black people in a racial sense and *svartr* is used to describe evil or 'devilish' traits, and that the two may be used in conjunction.[88] This meaning of *svartr* finds expression in *Egil's saga* where several *svartr* men share a disruptive and rowdy nature compared to their fairer brothers who are their opposite in appearance and temperament.[89] Although, Paul S. Langeslag convincingly challenges this distinction by arguing that in *Egils saga* the term *svartr* expresses both a behavioural and an ethnic blackness.[90]

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[87] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions."
[88] Wolf, "The Colour Blue," 55-78.
[89] Bernard Scudder (trans.), *Egil's Saga* (London: Penguin, 2002).
[90] Paul S. Langeslag, "Trǫll and Ethnicity in Egils saga," in *Á austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9th–15th August 2009*, vol. 2, ed. Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams, and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), 560-7.

Chapter 1: Blackness and Subalternity

This chapter considers the relationship between blackness and subalternity in *Ectors saga*. In modern understandings of race, skin colour is highly significant; to call oneself, or to be called, "black" is understood not as a neutral statement of visible somatic difference but an assertion carrying racial, social, and political implications unique to a particular time and society.[91] But as Bartlett points out, 'the significance attached to visible genetic markers [such as skin colour] varies from society to society.'[92] That being said, in the recent works of Arngrímur Vídalín and Basil Arnould Price it is suggests that blackness in Old Norse sagas may serve as a social and political marker of subalternity. Vídalín understands *blámenn* ("black men") to be a type of troll distinguishable by their animalistic behaviour and their supplication to king.[93] Price builds on the work of Vídalín using postcolonial theory in his analysis of the same *blámaðr* which appears in *Kjalnesinga saga*. He understands race to operate as a 'spectrum of comprehensibility,' and concludes that this *blámaðr* is shown to be both subordinate and incomprehensible in comparison to non-*blámaðr* characters.[94] Thus, he asserts that the *blámaðr* 'is subaltern: inaccessible outside Iceland's subordinating narrative, bestializing rhetoric, or [the protagonist] Búi's interpretation.'[95] Therefore, both scholars agree that the *blámaðr* in *Kjalnesinga saga* 'resembles a colonial slave,' and thus a modern subaltern.[96] In this comparison to a colonial slave Vídalín especially suggests a racial element – or even a racial justification – to the subalternity of the *blámaðr* character. Vídalín and Price also suggests consistent relationship structures between *blámaðr* and non-*blámaðr* characters by proposing that these relationships reflect a binary master-slave relationship

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[91] Bartlett, "Race and Ethnicity," 40.
[92] Bartlett, "Race and Ethnicity," 41.
[93] Vídalín, *The Supernatural in Islendingasogur*, 66-7, 106-8; Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 213.
[94] Price, "Búi and the blámaðr," 442-8.
[95] Price, "Búi and the blámaðr," 442.
[96] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling-Champions," 212.

between the *blámaðr* and their king. This chapter considers if the *blámenn* in *Ectors saga* are similarly subaltern, and if subalternity is also present in characters in this saga who are black (*svartr*), but not *blámenn*. The means by which subalternity is expressed is also considered. This includes whether this subalternity is expressed as a binary relationship, between dominant and subaltern characters, or as a graduated spectrum as proposed by Price. Other factors which contribute to the subalternity of black characters in *Ectors saga* are also explored, such as the importance of language, the associations of blackness and melancholic personalities, and the representation of black masculinity.[97]

Black characters within army hierarchies

In *Ectors saga* two near parallel episodes present armies containing *blámmen*. These two episodes allow us to consider the subalternity of *blámmen* and the expression of this subalternity in the hierarchical structures of the army. The two armies appear in the successive tales of the fifth and sixth knights, Trancival and Aprival respectively. The second of these, the tale of Aprival, is most instructive and therefore will be addressed first. In the Aprival's tale, King Arkilaus, who rules over most of *Blalandz* (literally "black land"), comes to conquer an unnamed country to the north of *Tyrkland* with an army of *blámmen* and his champion Baldúlfr. The army is described as:

> blámmen jorðu svartari ok grenjuðu sem vargar, fyrir þeim flocki var sá berserkr er Balldulfur het. Enn hann var allra þeirra ljótastr mestr ok sterkastur.

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[97] Bartlett, "Race and Ethnicity," 41. On the libidinous associations of blackness see: Barnes, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, 114.

("*blámmen* blacker than earth and howling like wolves, leading that group was the berserker called Baldúlfr. But of all of them he was the ugliest and strongest").[98]

Although Baldúlfr is called a berserker and not a *blámaðr*, ugliness and strength are two of the traits which most commonly describe *blámmen* and this ugliness juxtaposes the prophetic handsomeness of the hero Ector.[99] It should also be noted that *blámmen* often appear in sagas as a sub-group of berserkers.[100] Thus it appears that, if not a *blámaðr* himself, Baldúlfr's is *blámaðr*-like. His name, Bald-úlfr, meaning of "great-wolf" supports this assertion by aligning him with wolves like the howling *blámmen* he leads. In this name the prefix has the meaning of "foremost, best, greatest," which derives from the name of the god Baldr, and the suffix means wolf but can also have the figurative meaning of "enemy."[101] The name is also comparable to the more common term *mann-baldr* meaning great man.[102] Therefore, this name suggests that Baldúlfr is foremost in the wolfishness ascribed to the *blámmen*. Other points of comparison also liken Baldúlfr to a *blámaðr* and more generally to the category of trolls as set out by Arngrímur Vídalín.[103] Like other enemies in the saga, including a she-wolf, he can only be harmed by dwarven-made weapons; and like other troll and giant enemies he favours a blunt weapon, in this case a club.[104] This choice of weapon may indicative his primitive or bestial mode of fighting, which contrasts with knightly antagonists in the saga like Lutrektor who fights on horseback with a lance. Indeed, Baldúlfr is described as breaking the spine of Aprival's horse in a passage reminiscent of the warning

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[98] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 135, ll. 23-4.
[99] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 82; Lambertus, "Mirrors of the Self," 553.
[100] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 210-1.
[101] Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (London: Macmilan, 1874). "baldr." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/baldr; Geir T. Zoëga, *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), "úlf." Accessed online 22/07/23: http://norroen.info/dct/zoega/uu.html
[102] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "Mann-baldr." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/mann-baldr
[103] Vídalín, *The Supernatural in Íslendingasögur*, 93-113.
[104] Ectors saga, 135-6.

given to Bui before he faces the *blámaðr* in *Kjalnesinga saga*, when he is warned that a *blámaðr* kills by breaking bones:[105] *hǫggið kom þar er Aprival hafði setith ok brautt sodulinn ok hrygginn í hestinum svá hann fell daudr* ("the blow came when Aprival had sat down and broke the saddle and spine of the horse, so he fell dead").[106]

The tale of the knight Trancival bears significant similarities to that which follows it. In this tale Trancival's faces the army of King Tírus of Libya, this army also more contains a named champion, Atremon, who appears somewhat inhuman.[107] Atremon is described as being *likari trollum enn monnum* ("more like trolls than men"), and *mjǫk fjölkunnigur* ("well versed in magic").[108] It is not immediately clear from the text if he should be considered a *blámaðr*, a berserker, or both. But he is later referred to twice as a berserker but never as a *blámaðr*.[109] However, he like Baldúlfr, Atremon resemble *blámenn* in other sagas who are also commonly described as looking more like trolls than men.[110] His subsequent death also suggests an affinity between the *blámenn* and Atremon: *en eptir dauda Atremon urdu blámenn hrædir og bognudu fylkingar Tijri kóngs* (" but after the death of Atremon the *blámenn* became afraid and bent king Tírus' army").[111] Although it is not until the death of their king that the *blámenn* flee, the *blámenn* line is bent following the death of Atremon, either suggesting that their moral is significantly damaged or else that they are unable to maintain formation without his leadership.[112]

Atremon's death is also highly significant for his representation. The berserker fights the lion companion of Trancival, which results in both being killed and Atremon having his spine broken on a sharp protrusion. This final passage, involving the Atremon is typical of

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[105] Vídalín, *The Supernatural in Íslendingasögur*, 106-8.
[106] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga,"136, ll. 14-6.
[107] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga,"130, l. 22.
[108] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 131, ll. 1-2. The English translation is my own.
[109] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 132, ll. 16, 22.
[110] John Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millennium of World View" *Scandinavian Studies* 67 (1995), 15.
[111] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 133, ll. 3-4.
[112] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 133, ll. 15-7.

blámaðr in two ways. Firstly, he is equated to a beast in that he is a matched with Trancival's lion, while Trancival and Atremon's master, King Tírus, fight each other. This suggests that they are of equal hierarchical standing, and the equation of the lion and Atremon is extenuated by the fact that they kill each other suggesting that they are equals martially, and perhaps also socially. This depiction is consistent with *blámenn* in other sagas who are commonly depicted as being between beasts and men, or who are on occasion conflated with beasts.[113] Secondly, Atremon's death by the breaking of his spine is a close parallel to that of a she-wolf earlier in the saga – wolves being closely associated with *blámenn* as we have seen – as well as being a repetition of the deaths of wrestler-*blámaðr* in family sagas which in five comparable episodes involve a *blámaðr* being killed by being pressed onto a sharp protrusion and having their back, ribs, or spine broken.[114] Here it can be argued that the manner of a character's death can be indicative of their social standing within a hierarchy. This idea is supported by the death of King Tírus which immediately follows that of Atremon and is brought about by Trancival stabbing him through the navel. This is the same manner of death suffered by another usurper king, King Nocerus, at the hands of another of Hector's knights who is similarly stabbed through the navel by Vernacius in the first knight's tale.[115] This suggests the manner of death of characters can be taken to be indicative of their nature and standing within a social hierarchy.

Unlike with the characters of Baldúlfr and Atremon, there is little detail given to the unnamed *blámenn* who appear in these two armies. Their only functions in the saga seem to be to howl and to fight and they are describing without individuality, appearing only as a mass of enemies. Their lack of individuality and language means that their behaviour appears more like pet-monsters than men a conclusion also arrived at by Vídalín who writes that

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[113] Vídalín, *The Supernatural in Íslendingasögur*, 77; Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 212.
[114] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 211.
[115] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 95-7.

blámenn are depicted 'with racial contempt as a colonial monster that does not possess many human traits. He is kept as a wild animal among dogs, bears and lions, ready to be unleashed upon some hapless dockworker in an Icelandic village.'[116] The only sign of their humanity appears in the term *blámenn* ("black men"). These *blámenn* are presented as barely-human subalterns whose only role is to serve as grunts for their masters. Indeed, they appear to require this direction, since without their leaders they rout. Similarly, the *blámaðr*-like champions Baldúlfr and Atremon are animalistic in their behaviour and their lack the ability for language. Although they are distinguished from the mass of *blámenn* in that they are they are named and described as individuals, and that they are designed as berserks rather than *blámenn*. It thus appears that the term *blámenn* is reserved for those at the very bottom of the social hierarchy. The term *blámenn* thus operates as a marker of what Eriksen 'digital difference', a system of differentiation in which there is 'unambiguous inclusion/exclusion… where boundaries are fixed and all outsiders of certain kinds are regarded as more or less the same'.[117] In contrast to the *blámenn* and the berserkers Baldúlfr and Atremon, the leaders of the two armies, King Tírus of Libya and King Arkilaus of (most of) *Bláland* do not exhibit animalistic traits, nor is their humanity brought into question. They rule lands from which *blámenn* originate but are not *blámenn* themselves. This once more demonstrates that the *blámenn* are subaltern, dominated by leaders that are unlike themselves.

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[116] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 213; On the inclination of humans to relate to non-human species through complex relationships – domestication, pet-keeping, taming, deifying, fetishising – see also: Terry O'Connor, "Thinking About Beastly Bodies," in *Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals As Material Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Aleksander Pluskowski (Havertown: Oxbow Books, 2007), 6.

[117] Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Pluto, 2010), 79.

Black characters as Melancholics

The subalternity of these *blámenn* raises the question as to why blackness appears as a mark of subalternity in this saga. Indeed, the colour black – whether denoted by *blár* or *svartr* – is only attributed to antagonists. It is also often associated with earth. For example, King Arkilaus' *blámmen* are described as *jorðu svartari* ("blacker than earth").[118] The usurper King Nocerus, who is not a *blámaðr*, is described similarly: a*siona hans var líkari svartri jǫrðu enn mannligum yfirlitum* ("his appearance was more like black earth than a human form").[119] Demonic characters in the saga are also described as being black and likened to lava rock and coal.[120]

This association of the colour black with the element of earth likely derives from the work of the classical Hippocrates whose theory of four humours aligned the humours with the four elements in the cosmological theory of Empedocles. In this theory each of the four humours was attributed an element and a quality, and black bile was aligned with earth and the quality of dryness. Galen would later determine temperament traits based on these humours and their equivalent elements.[121] These principles would remain influential in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.[122] Black bile was the first of the humours to which aspects of character were attributed and Galen followed in a long tradition of linking anxiety and depression to excesses of black bile, he thus describes those with an excess of this humour as melancholics:[123]

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[118] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 135, l. 23.
[119] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 94, ll. 9-10.
[120] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 107, 111.
[121] Robert M. Stelmack and Anastasios Stalikas, "Galen and the Humour Theory of Temperament," *Personality and Individual Differences* 12 (1991): 3, 255-6.
[122] Stelmack and Stalikas, *Humour Theory of Temperament*, 261.
[123] Stelmack and Stalikas, *Humour Theory of Temperament*, 260.

"The melancholics act differently: they show fear and depression, discontent with life and hatred of all people… the colour of the black humour obscuring the area of thought brings about the fear."[124]

The *blámenn*, are likewise presented as a hateful group whose role in the saga is to serve as grunts for foreign invaders. Like Galen's melancholics they also lack cognitive abilities; this is expressed by their inability to speak like humans or to act as leaders or rulers, and the fact that they are overcome by fear in the absence of a non-*blámaðr* to direct them. Galen's view of melancholics, can thus explain the cognitive impairments and singular role of the *blámenn*, which reduces them to a subaltern group. However, whilst the colour term *svartr* is more commonly linked to the earth than *blár*, *svartr* characters do not seem to suffer from the same cognitive impairments as the *blámenn* and are thus not excluded from hierarchies in the same way.

The state of the being melancholic is also often linked to sin and assigned to groups who are racially or religiously different, and those who occupy a subaltern position in society. As highlighted by Suzanne Conklin Akbari: 'the bitterness of melancholic black bile, on occasion conceived to dominate the complexions of Jews and serfs stained as the cursed progeny of Cain, was deemed a waste product of sin.'[125] Blackness may thus be taken as evidence of an ignoble origin or an inherited sin. The ignominy of black characters is evidenced in *Ectors saga* by the subalternity of the *blámmen* and the celebrated overthrow of *svartr* rulers.[126] In these cases, the melancholic nature of the characters – expressed through their colour and their melancholic behaviour – justifies their overthrow and domination.

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[124] Rudolph E. Siegel, *Galen on Psychology, Psychopathology, and Function and Diseases of the Nervous System* (Basel/New York: Karger, 1973), 195.
[125] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 107, 62.
[126] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 97, 110.

The black, melancholic, and ignoble characters in *Ectors saga* are often also described as ugly whilst the heroes of the saga are both fair and beautiful, calling to mind the sanguinity of complexion which marks the greatest 'health, status, and morality.'[127] Much the same aesthetic dichotomy is expressed elsewhere in medieval literature.[128] For example, by the 13th century grammarian John of Garland who in *Parisiana poetria* uses a 'morally inferior' Ethiopian as a depiction of ugliness which he contrasts to beauty which is personified by 'elegant' nobles.[129]

Claire Weeda highlights two early Medieval examples of this: the remark of Isidore of Seville that "people who are dominated by blood are sweet-tempered and pleasant" (*quibus dominatur sanguis, dulces et blandi sunt*); and the similar comment of Bede that sanguine men are "cheerful, joyous, tender-hearted, [and] much given to laughter and speech."[130] Many other medieval writers make similar remarks regarding the pleasant and charming nature of sanguine people, and conversely the unpleasant and sinful nature of melancholics.[131] Given the wide reach of these ideas of sanguine and melancholic temperaments, and considering the popularity of Isidore's works and especially his *Etymologies*, it is likely that these ideas reached the learned composers of *Ectors saga* in Iceland.[132] Indeed, a similar contrast seems to appear in *Ectors saga* between the handsome and courtly protagonists and the animalistic, socially incapable and evil *blámenn*.

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[127] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 107.

[128] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 138-9.

[129] Edmond Faral, *Les arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle: Recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1962), 87; Arbusow Leonid, *Colores rhetorici: Eine Auswahl rhetorischer Figuren und Gemeinplätze als Hilfsmittel für akademischen Übungen an mittelalterlichen Texten* (Götttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 15-6.

[130] Stephen A Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (trans.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 109; For Latin see: W. M. Lindsay (eds.), *Isidore of Seville, Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 4.5.6. Available online, accessed 10/08/23: https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/isidore/4.shtml; Faith Wallis (trans.), *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 101. For a comparison of the two passages see: Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 107.

[131] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 107-8, 119-21.

[132] Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood, *A Companion to Isidore of Seville* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 101, 245.

These ideas of sanguinity and melancholy also appear to have an ethnic or racial dimension. In antiquity sanguinity was generally expressed by a light brown complexion, however, in medieval north-western European sources sanguinity is presented by a blushing red-white skin tone. In both cases the representation of sanguinity matches the presumed appearance of the audience.[133] In north-western European sources this red-white skin tone also reflected the prevailing beauty standards. This is demonstrated in *Parcevals saga*, a 13th century translated *riddarasaga*, in which the beauty of Blankiflúr is compared to fresh fallen snow and blood.[134] The representation of sanguinity thus changes to match the complexion of the audience and imbue this appearance with a sense of natural superiority.[135] At the same time, blackness is imbued with a sense of inferiority which justifies the domination of black characters.[136] This use of supposed natural states as a pretext for the domination of non-European peoples is reminiscent of colonial justifications which treat Western (white) superiority as a matter of 'scientific truth.'[137]

Black Unassimilability and Masculinity

Akbari describes two types of Saracen bodies in romance: those of assimilable physicality who may convert to Christianity or be married, and those of unassimilable physicality such as giants.[138] Initially this might appear to be reflected in *Ectors saga* with the *blámenn* representing the unassimilable extreme at one end of this spectrum. However, kings who are

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[133] David Goldenberg, "Racism, Color Symbolism, and Colour Prejudice," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. M. Eliav-Feldon, B. Isaac, and J. Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 90.
[134] Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance II: Knights of the Round Table* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 160-1.
[135] Goldenberg, "Racism, Color Symbolism, and Colour Prejudice," 90.
[136] Katherine Chambers, "'When We Do Nothing Wrong, We Are Peers': Peter the Chanter and Twelfth-Century Political Thought," *Speculum* 88 (2013): 2, 414.
[137] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 46.
[138] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 166; Sylvia Huot, *Outsiders: The Humanity and Inhumanity of Giants in Medieval French Prose Romance* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2016), 2.

svartr or who command black armies also appear to be unassimilable in *Ectors saga*. The assimilation which Akbari outlines entails marriage and conversion; however, both are denied to black characters in *Ectors saga*. Even when black characters in *Ectors saga* take up the titles of king, maintain a court of knights, an attempt to marry into the pre-existing monarchy, their kingship is presented as illegitimate by the universal unwillingness of white princesses to marry these black leaders.[139] Thus, blackness appears as a marker of social unsuitability.[140] In *Ectors saga,* three black rulers attempt to marry non-black princesses against their will, and another black character tries to sexually violate a dwarf.[141] In all cases these unions occur outside the structures of aristocratic marriage since they occur without the permission of both the woman in question, and their families. In *Ectors saga*, all these attempts are prevented by the knights of the protagonist Ector.[142] In other words, black characters play the role of sexual aggressors, which allows for Ector's knights to appear as the chivalrous saviours of damsels. The two groups thus represent two competing types of masculinity. The black characters represent a form of masculinity which is undesirable and sexually aggressive whilst Ector and his knights represent a form of masculinity which is desirable and protective of women. The black character might even be imagined as 'an obstacle in the way of white male sexual gratification.'[143] It is also notable that the negative masculine threat of the black characters is a "foreign" threat – in the sense that the black men are invaders and foreign to the courtly setting – to "native" women. In this narrative the ethnocentric desire of the "inside" group to maintain "purity" is in direct conflict with the "others" desire to integrate into the dominant group.[144] Thus, marriage – and the sex which it would be assumed to entail – constitutes a

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[139] The Princess' Almaria, Silvia of Liguria, and Valdre all refuse to marry *svartr* kings and instead marry Ector's knights. Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 95-6, 99, 164.
[140] Tangherlini makes a similar point with regards to Danish legends. Timothy K. Tangherlini, "From Trolls, Turks: Continuity and Change in Danish Legend Tradition," *Scandinavian Studies* 67 (1995): 1, 46.
[141] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 107.
[142] Huot notes a similar pattern with giants who attempt to marry human women in Medieval French Romances. Huot, *Outsiders*, 277.
[143] Huot, *Outsiders*, 277.
[144] Tangherlini, "From Trolls to Turks," 46-7.

threat to the continued homogeneity of the inside group.[145] Similarly, in modern Western societies racial discourses have been occupied with excluding the access of black men to white women. Meanwhile, white men have been allowed to control sexual access to women of all races.[146]

The consistent relationship between sexual aggression and blackness in *Ectors saga* seems to reflect a consistent fear of miscegenation – inter-racial marriage or sexual relations. Such attempted unions in the saga consistently appear as forced unions with an aggressive black male and an unwilling female party. The consistently negative representation of black characters and the syncretism of blackness and ugliness underlines what is demonstrated in *Ectors saga* – that such unions would only occur non-consensually. In the case of the son of King Tarsus his attempted rape of the dwarf Sacra, whose name means "sacred" in Latin, appears not only to be nonconsensual but religiously violating.[147] The black character poses a libidinous threat to that which is sacred. In these cases of marriage and rape the undesirable unions are prevented by the intervention of Ector's knights. At the close of the saga these knights take the marital place of the black antagonists whom they have slain.

Links between blackness and lust are common in other medieval European literature. Based on their choleric humours and their native climate, the 13th century writer Albertus Magnus comments that Ethiopian women exhibit a "sexual hotness."[148] The physician Arnald of Villanova makes a similar assertion in c. 1380 that black men, "like monkeys, were uncivilised, frightened of shedding blood, quick to use trickery and full of lust."[149] In both

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[145] Tangherlini, "From Trolls to Turks," 46-7.

[146] Huot, *Outsiders*, 277. See also: Chambers, "Twelfth-Century Political Thought," 411-4.

[147] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 107; C. T. Lewis, *Elementary Latin Dictionary*, abridged edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 743.

[148] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 110. See also: Peter Biller, "Black Women in Medieval Scientific Thought," *Micrologus* 13 (2005), 485-9). For the original Latin see: Paulus Hoßfeld (ed.), *Alberti Magni: De natura loci ad fidem autographi; De causis proprietatum elementorum ad fidem autographi; De generatione et corruptione* (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1980), 26.

[149] Here I quote from Weeda's summary of the views of Arnald of Villanova's views on black men. Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 110. For the original Latin see: M. R McVaugh (ed.), *Opera medica omnia*, 13 vols. (Barcelona:

cases there is an association between blackness and excessive lust. In *Ectors saga* all the black characters are men, and this lack of black women in this saga is consistent with the rest of the saga corpus. Indeed, the Old Norse term *blámenn* has no female equivalent, suggesting that the threat represented by these characters is inherently a gendered male threat.

In contrast, the Trojan heritage of Ectors seem to be foundational to their kingdom's legitimacy. Indeed, the adventures of Ector and his knights all end with the re-establishment of a legitimate social hierarchy under a king of Trojan heritage. This explains why the defeated (Trojan) Mesopotamian king is allied through the marriage of his daughter to Ector rather than being deposed, despite his pagan/Islamic practices. The assimilation of this Mesopotamian king suggests that the saga is primarily interested in the confrontation of legitimate and illegitimate powers and that legitimacy is primarily based in Trojan ancestry. Other factors which appear to contribute to social legitimacy or illegitimacy my be expressed on the spectrum below.

Table 2: The extremes of social legitimacy and illegitimacy in Ectors saga

<socially legitimate; non-pagan/Islamic; handsome/fair; courtly; good>	----------------	<socially illegitimate; pagan/Islamic; ugly/black; uncourtly/foreign; evil>

On this spectrum Ector stands at one extreme and the nameless masses of *blámenn* at the other. Based on their position on other antagonists in the saga may be determined to be good, assimilable or unassimilable. The Mesopotamian king almost lives up to the exemplary identity personified by Ector, with only his pagan/Islamic belief diminishing his perceived

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Speculum medicine, 2018), xiii. For further discussion of this passage see: Peter Biller, "Proto-racial Thought in Medieval Science," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. M. Eliav-Feldon, B. Isaac, and J. Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 174-5.

goodness. However, his religion does not appear to be an impediment to their integration with the exemplary dynasty of Ector, nor are any of the Mesopotamian characters required to undergo baptism before the marriage as is a common trope in chivalric literature where a Christian protagonist marries a Saracen/Muslim princess.[150] This may be explained by examination of the singular occasion in which the religious affiliation of the Mesopotamians is suggested. Before the battle between the armies of Tyrkland and Mesopotamia, the Mesopotamian king entrusts his army to Mohammed, a religious act which implies his belief in the prophet – and effectively foreshadows his inevitable defeat – but does not go so far as to explicitly designate him, or much less his dynasty, as Muslim.[151] Thus, the composer crafts the expressing of Islamic belief by the king of Mesopotamia to be significant enough to explain his defeat by Ector but not significant enough to require a baptism episode.

This omission also fits with the absence of explicit Christian references in this saga – a lack which could be explained by the antique setting of the story if not for the many references made to the even later religion of Islam.[152] Regardless of the justification, the saga appears relatively uninterested in religion and Islam seems to have the sole narrative function of indicating the bad characters, and by omission the good characters – hence the designation of "non-pagan/Islamic" rather than Christian in the above table. In the case of this text, the entanglement of racial and religious identities which Bartlett sites as a norm of medieval European identity does not materialise, rather the Trojan heritage of the Mesopotamians takes precedence over the suggestion of their religious alterity.[153]

Ector's adherence to a faith is never indicated in the saga.[154] At his birth Ector is sprinkled with water which may suggest baptism, but the author declines to explicitly name it

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[150] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 171-2.
[151] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 174.
[152] By this it is meant that there are no explicit references to saints, God, Jesus etc. However, biblical numbers, especially twelve appear often.
[153] Bartlett, "Race and Ethnicity," 42.
[154] Barnes, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, 116.

as such.[155] Furthermore, as Barnes points out, this rite was already performed in Iceland during its pre-Christian era and thus in this context is not necessarily a Christian rite.[156] It seems unlikely that this is supposed to be an overtly Christian act when one considers the complete absence of any references to the Christian God, his saints, or other Christian rites within the saga. Therefore, Barnes explains King Troilis of Mesopotamia's appeals to Mohammed 'as a means of marking a cultural distinction between rival princes who share Trojan ancestry.'[157]

Despite this religious or cultural difference, the two sides are later reconciled through marriage, demonstrating that their religious difference does not make the Mesopotamians unassimilable.[158] In contrast, black kingship is shown to be irreconcilable with a social order where compatibility is based upon heritage. This is demonstrated in the text by the failed courtships of black kings and non-black princesses which result in the death of the black usurpers and the arrangement of an alternative socially acceptable marriage. Unlike religion, inherited blackness is shown to be an insurmountable obstacle to social elevation, proving the inherent subalternity of black characters in *Ectors saga*.

The first of the *svartr* kings who appears in the saga is King Nocerus.[159] He is described in various ways, as a *jǫtunn* and a berserker with *svartr* skin. Nocerus' social position as king is presented as illegitimate, when the knight Vernacius meets the princess Almaria, who explains that Nocerus took the throne after killing her father King Modum. Almaria also asks Ector's knight Vernacius to kill the *jǫtunn Nocerum kong* ("*jǫtunn* king Nocerus") by stabbing him through the navel with his own sword, explaining that this is the only weapon which can harm him.[160] The designation of Nocerus as a *jǫtunn* likens him to

[155] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 83, l. 6.
[156] Barnes, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, 116.
[157] Barnes, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, 115-6.
[158] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 183-4.
[159] Another *svartr* king, Ingifer, is discussed in chapter two.
[160] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 95.

the monstrous rather than the courtly.[161] But despite the monstrous elements of Nocerus' representation his knights show mixed feeling towards their lord. When he comes back to the castle with the captured Vernacius they bow to him showing respect, and when he is killed some are mournful whilst others are glad.[162] It is also notable that Nocerus' knight Loricus earlier challenges Vernacius to a duel after Vernacius drink from King Nocerus' magical wine vat. Loricus defends his king's possessions with his life, and in response to Loricus' death King Nocerus becomes furious at the death of his "dear knight":

ok kallaði hári rǫddu ok mælti "því var þínn pútusonn svá djarfur at þú drapt mínn kærastr riddara, gef nú upp vápn þín, skal ek þík mínn unnustu.[163]

and [Nocerus] called in a loud voice and said: "that is the whore's son that so boldly killed my dear knight, now give up your weapon, I shall take you to my betrothed."[164]

The term *kær* (which appears here in the superlative form *kærastr*, "dearest") is used to refer to the affection between Nocerus and his knight Loricus, suggests an archetypal positive relationship between king and retainer.[165] Indeed, the same term is found in many other sagas where it is used to describe positive relationships between kings and their followers.[166] Nocerus' avenging of his knight equally fits this idealised feudal relationship,

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[161] Tom Grant, "Beowulfian Echoes in the Icelandic *Ectors saga*," *English studies* 104 (2023): 1, 8.
[162] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 95, 97.
[163] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 94, ll. 11-4.
[164] This is my own translation.
[165] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "Kæri." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/kaeri
[166] The term is used to describe close positive relationships between kings and their followers in other sagas such as *Magnúss saga berfœtts* chapters 7, 17, 26. For an online version see (accessed 18/07/23): https://www.snerpa.is/net/snorri/mag-berf.htm. For the edition see: Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla*, Íslenzk fornrit, no. 26-28, 3 vols. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1941-51). *Magnúss saga blinda og Haralds gilla*, chapters 8, 15. For an online version see (accessed 18/07/23): https://is.wikisource.org/wiki/Heimskringla/Magn%C3%BAss_saga_blinda_og_Haralds_gilla, for an edition see: Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Heimskringla*; *Strengleikar*, 29v, line. 23. For an online version see (accessed 18/07/23): https://clarino.uib.no/menota/document-element?session-id=255502976713584&cpos=1430393&corpus=menota. For the edition see: Keyser, R. and C. R. Unger (eds.).

and when the victorious king returns his knights bow in respect: *ut af borginne ganga ágætir riddarar hneigjandi þessum manni sem sínum herra* ("out of the castle march excellent knights bowing to this man as their lord").[167] The term *ágætr* used here to describe Nocerus' knights has a clearly positive meaning which can range from "excellent," to "famous," or "noble."[168] Thus, although Nocerus overthrew the previous king, his status as king is mostly is accepted by the characters around him with whom he has largely positive relationships. The greater issue for the assimilability of Nocerus seems to be his identity rather than his behaviour.

In the context of thirteenth-century Western European courtly literature, Tina Marie Boyer writes that 'the courtly universe was undermined by the presence of the giant, who, on the boundaries of an idealized and harmonious world, lingered to threaten any who encountered him.'[169] Much the same observation is made by Timothy Tangherlini in the context of Danish legend; that the "other" compromises the integrity of the inner realm.[170] Similarly, King Nocerus compromises the courtly space since his nature is inherently inhuman. To an extent this is demonstrated his apparent unmarriability in the eyes of the princess Almaria and therefore his unassimilability into the pre-existing royal hierarchy. However, his inhumanness is also established when Nocerus first enters the narrative:

ok er hann hafði setit um stund heyrir hann vápnabrak mikit í skoginn, litlu síðar ser

hann fram ríða einn mann ef mann skylldi kalla ríðandi einum storum úlfalda, ásjóna

Strengleikar, eða Lioðabók: En Samling af romantiske Fortællinger efter bretoniske Folkesange (Lais), oversat fra fransk paa norsk ved Midten af trettende Aarhundrede efter Foranstaltning af Kong Haakon Haakonssön (Christiania: Feilberg og Landmark, 1850).

[167] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 95, ll. 4-6. The English translation of this passage is provided in Loth's summary.
[168] Zoëga, *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, "ágætr." Accessed online 22/07/23: http://norroen.info/dct/zoega/aa.html; Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "ágætr." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/a-gaetr
[169] Tina Marie Boyer, *The Giant Hero in Medieval Literature*, Explorations in Medieval Literature, no. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 44. See also: Sylvia Huot, *Outsiders: The Humanity and Inhumanity of Giants in Medieval French Prose Romance* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2016).
[170] Tangherlini, "From Trolls to Turks," 47.

hans var líkari svartri jǫrðu enn mannligum yfirlitum, ok bar einna digra stǫng í hendi af járne gerða.[171]

"and when he [Vernacius] had been sitting for a while, he heard a great din of weapons in the forest, a little later he saw a man riding a large camel. His [Nocerus'] appearance was more like black earth than human features, and he carried a large staff made of iron in his hand."[172]

Although, as we have seen, Nocerus possesses many of the trapping of kingship, here he appears as a typical monstrous enemy encountered in the wilderness by the courtly hero, fitting into a common motif recognisable across Western European Medieval literatures and languages.[173] Another hint to his nature is provided by his name which derives from the Latin verb *noceō* ("to do harm, inflict injury").[174] This name contrasts with the name of the previous king Modum (*modus*, "manner, method") who Nocerus kills and whose kingdom and *modus* he adopts.[175]

Nocerus' nature is also reflected by his death which, as mentioned before, closely parallels the death of King Tírus of Libya, the commander of an army of *blámenn* and berserkers, and is affected by a stab through the navel. As Tom Grant points out, the motifs used in the passage describing Nocerus' death closely resemble those of other monsters in insular literature. Grant compares the death of Nocerus to that of Grendel's mother in the Old

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[171] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 94.
[172] This is my own translation based on the edition and summary of Loth.
[173] Lambertus, "Mirrors of the Self," 552; Huot, *Outsiders*.
There are many examples of giants in the forest wielding metal bars. For an interesting example in Yiddish, see Lajb Fuks, *The Oldest Known Literary Documents of Yiddish Literature (C. 1382)*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1957), 82-169. On the motifs surrounding giants more generally see: Huot, *Outsiders*.
[174] Lewis, *Latin Dictionary*, 539. I have not found any other use of the name Nocerus or any comparable name in another medieval Icelandic text. Although, he may be inspired by the black giant Nabon li Noirs, king of the ominously named Païs de Servaige ("Land of Servitude"), who appears in the Prose *Tristan*. On this character see: Huot, *Outsiders*, 169-75.
[175] Lewis, *Latin Dictionary*, 513.

English epic poem *Beowulf*.[176] In both passages the motif of the 'useless weapon' appears, this is where the hero discards a weapon which is useless against their supernatural enemy and instead resorts to wrestling their foe. This motif is symbolically important since the enemy's invulnerability to the discarded weapon demonstrates that they are not human.[177] However, in the case of Ector the sword used by the hero is effective and therefore it is strange that the hero still discards it. The motif's presence here is awkwardly accounted for by the author's comment that the falling sword wakes Nocerus. But the motif is ill fitting here since one would have assumed that the mortal injury inflicted on Nocerus would be the thing to wake him, not the sound of the falling sword. The use of this motif in *Ectors saga* can thus only be accounted for as a symbolic choice to demonstrate the monstrosity of the Nocerus. Upon waking Nocerus writhes wildly, destroying the hall in a way which is once more reminiscent of *Beowulf*.[178] In both narratives the monstrous enemy has left the wild peripheries to threaten the courtly setting and his death signals the return of the normal social order, thus the violent thrashing at the end of their struggles may be interpreted as a final futile attack upon the courtly setting which they have invaded, or a moribund acknowledgement of their wild nature which is naturally at odds with their courtly surroundings. In the case of Nocerus, after being stabbed and attempting to pursue his attacker he is again referred to as a berserker, emphasising his wild and unsociable nature.[179]

The role of Nocerus' navel in his death, may also have a wider significance for his identity. In Medieval Christianity the navel was used to symbolise a central position, indeed Isidore of Seville describes Jerusalem as "the navel of the whole region," (*quasi umbilicus*

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[176] Grant, "Beowulfian Echoes," 8. The single extant manuscript of *Beowulf* appears to date from the late 10th or early 11th centuries. Although, the date of the original composition of *Beowulf* remains a matter of considerable debate. Kevin S. Kiernan, "The Eleventh-Century Origin of Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript," in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. Colin Chase (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 9-22.

[177] Grant, "Beowulfian Echoes," 8-10. See for example, Gunnarr's casting away his ineffective axe during a fight with a giantess in chapter 6 of Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls discussed in Peter Jorgensen, "The Gift of the Useless Weapon in Beowulf and the Icelandic Sagas," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 94 (1979), 87.

[178] Grant, "Beowulfian Echoes," 9.

[179] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 96, l. 18. Earlier he is also called a *berserkur*, 96, l. 5.

regionis totius) referring to the city's ideological centrality to the Christian worldview and the conventions of medieval *mappae mundi* which generally position Jerusalem at their centre.[180] A related idea appears in saga literature, where the navel is used to describe the corporal boundary between the human and bestial elements of a character who incorporate both natures. For example, a monster in *Tristams saga*, is described covered in fur on his top half but human from the navel down.[181] Similarly, in *Hrólfs saga kraka* an *Elgfróði* (Elk-man) is described as human above the navel and elk below.[182] The piercing of the navel might therefore serve as a breaking of the illusion of Nocerus' humanity, or alternatively the breaking of the boundary between his humanity and his bestiality, after which the inhuman nature of Nocerus is revealed.

The analysis of this section shows that the *svartr* Nocerus is subaltern, and that his subalternity is based primarily in his nature rather than his behaviour. The character of King Troilis of Mesopotamia similarly shows that heritage is the most important factor in determining assimilability. However, it is notable that the subalternity of *blámenn* in the saga is based primarily on the perception of their natural inability, whereas the subalternity of *svartr* is enforced by their active exclusion by non-black characters.

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[180] Stephen A Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (trans.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 287; For Latin see: W. M. Lindsay (eds.), *Isidore of Seville, Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 14.3.19. Available online, accessed 10/08/23: https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/isidore/14.shtml. Regarding the definition of *umbilīcus* see: Lewis, *Latin Dictionary*, 886. For analysis of this passage see: Arngrímur Vídalín, "From Inside Out: Chroniclers, Genealogies, Monsters, and the Makings of an Icelandic World View," in *Supernatural Encounters in Old Norse Literature and Tradition*, ed. Daniel Sävborg and Karen Bek-Pedersen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 145; Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 56, 220. Regarding the position of Jerusalem on *mappae mundi* see Woodward, "Mappaemundi," 316, 341.

[181] Kalinke, "Arthurian Pastiche," 76.

[182] Timothy J. S. Bourns, *Between Nature and Culture: Animals and Humans in Old Norse Literature*, PhD thesis (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2017), 229; Jónsson, Guðni and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, "Hrólfs saga Kraka ok kappa hans," in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 2, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1943-1944), chapter 26. Available online (accessed 18/07/2023): http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Hr%C3%B3lfs_saga_kraka_ok_kappa_hans

Otherworldly Black "Subalternity"

Nocerus and the *blámenn* are socially excluded and may, in slightly different ways, be considered subaltern. Despite their dehumanising representation they do attempt to participate in existing human social hierarchies. However, other black characters in *Ectors saga*, appear as chthonic other worldly beings and so operate in separate hierarchies. One of these characters is Tarsus who is called "king over all the *svartr* elves" (*kongr yfir ollum svartalfum*) and who is encountered by Ector's knight Fernacius in the third knight's tale.[183] Tarsus is introduced like other monstrous characters as a "man, if they are to be called man" (*madur ef mann skal kalla*) and is given the following description:[184]

> sá var bęði har ok digur hofudit þuílíkt sem hraunklettur, augun huít sem hiegeitlar, þarf þár ekki sogu ur ath gera, ath einga þottisk hann leidiligri skepnu hafa seth, hann hafði kylfu ser í hendi ok fleina í.[185]
> "He is tall and stout and, his head is like a huge piece of lava and his eyes are white as flint, and in his hand he carries a club and two pikes."[186]

King Tarsus accuses the knight Fenacius of having killed his son, who we can therefore assume was an unnamed black character who the knight encountered slightly earlier. Fernacius and Tarsus fight and the knight kills and beheads the Tarsus, after which he burns his body.[187] King Tarsus does not resemble any of the other characters in the saga, instead appearsing to be more obviously supernatural. His comparison to lava rock also suggests a

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[183] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 112, ll. 2-3.
[184] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 111, ll. 14-5.
[185] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 111, ll. 15-20.
[186] Loth provides this translation of in his English summary. Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 111.
[187] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 112.

hellish nature or origin for this character, as does his name's proximity to Tartarus, the underground prison of the titans. Tarsus therefore resembles the giant Surtr – whose name derives from the colour term *svartr* ("black") – and who is likewise associated with blackness, fire, and underworld.[188] Moreover, Surtr appears in the *Prose Edda* in connection with the burning of Troy – which is called *Surtaloga* ("the flame of *Surtr*").[189] Therefore, like Tarsus, Surtr is not only a demonic figure but also an anti-Trojan figure.[190] It is also noteable that in Snorri's *Edda* Surtr is twice described as being from the south.[191] Indeed, he is named as the guardian of a land to the south named *Múspell* (or *Múspellsheimr*) and described as "light and hot; that region is glowing and burning, and impassable to such as are outlanders and have not their holdings there" (*logandi ok brennandi, er hann ok ófœrr þeim er þar eru útlendir ok eigi eigu þar óðul*).[192] The *Edda* also foretells that at the time of *Ragnarǫk* Surtr will leave *Múspellsheimr* and destroy the world.[193] *Múspellsheimr* is generally understood as a realm of fire, and appears in Old Saxon and Old High German poetry as a term for the Christian day of Judgment.[194] Although, the emphasis on its heat and its southern location suggest that it might also linked to Africa. Indeed, like *Bláland* and Libya in *Ectors saga* it is not a place to which heroes travel but rather a marginal location from which monstrous enemies originate and comes to threaten the rest of the world. The parallels between Tarsus and Surtr demonstrate how evil characters were similarly portrayed as black in Old Norse

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[188] Yves Bonnefoy, *American, African, and Old European Mythologies* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press), 231.

[189] Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda: Skáldskaparmál* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), 6.

[190] Thomas J. Macmaster, "The Origin of the Origins: Trojans, Turks and the Birth of the Myth of Trojan Origins in the Medieval World," *Atlantide* 2 (2014), 8-9.

[191] Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005), 51.

[192] For an edition see: Faulkes (ed.), *Gylfaginning*, 9. For an English translation see: Arthur Brodeur (trans.), *The Prose Edda* (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1916), 16-7.

[193] For an edition see: Faulkes (ed.), *Gylfaginning*, 9. For an English translation see: Brodeur (trans.), *The Prose Edda*, 16-7.

[194] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "múspell." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/muspell

literature, whether they be demonic or human. Furthermore, it shows that a similar vocabulary was used to describe fiery otherworlds and Africa.

Tarsus' son, who is left unnamed in the saga, is otherwise given an equally detailed physical description:

Hann ser hvar maðr var lítill ok ljótr, hann var svartur sem kol hǫfudmikill ok baraxladr rangnefjǫðr ok rifinn kjapturin ut til eyra, hann sier ath hann á við eina lítla mey ok leitar til samfara við hana, enn hunn var því nęr á voxt ok fimm vetra gǫmul born, hun wer sig sem kostur er á.

"Where he [Fenacius] sees a little ugly man. He was black like coal, big-headed and broad-shouldered, and with a crooked nose and a mouth which ranges from ear to ear."[195]

Unlike his father, whose humanity is disputed with the phrase *maður ef mann skal kalla*, the son's human nature does not seem to be in doubt. His distinctive features – a large head, prominent shoulders, a crooked nose, and a mouth which reaches from ear to ear – also do not suggest monstrosity, but human variation and racial difference. This character is caught by Fernacius attempting to rape another character who initially appears to be a five-year-old girl named Sacra ("sacred"), but who is later revealed to be an adult dwarf. The naming of this dwarf creates a powerful metaphor in which the attempted sexual violation of the dwarf is both a social and a religious violation. Fernacius kills the aggressor who upon his death "sinks into the ground" of his own accord.[196] That he is seen to return underground again suggests an association with Hell either deriving from his sinfulness or as part of his inherent

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[195] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 107, ll. 9-12.
[196] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 107.

demonic nature. The comparison of his colour to coal also suggests a chthonic association, especially since this comparison is used in other sagas to describe victims of undead *draugr*.[197] Despite their significant difference Tarsus and his son share a cluster of associations with the black, chthonic, and infernal. However, they cannot be considered subaltern in the same way as other black characters since they make no attempt to be part of the human socio-political structure. Nevertheless, like other black characters in the saga their blackness serves to mark them out as unassimilable and evil characters.

Conclusion of Chapter 1

This chapter demonstrate that interactions between black and non-black characters in *Ectors saga* show blackness to be a consistent marker of subalternity. The *blámenn* especially represent an extreme category of subaltern who are presented as being naturally subaltern due to their animalistic nature and inability to speak. Within these armies of *blámenn* are the named champions, Baldúlf and Atremon, they do exhibit many of the same traits as the *blámenn* but are referred to as berserkers and hold a higher position in the social hierarchy of the antagonists. Thus, the term *blámenn* marks a specific extreme of subalternity associated with the colour term *blár*. *Svartr* characters possess more individuality and appear in other roles, as kings or champions but nevertheless possess an inherent subalternity which cannot be surmounted by their becoming a king or adopting courtly behaviour. This suggests that their blackness and their subalternity are inherent parts of their nature. Notably, the kings who command *blámenn* and *svartr* champions are not described as being black or having traits

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[197] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (eds.), *Eyrbyggja saga: Brands þáttr ǫrva, Eiríks saga rauða, Grænlendinga saga, Grælendinga þáttr*, Íslenzk fornrit 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1935), 93. For analysis and an English translation see: Miriam Mayburd, "It was a Dark and Stormy Night: Haunted Saga Homesteads, Climate Fluctuations, and the Vulnerable Self," in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland, 1150-1500*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 27.

like *blámenn*, nor do they possess other signs of alterity. Thus, it appears that blackness, as well as the behaviours attributed to blackness are antithetical to leadership. Many of these negative qualities, such as reduced cognitive ability, appear to derive from classical humoral theory and ideas about melancholics. Where black rulers appear in *Ectors saga* they are cast as foreign invaders whose rulership of the East is illegitimate. Furthermore, when these black rulers attempt to integrate into the pre-existing royal hierarchy through marriage they are rejected and ultimately killed by the knights who take their desired bride and kingdom. Thus, the saga presents two models of masculinity; one which is black and undesirable, and one which is Trojan and desirable. In this way, the saga presents an aversion to the mixing of black and non-black characters which presents similarly to modern fears of racial miscegenation.

Chapter 2: Geography, Space, and Marginality in *Ectors saga*

The previous chapter demonstrated that where black characters in *Ectors saga* are consistently portrayed as subaltern, and characteristics associated with blackness serve to justify this subalternity. Spatiality is also important in the portrayal of these black characters, since their occupation of the courtly inside space appears as a transgression of the social order. In this way these characters can be considered marginal, as belonging to peripheral regions of the world.[198] This chapter will explore this marginality, and how geography is used to marginalise black characters in *Ectors saga*. The marginalisation of ethnic and monstrous others is apparent in medieval *mappae mundi*, where they are depicted on the edges of known world.[199] In many cases, ethnic and monstrous alterity intersect in these peripheries. For example in the term *Blemmyes* which may refer both to the headless Plinian monster and the ancient people from whom the modern Beja people are descended.[200] Ethiopians in classical sources and the *blámenn* of Norse literature are similarly located south of Egypt, creating a marginal space inhabited by being those who are ethnically and/or monstrously different.[201] In both cases there seems to be a significant link between race and place. Race and place appear to be similarly co-dependant ideas in climate theory.[202] The classical writers who devised this climate theory determine their own Mediterranean climate to be the environmental norm and thus their own condition to be the normal and natural human state. Accordingly, the further one travelled from the Mediterranean, the stranger the environment and thus the people were imagined to be. In this way the climate theory was used to explain

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[198] Bjørn, "Marginality," 253.
[199] Woodward, "Medieval Mappaemundi," 331.
[200] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 213-5.
[201] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling Champions," 213-5.
[202] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 110.

the mental and physical characteristics of different ethnic groups.[203] However, climate theory alone cannot account for the innate differences which are presented between black and non-black peoples in literature in *Ectors saga*, since climate is a variable which can be changed by travel or migration.[204] Furthermore, as will be discussed in this chapter, classical writers did not judge all people from Africa to be black in colour, nor did they consider Africa as the sole areas from which black people might originate.[205] Blackness might also be attributed to groups who were judged to be 'corrupted' for various reasons.[206] For example, those who are amongst the divinely punished progeny of Cain or Jews who marked by their disbelief in Christ. [207] Therefore, this chapter will argue that blackness in *Ectors saga* is not solely an indicator of climate but also a racial marker imposed by a dominant discourse on groups which are judged to be inferior and marginal. In addition, this chapter will consider how the peripheral location of Iceland is negotiated within the saga. Given Iceland's distance from the Mediterranean, climate theory would suggest that it is a place of environmental alterity and that this difference in climate would influence the condition of Icelanders. However, as this chapter also argues, *Ectors saga* engages in the demarginalisation of Icelanders by aligning them with the Trojans on grounds of common descent.

 Ectors saga mentions many geographical places which allowing for the consideration of how black characters and peripheral space fit into the geography of the medieval Icelandic world view. Linguistically Old Norse also allows for the broad categorisation of lands based on their location relative to Scandinavia, which is itself referred to as *Norðrlǫnd* (literally "northern land"). As such lands to the East of Scandinavia are referred to collectively and interchangeably as *Austrvegr* ("eastern way"), *Austrríki* ("eastern kingdom/empire"), and

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[203] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 1.
[204] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 110.
[205] Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 93.
[206] Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 89-90.
[207] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 107.

Austrlǫnd ("eastern lands").[208] The use of *Austrvegr* is especially broad since it is more of a

directional term, describing an eastern route or way which leads from Scandinavia to Russia,

Greece, and Asia.[209] By mapping the primary waterways and the dispersal of archaeological

evidence in this region Heiki Valk has suggested specific routes through the eastern Baltic

which may have been used by Scandinavian vikings travelling this *Austrvegr* route.[210] Many

coin hoards containing Arabic coins have also been found and attest to the reach of this

eastern route.[211] Other Old Norse place names are similarly directional. For example,

Vestrlǫnd ("western lands") can be used to refer to the British Isles or to western Iceland

depending on the context.[212] Similarly, *Suðrríki* ("southern kingdom/empire") is used to refer

to areas immediately south of Scandinavia (Saxony, Germany), as well as central and

southern Europe more generally.[213] The use of these directional terms speaks to how

geography and space were understood by Old Norse writers and their audiences. Cardinal

directions appear to have had a significant role in Norse understandings of geography and

space and this language allowed areas to be understood in broad directional terms, as "the

East," or "the North." The directional nature of these terms gives them a particular practical

use in relating travel. The sense is visible in *Ectors saga*, which begins with a description of

the Trojan's eastern (*Austrvegr*) travel:

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[208] Sverrir Jakobsson, "On the Road to Paradise: 'Austrvegr' in the Icelandic Imagination," in T*he Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, vol. 2, ed. John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick (Durham & York: Durham University, 2006), 935. For definitions see: Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "Austr-ríki," "Austr-vegr." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/austr-riki; https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/austr-vegr

[209] Jakobsson, "Austrvegr," 935.

[210] For suggestions of viking routes through the eastern Baltic see the map in Heiki Valk, "The Vikings and the eastern Baltic," in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (London/New York: Routledge, 2012), 486.

[211] Valk, "Vikings and the eastern Baltic," 487-93; for the dispersal of coin hoards in the eastern Baltic see especially the map on p. 487.

[212] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "Vestr-lönd." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/vestr-lond

[213] Jakobsson, "Austrvegr," 935; Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "Suðr-ríki." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/sudr-riki

Efter niðrbrot Trojiborgar þá er Grickir hofðu hana víða heldr af raðum enn hernaði þa

dreifðust ættir Priamus kongs víða um Austrvegr reisanði þar margar ok stórar

borgir.[214]

"After the fall of Troy, when the Greeks fought against it, the king of King Priam

spread widely throughout the East, building many great cities there."[215]

In this passage the directional and vague qualities of the term *Austrvegr* are apparent. The use

of this term also suggests a similarity between the dispersal of the Trojans in *Ectors saga* and

the eastern adventures and conquests of Scandinavians in the eastern Baltic. Indeed, such

viking *Austrvegr* adventures are a common theme of saga literature.[216] Historically these

adventures took the form of sporadic raids and invasions which established temporary control

over local populations but did not amount to lasting Scandinavian supremacy.[217] Once the

main action of the saga has been resolved Ector is similarly described as going harrying

throughout the east and subjugating all of the kings of the East.[218] However, most place

names in the saga are borrowed from Latin and so do not denote a directional meaning akin

to *Austrvegr*. There are many such examples in *Ectors saga*: *Libia* ("Libya"), *Indialand*

"India"), *Spania* ("Spain"), *Ethiopia*.[219] Indeed, due to the distance between the Icelandic

audience and the story's unfamiliar eastern setting, most of the places referred to in the saga

use names derived from Latin. These place names must therefore be considered within the

context of the classical and biblical literature through which they entered the Old Norse

language.[220] Unlike the directional place names discussed above – which centre Scandinavia

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[214] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 81.
[215] This is my own translation of Loth's edition.
[216] Valk, "Vikings and the eastern Baltic," 492-3.
[217] Valk, "Vikings and the eastern Baltic," 492-3.
[218] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 184-5.
[219] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," Libya: 126; India 82; Spain 164; Ethiopia 174.
[220] Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction," 198.

as a point of departure – classical and biblical texts position Jerusalem and the other biblical locations of the Near East at the centre of the world.[221] This view of geography is equally reflected in surviving Icelandic maps from the period which position the Near East at the centre of the known world and Iceland on the northern periphery, opposite Saharan African which occupies the southern periphery.[222] Of these extant maps, the Larger Viðey Map (c. 1225-50), is the greatest in terms of scale and detail.[223] It is also the only medieval Icelandic map on which Iceland itself appears and will therefore be used as a points of reference when considering the worldview of medieval Icelanders.[224]

Inside and Outside space in *Ectors saga*

One way of understanding marginality in *Ectors saga* is through Jürg Glauser's theory of inside and outside spaces in *märchensagas* ("fairy tale saga"). This category of saga was devised by modern scholars to denote a narrative world characterised by a courtly centre (or inside space) in opposition to marginal uncourtly regions (outside spaces) populated by the dwarfs, elves, and giants of Norse mythology. Glauser includes *Ectors saga* within this category and understands these *märchensagas* to be structured by a strict spatial dichotomy of "inside" and "outside" spaces.[225] The values of the inside space are beauty, nobility, courtly manners, chivalric virtue, and strength.[226] Meanwhile, the outside space is characterised by the negation of these values and is therefore a space where the protagonists can prove themselves in quests of personal development.[227] Scholars such as Werner Schäfke draw on

[221] Woodward, "Medieval Mappaemundi," 340; Sverrir Jakobsson, "Hauksbók and the Construction of an Icelandic World View," in *Saga-Book*, vol. 31, ed. Alison Finlay et al. (Exeter: Short Run Press Limited, 2007), 27.
[222] Dale Kedwards, *The Mappae Mundi of Medieval Iceland* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020).
[223] The Larger Viðey map is found in the manuscript GkS 1812 III 4to, ff. 5v-6r, alongside the Smaller Viðey map (f. 6v). Kedwards, *Mappae Mundi*, 119-20, 197.
[224] Kedwards, *Mappae Mundi*, 119-20, 197.
[225] Glauser, *Märchensagas*, 192-6.
[226] Glauser, *Märchensagas*, 165.
[227] Astrid Van Nahl, *Originale Riddarasögur als Teil altnordischer Sagaliteratur* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981).

Glauser's influential binary of space and his idea of personal development being the primary aim of knightly quests in *Märchensagas.* Of this personal development Schäfke writes: 'they can only prove themselves worthy of their origins through military expeditions and mortal combat with the dire monstrosities of the outer space.'[228]

According to Glauser this personal development follows a general pattern of 'deficiency – trial – reconstitution.'[229] In *Ectors saga* the 'deficiency' which triggers the adventures is the wish of Ector and his knights to prove their knighthood; the 'trials' are represented by battles against 'polluting force[s]'; and the 'reconstitution' is affected by Ector's granting of kingdoms to his proven knights at the end of the saga.[230]

Glauser's ideas of inside and outside spaces are useful for understanding the relationship between narrative and space in *Ectors saga*. Although, *Ectors saga* exhibits several peculiarities relative to the pattern Glauser suggests. The first of these is that *Ectors saga* is unusual in that the East and not Europe or western Scandinavia, is the homeland of the protagonist.[231] Thus much like in medieval *mappæmundi*, the central space of the story is not Scandinavia, but the Near East. This is also where most of the action of the saga occurs, meaning that in geographical terms there is not a clear distinction between the inside and outside spaces.[232] Instead, characters are shown to travel from inside to outside spaces through topographical markers such as forests and mountains.[233] Furthermore, the uncourtly monsters which populate the outside space are invariably cast as foreign invaders rather than

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[228] Werner Schäfke, "The *Wild East* in Late Medieval Icelandic Romances – Just a Prop(p)?," in *Á austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia*, Preprint papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, vol. 2, ed. Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Frederick Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), 846-7.

[229] Glauser, *Märchensagas*, 197-200.

[230] Glauser, *Märchensagas*, 149-51. For Ectors' granting of kingdoms to his knights see: Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 185.

[231] Glauser, Märchensagas, 197-200.

[232] Ector's knight Florencius travels to Liguria which is the scene of his main 'trial' and can therefore be considered an outside space. However, the representation of Liguria is otherwise the same as outside spaces in the East. Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 98.

[233] This point is made in Michael Micci, *Off the Map Modes of Spatial Representation in the Indigenous Icelandic riddarasögur*, PhD thesis (Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2023), 168; For examples of topographical features used as markers of outside spaces see: Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 107, 115, 139-40.

being indigenous to that space. In other words, the space is not inherently 'outside,' but is rendered so by the presence of monstrous antagonists. These monstrous antagonists originate from elsewhere, places which for the purpose of the thesis will be referred to as 'marginal spaces,' namely *Bláland*, Scythia, and Spain. Thus, the boundary between inside and outside spaces in *Ectors saga* seems more fluid than Glauser's framework suggests since monstrous antagonists from marginal spaces occupying inside spaces and thus render them outside spaces. The nature of these space is thus influenced by their occupation by ether monstrous or virtuous characters.

These occupations disrupt the usual binary of inside and outside space creating social dilemmas which must be resolved by Ector's knights defeating enemies who are antithetical to the values of the spaces which they occupy. The fact that these enemies are out-of-place is emphasised by the sagas use of eastern locations with hold religious significance to the Christian audience of the saga and would therefore naturally be considered as inside spaces. Glauser views the quests of Ector's knights as quests of knightly development, however the virtue of Ector and his knights is already established at the beginning of the saga. Thus, whilst their adventures may serve as proof of their knightly virtues, the most significant changes which occur in the saga surround the removal of unworthy rulers and the elevation of worthy rulers in their place. Indeed, the saga culminates in the elevation of Ector's knights to kingly status through marriages with princesses.[234]

Rather than being developed throughout the saga, the respective ability of Ector and his knights is established at the beginning of the saga in a tournament from which Ector emerges as the foremost of the knights. The respective skill of the knights is also referred to throughout the saga and as Michael highlights the cardinal directions play a significant symbolic role in this regard. For example, when Ector's knight Vernacius travels West, the

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[234] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 185.

opposite direction from Ector, the text underlines his position as the least valuable knight of the retinue.[235] Conversely, when Ector travels East the narrator justifies this decision by stating that it is the greatest of the directions.[236]

The East in *Ectors saga*

In Old Norse literature the representation of *Miklagarðr* (Constantinople, or literally ("the great city") is overwhelmingly positive. Similarly, the Byzantine emperor is generally presented as exceling 'not only in power but also in book-learning and spiritual strength.'[237] The byname *víðførli* "far travelling" in several sagas is attached to characters who travelled partly or exclusively East of Scandinavia, suggesting that prestige was especially attached to Eastward travel.[238] Greece itself was generally regarded as the main gateway to this Eastern travel, and both *Miklagarðr* ("the great city") and *Garðaríki* ("realm of cities") enjoyed an endured association with glory and nobility within Scandinavian literature.[239] During this period, the ongoing schism between the eastern Orthodox and western Catholic churches had a marked negative affected on the depiction of Greece in continental Western European.[240] However, no such effect is visible in Scandinavian where Greece continued to be regarded

[235] Micci, *Off the Map*, 167; Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 91.
[236] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 134.
[237] Jakobsson, "Austrvegr," 937. See also: Sverrir Jakobsson, "Austurvegsþjóðir og íslensk heimsmynd Upgjör við sagnfræðilega goðsögn," *Skírnir* 179 (2005), 93-4, 107-8.
[238] This byname appears in the titles of several Old Norse texts: *Eiríks saga víðførli*, *Yngvars saga víðførli*, *Þorvalds þáttr víðførli*. Jakobsson, "Austrvegr," 935-6. See also: Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "Víð-förull." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/vid-forull
[239] Jakobsson, "Austrvegr," 939. It has been alternatively proposed that *Garðar* should be treated as a personal name and thus that *Garðaríki* means "the kingdom/empire of Garðar". Although, most scholars have proposed etymologies which broadly agree with the position of Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, that the name "derived from the castles or strongholds (*garðr*) which the Scandinavians erected among the Slavonic people". Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "Garða." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/gardr. Within Russian scholarship *Garðaríki* is traditionally translated as "the Country of Towns." Tatjana N. Jackson, *Eastern Europe in Icelandic Sagas* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019), 65.
[240] Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Schism that never was: Old Norse views on Byzantium and Russia," *Byzantinoslavica* 66 (2008), 173-88.

positively into the 14th and 15th centuries, despite the changing political realities of the area.[241]

The positive associations of *Miklagarðr* and *Garðaríki* are representative of a larger strand of thought in Old Norse literature in which the East was presented as a place of wealth, culture, and civilisation where protagonists might acquire prestige in mixing with the noble people who populated the region or even my marrying an eastern princess.[242] Accordingly, in *Ectors saga* the East is an area full of virtuous and noble characters, most notably those attached to the Trojan courts in Parthia and Mesopotamia.

A second strands of thought about the East in Old Norse literature is that it is a place of fantastic and ferocious beasts.[243] This equally finds expression in *Ectors saga* through the many magical and exotic beasts which appear in the narrative: a dragon (*drekka*), a magical wolf and sow, two of the sagas antagonists who transform into poison spewing serpents (*ormr*), and the giant (*rísi*) Torquatus who rides a *hyrela*.[244] Nor are these exotic animals redistricted to the side of the antagonists since Ector rides a dromedary (*dromedarí*) which is as fast as a bird, and the knight Trancival receives a magical horse from an elf-woman, and gains a lion companion.[245]

Ectors saga differs from most other Icelandic romances in that the saga's inside space is located outside of Europe and in what might be considered an "Oriental" space – given that

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[241] Jakobsson, "Austrvegr," 939.
[242] Jakobsson, "Austrvegr," 935; Frederic Amory, "Things Greek and the Riddarasögur," *Speculum* 59 (1984): 3, 509-10. Ector's mother Gelfríðr may be regarded as one example of such an eastern princess. Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 82.
[243] Jakobsson, "Austrvegr," 935.
[244] The saga says that Torquatus is too big to sit a horse and that not even a camel could hold his weight. This may explain why most antagonists in the saga rides camels whilst Ector's knights ride horses. Torquatus rides a *hyrela*. This animal is not described in the text although Kalinke describes it as 'an unidentified wild animal which he has tamed'. Kalinke, "Arthurian Pastiche," 83.
[245] Ector receives a dromedary (*dromedarí*) which is as fast as a bird. Dromedaries are native to Arabia. Unlike the camels native to central Asia and ridden by several *rísi* and other enemies. Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 86, 123. The lion companion motif seems to have entered Old Norse literature via sagas translated from Old French, such as *Ívens saga*. On the lion motif in Old Norse literature see: Marianna E. Kalinke, "The Cowherd and the Saint: The Grateful Lion in Icelandic Folklore and Legend," *Scandinavian Studies* 66 (1994): 1. For the lion in *Ívens saga* see: Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance II*, 84-9.

it is a representation of "the East" from a European perspective. Given this geographical shift and the post-colonial approach of this paper it is useful to consider this space in light of Edward W. Said's book *Orientalism* which is generally regarded as a foundational work in post-colonial studies. Said writes predominantly of the colonial Western perspective of the Orient. One of his key ideas is that of an all-embracing Western tutelage imposed on the East by Western colonial powers who sought to impose their ways of thinking and way of life on the Orient.[246] This tutelage – especially in the religious and miliary senses – might to an extent be seen in *Ectors saga* where the hero and his knights travel the Middle East and establish chivalrous rules over areas previously controlled by idolatrous followers of Mohammed. However, in these cases the knights are presented as re-establishing a social, religious, and even natural status quo rather than a new Western order. In contrast, the Muslim/pagan enemies whom they encounters are generally presented as recent invaders or usurpers. In his book, Said also describes an 'Oriental personality,' which casts the East as a geographically, morally, and culturally distinct area, from a European perspective.[247] Through possession of this oriental personality, the Orient appears to European observers as 'a the land of barbarians' or at least as 'an unfamiliar land beyond ours.'[248] The Orient is thus positioned outside of Europe but also plays a significant role in defining its limits.[249] Said similarly describes Islam as an outside force against whom European civilisation can be defined.[250] In contrast, in *Ectors saga* the cultural and moral character of medieval Europe is transposed onto the classical Orient, thereby subsuming it into a universalizing narrative of Western history which harks back to a classical era which is imagined to represent an idealised version of Western society.[251]

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[246] Said, *Orientalism*, 35.
[247] Said, *Orientalism*, 31.
[248] Said, *Orientalism*, 54.
[249] Said, *Orientalism*, 71.
[250] Said, *Orientalism*, 70.
[251] Young, *White Mythologies*, 2.

There are many myths of Trojan descent to be found in Western European literature.[252] The earliest of these dating from the seventh century and concerning the Trojan ancestry of the Franks.[253] Similarly, ideas of Trojan ancestry are found in Old Norse literature. For instance, in *Gylfaginning* and its preceding *Formáli* (prologue) in the *Prose Edda* where Snorri describes how the Æsir, powerful sorcerers from Asia, come to and conquered the north from their place of origin, Troy in *Tyrkland*.[254] Given Óðinn's foundations place in the genealogies of Scandinavian kings Snorri thus establishes the euhemerised Odin, chief of the Æsir, as a Trojan ancestor of northern kingship.[255] In *Gylfaginning* it is also mentioned that when Odin came to Sigtuna (Sweden) he implemented a legal system comparable to that which had previously existed in Troy, thereby linking the legal institutions of Scandinavia to those of ancient Troy.[256] Snorri's *Ynglinga saga* similarly identifies the Æsir with a place in Asia giving the two alternative names *Ásaland* ("Land of the Æsir") and *Ásaheimr* ("World of the Æsir") and saying that the capital of this land was *Ásgarðr*. Such euhemeristic identifications of the Æsir with Asia are common in Old Norse texts, as Alison Finaly points out in his translation of the *Prose Edda*.[257] Through these stories of Trojan origin Scandinavians positioned themselves within the larger Western European tradition of Trojan heritage – in what might be described as an 'imagined community' of Trojan ancestry.[258]

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[252] Matilda T. Bruckner, "Remembering the Trojan War: Violence Past, Present, and Future in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*," *Speculum* 90 (2015): 2, 366.

[253] Penny Eley, "The Myth of Trojan Descent and Perceptions of National Identity: The Case of Eneas and the *Roman de Troie*," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 35 (1991), 28-9.

[254] Kevin J. Wanner (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 140.

[255] Wanner (trans.), *Edda*, 141.

[256] Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda Prologue and Gylafaginning* (Exeter: Short Run Press Limited, 2005), 6.

[257] Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla*, volume 1 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2011), 6.
The use of Odin and the Æsir to draw links between Troy and Scandinavia may also be compared to Virgil's use of Aeneas in the *Aeneid*. This text similarly subsumes the story of Troy into a myth of the foundation of Rome.

[258] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 1983).

These Scandinavian narratives offer an explanation as to why Ector's Orient is treated as a space of European heritage, especially with regards to its values and royal institutions which resemble those of Medieval Western Europe. Such stories of the distant Scandinavia and Trojan past may be considered myths not just in the popular sense – that they are not based on tangible evidence or any enduring oral history – but also in the more profound sense that they developed as a means of explaining the present and promoting its values.[259] A similar view is presented by Fentress and Wickham who highlights the creativity involved in rendering the past in a form which is 'functionally relevant' and so able to address the concerns of the audience's present.[260] Unlike the Orient of Said which is a Western representation and to a lesser extent a colonial reality, Ector's Orient is better considered as one example of a collective western fantasy, or what V. G. Kiernan terms 'Europe's collective day-dream of the Orient.'[261]

Crucially, the modern orientalism which Said presents seeks to tutor the East in the ways of the West; meanwhile, the orientalism of *Ectors saga* seeks to return the region to a former classical glory which is personified by the Trojan people and is treated as part of Western European history and culture. Both approaches are recognisably Eurocentric and reflect an attempt to claim the Orient – what Young calls a 'politics of arrogation' – whilst also demonstrating the nature of the Orient as a generalised 'other' of Western construction.[262] Due to this arrogation of the Orient and of Trojan identity, the audience of *Ectors saga* is encouraged to identify with the Trojan protagonist Ector.

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[259] Reynolds, "Medieval Origins," 379.
[260] James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 146.
[261] V. G. Kiernan, *Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to Other Cultures in the Imperial Age* (London, Zed Books, 2015), 136; Said, *Orientalism*, 52; Young, *White Mythologies*, 129.
[262] Young, *White Mythologies*, 2-3, 127.

The demarginalisation of Iceland in *Ectors saga*

At the end of *Ectors saga* the narrator askes the audience to tolerate his lack of knowledge (*fáfræði*) given the distance of the author from the events: *vér höfum harðla fjarri staddir verit þeim tíðindum* ("we have been very far away from those events").[263] Despite this distance, Icelanders did not see themselves as being wholly separate from the classical past. This is evident in the tracing of the genealogical lines of the god Odin back to Trojan ancestry, and the appearance of Trojans in the ancestry of many prominent Icelandic families.[264] Iceland's peripherality but also its belonging to Europe is expressed in the Larger Viðey map where Iceland appears at the far edge of the map, just below the label of *Europa* and alongside Thule.[265] In Roman literature, Thule was emblematic of 'geographical extremity and remoteness,' and in some [266] literature from Scandinavia and England Thule is regarded as an earlier name for Iceland.[267] In representing Iceland alongside Thule and omitting other places in the region the map rejects the conflation of Iceland with Thule, and instead appears to set Thule up as a 'theorised mirror image' against which Iceland can be measured.[268] This approach allows for the negative connotations of barbarism and marginality to be assigned to a theoretical Thule rather than Iceland.

Other Icelandic sources similarly utilise ideas from classical literature to present Iceland in a favourable light. For example, the 14th century codex *Hauksbók*, presents the settlement of Iceland and Greenland as part of a larger historical pattern which saw 'the translation of peoples and learning from East to West.'[269] To this end *Hauksbók* includes a

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[263] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 185,
[264] Margaret C. Ross, "The development of Old Norse Textual worlds: Genealogical Structure as a principle of Literary Organisation in Early Iceland," *Journal of English and Germanic philology* 92 (1993), 372-85.
[265] Kedwards, *Mappae Mundi*, 120.
[266] Kedwards, *Mappae Mundi*, 136-7, 227.
[267] Kedwards, *Mappae Mundi*, 227.
[268] Kedwards, *Mappae Mundi*, 23.
[269] Jakobsson, "Hauksbók," 29.

retelling of the story of Troy in the form of the earliest extant version of *Trójumanna saga*, drawing a comparison between the eastern migration of Trojans to Rome and the eastern migration of Scandinavians to Iceland. The author of *Ectors saga* also makes an effort to tie his work to *Trójumanna saga*, which is mentioned twice by name.[270] In *Ectors saga* it is also asserted that both texts were discovered in the works of one "Master Galterus" (*meistara Galteri*).[271] This name most likely refers to the French writer Walter (Gautier) de Châtillon, who wrote in Latin and whose name in Latin was rendered as *Galterus de Castellione*.[272] He is the author of the epic Latin poem *Alexandreis* which was translated into Old Norse as *Alexanders saga* by Brandr Jónsson bishop of Skálholt (d. 1264).[273] Notably, in his translation Brandr often refers to *meistari Galterus*.[274] Similarly, in *Ectors saga* learned knowledge is attributed to "the master" who is identified as Galterus at the end of the saga where it is written that "both *Trójaumanna saga* and the story of Ector he [the author] has found in the books of Master Galterus, who considered Ector a hero equal to Alexander the Great."[275] The reference to Alexander the Great again strongly suggests that the Master Galterus referred to here is the author of *Alexandreis*.

The author thus claims that *Ectors saga* is based on a text of Galterus, although no such text seems to survive. The author likewise claims that the *Trójaumanna saga* was based on a text of Galterus, although it is generally held that the saga is a compilation based on several texts: Dares Phrygius' *De Excidio Troiæ*, the so-called *Latin Homer*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and Ovid's *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*.[276] It is not impossible that both sagas are based on

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[270] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 86, 185.
[271] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 185.
[272] Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography*, 21.
[273] Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography*, 21.
[274] Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography*, 21.
[275] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 186.
[276] Other aspects of the origin of *Trójamanna saga* are also a matter of debate. For example, it is disputed whether the saga was translated c. 1200 in Iceland, or in Norway at the court of King Hákon Hákonarson (1217-63), 122.
Kalinke and Mitchell, *Bibliography*, 122.

lost texts of Gautier de Chatillon. Although, in the absence of such an exemplar for either text it is perhaps better to assume instead that the author of *Ectors saga* is refers to Gautier and *Trójaumanna saga* to lend authority to their own work and to expand the body of texts which linked the past of Iceland with that of the East. This link between North and East is expressed twice in *Ectors saga* as a supplication of North to East. Firstly, in this passage which Loth translates in his summary:

> "Ector choses himself to ride towards the east, as "the Masters" have said that the east is the chief of all the points of the compass. Aprival choses to ride towards the north, for just as the north serves east, so he himself is in Ector's service."[277]

Here the hierarchical relationship between lord and retainer finds expression in the cardinal directions. As Barnes points out, this same service of north to east is expressed again, in rather less heroic terms, in a second passage which incorporates seven horse-boys with Norse names into Ector's army.[278] The names appear as follows: *Jon busi, Hoskulldr Talma sonn, Jon Anndresson, Þorbjorn fętill, Eirekur badkall, Magnus skalldi ok Sigurd kongr*.[279] Agnete Loth suggests that some of the names of Ector's "horse-boys" may refer to individuals known to the writer.[280] Indeed, the specificity of the names given to these characters who only appear once in the saga suggests they had some significance to the audience, perhaps even that they were members of the textual community of this text, either as members of the intended audience or individuals involved in the composition. These horse-boys play the role of loyal subordinates. In doing so the Icelandic characters are lent prestige by their association.

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[277] Loth, "Ectors saga,"134.
[278] Barnes, *Bookish Riddarasögur*, 26.
[279] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 171.
[280] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 171.

The last two names in the list of horse-boys standout since they refer to specific titles, that of a skald and a king. This seems to represent an attempt to specifically tie Scandinavian kingship and the Scandinavian skaldic tradition to Trojan precedents. In addition, it is presumably not lost on the composer or the audience of *Ectors saga* that the inheritors of the skaldic tradition are the writers of Iceland themselves. Through many such reference to classical literature the author of *Ectors saga* locates Iceland within a broader European historical narrative and therefore demarginalizes it and counters the negative associations of its peripherality.

Africa in *Ectors saga*

Icelandic ideas about the East and the North were rooted in classical knowledge and the lived experience Scandinavians. On the other hand, the image of Africa in medieval European developed mostly in 'physical and cultural isolation from the African world.'[281] The European perception of African was therefore largely dictated by classical sources and not by Scandinavian interaction with Africa or Africans.[282] Isidore's description of Africa was highly influential in medieval European understandings of the regions of Africa.[283] His description appears to have been similar important in Iceland since the regions of African which appear in the Icelandic Larger Viðey map closely follow the names which Isidore provides.[284]

In classical European texts, Africa is often presented as a place of extreme conditions which effected men, beasts, and the earth itself.[285] This perception of Africa was likely

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[281] Jean Devisse, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), 38.
[282] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 51.
[283] In keeping with Isidore, the medieval European tradition considered Egypt to be part of Asia, not Africa. Therefore, for the purpose of understanding the medieval geographical imagination this thesis also treats Egypt as part of Asia. Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 49, 217.
Kedwards, *Mappae Mundi*, 218-21.
[284] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 49, 217; W. M. Lindsay (eds.) *Etymologiarum*, 14.5.8.
[285] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 49.

influenced by the 'climate theory' proposed by Macrobius in around 400 CE.[286] Although earlier writers such as Galen (died c. 216 CE) circulated similar ideas about the effect of the burning equatorial sun on Africans. Galen's comments about Africa appear to have been especially influential since they were copied and expanded on by both Latin and Arab writers.[287] These early ideas about Africa as 'a land of geographic, physiological, and intellectual abnormality' predisposed Europeans to view Africans as subhuman.[288] Indeed, Robert Bartlett notes that these ideas of geographic determinism were foundational to the development of medieval racial thought and also that these ideas underlined skin colour as a marker of difference.[289] This climatic determinism finds linguistic expression in Latin and Greek in the term *Aethiops*, which was used to refer to Africans generally. The name *Aethiops*, a compound derived of two Greek words *aíthō*, "I burn" and *ṓps*, "face," with the meaning "burnt face."[290] Likewise, this etymology applies to the Latin variant of this term. Significantly, this term assumes an altered state from what would be considered normal or natural. Similar connotations of alterity are at work in Old Norse in terms *blá-maðr* ("black-man") and *blá-menn* ("black-men") in which *blár* is used to qualify the term *maðr*. Indeed, much the implications of alterity are at work in modern terms such as African American or Indigenous America which imply that most Americans are not African (i.e., black) or indigenous. Meanwhile the term white American is rarely used since whiteness is implied by the term American.

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[286] The significance of 'climate theory' for the representation of black people is discussed at greater length in chapter 1.

[287] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 218.

[288] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 52.

[289] Richard Cole, "*Kyn / Fólk / Þjóð / Ætt*: Proto-Racial Thinking and its Application to Jews in Old Norse Literature," in *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*, ed. Cordelia Heß and Jonathan Adams (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 242-3; Bartlett, "Race and Ethnicity," 39-56.

[290] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 220; Lewis, *Latin Dictionary*, 38. For the use of the word *Aethiops* in Antiquity see F. M. Snowden, "The Negro in Classical Italy," *American Journal of Philology* 68 (1947), 266-92.

In Old Norse, the term *blár* has a clear geographical association with Africa and appears in the place name *Bláland*, a term used for various parts of Africa. People from *Bláland* are commonly referred to as *blámenn* and Old Norse translations of French romances, such as *Ívens saga* also use the word *blámaðr* as a substitute for *mor* ("Moor").[291] Although, there are rare instances where the term *svartr*, is also related to the south and possibly Africa. For example, in Snorri's *Edda*, in which the flame wielding giant *Surtr* – whose name derives from *svartr* – is twice described as being from the south.[292]

The term Africa does not feature in *Ectors saga* and whilst the name Libya is sometimes used to denote the entire African continent, this does not appear to be the case here since the King of Libya is not aligned with the rulers of Numidia and Ethiopia who also appear in the saga.[293] In fact, the King Tírus of Libya is an antagonist whilst Prince Lucius of Numidia and King Valpriant of Ethiopia are friendly towards Ector with the former being a vassal of Ector's father Karnotius. Therefore, if we assume that the geography of the saga is broadly consistent, the only term which might refer to the continent of Africa is *Bláland*. This would also explain the description of King Arkilaus as ruler of "most of *Bláland*" (*mestan hlut Bláland*) which can therefore be understood as Africa minus the regions of Numidia, Ethiopia, Libya, and *Bláland hit mikla*, which are attributed to other rulers.[294]

The representation of the rulers of different parts of African can be quite simply separated into those which are portrayed negatively (Libya, *Bláland hit mikla*, and *Bláland*) and those which are presented positively (Numidia and Ethiopia). King Arkilaus of (most of) *Bláland*, and King Tírus of Libya have already been discussed in chapter one, and here it suffices to say that whilst not being described as black themselves they each command an

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[291] Wolf, "The Colour Blue," 61; Sofia, Lodén,Rewriting Le Chevalier au Lion, in Arthurian Ethics in Thirteenth-century Old Norse Literature and Society, 93-4.
[292] Faulkes (ed.), *Gylfaginning*, 9, 51. Surtr and his resemblance to Tarsus in *Ectors saga* is discussed at greater length in chapter 1.
[293] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 47-8.
[294] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 135, 118, 174-5, 103, 126.

army of *blámenn*. These *blámenn*, who are described in especially animalistic terms only appear to derive from African in the saga.

Other black or African figures do not so easily fit into this intersection of blackness and African origin. For example, the berserker Kaldanus who is the ruler of *Bláland hit mikla* but is described as originating from Chaldea (*Caldea landi*).[295] Like the kings Arkilaus and Tírus, Kaldanus is not described as black. However, unlike Ariklaus and Tírus, Kaldanus does bear significant similarities to black characters discussed in chapter one: he is a troll, can only be harmed by dwarven-made weapons, is an idolater and a follower of Mohammed, and a berserker, as well as being the ruler of *Bláland hit mikla*. In addition, his entire army uses black tents, the biggest of which is his.[296] Like many *svartr* characters in the saga, and many *blámenn* in other sagas, his humanity is also questioned using the expression: *er hans yfirlith líkari trǫllzligum glyrnnum enn manligum asionum* ("he looks more like a troll than a man").[297] Furthermore, like the *blámenn* in *Ectors saga* he has animal-like features: *hann hefir hrossa fétur að hniam neðan galdra maður ok seiðskratti* ("he has horse's feet from his knees downwards, a man of magic and a wizard").[298] This passage identifies him as a practitioner of magic, and given his horse feet we might reasonably assume that he is a shape-shifter of some kind. Although, Kaldanus is also reminiscent of the horse footed Hippopodes of Greek mythology who are found on some medieval *mappæmundi*, and whom Pliny the Elder locates on an island off the coast of Scythia.[299]

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[295] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 99.
[296] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 100-101.
[297] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 99.
[298] The English translation is my own. Loth does not translate the entire passage but summarises it as follows: "and [he] has the legs of a horse from the knees downwards." Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 99.
[299] Woodward, "Medieval Mappaemundi," 331. Here Woodward provides a useful table of the main "semimythical races" found on *mappaemundi* and the locations with which they are often associated. Like the black characters in *Ectors saga*, many of these "races" are associated with Africa or Scythia. For Pliny's description of the Hippopodes see: H. Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History*, vol. 2 (London: William Heinemann, 1942), book 4, 192.

Nevertheless, the idea that magic is related to Kaldanus' horse feet is supported by comparisons with other shape-shifting characters in *Ectors saga*, of which there are several. Amongst these are the *svartr* berserk Ingifer and the wizard Argus both of whom turn themselves into serpents (*ormr*).[300] In both cases the serpents spew poison and in the case of Argus this poison is described as devastating the earth and causing it to turn *svartr*.[301] Thus, like Kaldanus, both characters are magical and have a proximity to blackness. This suggests that magic and blackness are linked in some way or at least that they both serve as indicators of alterity.

Argus is particularly useful as a comparison for Kaldanus since his magic abilities are described almost identically: *hann var galdra-maðr ok seiðskratte* ("he was a wizard and a sorcerer").[302] Furthermore, Argus' transformation is explicitly linked to this magical ability: *varð at ormi með svá miklum trollskap ok fjǫlkynngi* ("[he] became a serpent with so much magic and sorcery").[303] Thus it appears that the bodily alterity of Argus is a result of his magical ability, and that the same is likely true of Kaldanus. This insinuation of bodily alterity once again links the character of Kaldanus to ideas about blackness as an abnormal bodily state, as in the burnt *Aethiops* of classical literature.

Having addressed Kaldanus' proximity to blackness and its implications, it remains to be considered why he is characterised as being from Chaldea. As Matthew Driscoll posits, it is likely that Chaldea was known to the composer of *Ectors saga* through its appearances in the bible.[304] Thus Chaldea's appearance in *Ectors saga* may be related to the Biblical Prophecy of Isaiah, also known as which prophecies that God will set the Medes against

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[300] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 110, 161.
[301] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 161.
[302] The English is my own translation based on Loth's edition. Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 161.
[303] The English is my own translation based on Loth's edition. Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 161.
[304] Driscoll, "Late Prose Fiction,"198. Elsewhere the author of *Ectors saga* appears to draw ideas about places from Isidore's *Etymologies*. However, the single mention of Chaldea in *Etymologies* pertains to the similarities between the Chaldean and Syrian languages and the fact that Abraham was Chaldean (*Etymologies*, 9.1.9). Thus, this would not explain the negative representation of Chaldeans in the saga. W. M. Lindsay (eds.) *Etymologiarum*, 9.1.9.

Babylon 'the famous pride of the Chaldeans,' destroying it as he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrha and depopulating that land so that it shall thereafter only be habituated by serpents (*draconibus*), ostriches (*struthiones*), "hairy ones" (*pilosi*), and sirens (*sirenes*) [Isaiah 13:16-22].[305] It may be from this post-apocalyptic landscape, populated by monsters which the composer of *Ectors saga* imagined Kaldanus to originate. Crucially, within Isaiah's biblical prophecy one of the consequences of the Chaldean's doom is the burning of their faces: *unusquisque ad proximum suum stupebit, facies combustae vultus eorum* ("everyone shall be amazed at his neighbour, their countenances shall be as faces burnt") [Isaiah 13:8]. The image of a people with burnt faces is strikingly similar to the etymology of the Latin term *Aethiops* "burnt face."[306] As in the cases of King Arkilaus and King Tírus it is again significant that whilst Kaldanus is aligned strongly with ideas around blackness, he is not explicitly called black himself. Here once more the author shows an unwillingness to cast black characters as leaders. Indeed, blackness within *Ectors saga* may even be considered as antithetical to leadership given its associations with subalternity, discussed in chapter one.

The characterisation of Kaldanus is indicative of broader European ideas of blackness and Africaness, which were related but not synonymous. Whilst the term *Aethiops* denotes blackness by its definition, classical writers such as Herodotus refers to two types of Ethiopians, a western group who are 'woolly-haired,' and sometimes described as having flat noses, and an eastern straight-haired group originating from Asia.[307] The neologism

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[305] For English translation see: Isaiah 13:8 (Douay-Rheims), accessed 10/08/23: https://www.drbo.org/chapter/27013.htm; for Latin see: Isaiah 13: 8 (Latin Vulgate), accessed 10/08/23: https://www.drbo.org/lvb/chapter/27013.htm

[306] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 220. For use of the term *Aethiops* in Antiquity see Snowden, "The Negro," 266-92.

[307] F. M. Snowden, "The Negro in Classical Italy," *American Journal of Philology* 68 (1947), 268-9. In the first passage Herodotus lists these Asian Ethiopians amongst the peoples of Iran, meanwhile in the second he states that their appearance is like that of Indians. A. D. Godley, *Herodotus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), Hdt. 3.94; Hdt. 7.70.1-2. Accessed online 10/08/23: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0126%3Abook%3D3%3Achapter%3D94; http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0126%3Abook%3D7%3Achapter%3D70%3Asection%3D1

Leucæthiopes ("white Ethiopians"), appears to reflect this later group in Medieval texts.[308] This idea of two types of Ethiopians is also evident in a 13th century letter from Frederick Barbarossa to Saladin which refers to Saladin's governance of 'both Ethiopias' (*ambas Aethiopias*).[309] The 16th century Berber Andalusian writer Leo Africanus similarly describes two types of Moors, one white and the other black.[310] In his descriptions of other African peoples Africanus writes that black people are more likely to be idolaters and explains white Africans as descendants of people from the East.[311]

This idea of two types of Ethiopians also appears to find expression in *Ectors saga* in the character of Prince Lucius of Numidia who becomes the loyal companion of Ector's knight Alanus.[312] Indeed, the name Lucius, resembles the term *Leucæthiop* ("white Ethiopian") since Lucius is derived from the Latin *lūx* "light," *Leucæthiop* derives from the Ancient Greek cognate *leukós*.[313] This suggests that just as *leukós* negates the assumption of blackness which comes with the term *Aethiopes*, the name Lucius may be intended to negate the assumption of blackness attached to the location of Numidia.[314]

King Valpriant of Ethiopia is the second virtuous African to appear in the saga, although there are scant details regarding his character, he is a vassal of the Trojan King Karnotius (the father of Ector) and is described as fighting valiantly for his king.[315] Therefore, although he appears only briefly, his representation is wholly positive and there is no suggestion of his alterity or his blackness. Thus, Valpriant may also fit the mould of a *Leucæthiop*. Whilst the animalistic *blámann* in *Ectors saga* originate from Africa, the characters of Lucius and Valpriant show that African characters are not necessarily portrayed

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[308] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 53-4.
[309] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 156, 248.
[310] John Pory (trans.) and Robert Brown (eds.), *The History and description of Africa and the notable things therein contained*, vol. 1 (London: Hakluyt society, 1896), 20.
[311] Pory (trans.), *The History and description of Africa*, 55, 91.
[312] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 118-9.
[313] Lewis, *Latin Dictionary*, 483.
[314] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 53
[315] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 177.

negatively or as being black. But when African characters are represented positively, they appear as non-black, non-raced characters.

Scythian Blackness

As the previous section shows, not all African characters in *Ectors saga* are black. However, the opposite is also true: that not all black characters in the saga are African. One of these characters is the *svartr* King Ingifer of Scythia (*Svíþjóð hin kalda*). This section will consider authorial decisions to locate blackness in Scythia, and what ths means for the meaning of blackness in the saga.

A similar link between Scythia and blackness is explained by Snorri in the first chapter of *Ynglinga saga*:

> "To the east is the region called Asia, and the region to the west some call Europe, and some Enea. And from the north to *Svartahaf* (The Black Sea) extends *Svíþjóð in mikla* (Scythia, lit. "Sweden the Great") or *in kalda* (the Cold). Some claim *Svíþjóð in mikla* to be no smaller than *Serkland in mikla* (Saracen-land the Great), others compare it to *Bláland in mikla* (Blackland the Great). The northern part of *Svíþjóð* remains uninhabited because of frost and cold, just as the southern part of *Bláland* is empty because of the heat of the sun. In *Svíþjóð* there are many large uninhabited areas. There are also nations of many kinds and many languages. There are giants there and dwarves, there are black people (*blámenn*) there, and many kinds of strange nations (*undarlegar þjóðir*). There are also amazingly large wild animals and dragons."[316]

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[316] Finlay and Faulkes (trans.), *Heimskringla*, 6.

In the case of Scythia (*Svíþjóð*) the monikers *in mikla* or *in kalda* are used to differentiate Scythia from Sweden, which can also be referred to as *Svíþjóð*.[317] In this extract the Scythian moniker *in mikla* is added to both *Serkland* and *Bláland* to underline their similarity of size. This is an especially notable addition in the case of *Serkland* since this place name usually does not bear this moniker. Alison Finlay suggests in her translation that *Serkland in mikla* refers to Northern Africa. However, *Serkland* can have a wide variety of meanings: Northern Africa, southern Spain, Asia Minor, Assyria, Babylon.[318] Textual context often provides the key to disambiguating this term, although the broad geographic scope of *Ynglinga saga* precludes such an attempt in this case.[319] It is also uncertain if the moniker *in mikla* is meant to refine the meaning of the term. Although it is clear from the above passage that it at least points to a unifying feature of these three places from which hostile forces tend to appear in sagas.

In terms of climate, the passage presents Scythia as a northern mirror image of the southern *Bláland* (Africa), both of which remain partially uninhabited due to their extremes of climate. This parallel also suggests that like Africa, Scythia was likely considered 'a land of geographic, physiological, and intellectual abnormality'.[320] In terms of population Scythia is described as including giants, dwarves, *blámenn*, and many kinds of "strange nations" (*undarlegar þjóðir*) as well as unusually large wild animals and dragons. Some of these

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[317] Although these monikers are not used consistently in this passage, the wider context of the chapter makes it clear that it is Scythia, not Sweden, which is being described.

[318] Cleasby and Vigfusson define *Serkland* as northern Africa or southern Spain, or Assyria or Babylon in ancient texts translated from Latin. Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "serkir." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/serkir. Zoëga notes that the term *serkir* can refer to numerous peoples, including Saracen, Assyrians, and Babylonians, but defines *Serkland* as "the land of the Saracens" and notes that this term is especially used to refer to northern Africa. Zoëga, *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, "serkir," "Serkland." Accessed online 22/07/23: http://norroen.info/dct/zoega/s.html

[319] Attempts to disambiguate the term Serkland in the context of particular texts. For, examples, see: Diana Whaley, "Skaldic Poetry," in *A companion to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 494; Judith Jesch, "Geography and Travel," in *A companion to Old Norse-Icelandic literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 125.

[320] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 52.

tropes are common to many far-away locations in saga literature. As we have seen giant animals and dragons likewise appear in description of the East. But what is particularly significant in this passage is the location of *blámenn* and "strange nations" (*undarlegar þjóðir*) in Scythia. This indicates that *blámenn* are not necessarily thought to be unique to Africa (although it appears that they are in *Ectors saga*).[321] In *Bragða-Mágus saga*, it is similarly claimed that the *blámenn* may be found in both *Bláland* and Scythia.[322]

The term *þjóð* which is translated in the above passage from *Ynglinga saga* as "nation," may also be translated as "people" in a sense which denotes ethic/racial groups.[323] As Richard Cole shows, this term *þjóð* (along with *kyn*, *fólk*, and *ætt*) is used to refer to Jews as a group of common kinship and descent who exhibit hereditary traits including a specific skin colour.[324] The fact that *undarlegar þjóðir* is listed alongside giants, dwarves, and *blámenn* further suggests that the term refers to a racial group in this context. Scythia in *Ynglinga saga*, as in *Ectors saga*, is therefore presented as a marginal space in which black characters may be found. However, *Ectors saga*, unlike other texts, maintains a distinction between blackness located inside Africa, and blackness located elsewhere whereby *blár* is used only to refer to black Africans and who represent the most extreme form of subalternity.

Conclusion of Chapter 2

By focussing on geography and its role in the shaping the identities of both black and Icelandic characters in *Ectors saga*, this chapter demonstrates how the author situates Iceland in a broader pan-European narrative of descent which treats the Orient as a courtly and

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[321] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, 52.

[322] Gustaf Cederschiöld (ed.), "Mágus saga jarls," in *Fornsögur Suðrlanda*, ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (Lund: F. A. Brockhaus, 1884), 34-5; Cole, "Proto-Racial Thinking," 263-4.

[323] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "Þjóð." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/thjod

[324] Cole, "Proto-Racial Thinking," 265.

European 'inside space,' to which black characters are foreign and incompatible. Through *Ectors saga* the author seeks to elevate Iceland's significance whilst reinforcing the marginality of Africa and other areas of black origin. The juxtaposition of these two peripheral place exemplifies what the postcolonial scholar Spivak stipulates, that 'only the marginal can speak for the margin,' meaning that in the context of medieval Icelandic literature black characters are most often both voiceless and marginalised.[325] Furthermore, this chapter establishes that blackness does not refer solely to those of African origin, as demonstrated by the presence of two non-black characters in the saga who originate from African and are portrayed positively. Although blackness is associated with areas thought to be inhabited by monsters, including Africa, Scythia, and Chaldea, and the term *blár* is used to refer only to black African characters. Consequently, the location of characters in peripheral areas is suggestive of their alterity but the greatest alterity is exhibited by characters who are both *blár* and African.

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[325] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 171.

Chapter 3: Intersectionality in *Ectors saga*

The previous two chapters have shown that in *Ectors saga* black characters are presented as subalterns by their exclusion from social and political hierarchies and are marginalised by their location at edges of the known world. In these ways their representation resembles the exclusion of those perceived as racial minorities in modernity. The previous chapters also show that there are a range of motifs and associations which are typically related to blackness – what we might call a motif-cluster. These individual motifs have traditionally been studied separately, and whilst much valuable scholarship has been affected using this approach, it nevertheless restricts the ability of scholars to study identities which are made up of several of these motifs as anything other than the sum of their constituent parts. The approach of Heng to race in the Middle Ages has also been criticised for its tendency to subsume different facets of identity into race as a single strategy of differentiation. The post-colonial concept of intersectionality offers a different way to interpret race in *Ectors saga*, as once strand of identity which intersects with others creating complex identities within the saga.[326] This chapter will utilise this concept of intersectionality to deconstruct layers of alterity in *Ectors saga*, and demonstrate how these various layers of meaning might contribute to racial characterisations in the saga.

Within medieval literary context this exploration of intersectionality is complicated by disparities between medieval and modern modes of categorisation, since groups which modern readers might assume to be obviously separate and distinct – for example vikings, Jews, and Saracens – may be combined and conflated in medieval texts.[327] Certainly, within

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[326] Sian, *Postcolonial Thought*, 134.

[327] Natalia I. Petrovskaia, "Which 'Pagans'?," in *Writing battles: New Perspectives on Warfare and Memory in Medieval Europe*, ed. Rory Naismith, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 147-64.

Medieval insular literature there was a tendency to use interchangeable terminology to refer to non-Christian peoples. For example, the term Saracen may be used to refer to Arabs and Muslims but also groups who are non-Muslim, such as Danes, Lithuanians, or even pagan Romans.[328] Vikings and Jews might also be referred to either as 'pagans' or 'Saracens.'[329] In this way the boundaries between different non-Christian groups are blurred with the effect of presenting them in a binary opposition to Christians.[330] This conflation of non-Christian groups may represent writers comparing contemporary and past opponents of Christianity.[331] Indeed, past events – especially those which appear in the bible – often appear on medieval *mappae mundi* which thus simultaneously represent the past and the medieval present.[332] Elsewhere in medieval literature, the use of biblical allegory likewise tended to blur the lines between contemporary and biblical opponents. Therefore, groups which we might otherwise assume to represent distinct peoples in medieval literature may become part of what Kathy Cawsey calls 'a confused goulash of alterity' – a cluster of different appellations used to denote a chaotic mix of alterity.[333]

The intersection of Blackness and Trolldom

Ectors saga frequently remarks about black characters that they look "more like a troll than a man," suggesting that they display visible signs of difference which are inhuman.[334] The term

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[328] Petrovskaia, "Which 'Pagans'?," 148; John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 127; Alan V. Murray, "The Saracens of the Baltic: Pagan and Christian Lithuanians in the Perception of English and French Crusaders to Late Medieval Prussia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 41 (2010): 4, 417-8.
[329] For an example of a Scandinavian Saracen see Diane Speed, "The Saracens of *King Horn*," *Speculum* 65 (1990): 564-95.
[330] Petrovskaia, "Which 'Pagans'?," 148.
[331] Petrovskaia, "Which 'Pagans'?," 148.
[332] Petrovskaia, "Which 'Pagans'?," 148.
[333] Cawsey, "Disorienting Orientalism," 385.
[334] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 99, 109, 133. Here I give my own translation of a passage on page 99, lines 6-8.

trolldómr represents two intersecting meanings: "being a troll" and "being magical".[335]

Although, the term troll is also commonly used in Old Norse literature to refer to people of different ethnic groups: Sámi, Bjarmians, *Skrælingjar* (indigenous Americans). There are several uses of the term troll to denote ethnic difference in *Ketils saga hœngs*. In this saga Ketil's Sámi wife Hrafnhildr is referred to as a troll but is also described as having a particularly wide face.[336] A group of Sámi men are similarly described in the saga as "not narrow faced."[337] Both of these descriptions appear to reflect stereotypes of Sámi having wide faces which persist to this day.[338] It has also been argued that other aspects of Hrafnhildr's behaviour also reflect Norse understandings of Sámi cultural practices.[339] Thus, the term troll is used as 'an exaggeration of ethnic and cultural differences.'[340] Although, unlike the black characters in *Ectors saga*, these trolls are not necessarily unassimilable. In fact, many characters in sagas, even protagonists, are part Sámi and therefore are referred to by the term *hálf-troll*.[341] For example, the early 9th century hersir Hallbjorn Halftroll who was of mixed Norwegian-Sámi origin and features in both *Egils saga* and *Ketils saga hœngs*. However, the term troll can also be used to refer solely to being magical. This appears to be the case in the character of Lutrektor who is called a troll but outwardly appears to be a skilful and human knight.[342]. Nevertheless, his name hlutr-ektor identifies him as a magical

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[335] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "Troll." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/troll-skapr

[336] Charles Robinson (trans.), *Ketils Saga Hængs, Gríms Saga Loðinkinna and the Narrative of Survival*. MA Thesis (Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2012), 7-8.

[337] Robinson, *Narrative of Survival*, p. 8.

[338] Ben Waggoner (trans.), *The Hrafnista sagas* (New Haven: Troth, 2012), xxi.

[339] Else Mundal, "Coexistence of Saami and Norse culture – reflected in and interpreted by Old Norse myths," in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society. Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference*, ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret C. Ross (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2000), 353-5.

[340] Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "Behind the cloak, between the lines: Trolls and the symbolism of their clothing in Old Norse tradition," *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies* 47 (2017): 2, 338.

[341] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "hálf-troll." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/halfr

[342] Loth (ed.) "Ectors saga," 126.

and evil, mirror image of Ector since *hlutr* is a term for magic (especially that of sacrifice and divination).[343]

In the cases of most trolls in *Ectors saga* the two meanings of the term are less easily separated since bodily alterity is often explained as being the result of magic. Indeed, in *Ectors saga* magic is most often expressed through bodily transformation.[344] In other sagas, there is also a far higher rate of magic in characters who come from different ethnic groups such as the Sámi or Bjarmians.[345] Therefore, bodily alterity, ethnicity and magic are categories which often intersect. Indeed, Sirpa Aalto notes the significant similarities in the representation of distant non-Christian peoples – *serkir* ("Saracens"), *skrælingar* ("Indigenous Americans"), and *blámenn* – and other 'heathen' groups with which Scandinavians had greater contact such as the Karelians, Bjarmar, Wends, and Sámi.[346] These different groups share core similarities in their bodily alterity, magical association, and non-Christianity.[347] This core racial "other" identity is often expressed by the term *troll*. Although each people represent variations of this troll identity. For example, the Sámi are portrayed as heathen sorcerers whilst *blámenn* are similarly presented with the addition of a greater emphasis on their subalternity and marginality which makes them unassimilable characters.[348] Notably, blackness is largely restricted to distant groups, *blámenn* from Libya or Bláland, demonic *blár*/*svartr* otherworldly character, and the *svartr skrælingar* of the Vínland sagas.[349] It has been suggested by Paul S. Langeslag that terms *svartr* and *troll* may

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[343] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "*Hlutr*." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/hlutr

[344] Loth (ed.) "Ectors saga," 99, 109, 133.

[345] Lyonel D. Perabo, *Here be Heathens: The Supernatural Image of Northern Fenno-Scandinavia in Pre-Modern Literature* (Reykjavík, 2016). See also: Hermann Pálsson, "The Sami People in Old Norse Literature," *Nordlit* 5 (1999), 29-53.

[346] Sirpa Aalto, *Categorizing Otherness in the Kings' Sagas*. PhD thesis (Joensuu: University of Eastern Finland, 2010); Bandlien, "Marginality," 261.

[347] Bandlien, "Marginality," 261.

[348] Aalto, *Categorizing Otherness*.

[349] Sverrir Jakobsson, "Black Men and Malignant-Looking: The Place of the Indigenous Peoples of North America in the Icelandic World View," In A*pproaches to Vínland: A Conference on the Written and*

be regarded as ethnic terms.[350] In the case of *Ectors saga* it seems possible to take Langeslag's assertion further and posit that the intersection of these two terms appears to reflect an unassimilable racial difference.

The intersection of Blackness, Beasts, and Berserkers

In saga literature, and especially *fornaldarsögur*, *blámenn* and berserkers often appear alongside each other, as they do in *Ectors saga*, suggesting similarities between the two groups.[351] The appellation *ber-serkr* literally means "bear-shirt," and is used to describe characters whose behaviour and nature are animalistic and violent.[352] Berserkers are thus considered by scholars such as Catherine Raudvere to fit broadly into the category of *ham-hleypa* (literally, "skin-leaper"): those who have the ability to propel their *hugr* ("soul") into a different *hamr* ("skin").[353] In Old Norse literature this always results in at least part of the human body being left behind when the *hugr* takes a new *hamr*.[354] Therefore, it is more accurate to talk of 'skin-changing' rather than 'shapeshifting'. *Ynglinga saga* describes Odin as the foremost of these skin-changers and Snorri describes several of his transformations into fish, birds, and serpents.[355] Odin's berserker warriors are also compared to bears, bulls, and maddened dogs, and fight without armour and hold their shields between their teeth.[356] Similarly, other portrayals of the *berserks-gangr* describe warriors who 'howled like wild

Archaeological Sources for the Norse Settlements in the North Atlantic Region and Explorations of America, ed. Andrew Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík, Sigurður Nordal Institute, 2001), 88-104.

[350] Paul S. Langeslag, "Trǫll and Ethnicity in Egils saga," in *Á austrvega*: Saga and East Scandinavia (2009), 560-7; Wolf, "The Colour Blue," 65.

[351] Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others," 14.

[352] Catherine Raudvere, "Popular Religion in the Viking Age," in *The Viking World*, 235-243, ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), 242; Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "*ber-serkr*." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/ber-serkr

[353] Raudvere, "Popular Religion," 241.

[354] Raudvere, "Popular Religion," 241.

[355] Finlay and Faulkes (trans.), *Heimskringla*, 10-1; Raudvere, "Popular Religion," 241.

[356] Finlay and Faulkes (trans.), *Heimskringla*, 20; Raudvere, "Popular Religion," 241.

beasts, foamed at the mouth, and gnawed the iron rim of their shields.'[357] One such berserker

frenzy is displayed by Kveldulf in *Egils saga*: *at þá hamaðisk hann ok fleiri váru þeir*

ƒǫrunautar hans er þá hömuðusk. Þeir drápu menn ƒlá alla er fyrir þeim urðu ("then he

frenzied and most of his companions [also] frenzied. They killed everyone they came

across").[358] In this passage the word *hamask*, which is synonymous with *beserks-gangr*, is

translated as "frenzy" but more specifically refers to a change of shape.[359] A similar bodily

alterity is suggested by Kveldulf's name which literally translates as "evening-wolf" and

hints that he becomes a wolf in the evening, i.e., that he is a werewolf.[360] Indeed, the saga

affirms that people thought that he was a *ham-ramr* ("skin-changer") and that this was the

reason for his name (his birthname being simply Ulf).[361] The term *ham-ramr* is often used to

describe berserkers.[362] Kveldulf is also described as being bad-tempered to the point that few

people dared to speak to him. Similarly, his son Grim is ill-tempered and described as

"swarthy (*svartr*) and ugly (*ljótr*) resembling his father in both appearance and character."[363]

We can thus deduce that Kveldulf himself is equally *svartr* and *ljótr*. The link between these

traits is a recurring theme in Norse texts in which dark characters often appear as ugly,

loutish, and malevolent.[364] Indeed, in *Ectors saga* blackness and ugliness appear to be almost

synonymous. This passage also demonstrates that blackness and bad temperament are linked

and that both were considered inheritable. Likewise, the ability to skin-change appears to be a

family trait. Indeed, Kveldulf's father is called Bjalfi, literally meaning "animal skin,"

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[357] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "*ber-serkr*." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/ber-serkr
[358] This is my own translation based on the edition of Bjarni Einarsson and the English translation of Bernard Scudder. Bjarni Einarsson (ed.), *Egils saga* (Exeter: Short Run Press Ltd, 2013), 36; Scudder (trans.), *Egils saga*, 47.
[359] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "*hamask*." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/hamask
[360] Einarsson (ed.), *Egils saga*, 1.
[361] Einarsson (ed.), *Egils saga*, 1.
[362] Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "*ham-ramr*." Accessed online 22/07/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/ham-ramr
[363] Scudder (trans.), *Egils saga*, 5; Einarsson (ed.), *Egils saga*, 1.
[364] Cole, "Proto-Racial Thinking," 261.

suggesting that he had the same skin-changing ability as his son.[365] It is perhaps then unsurprising that there exists the term *hálf-berserkr* to describe partial berserker heritage and that this term is used in much the same way as the term *hálf-troll*. It has even been suggested that the term *berserkr* may be treated as 'as a sort of caste grouped around chiefs and kings.'[366] A mixture of berserker/animalistic behaviour, blackness/ugliness, and bad temperament are visible in several characters in *Ectors saga* with the most striking example being Baldúlfr. This character howls like a wolf and leads a force of *blámenn* and berserkers of which he is strongest and ugliest.[367] The similarities between the characters and indeed the names of Kveldulf and Baldúlfr are striking with the greatest distinction between the two being that Kveldulf is a protagonist and Baldúlfr an antagonist. Given their similarities in characterisation this likely speaks more to changing modes of Icelandic self-representation than it does to differences between these characters.

In *Ectors saga* the primary distinction between *blámenn* and berserkers, appears to be the former's subalternity. However, in other sagas, such as *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, an antagonist is described interchangeably as a *blámaðr* and a berserker, suggesting that the two identities are not mutually exclusive and can be combined. Like berserkers and *blámenn* in *Ectors saga*, this antagonist is also likened to an animal: "he had claws so large, that they were more like the claws of a griffin than a man's nails" (*klær hafði hann svá miklar, at þær váru líkari gammsklóm en mannanöglum*).[368] It can therefore be seen that the two groups

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[365] Scudder, *Egils saga*, 3, 206.

[366] Bonnefoy, *Mythologies*, 233.

[367] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 135.

[368] Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.), "Sturlaugs saga starfsama," in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 2, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík, Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1943-1944), chapter 12. Accessed online 13/08/23: https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Sturlaugs_saga_starfsama; Here I quote the English translation of in Peter Tunstall (trans.) *The Saga of Sturlaug the Industrious* (published online, 2008), chapter 12. Accessed online 13/08/23: https://web.archive.org/web/20100908081937/http://www.oe.eclipse.co.uk/nom/Sturlaug.htm. For an alternative translation of this passage see: Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others," 15-6. The two translations differ in their translation of the term *gammsklóm* which Lindow translated as "claws of a griffin" and Tunstall translates as "vulture's claws." Dictionary sources also seem to disagree as to the correct translation. See:

intersect significantly, sometimes to the point of conflation. Nevertheless, in *Ectors saga*,

blámenn are distinguished from berserkers by their consistent association with Africa, their

consistent subalternity, and their blackness being referred to by the term *blár* rather than

svartr. Therefore, the intersection of *blár*-ness and Africaness in *Ectors saga* creates a unique

and subaltern identity.

The intersection of Black and Jewish racial features

Perhaps the most complex identity in the saga is that of unnamed son of King Tarsus of the

black elves. This character is encountered by Ector's knight Fenacius whilst the knight is

traveling through a forest:

> *Hann ser hvar maðr var lítill og ljótur. Hann var svartur sem kol hǫfudmikill ok*
>
> *bæraxladr rang-nefjaðr ok rifinn kjapturin ut til eyrna.*
>
> "Where he [Fenacius] sees a little ugly man. He was black like coal, big-headed and
>
> broad-shouldered, and with a crooked nose and a mouth which ranges from ear to
>
> ear."[369]

The location of this character in a forest, what Glauser would term an 'outside space,'

immediately hints to his alterity.[370] Although, in this case there an abundance of other signs of

this alterity. As discussed in chapter one, both King Tarsus and his son display chthonic

associations and their blackness contributes to this part of their characterisation, as does the

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Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, "gambrs-kló." Accessed online 13/08/23: https://cleasby-vigfusson-dictionary.vercel.app/word/baldr; Zoëga, *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, "gammr." Accessed online 13/08/23: http://norroen.info/dct/zoega/g.html

[369] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 107, ll. 9-12.

[370] See the first section of chapter 2.

son's attempted sexual violation of a dwarf woman named Sacra. But what is especially striking in the above description is the author's choice to include so many somatic features. This is not just unusual compared to the rest of the saga, but also given the tendency for medieval sources to make limited allusions to somatic distinctions between peoples. Often medieval writers or illustrations do not mark such ethnic distinctions even when they must have been quite apparent. For example, in a 14th century illustration of a battle between Charlemagne's Franks and Saracens in a manuscript of the *Grandes chroniques de France*, both sides are shown in matching arms and armour, nor are there any indicators of physiological difference between the two sides, give no sense of historical or ethnic difference.[371] The repertoire of racial tropes with a strong physiological component was also far more limited in the Middle Ages compared to in a modern colonial context.[372] Such somatic markers are largely limited to those related to Jews – the so called "Jewish nose" or "Jewish hat" – and the physiognomy features of black Africans which Bartlett summarises as: 'black skin but also full lips, broad nose, and curly hair'.[373]

With his crooked nose (*rang-nefjaðr*), black skin, and broad mouth, Tarsus' son displays many of the most common somatic markers of racial difference found in other European sources of the period. Here the demonic and the racially different are presented in a single character in a manner not unlike the use of the "Jewish nose" in Christian depictions of the Devil. Such a depiction appears on a panel of the Kalanti altarpiece (c.1420). This altarpiece depicts *The Legend of Theophilus*, in which Theophilus, a 6th century clerk of the bishop of Cilicia, who enters into a legal contract with the devil which is brokered with the

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[371] Robert Bartlett, "Illustrating Ethnicity in the Middle Ages," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. M. Eliav-Feldon, B. Isaac, and J. Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 132.
[372] Bartlett, "Illustrating Ethnicity," 133.
[373] Bartlett, "Illustrating Ethnicity," 133-4.

help of a Jewish sorcerer.[374] This widely circulated text suggests that the Jewish sorcerer is especially able to contact Satan, a closeness which is equally represented in the Kalanti altarpiece by the "Jewish nose" of Satan.

Figure 1: Detail from a panel of the Kalanti altarpiece c.1420. Housed in the National Museum of Finland in Helsinki.

Tarsus' son is different from other black characters encountered in the saga. He is a spiritual rather than a martial threat whose attack is not against a kingdom but against the sacred – in this case personified by a dwarf. This once more aligns this character to medieval depiction

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[374] Elina Räsänen, "Images of Jews in the Kalanti Altarpiece," in *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*, ed. Cordelia Heß and Jonathan Adams (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 296-8.
Kersti Markus, The Saint Barbara Altarpiece of Master Francke and its Birgittine Context

of Jews in medieval European literature in which Jews are generally depicted as the 'enemy-at-home,' in contrast to the role of Muslims characters as the 'enemy-of-war.'[375] This difference in depiction appears to derive from their proximity to Christians – due to their presence in many urban centres of Christian Europe – and their staunch resistance to conversion which was commonly lamented in Christian writing.[376] From the twelfth century onwards various conspiracies arose proposing to explain Jewish resistance to conversion as the result of a divine curse, physical impairment, or an imagined Jewish thirst for Christian blood.[377] Amongst the most virulent accusations against Jews was that of the blood libel – the ritual murder of Christian boys and the use of their blood in religious Jewish ceremonies.[378] Through these various conspiracies and accusations Jews were categorised not only as an 'enemy-at-home' but a religious enemy of Christians. This may explain why the son of Tarsus in *Ectors saga* is portrayed with a "Jewish nose." His blackness also appears to have both a racial and religious significance and since similar comparisons to coal (*kol*/*kolblár*) or pitch (*bik*/*biksvartr*) often appear in sagas to describe demonic *blámaðr*.[379] It is also common for sagas to describe *blámenn* as inhuman in appearance, as in the case of Tarsus who is called ("a man if they are to be called man" (*maðr ef mann skal kalla*).[380]

As Arngrímur Vídalín notes, blackness and demonic nature commonly intersect in Old Norse literature, and the term *blámaðr* is used to denote both black Africans and

[375] Heng, *Invention*, 8, 112-3, 379-80.
[376] Bartlett, "Illustrating Ethnicity," 134; Amnon Linder, *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 1997.
281–4, no. 542;
[377] Weeda, *Ethnicity*, 62
[378] Joe Hillaby, "The Ritual-Child-Murder Accusation: Its Dissemination and Harold of Gloucester," *Jewish Historical Studies* 34 (1994-6), 69-109; Alan Dundes, "The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore" (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).
[379] Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others," 14. For an example of a *kolblár blámaðr* see: Unger (ed.), *Karlamagnus saga ok kappa hans*, 54; for an example of a pitch black *blámaðr*, see C. R. Unger (ed.), "Bartholomeus saga postula," in *Postula sögur: Legendariske fortællinger om apostlernes liv, deres kamp for kristendommens udbredelse, samt deres martyrdöd*, ed. C. R. Unger (Christiania: Trykt Hos B. M. Bentzen, 1874), 763.
[380] Lindow, "Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others," 15; Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 111.

demons.[381] These meanings are not mutually exclusive, indeed Vídalín has found that in every case when the term *blámaðr* means demon, it also means black African.[382] The association of black colour and demons is perhaps unsurprising given that Christians had encountered black Africans as religious enemies during the Crusades.[383] Thus, for Icelanders who had most likely never met either a Jew or a black man the two might be easily become conflated.[384] Although neither Tarsus or his son are described as being *blámenn* they nevertheless resemble the demonic *blámenn* of other sagas in the description of their blackness, their inhuman description, and their associations a hellish underworld. Thus, the identity of these characters represents a multiplicity of intersections; they are at once black in a racial sense, demonic, Jewish, and animalistic.

Greyness as a Racial feature

Reference to Jewish race might similarly aid to disambiguate the description of the *rísi* (giant) Gandilabrus in *Ectors saga* who is described as *steinn-grár* (stone grey) in colour. The term *steinn-grár* is very unusual – indeed, it appears to be completely absent from Kirsten Wolf's very comprehensive scholarship on Old Norse colour terms. Most occurrences of the word *grár* (grey) in sagas refer to the colour of animals not humans or human-like beings. Indeed, majority of terms for tones of grey are related to various animals: *hǫss* (grey,

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[381] Latin texts often use *aethiops* to refer to black Africans more generally, Vídalín similarly uses the term Ethiopians according to this wider meaning. Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling-Champions," 208.
[382] Vídalín, "Demons, Muslims, Wrestling-Champions," 208.
[383] Bartlett, "Illustrating Ethnicity," 134.
[384] Whilst it is difficult to prove the absence of Jews in medieval Iceland and Scandinavia there are no medieval sources which confirm their presence in either region. Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Heß, "Encounters and Fantasies: Muslims, Jews and Christians in the North," in *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*, ed. Cordelia Heß and Jonathan Adams (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 3; Cole, "Proto-Racial Thinking," 264.

especially of a wolf), *apal-grár* (apple grey, used to describe a horse),[385]*úlf-grár* (wolf grey),[386] *föxóttr ok grár at lit* (mottled and grey in colour, used to describe a horse).[387] The representation of Gandilabrus also includes two animalistic aspects, namely he howls so loudly that those who are near him are nearly driven insane and he is described as being "hairy like a sheep" (*loðinn sem sauðr*).[388] His howling is reminiscent of that of the *blámenn* in the saga whilst his comparison to a sheep and his greyness may suggest a Jewish aspect to this character, given the frequent association of Jews with goats in medieval Christian iconography.[389]

A greyness of tone is also observed by Richard Cole in his study of visual representations of Jews in Scandinavia. Cole notes observes difference in skin tone between Jesus and his Jewish tormentors in an image of the passion scene in the Ål Stave Church in Norway. In these images Jesus skin is a rudy pink colour whilst his Jewish tormentors are smaller and paler, with a white or brown-grey skin tone.[390] Another image from the same church shows the disciples at the last supper pictured with brown/red hair, a rudy skin tone, and flushed cheeks, whilst behind them stands Judas, smaller, completely pale white skinned and black haired.[391] Cole surmises that compared to the colour of Jesus and his disciples the skin tone of Judas and the Jews 'are of a browner hue, which somehow simultaneously conveys the image of being more pallid and sickly, while also not quite being white.'[392] Such a colouration may be equivalent to the phrase *steinn-grár* (stone grey) used in *Ectors saga* to

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[385] Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, "Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar," in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 3, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1943-1944), chapter 20. Available online (accessed 18/07/2023): http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Hr%C3%B3lfs_saga_Gautrekssonar; For the most recent translation see Ben Waggoner (trans.), *Six Sagas of Adventure* (New Haven: Troth Publications, 2014).
[386] Jesse L. Byock (trans.), *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* (London: Penguin. 1998), chapter 51.
[387] Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (trans.), "Arrow-Odd," in *Seven Viking Romances*, ed. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (London: Penguin, 1985), chapter 2.
[388] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 165-6.
[389] Cole, "Proto-Racial Thinking," 257.
[390] Cole, "Proto-Racial Thinking," 262.
[391] Cole, "Proto-Racial Thinking," 263.
[392] Cole, "Proto-Racial Thinking," 260-1.

describe the giant Gandilabrus.[393] However, Marianne Kalinke suggests a different

explanation of Gandilabrus description as being evocative of the effigy of a stone giant

sculpted by Tristam in *Tristams saga*.[394] In her analysis Kalinke points to similarities in the

two passages below:[395]

[393] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 166, l. 2.
[394] Kalinke, "Arthurian Pastiche," 75-6.
[395] Elsewhere I have presented quotes from Loth's edition of Ectors saga in normalised Old Norse to render them easier to read. However, here I have left both texts in the form in which they appear in the edition since this is the approach taken by Kalinke.

Table 3: A comparison of the description of Gandilabrus in Ectors saga and the effigy of a stone giant in Tristams saga

Gandilabrus in *Ectors saga*:	Effigy of a stone giant in *Tristams saga*:
suo unndarliga skapadur ath hann þurfti eigi clędi. þuijat hann war lodinn sem saudr og fell huer lagdur wm anann. steinngrar ath lith. hann uar atian alna har og hafdi stónng af iarne giórua og ij enn digrara ennda fedmingsdigur.[396]	*ok reiddi báðum höndum járnstaf sinn yfir öxl sér at verja líkneskjuna. En hann var klæddr storu bukkskinni ok loðnu, ok tók kyrtillinn honum skammt ofan, ok var hann nakinn niðr frá nafla ok gnísti tönnum, grimmr í augum, sem hann vildi berja alla þá, er inn gengu.*[397]
"so strangely shaped that he did not need to wear clothes, for he was as shaggy as a sheep and the tufts of wool fell one upon the other. He was stone-grey in colour. He was eighteen ells tall and had an iron staff the thick end of which was a fathom wide."[398]	"holding his iron staff over his shoulder with both hands as if protecting the other statue. He wore a big, shaggy goatskin, and his tunic didn't come down very far, so he was naked from the navel down. He gnashed his teeth and had fierce eyes, as if he, as if he wanted to kill everyone who entered."[399]

[396] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 165-6.
[397] Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance I: The Tristan Legend* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 78.
[398] The English translation given here is that found in Kalinke, "Arthurian Pastiche," 75-6.
[399] Kalinke (ed.), *The Tristan Legend*, 79.

The similarities between the two giants can be summarised as follows: both are made of or resemble stone, both are naked save for shaggy sheep/goat skins, both wield irons staffs, and both giants fight and are defeated by the hero of their respective sagas.[400] The number of similarities is notable, yet some of these motifs are very common. For example, the wielding of an iron staff by a monstrous enemy. Indeed, this motif appears earlier in *Ectors saga* in the *svartr* King Nocerus and another unnamed giant.[401] The fact that both Gandilabrus and the giant in *Tristams saga* fight and are defeated by the hero of the saga is also unsurprising given their roles as antagonists. This leaves the similarities of colour and animal association which can equally be explained as references to Jewish alterity, as also appears in the character of Tarsus' son.

The intersection of Blackness, Idolatry, and Islam

Throughout *Ectors saga*, idolatry and Islamic belief are repeatedly conflated, as is common in medieval romance.[402] This conflation is most pronounced in the case of Kalldanus, a berserker of Chaldean origin who rules over *Bláland hit mikla* ("Blackland the Great"). In the second knight's tale, Ector's knight Florencius destroys an ornate statue of Mohammed belonging to Kalldanus. In response the berserker swears by all the gods (plural) that he will have vengeance on the knight.[403] Although, he later refers to the wrath of Mohammed specifically.[404] Florentius later reveals himself to be the destroyer of the idol, news which induces the berserker rage of Kalldanus. This combination of references to the Islamic prophet Mohammed specifically and a plurality of unnamed deities is intriguing. As

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[400] Kalinke, "Arthurian Pastiche," 75-6.
[401] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 94, 105.
[402] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 201.
[403] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 101.
[404] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 102-3.

mentioned previously in this chapter, berserkers are especially associated with the god Odin and often appear as his followers.[405] Meanwhile, the representation of Mohammed has some obvious peculiarities. Firstly, in medieval Islamic belief, as in Modern Islam, the use of visual representations of the prophet was taboo. Secondly, Mohammed is considered a prophet rather than a deity therefore it is peculiar to reference his wrath rather than the wrath of Allah or of God. Thirdly, the final battle of the saga occurs in the year 377 BC, almost an entire millennium before the advent of Islam.[406] These peculiarities may well derive from ignorance of Islamic beliefs, or a disregard for their accurate representation. Nevertheless, it is telling that what is presented as quasi-Islamic belief bears far closer resemblance to pre-Christian Scandinavia religion. Thus, in *Ectors saga*, Mohammed effectively acts as a stand-in for Odin. Meanwhile, Odin and the rest of the Æsir are entirely absent from the saga as is consistent with Snorri's accounts of the euhemerised Æsir travelling to Scandinavia after leaving Troy.

Two other Muslim idolater characters who appear in *Ectors saga* are the brothers Ermengillus and Estomarus from Spain. These brothers are not described as black but are characterised by similar traits as black enemies in the saga: they are ugly, they are idolaters and Muslims, they are berserkers, and their army is made up of berserkers and a giant.[407] The use of Spain as a point of origin for these antagonists is probably informed by the composer's contemporary knowledge of Saracens in Iberia. This area appears most notably in Old Norse literature in *Karlamagnus saga*, which recounts Charlemagne's battles against Saracens in Iberia.[408] Other Norse sources on Iberia include two Norwegian sources composed at the end of the 12th century, the Old Norse *Ágrip* and the Latin *Historia Norwegiæ*, which record the

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[405] On the association of Odin with Berserkers see section two of this chapter.
[406] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 186.
[407] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 164-5.
[408] C. R. Unger (ed.), *Karlamagnus saga ok kappa hans: Fortællinger om keiser Karl Magnus og hans jævninger: I norsk bearbeidelse fra det trettende aarhundrede* (Christiania: H. J. Jensen, 1860).

death of Erik Bloodaxe (c. 950) on a raid in Iberia.[409] Around the same time *Knýtlinga Saga* also records that a Danish count conquered Galicia, becoming known thereafter as 'Ulf the Galician'.[410] Whilst the historicity of some of these events might be contested – indeed several texts place Erik's death in Stainmoor in Westmoreland rather than Iberia – these mentions of Iberian nevertheless demonstrate an awareness of Spain as an area of religious conflict and of viking activity.[411] In some cases, Muslim pirates in the Mediterranean are also referred to as *vikingar* in Old Norse texts, suggesting a parallel between the piratical activities of the two groups.[412] This same image of Muslim vikings seems to appear in *Ectors saga* in the characters of Ermengillus and Estomarus who attack Antioch from the sea and station their fleet "in the fjord" (*í fjǫrdinn*) near the city whilst they sent word to King Apollonius of Syria to surrender his kingdom and his daughter to them.[413] This strategy appears typical of Scandinavian warfare especially given the use of a fjord to station a fleet, a topographical element common to Scandinavia but non-existent in Syria. In addition, the brothers are accompanied by berserkers and a *steinn-grar* ("stone-grey") giant from *Svíþjóð* (Sweden) named Gandilabrus.[414] These Muslim characters thus appear as a conflation of a pagan and a Muslim enemy and demonstrate how the author of *Ectors saga* drews significant influence from their contemporary context to inform their representation of antagonists in the saga.[415]

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[409] Ann Christys, *Vikings in the South: Voyages to Iberia and the Mediterranean* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 98.
[410] Christys, *Vikings in the South*, 98.
[411] Christys, *Vikings in the South*, 98.
[412] Christys, *Vikings in the South*, 101-2.
[413] Loth (ed.), "Ectors saga," 164.
[414] The character of Gandilabrus and the significance of his grey colour will be discussed in chapter 3.
[415] Natalia I. Petrovskaia, "Which 'Pagans'?," in *Writing battles: New Perspectives on Warfare and Memory in Medieval Europe*, ed. Rory Naismith, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Elizabeth Ashman Rowe (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 147-64.

Conclusion of chapter 3

By considering the black characters of *Ectors saga* in light of intersectionality it is evident that racial otherness is a key part of the alterity presented by these characters. It also demonstrates a great awareness of the composer and the sagas audience as to the negative associations of racial markers such as the "Jewish nose" of black skin. Thus, even where these characters are highly fantastical their representation is framed by racial thinking. Indeed, supernatural aspects may be regarded as an important part of the racializing process in that they deny equal humanity to other groups and therefore justify their subalternity, persecution and annihilation.[416] The use of the term troll especially suggests racial difference, since in other Old Norse literature it is used to describe ethnic groups in a negative way in which they are associated with bodily alterity and magic. Black trolls in *Ectors saga* also appear as magical characters with monstrous bodies and so are racialized in a similar way. The intersection of blackness and trolldom and adds to these characterisations a sense of subalternity and marginality. Therefore, whilst many Sámi trolls in saga literature are assimilable and marry human characters – the intersection of blackness and trolldom makes these characters inassimilable in *Ectors saga*. This chapter also demonstrates the utility of the concept of intersectionality in the analysis of Medieval literature as a tool for disambiguating "otherness," whilst still allowing for overlap between different types of alterity. Indeed, the need to appreciate the intersectionality of race seems to be as pertinent in the context of *Ectors saga*, in which multiple types of alterity abound and intersect, as in modernity where intersections such as those of race and gender result in unique forms of discrimination.

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[416] Here I quote Tangherlini's translation of a quote from Lanternari and De Vincenzo. Tangherlini, "From Trolls to Turks," 59; Lanternari, Vittorio and Augusto De Vincenzo, *L'incivilimento dei barbari: problemi di etnocentrismo e d'identità* (Bari: Dedalo, 1983), 151.

Thesis Conclusion

This thesis has explored the depiction of black characters in *Ectors saga* and considered the extent to which their representation is representative of racial thinking. To this end, a critical-race approach inspired by that of Geraldine Heng was used, focussing on the ways in which race is constructed and how it is used to justify superiority and exclusion.[417] The concepts of subalternity, marginality, and intersectionality were also central to the approach of this thesis, with each chapter being organised around being based around one of these concepts. In analysing subalternity as a racial construction this chapter built on the work of Basil Arnould Price who, in the context of a *blámaðr* in *Kjalnesinga saga* suggested that *blámenn* were socially and politically excluded from hierarchies and may therefore be regarded as a 'subaltern race.'[418] This chapter considered if the same analogy was consistent with their representation in *Ectors saga*, and if a similar racial subalternity was evident in characters described as *svart*. It was found that the *blámenn* in *Ectors saga* who originating from the warm climates of Libya and *Bláland* (Africa) were consistently cast in a subaltern role, with a lack of cognitive ability and a hateful temperament, and that these traits were consistent with classical climate theory which suggests traits for different groups based on their climate. Like *blámenn*, *svart* characters in *Ectors saga* exhibited a similar evil temperament however they do appear in roles where they exercised greater authority, as leaders or kings. Nevertheless, these *svartr* characters appear unassimilable into the social hierarchy, and are cast as antagonists and usurpers who throughout the course of the saga are supplanted by Ector and his followers. In the unassailability of these black characters their appears a significant gendered factor whereby the refusal of princesses to marry the black antagonists, and

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[417] Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27.
[418] Price, "Búi and the blámaðr," 448

conversely their willingness to marry the knights of Ector, signalled that the nature of the black characters was incompatible with a position of hight social authority. It is also notable that the princesses in this saga played a key role in directing the protagonists in killing the black usurpers and distinguishing between two types of masculinity in the saga: the masculinity exhibited by black characters which is presented as undesirable and a threat to the pre-existing social hierarchy; and the masculinity of the knights of Ector which is portrayed as desirable and protecting the homogeneity of a social elite which claims a shared Trojan heritage.

The second chapter focussed on the role of geography in the construction of both black and Icelandic identity in the saga. This chapter reveals the central role played by narratives of pan-European heritage in demarginalising Icelandic identity and claiming the Orient as a symbolically important 'inside space,' from which black characters are excluded. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates the importance of understanding the worldview and self-identity of the textual community which produces a text, as a prerequisite for understanding alterity. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrated how marginality and subalternity are used in tandem to construct the racial characterisation of the *blámenn* and to a lesser extent *svart* characters.

In the third chapter the intersectionality of race with other categories of differentiation was considered, bringing to light different forms of racialisation such as the use of black and Jewish racial features in the representation of racialised demonic characters. The possible racial significance of the Norse terms "troll" and "berserker" was also explored, and it was demonstrated that these terms merit further consideration as ethnic or racial markers in future research. In the case of the grey giant Gandilabrus it was also shown that a process of racialisation may provide an alternative explanation to some of his characteristics. In these ways this chapter's focus on intersectionality invites future research to consider the

possibilities of race making. Furthermore, this chapter fundamentally demonstrated the permeability of categories of differentiation and thus the need to consider identity as an intersectional construct.

By addressing the question of black race in *Ectors saga* this thesis tackled a topic of both contemporary and historical concern and brought to light the diversity identity in Old Norse literature, as well demonstrating the potential social value of *riddarasögur* genre. This research found that there is significant evidence of racial thinking in the depiction of black characters in *Ectors saga*, although the forms of racial construction vary between *blámenn* and *svartr* characters and are more consistent in the case of *blámenn*. Black characters of both kinds are set apart from social and political hierarchies and located at the margins of the narrative world. However, the concepts of subalternity and marginality alone do not reflect the full diversity of alterity exhibited by black characters. Therefore, an intersectional approach to race appears to be the natural way forward for future scholarship in this area. In addition, whilst this thesis focussed on blackness as a marker of race, and in doing so addressed an important gap in scholarship, it has shown that race-making should not be considered solely with regards to somatic markers such as skin colour.

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