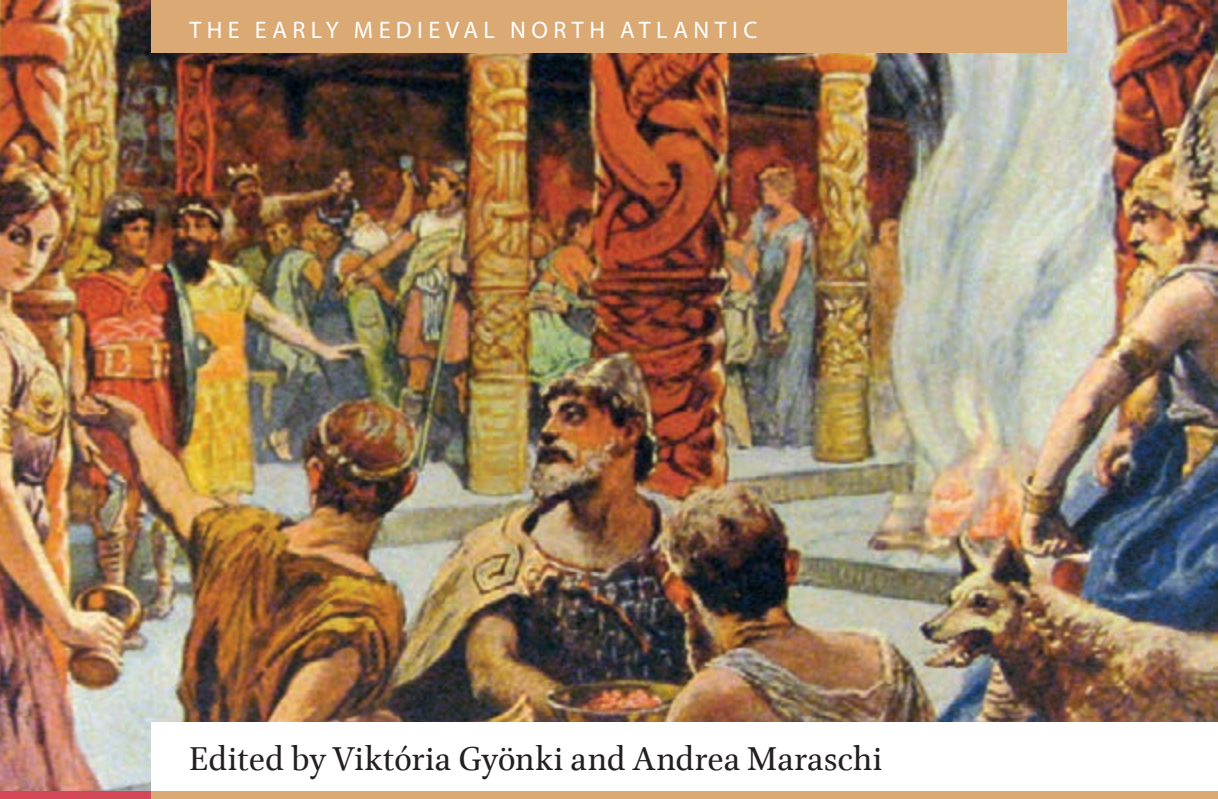
THE EARLY MEDIEVAL NORTH ATLANTIC



Edited by Viktória Gyönki and Andrea Maraschi

Food Culture in Medieval Scandinavia

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The Early Medieval North Atlantic

This series provides a publishing platform for research on the history, cultures, and societies that laced the North Sea from the Migration Period at the twilight of the Roman Empire to the eleventh century. The point of departure for this series is the commitment to regarding the North Atlantic as a centre, rather than a periphery, thus connecting the histories of peoples and communities traditionally treated in isolation: Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians / Vikings, Celtic communities, Baltic communities, the Franks, etc. From this perspective new insights can be made into processes of transformation, economic and cultural exchange, the formation of identities, etc. It also allows for the inclusion of more distant cultures – such as Greenland, North America, and Russia – which are of increasing interest to scholars in this research context.

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This volume includes contributions from scholars who presented at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds, 2016. The theme was 'Food, feasts and famine', and the authors were able to provide a wide range of perspectives on Medieval Scandinavia. The aim was to represent Old Norse literary and historical topics in different panels and sections. One result from those panels can be found in this volume: a selection of papers by scholars who share the same research interest, that is, Medieval Scandinavia.

Cover illustration: Einherjar are served by Valkyries in Valhöll while Odin sits upon his throne, flanked by one of his wolves (c. 1905). Doepler, Emil. c. 1905. *Walhall, die Götterwelt der Germanen* (cropped). Martin Oldenbourg, Berlin. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

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Spelling, Dates, and Other Conventions

Old-Norse personal names and Icelandic terminologies (legal and literary) are given in Old Norse / Icelandic in this book. Names of Norwegian kings and other historical figures who lived later than the so-called saga age or when the sagas were produced, are written in modern Norwegian.

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List of Common Abbreviations

Ágrip	Ágrip af Nóregskonungasǫgum
ES	Egils saga Skalla-grímssonar
HdpDiH	Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam
HE	Historia Ecclesiastica. The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis
HK	Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla
HN	Historia Norwegie
HSH	Sturla Þórðarson. Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar.
MS	Morkinskinna I-II
NgL	Norges gamle Love indtil 1387
Or	"Ohtheres' report. Text and close translation"
OS	Orkneyinga saga
PO	Passio et miracula beati Olavi
Que	Pietro Querini's Account
SS	Sverris saga
tCa	The Crew's Account

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Introduction: A New History of Medieval Scandinavia

Andrea Maraschi, Viktória Gyönki

Although accompanying the term 'history' with the adjective 'new' may seem odd, the concept of a 'new history' was coined by scholars of the third generation of the École des Annales, which had been founded by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch at the end of the 1920s. Febvre and Bloch deeply renovated French historiography, broadening its horizons to aspects that were often ignored by contemporary and past scholars. 'Le bon historien', Marc Bloch famously stated in his seminal *Apologie pour l'histoire*, 'ressemble à l'ogre de la légende. Là où flaire la chair humaine, il siat que là est son gibier'.[1] Funnily enough, the French historian used the metaphor of eating, and the history of food culture and consumption was bound to become one of the more interesting novelties of this new historiographic tradition. In fact, around the 1970s, scholars including Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora coined the label *nouvelle histoire* to define their specific contribution to such a 'total' history of medieval Europe: their interests included the so-called *histoire des mentalités* and cultural history.[2]

Speaking of culture, food soon became the object of attention of a growing number of scholars: 'food *is* culture', reads the title of a book by one of the most prominent experts in the field, Massimo Montanari.[3] The two things are tied to each other, and the study of foodways is essential in order to determine the characteristics of a given civilization.[4] It is no wonder that the editorial of the first issue of *Food&History*, the scientific journal of the European Institute for the History and Cultures of Food, which was

1 'The good historian [...] resembles the ogre of legend. Wherever he smells human flesh, he knows that there lies his prey'. Bloch, Apologie pour l'histoire, p. 4.

2 Mucchielli, 'Aux origines de la Nouvelle Histoire en France'; Rubin, ed., *The Work of Jacques Le Goff*.

3 Montanari, *Food is Culture*. Emphasis author's.

4 Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit*.

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founded in 2003, was entitled 'A New History Journal. A Journal about New History?'.[5] By the early 2000s, the teachings of the first historians of the École had reached their full potential. After decades of pioneering studies starting in France and Poland,[6] and later in Italy, England, and Germany,[7] food history had finally emerged as a proper field of research.

Scandinavian countries have joined this new trend in historiography at a later date. When thinking about Scandinavian food history, one has to acknowledge the contribution of Norwegian culinary expert Henry Notaker,[8] who has been remarkably active in the field since the 1990s. In the same years, Renée Valeri published an important article on Scandinavian food culture in the seventeenth century.[9] Starting from the first decade of the 2000s, several studies have emerged, often addressing the topic of food consumption and food culture in the so-called Viking Age or the history of Scandinavian cookbooks.[10] In the last decade, studies on the history of food in medieval Scandinavia have flourished, and have become ever more nuanced: such publications address a range of micro-topics, from practical remedies against famine,[11] to food processing and cook utensils,[12] from peasants' food habits[13] to beer brewing,[14] from food as an identity marker[15] to the use of food for magic purposes.[16] Furthermore, twenty years ago, an edition of the important *Libellus de arte coquinaria* was published by Rudolf Grewe and Constance Hieatt.[17]

This book wants to represent a further step towards a better understanding of the practical, economic, symbolic, religious, and ritual significance of food in medieval Scandinavia. It consists of eleven chapters that focus on a wide

5 Montanari, 'A New History Journal', p. 14.

6 Franciszek Bujak and Jan Rutkowski founded the *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* (Annals of social and economic history) in 1931.

7 E.g. Messedaglia, *Il mais*; Drummond and Wilbraham, *The Englishman's Food*; Abel, *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft*.

8 Notaker, *Food Culture in Scandinavia*; idem, 'Scandinavia'.

9 Valeri, 'Création et transmission'.

10 E.g. Lõugas, 'Fishing Trade'; Poole, 'Living and Eating'; Isaksson, *Food and Rank*; Rikstad, 'Nordiske kokebøker';

11 Mehler, 'From Self-Sufficiency'.

12 Øye, 'Food and Technology'.

13 Simonsson, '"A People who Eat Wood"'.

14 Viklund, 'Beer Brewing'.

15 Ármann Jakobsson, 'Food and the North-Icelandic Identity'.

16 Maraschi, 'The Impact of Christianization'.

17 Grewe and Hieatt, eds., *Libellus de arte coquinaria*. It is worth noting that, only four years ago, Sverrir Tómasson dedicated a book to Icelanders' food habits in medieval times: Sverrir Tómasson, *Piparðir páfuglar*.

range of primary sources, including archaeological findings, Old Norse saga literature, the *Eddas*, skaldic poetry, and legal texts. The volume is meant to stimulate academic debate on such a macro-field of study, and to link Scandinavian food cultures to the broader context of medieval European ones. The variety of topics addressed by the authors may seem to be to the detriment of the book's unity, but – as readers will realize, and as food historians know from experience – food has a transversal nature, which fits multidisciplinary approaches within both a short-term local and a long-term global perspective. For instance, as the first two chapters show, food is an extremely important element to consider if one is interested in the process of Christianization of the North. This is because of people's need to stay the same, while religious institutions and faiths change around them. In this sense, one can hardly fail to note that, according to Ari Þorgilsson, the Church allowed Icelanders to stick to some of their traditional customs, among which the consumption of horsemeat.[18] Although this is not the place to discuss and appreciate such an interesting detail, it is clear that food is never detached from history: on the contrary, since history is made by people, and since people deal with food on a daily basis for obvious reasons, it is hardly surprising that food was often factored in by the Roman Church when pagans were about to be converted to Christianity. Before becoming Christians, pagan Scandinavians, similarly to their Central and Southern European contemporaries, were concerned about bad harvests and famine, and their preoccupations did not change after the conversion:[19] 'Famine is a structure of daily life',[20] noted Fernand Braudel, who, by the way, was a prominent figure of the second generation of the École des Annales. The first chapter, by Andrea Maraschi, analyses the helpfulness of 'magic' and 'religion' in such a transition phase based on the saga literature, suggesting that continuity prevails over differences. The author looks at the sources through the lens of Heideggerian existentialism, which – as an important tradition of historians of religion from the last century suggests – is useful for discarding cultural biases concerning past societies' need for supernatural entities. In fact, deities' help was fundamental to overcoming the feeling of being at the mercy of natural elements. Moving from Hans Jacob Orning's, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir's, and Stephen Mitchell's brilliant studies on the magical reality of the saga worlds,[21] the

18 Ari Þórgilsson, *Íslendingabók*, I, p. 17.

19 Montanari, 'Unnatural cooking', p. 30.

20 Braudel, *Civiltà materiale*, p. 45.

21 Orning, 'The Magical Reality of the Late Middle Ages'; idem, 'Legendary Sagas as Historical Sources'; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'On Supernatural Motifs in the *Fornaldarsögur*'; Ead., 'The Narrative Role of Magic in the *Fornaldarsögur*'; Mitchell, 'The Supernatural and the *Fornaldarsögur*'.

author reflects on the endurance of food-related needs and concerns from pagan to Christian times, in the conviction that sagas mirror the actual folk beliefs and mentalities of the people who produced them. *Fornaldarsögur*, in particular, may reflect even older beliefs, as suggested by Margaret Clunies Ross and Torfi Tulinius,[22] among others.

Karoline Kjesrud adopts a similar approach, but focuses on the Old Norse corpus of Marian miracles,[23] in order to study Mary's intervention in the preparation of food and drink. Since the dawn of Jewish-Christian tradition, prophets and sacred figures proved rather active in helping people with more or less ordinary issues concerning food, from situations of emergency to feasts. Jesus himself is seen multiplying loaves and fish, as well as changing water into wine at the Wedding of Cana. Even parables often resorted to food-related images, in order to explain to an illiterate audience the highest of messages: what the Kingdom of Heaven is, and how the faithful could be allowed into it. Medieval hagiographers embraced such an attitude, because the rhetorical strategy kept working efficiently: everybody was 'sensitive' to food, because food was a universal language that everybody could understand.[24] On the practical side, a deity was supposed to ensure good harvests, healthy livestock, and favourable weather, first and foremost. It is no wonder, then, that Mary's role in Old Norse culture reflects that of other female deities as guardians of fertility, abundance, and, consequently, even feast preparing. Such a continuity of functions, the author observes, links Mary with figures of the likes of Isis and Freyja. Furthermore, it reiterates the utopian idea of a world of plenty where hunger would never be an issue: like in Valhǫll, for instance, where 'miraculous' drinks flowed perpetually.[25] Kjesrud integrates her study of literary sources with iconographic ones such as thirteenth- and fourteenth-century painted altars, where Mary is depicted holding fruits. In such cases, food is likely used in metaphorical terms: eating food signified eating wisdom,[26] and milk in particular had important symbolic meanings.[27] The author also considers Old Norwegian laws about food and drink and inscriptions (runes and prayers) on tankards and drinking horns, showing that food represented a fundamental cornerstone in religious discourse.

22 Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*; Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*, p. 186.
23 See also Kjesrud, 'Conceptions of the Virgin Mary'.
24 Montanari, *La fame e l'abbondanza*, pp. 118–120.
25 Maraschi, 'Hunger Games'.
26 Hermann, 'Memory, Imagery, and Visuality', p. 325.
27 On this, see the recent Penniman, *Raised on Christian Milk*.

A later chapter, by Andrew McGillivray, similarly focuses on 'supernatural' motifs. The author delves into the territory of 'magic' and 'witchcraft' in one of the most important legendary sagas, *Völsunga saga*, and for good reason. Food is often associated with 'supernatural' powers (either negative or positive) in the Old Norse literary corpus, and it is worth wondering why that was the case. As Stephen Mitchell and other scholars have shown,[28] the very concept of 'magic' is problematic per se: any modern translation of terms such as *galdr*, *trolldómr*, *fjǫlkynngi*, *fordæða*, *forneskja*, or *fyrnska* implies putting an etic filter on the text.[29] The author deals with this terminological challenge by focusing on *Völsunga saga*, because, he observes, this may help to better understand what the author's conceptualization of 'magic' was, and how his audience may have reacted to it. The saga offers interesting examples of intoxicating substances such as drinks and potions, which McGillivray analyses from a narratological perspective: what was the purpose of such literary scenes? Why were they put in the story, and what can their characteristics tell the reader about the author's society and worldview? The chapter is then based on a synchronic approach that aims to deeply investigate how 'magic' works within that specific text when a certain concoction is consumed.[30] Such analyses do justice to the not foregone value of *fornaldarsögur*, which – as Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir observes – resemble folktales to some extent, and reflect the authors' and their audiences' ideas about this world and the Otherworld.[31] Moreover, 'magical' foods and drinks represented an opportunity to develop the plot in interesting ways and entertain listeners and readers, but also to discuss cultural concepts such as free will and fate.[32] In sum, *Völsunga saga* seems to suggest that 'magical' concoctions were mostly associated with evil intents, and that even stereotypically positive rituals such as banquets (Latin *convivium*, from *cum* + *vivere*, literally meaning 'sharing life together') may become the perfect stage for vengeance and death.

Of course, there are important practical aspects of food that are worth considering in a volume such as this one. In Chapter 3, based on the

28 Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic*, pp. 12–13; idem, 'Leechbooks, Manuals, and Grimoires', pp. 61–64; Segev, *Medieval Magic*, pp. 25–26; Ármann Jakobsson, *The Troll Inside You*, p. 63; Dillmann, *Les magiciens*, pp. 194–198.

29 Bailey, 'The Age of Magicians', pp. 2–3.

30 Tolley, 'Peripheral at the Centre', pp. 16–17.

31 Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'On Supernatural Motifs', p. 33. See also Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 109.

32 Sweeney, *Magic in Medieval Romance*, p. 48.

fundamental contributions by James Barrett,[33] Stefan Figenschow studies stockfish production and trade in medieval Norway, and how it affected the development of north-Norwegian coastal society. Since written sources describing the social conditions of such a region are both scant and patchy for what concerns the early and high medieval times, the author integrates them with archaeological findings (e.g. fish bones). He critically discusses evidence from written sources such as literary and legal texts prior to the twelfth century, observing that more solid conclusions can be drawn about the thirteenth century onwards, when a greater number and a wider range of sources cast light on important nuances and details. The author suggests that Norway's trade of stockfish increased considerably by the end of the twelfth century, so much so that, in the following two centuries, it began being imported in important cities such as London. In fact, thanks to the comparison of archaeological and written records, the quantity and quality of Norway's stockfish trade c. 1300 can be clearly studied, and one observes that it played a remarkable role in European markets at the time.

Figenschow's contribution finds its natural continuation in Chapter 6, where Magne Njåstad looks closely at late Norwegian fisheries and at their commercial infrastructure. Starting from Pietro Querini's famous report of his shipwreck at Røst in 1432, and with the help of important studies such as those by Grethe Authén Blom, Sigrun Høgetveit Berg, and Lars Ivar Hansen, among others, the author investigates stockfish production and transport, but also emphasizes the role of stockfish as a source of income for the Church. Indeed, fines to the Church could be paid in stockfish, and so could tithes. Certainly, this was due to the economic importance of such a commodity, but also to the fact that fish was always allowed in times of fast during the Middle Ages.[34] Njåstad shows that written records, especially in the case of official ones, can represent fundamental resources, when appropriately contextualized and supported by quantitative analysis.[35] And so, building from Querini's report, the author's conclusions reach thousands of kilometres and several centuries, and paint the picture of a proper system of stockfish mass production. In some sense, then, although Stefan Figenschow and Magne Njåstad may have followed different methodological paths, their chapters emphasize once more the perks of interdisciplinary approaches.

33 Barrett *et al.*, 'Detecting the Medieval Cod Trade'; idem, 'Interpreting the Expansion of Sea Fishing'; idem, 'Fish for the City'.

34 E.g. Larson, ed., *The Earliest Norwegian Laws*, pp. 45–46.

35 Nedkvitne, *Utenrikshandelen fra det vestafjelske Norge*.

Pietro Querini's record is among the primary sources of Chapter 5, where Erik Opsahl delves into drinking culture in late medieval Norway. If archaeological findings are slightly more problematic when it comes to beverages, Scandinavian written sources are not disappointing. Ranging from documents and letters from the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* and *Svecanum* to legal texts and sagas, the author discusses moral perspectives on drunkenness, trade with European countries such as Germany, and even liturgical issues. As said above, food is an economic asset, but also a cultural and identity marker. This is important when studying a Nordic Christian Kingdom such as that of Sverre (1177–1202), who condemned intoxication: Christianity had long changed the attitude of such rulers towards alcohol consumption, advocating for moderation. Where water and milk were considered common everyday drinks, beer and wine were held in much higher esteem and were more expensive. Their importation, however, could cause concern to Norwegian rulers, because then people would indulge in drinking. In fact, relationships with German traders were not idyllic between the late twelfth and the fourteenth century. Be that as it may, the author notes that the importation of wine, in particular, was a necessity, due to the Eucharistic liturgy. Even though the problem became really serious after the Reformation, since at that point wine would be drunk by members of the congregation as well, Nordic countries had repeatedly asked the Roman Church for exemptions or alternatives, since the necessary liturgical elements (bread and wine) were hardly as available in Scandinavia as they were at lower latitudes.[36] When wine did not actually lack, it could not be of a decent quality (this, apparently, could be the case for Rhenish wine), and it may not have been easy to import for instance, Flemish or English wines to Bergen. Written records, however, seem to reflect Snorri's famous representation of Óðinn, the sole god to drink wine, and the sole god who lived *only* on wine. In fact, Norwegian elite's feasts were characterized by the abundance of such a precious beverage, because their prestige often depended on the banquets' wealth and magnificence. Interestingly, sources such as *Sverres saga* show that food was still very useful from a rhetorical viewpoint. Just as, many centuries earlier, Einhard, Charlemagne's biographer, had portrayed his emperor as someone who was simultaneously German and Christian, a great eater of meat, yet fairly moderate with food in general and with alcohol, King Sverre is described as a ruler who never drank too much and was always self-controlled. This is because rulers were supposed to embody their people's identity markers

36 Maraschi, 'Wine, Bread, and Water', pp. 332–336.

and positive values, and diet was one of the fundamental attributes in such discourses. Good rulers eat and drink well in terms of quality and quantity, that is, in accordance with their culture's values; bad rulers eat and drink the wrong things, or they eat and drink too much, or too little.

Economic aspects of food culture in medieval Scandinavia can be studied from different perspectives. In Chapter 4, Marion Poilvez studies two instances of social and political outcasts from *Ǫlkofra þáttr* and *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*: respectively, a brewer and a chicken merchant. Although Icelandic sagas are often concerned with *goðar* and prominent *bœndr*, that is, with more important social actors, the author selects two sources that cast light on the reality of the *nouveaux riches* of thirteenth-century Iceland.[37] Such self-made men were seen as a subversion of the standard social ladder, in spite of their successful businesses and their wealth: this, the author observes, deprived them of a chance at social mobility. Not surprisingly, both characters are referred to in demeaning terms, and their respective activities (chicken trade and ale-brewing) are connoted negatively. The two social climbers are then contrasted with independent farmers, and their activities identify them as ignorant opportunists, not even worthy of being outlawed. The author's focus on food-related business, then, is useful to stimulate discussion about social issues and the evolution of new types of production in Iceland at the time.[38] Such analysis is particularly useful if one considers the broader contemporary economic context, for similar tensions were emerging in many a European city.[39] The traditional idea of reciprocity and sharing through gift-giving was still the dominant model, whereas Ǫlkofri and Hœnsa-Þórir were merely interested in profit for its own sake.

The positive connotation of gift-giving, already typical of Germanic societies in earlier medieval times,[40] returns in Chapters 10 and 11. Considering how compelling an aspect of social life feasting was, it is worth noting that scholars of the Medieval North did not pay much attention to it until some thirty years ago. Viktória Gyönki dedicates her analysis to the concept of hospitality in *Íslendingasögur* and *Konungasögur*, for – she observes – feasts

37 Helgi Þorláksson, 'Social Ideals'.

38 Durrenberger *et al*., 'Economic Representation'; Sverrir Jakobsson, 'From Reciprocity to Manorialism'.

39 E.g. Tanzini and Tognetti, *La mobilità sociale*.

40 For instance, *beaga bryttan* ('giver of rings') and *sinces bryttan* ('treasure-giver') are Old English kennings for 'king' in *Beowulf*: a good ruler was supposed to show his generosity and to share his wealth with his men and allies. Chickering, Jr., ed., *Beowulf*, pp. 50, 68, 134, 160. See Hermanson, 'Holy Unbreakable Bonds'; O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Values and Ethics in Heroic Literature'.

were a fundamental social tool to display power and form alliances in medieval Iceland. As other scholars such as Hans Conrad Peyer and Alban Gautier have noted,[41] this was very much the case in Northern Europe, and one can hardly fail to notice that such values are consistent with Tacitus's traditional description of the customs of 'Germani'. As suggested by the 2019 Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery's main theme ('Food&Power'), medieval people were aware of the power of eating together, and Viðar Pálsson has recently stressed the importance of this idea among Icelanders.[42] Viktória Gyönki indirectly reminds the reader of Plutarch's well-known statement: 'We invite one another not barely to eat and drink, but to eat and drink together'.[43] Feasts were occasions during which political equals and near-equals could make political bonds, or could start feuds. Hospitality played a critical role in such a non-verbal communication system, and scholars of different disciplines have suggested that many other societies have imbued the practice of eating together with the same value.[44] Furthermore, in a Scandinavian context, banquets represented an opportunity to display socially valuable skills such as reciting poetry. Moreover, the literary sources that the author has selected present key differences, like e.g. the tendency in family sagas to linger on the micro-history of personal and clan-related issues, whereas Kings's sagas favour the macro-historic layer of political activity.

Martina Ceolin's analysis in Chapter 11 perfectly integrates the previous one, for she also aims at studying in detail medieval Icelandic feasts. When dealing with food-related practices, diachronic and historico-anthropological perspectives are always fruitful, and the author lays the basis for the contextualization of medieval Icelandic communal meals within a broader landscape. Icelandic literary sources simultaneously represent an asset and an issue, for scholars have long debated whether *Konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur* can be studied as ethnographic sources.[45] The author focuses specifically on *Eyrbyggja saga*, which offers many interesting details in this sense. One of the key points of Martina Ceolin's contribution is the

41 Peyer, *Von der Gastfreundschaft zum Gashaus*; Gautier, 'Hospitality in Pre-Viking Anglo-Saxon England'.

42 Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power*.

43 Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales*, II, p. 10.

44 E.g. McCracken, 'The Floral and the Human'; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*; Hamington, ed., *Feminism and Hospitality*; Dietler, 'Feasts and Commensal Politics'. See also Maraschi, 'Þórgunna's Dinner', pp. 50–51.

45 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Tendencies in the Historiography', pp. 5–6; Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Deconstructing Snorri', p. 195.

distinction between what the modern reader would like to find in a saga, and what saga authors deemed important instead. *Eyrbyggja saga*, like many other Old Norse texts, rarely mentions what tablemates ate and how it was prepared, while it dedicates much attention to other ritual aspects connected to feasting, first and foremost the disposition of seats and gift-giving. Such information, though perhaps disappointing to some, is a precious resource, since saga authors wanted to tell relatable stories to their audience, in order to captivate and entertain them: universal practices such as banquets were remarkably powerful tools, Gerd Althoff notes.[46] Since the shift among saga scholars towards anthropology, cultural history, and social history back in the 1970s, *Íslendingasögur* have been appreciated for their ethnographic value, and philology has turned out to be a valuable asset in the field of Food Studies. As mentioned above, the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* emphasizes the role of feasts as occasions to cement social bonds, rather than of the food itself. However, drinks are paid some attention, and in particular mead and ale. Moreover, drinking was associated with specific terminology (depending on how many people shared the drinking vessel), and with rituals such as drinking toasts or contests. In fact, the cultural association between feasting and drinking in the North is epitomized by the expression *drekka bruðkaup* (lit., 'to drink the marriage'), meaning 'to marry'.[47] The author remarks that scenes of communal banquets in *Eyrbyggja saga* reflect political changes in Iceland at the time of its composition, suggesting that the usefulness of *Íslendingasögur* for food historians (and for historians, in general) is far from over.

This volume's contributors show that the food culture (or, should one say, cultures) of medieval Scandinavia can be studied by resorting to a heterogenous array of sources.[48] Helen Leslie-Jacobsen's and Philip Lavender's chapters (7 and 8, respectively) are perfect examples of how dynamic the approach to Food Studies can be. Helen Leslie-Jacobsen deals with a practical issue in thirteenth-century Norway and Iceland, namely, the theft of food. She bases her analysis on legal texts, and particularly on the development of the Norwegian first national law code, *Landslǫg*. This document is of utmost importance for the study of late-thirteenth-century Norway, since it is the result of King Magnús's project of unifying several regional laws, which were promulgated at legal assemblies. The author argues that certain theft laws in *Landslǫg* actually derived from *Járnsíða*, the law

46 Althoff, 'The Variability of Rituals', p. 87.

47 Maraschi, *Un banchetto per sposarsi*, pp. 193–196.

48 E.g. Øye, *Driftsmåter i Vestnorsk Jordbruk* and *Mat Og Drikke I Middelalderen*.

code that Magnús composed specifically for Iceland in the early 1270s.[49] By comparing *Landslǫg*'s theft section with the same sections in *Járnsíða* and in the earlier Norwegian *Gulaþingslǫg* and *Frostaþingslǫg*, the author observes that specific innovations about food theft likely depend on the Icelandic legal text, where it is stated that starving people should not be prosecuted if they stole food for their survival. Interestingly, public morals concerning food theft have not always allowed similar exemptions: while Lycurgus encouraged Spartan children to steal food and only punished them if they were caught stealing, French philosopher Anatole France refused to condone any form of theft, regardless of the circumstances. The author also analyses more specific cases of theft and violations that are mentioned in legal texts, such as entering other people's onion or angelica patches, and stealing milk and berries. In sum, this study helps to highlight important changes in Norwegian and Icelandic laws in the thirteenth century with regards to food robberies: laws became more specific and comprehensive, and took various categories of thieves into consideration. For instance, they started marking distinctions based on the ability of the thief to actually work, on the amount of food stolen, on whether the guilty was a repeat offender, and on what their reputation was. The thief's background was now a critical aspect to factor in.

In Chapter 8, Philip Lavender deals with a much more subtle and nuanced topic: the meaning of literary scenes where characters hang around in the kitchen in late Icelandic sagas and *rimur*. As seen above, literary criticism is a key asset when dealing with medieval Scandinavian food cultures, due to the large amount of information that can be drawn from such texts. Alongside food, drink, and the table, Icelandic sagas also feature several references to kitchen fires and *eldaskálar*, which were the beating hearts of medieval houses. As the author observes, however, spending time around the fire was often deemed inappropriate for young men, whence the term *kolbítr*, 'coal-biter', indicating men who wasted their time idling all day around the fire.[50] This motif has a deep anthropological significance, for it may concern both the sexual and social maturation of the boy (from childhood to manhood), and his transition from a female-dominated environment (the kitchen) to one dominated by men. This, Ármann Jakobsson notes, could, in turn, affect the relationship between boys and their fathers.[51] It is clear, then, that food-related activities overlap with topics related to

49 Gudmund Sandvik and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Laws'.
50 On this motif, see Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'En verden skabes'.
51 Ármann Jakobsson, 'Troublesome Children'.

gender studies, for the amount of time that a boy would spend by the fire was associated with his more masculine or feminine habits and character traits. In such an interplay of gendered environments, food preparation was associated with women, thus perpetuating traditional ideas that are certainly not exclusive to medieval Scandinavia.[52] This chapter proves a stimulating literary-anthropological analysis, for it also deals with the taboo of the dirt that was typical of seats by the fire: getting dirty from the filth associated with that area symbolized foolishness and low status. As noted by scholars of sagas and gender, such as Jenny Jochens, *eldaskálar* were not overtly connected with food preparation, and the few episodes of women cooking in the sagas do not explicitly reference the hearth.[53] While cooking was likely deemed a feminine practice, the fireside was at least gender neutral: yet, it downgraded young men's reputation and created contrasts with their fathers. Lavender's diachronic approach, which reaches as far forward as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources, shows the long-term endurance of such ideas, and confirms that Food Studies benefits from multidisciplinary, wide-ranging approaches.

We hope that this volume may stimulate new students and scholars to further deepen our understanding of food cultures in medieval Scandinavia. There is much work still to be done, but this 'new history' certainly has great potential.

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52 Montanari, *Food is Culture*, p. 49.

53 Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*.

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