



Home Cultures

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FEELING AT HOME WITH ANIMALS IN OLD NORSE SOURCES

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ABSTRACT While Viking-age and medieval Iceland was a place of domestic animals, studies of its literature and material culture have little considered the multi-sensory nature of animal-human relationships.¹ A farming society necessarily shapes its places and society around the animals with whom its livelihoods are shared, but the ways in which the home (ON heimr) became, and continued to become a multi-species space in early Iceland cannot be simply assumed. This article considers ways in which the sights, sounds, and tangible bodies of domestic animals are implicit markers of the home in the Sagas of Icelanders, through investigation of dogs, cattle, and sheep, and their relations with human figures. Icelandic archaeology tells us about field and farm, but little about home,

and this article aims to demonstrate that a focus on home in the Sagas enables us to think more deeply about the evocation of home-feelings in our archaeological material.

KEYWORDS: Medieval Iceland, animal studies, Icelandic sagas, Viking-age archaeology, medieval farming, anymal

Bú er betra,
þótt lítit sé,
halr er heima hvern;
þótt tvær geitr eigi
ok taugreptan sal,
þat er þó betra en böen.
Bú er betra,
þótt lítit sé,
halr er heima hvern;
blóðugt er hjarta
þeim er biðja skal
sér í mál hvert matar.

(Kristjánsson and Ólason 2014: 329)

A farm is better, though it be small, everyone is a person at home; though he has only two goats and a rope-raftered house, that is better than begging.

A farm is better, though it be small, everyone is a person at home; bloody is the heart of those who must ask for themselves at every mealtime.

These lines from *Hávamál* 36-7, one of the most famous of the eddic poems, show a view of home that can be dated to at least the thirteenth century when the poem was recorded in an Icelandic manuscript.² It is a view of home that features a dwelling place, anymals, food and shelter – but home is also defined here and in modern scholarship as where we have the *feeling* of home, and where our actions matter – where we can be somebody (Westman 1991; Jackson 1995, 123; Heide 2014). Human beings are acknowledged homemakers (Ginsberg 1999; Ingold 2011); but this homemaking is evidently more complex than simply building a structure in which to shelter and cook food. The need to belong somewhere is a pervasive feature of human existence, facilitated through “lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships” with human and, I would argue, anymal

figures (Baumeister and Leary 1995: 497). The two goats in *Hávamál* 36 are more than simply economic objects: they are the only animals (human or anymal) with whom the basic home is explicitly envisioned in this stanza. This article will explore the ways in which being with anymals may have contributed to the evocation of the home-place in a series of examples from the medieval Icelandic texts known as the *Íslendingasögur*, or *The Sagas of Icelanders* (henceforward referred to as the *Sagas*). I will also draw on the earliest Icelandic laws, known as *Grágás*, and show how consideration of domestic animals as markers of home in these texts might contribute to the further development of multispecies approaches in Icelandic archaeology.³

Previous investigations of anymals in Norse contexts have tended towards either heavily theoretical approaches to the anymal-human relationship (Bourns 2017) or a focus on the role of anymals in human-human relations (Rohrbach 2009), while relevant archaeological studies have taken a broader range of focus (for example, the North Atlantic region [Hogg 2015], or Late Iron Age Scandinavia [Jennbert 2011]) in addition to a primary approach on a specific type of material (for example, funerary contexts or faunal assemblages at farm-sites). A more recent trend in prehistoric archaeology that focusses on how anymals lived on archaeological sites, not necessarily as human objects of production or use, but as anymal subjects with their own agency, will prove more useful in addressing questions of home (for example, Armstrong Oma 2018). Study of anymals in either literary texts or material remains must recognize their living, breathing, sensorial bodies with whom human homemaking in the past necessarily engaged.

This paper extends the idea of home as practice and repeated actions including cooking, milking, haymaking, slaughtering animals and bringing them home (Despres 1991; Ingold 1995; Jackson 1995; Gurney 1997), prioritizing the idea of home as relationships within these praxes. Rather than the concentric circles of home-ness (Hollander 1991), or Hastrup's structuralist view of a fixed *innan-garðs* and *útgangarðs* (inside the enclosure and outside the enclosure [Hastrup 1990: 31]), this essay proposes the idea of a partible home: pockets of home that might be taken with you within relationships, or that are contained within certain actions. The following consideration of the home, and the ways in which specific anymals, anymal actions, and anymal-places act as markers of it, will provide an example of how multi-disciplinary, source-pluralist work can open-up past spaces in illuminative ways, providing a model for future work on multi-species dwelling and anymal-human interactions both within and without studies of medieval Iceland.

SOURCES

This article draws on literary, legal, and archaeological sources from the period 890-1500 in Iceland. The wide date-range is necessary to

accommodate the earliest archaeological sources, as well as the later of the *Sagas*, which while written in the high and late medieval periods, are compilations of stories told about Viking-age Iceland.⁴ These sagas are self-consciously concerned with the depiction of a Viking-age past, and life in early Iceland. They are taken to have, in many cases, a root in pre-existing oral traditions shaped by experiences and memories of Viking-age society, while having been shaped by a medieval compiler (Andersson 2006; O'Connor 2017). They may be considered to have an almost folkloric relationship with the past, both refreshing cultural memories, and creating stories about the past that were meaningful to medieval compilers (Cormack 2007; Hermann 2013; Lethbridge and Hartman 2016; Jesch 2018). It makes little sense, then, to investigate these *Sagas* without an eye on both the texts and the material remains that preceded them and embodies the past with which they explicitly seek to engage. Taking a multi-disciplinary approach to the question of animals and home shows how the study of such stories can offer additional insights to the interpretation of archaeological remains in early Icelandic farmscapes. In turn, consideration of the early farms and organization of society in which these stories originated, can help us better understand the animals, relationships, and homes imagined in these texts. Past and present, text and object feed into each other to provide more valuable interpretations of both.

"HOME" AND HEIMR

When we talk of the physical home in Viking-age Iceland, we refer to a farm including a longhouse, several outbuildings, and an enclosing wall, all constructed largely of turf with wooden supporting beams (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1992; Milek 2006). This is an organizational structure that seems to have been adopted early in the settlement of Iceland, although evidence for local variation does exist.⁵ Near the farmhouse would have stood buildings for the stalling of animals, but even when an animal building is not evident through excavation, the presence of domestic animals on these sites is often well-attested by the faunal remains found in the middens of the farm.⁶ Such collections provide invaluable information not only about which animals are being processed or eaten at the site, but also why they were being kept (by showing kill-off patterns contingent on different management strategies). Animal management strategies in themselves shaped the establishment and continued organization of farmsteads from the earliest periods of settlement (Vésteinsson 1998; Catlin 2019).

Nonetheless, the excavation of structures and middens alone can only tell us so much about how the home may have been perceived, and important work by Oscar Aldred and others have sought to analyze such farmsteads (and their animals) through routine pathways and other experiences of place, particularly with respect to turf walls and pre-Christian burial sites, two of the most extensively encountered

and surveyed features of the Viking-age landscape (Einarsson *et al.* 2002; Aldred 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014; Aldred and Friðriksson 2008; Einarsson and Aldred 2011; Einarsson 2015). Both turf walls and pre-Christian burials sites would have impacted on the evocation of home (or not-home), and walls may have specifically indicated the beginning of a home-space; although, as demonstrated by Vikstrand (2006) and highlighted by Merkelbach (2020), the binary of outside and inside the fence (Hastrup 1990) does not seem to hold consistently meaningful distinctions in Viking-age Iceland. Instead, as highlighted by Merkelbach with regards to “belonging” and argued here with regards to the feeling of “home”, a number of social, physical, and ontological factors are involved in such emotional states, of which physical boundaries are just one. The enclosed spaces of the homefield or the farmhouse are not the home, but they were certainly two of the many places where home was created and maintained.

In the *Sagas*, *heimr* is the home-farm, with *heima* (homeward) indicating movement towards such a place. Dwelling and living could be indicated by the same phrase: *eiga heima* (to have a home), and people were born into the home-world (*heiminn*). This sense of home in Old Norse is perhaps more akin to the German *heimat* than our modern usage of the word in English – except that despite their common roots in the Indo-European *kei* (linked with concepts of lying down, resting, and the cherishing of something), there is little sense of safety within this Old Norse home (Hollander 1991: 44). The world was a dangerous place, and while loitering at the fire was seen as a cowardly act, enough men are killed within their houses in the *Sagas* to suggest that staying at home was no more likely to keep you safe than being abroad.

Four *heim-* compounds are used to indicate the household in Old Norse: *heimafólk* (home-people), *heimalið* (home-group), *heimasveit* (home-company), and *heimkynni* (home-kin [Cleasby and Vigfússon 1874: 249–250]). While the sense of these words as “household” is accurate, their individual translations strongly emphasize the bonds between people and the home that constitute this legal and social entity. In the *Sagas* (and the *Grágás* laws), hired workmen were referred to as *heimamenn* (home-men), a term that immediately included them within the concept of *heimr*. Such a term might have reinforced a sense of community within the household, especially valuable as some workers might only have been hired at the last *fordagar* (moving days), and the climate of medieval Iceland became increasingly variable in the centuries after settlement (Ogilvie 1991: 240, 249; Hoffmann 2014: 335): with poor harvests and diseased livestock an ever-present risk, perhaps quick-formed loyalty and fashioned unity were vital to the survival and security of the household-farm (Hansen 2008: 41). The legal duties of these men who joined the medieval Icelandic household at the *fordagar* included repairing the *túngarðar* (homefield walls [Finsen 1852a: 129]): the most important walls on the farm, often depicted in the literature as encircling the home-farmhouse and enclosing the

prime hayfield. As the supposed boundary of the home-place, the stipulation that incoming members of the household should repair these walls might represent an initiatory rite: their joining of a household synonymous with the maintaining of its boundaries.

The importance of boundaries seems encapsulated in the idea of death as departure from the home (both as world and living place). To lie between home and *hel* (*liggja milli heims ok heljar*) was to rest on the brink of death, and the association between death and departure is further emphasized by legal concepts such as outlawry that command the outlawed person to leave their home and move into a non-home space in which they could be killed (Miller 2004: 133). The term *óheimilt* (un-homed, without domicile) is synonymous with *útilegumaðr* (outlying-man, outlaw), reinforcing the contrast between those within and without the law, and those within and without the home (Halldórsson 1959: 123). However, in the *Sagas* neither outlaws nor the dead necessarily left either the world or the farm (for example, *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 34 and *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 24), calling into question the rigidity of these boundaries, the permeability of which seems clearly to have been of interest to the compilers of these texts.

ANIMALS IN THE HOMEFIELD AND BEYOND

The enclosing of space was vital to an agro-pastoral economy such as Iceland, in which certain animals needed to be kept in certain places. From the earliest settlement stages, herds of animals would have played vital roles in the establishment and survival of initial camps in Iceland, even if people had been drawn to the island by its hunting opportunities (Frei *et al.* 2015; Evans 2017: 38–41). The medieval sagas clearly emphasize associations between these domestic animals and the enclosed home-spaces: from Inni-Krákr, a gelded horse who spends the winter in the main farmhouse (*Droplaugarsona saga*), and a boar, goat, and bull who live just outside or within the house (*Eyrbyggja saga*). *Grettis saga* depicts two sheep with homemaking associations, while *Njáls saga* shows us Sámr the dog explicitly placed on the roof of the home-place. Every kind of domestic animal is associated with the home in these stories in formative ways. These animals are not just depicted in (or on) the home, they can be used to symbolize its very essence.

The Old Norse words for home and homefield (*heim-* and *tún-*), are found in compounds with words for different domestic animals. Cattle are represented by *heimagriðungr* (home-bull Jóhannesson 1950: 19), and geese by *heim(a)gás* (home-goose Sveinsson 1939: 282 and Jónsson 1936: 37). In addition, we specifically find pigs associated with the *tún* and hay from this homefield (*taða*) in terms such as *töðugóltr* (homefield-hay-boar [Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsson 1991: 274]), *túngóltr* (homefield-boar [Kristjánsson 1956: 60]) and

túnsvín (homefield-pig) in legal texts (Finsen 1852b: 121). Nowhere do we find a **heimasvín*, however, which might suggest a difference in the way *heim-* and *tún-* were perceived, with some animals attached to one concept rather than the other. In the *Sagas*, we find riding horses and milk-cattle as the animals most often present around the farm, with dogs, goats and pigs making key appearances in specific sagas (especially *Njáls saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*).⁷

The compounds discussed above seem to indicate that certain animals had an association with the home and homefield in a way that others did not, although the use of such terms was not common in the textual sources. It is perhaps the case that these terms were used for specific purposes, to emphasize instead the home-ness of a specific animal in a specific context, rather than an indicator that some horses are *heimahestar* all the time and others are not. Perhaps the existence of such a term indicates that all horses (or pigs, or cattle) have the potential to become a *heim-* animal. Rather than simply associating certain animals with specific locations, the compounding of terms with *heim-* or *tún-* may, it can be argued, associate animals with specific actions or relationships. For example, the *túngoltr* may be the boar fattened close to the house for slaughtering in the autumn (*Víga-Glúms saga*, ch. 18), while the *heimagriðungr* is the bull-of-this-household, rather than the bull of a neighbor (for example, in *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, ch. 9). A *heimahestr* may have been the designation of a riding horse, given that these are the horses that would have spent most time at the central farm enclosure, although it cannot be ruled out that this was a term for a breeding stallion – notably kept at a distance from the farmhouse with groups of studhorses on their own pastures – the emphatic *heima-* may have been needed to specify ownership of such an animal in such a space, as opposed to in the homefield where an association with the specific farm would have been clear. In either instance, the relationships indicated by these terms are just as important as the places with which they are associated.

More often than not, animals are not compounded with these home terms, but rather are simply present in the homefield and farm area. If the central farm enclosure can be taken as evoking home-feelings, as the place to which a person returns, dwells with family, consumes food and lays one's head, and certain animals are constantly or often a visual, audible, olfactory, and interactive presence in this space (especially riding horses, cattle, and dogs), then it can be proposed that such animals would evoke home-feelings wherever they were, through the enactment of relationships. This evocation, however, is not just a matter of association with place: animals were co-practitioners in the routines that constituted the Icelandic home. Therefore, the enactment of this practice, wherever implemented, would have caused the creation and continuation of the home beyond the borders of the homefield.

DOGS

The companionship of dogs, and subsequent sensory effects, can be seen as such a marker of home. While dogs are relatively absent from the descriptions of farm life in the *Sagas* (compared to other domestic animals), their inclusion is almost always alongside an association with the home-buildings. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the presence of dogs among the farm buildings is also often shown from the perspective of antagonistic figures. There are exceptions to this, which will be highlighted below as showing a more expansive view of dogs and belonging.

The boundary of the farm can be associated with the sounds of dogs. In *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (ch. 3) a group of men are considered to have reached the limit of the home-place once they *kómusk svá brott ór hunda hljóðum* (came away out of the hearing of dogs [Þórolfsson and Jónsson 1943: 13]); and in *Njáls saga*, the howl of the dog Sámr tells his owner, Gunnarr, that enemies had breached the homefield wall (Sveinsson 1954: 185–186). Sámr's links with the home are extensive, and emphasized throughout *Njáls saga*, especially in his enemies' recognition that *skuluð þit Gunnar eigi heim sækja, því at þat má engi ætla, meðan hundrinn lifir* (you should not attack Gunnarr at home, because that may not be considered while the dog lives [Sveinsson 1954: 174]). While the men do attack Gunnarr at his home, their plan requires a local farmer to go to the farmstead to draw Sámr away to be killed outside the boundary of the homefield wall: only then can the attack on Gunnarr commence, and his home be destroyed.

Another example of a dog guarding the house is found earlier in *Njáls saga*, in which a slave, Melkólfr, is blackmailed into robbing the storehouse of his former master. When he reaches the farm:

Hundrinn gó eigi at honum ok kenndi hann ok hljóp í móti honum ok lét vel við hann. Síðan fór hann til útibúrs ok lauk upp ok klyfjaði þaðan tvá hesta af mat, en brenndi búrit ok drap hundinn (Sveinsson 1954: 123).

The dog did not bark at him and instead knew him and leapt up to meet him and let all be well with him. Then [Melkólfr] went to the outbuilding and opened it up and loaded from there two horses with food and burned the storehouse and killed the dog.

Here once more we see emphasized the dog amongst the buildings of the farm, and the combined destruction of the dog and part of the home-farm. The description highlights the affective relationship between man and dog, and it may be suggested that such a friendly greeting evoked a previous attachment to the farm, causing Melkólfr to lash out and kill the dog – an event that, given the lack of barking and aggression, does not seem to have been necessary to implement the theft. The killing of the dog may demonstrate both Melkólfr's low

character, and his self-loathing at what he has done, as he earlier tells Hallgerðr that he is no thief, and only agrees to the act when she threatens his life, just as a local farmer only agrees to entice Sámur away from a home when Gunnarr's enemies threaten to kill him if he refuses. In both cases violence against the home-farm through the betrayal of dogs is enacted. In the Melkólfr episode, the theft specifically of cheese serves to reinforce this killing of the dog and burning of the buildings as an attack against the home. As highlighted in the following section on cattle, milk and its secondary products seem to hold an important position in ideas of the Icelandic home.

To return to Sámur, although he may be presented as a glorified guard-dog, his description upon introduction in *Njáls saga* emphasizes a more multi-faceted set of associations (Sveinsson 1954: 173). The dog is described as a perceptive companion, intelligent, brave, and self-sacrificing, who lays himself at his new master's feet. In taking his place at Gunnarr's feet – an action recognizable to dog-owners everywhere – the saga suggests that Sámur should be considered as belonging with Gunnarr, rather than Gunnarr's farmstead. The entanglement of Gunnarr, his farmstead, and his dog in these chapters, and their subsequent destruction together, may indicate that both the dog and the house are to be considered equally likely to evoke a sense of security and familiarity for Gunnarr.

The relationship between men and dogs was legally significant in medieval Iceland, with dogs possessing *eigi hælgí* (no legal immunity [Finsen 1852b: 187]), unless that dog was correctly leashed by a human figure.⁸ In addition, the exchange of food and interactive responses of care were key in determining the legal status of a man's relationship to a dog:

Ef hundr kómr ifor með manne oc biðr hann mat gefa honum eða
 systir vm hann er þeir coma til húss. Þa abyrgiz hann hund þótt
 aNaR eigi. eN eigi ef hann sriptir ser ecki af. (Finsen 1852b:
 188)

(If a dog goes along with a man and he (the man) asks for food to be given to him or works for him when they come to a house, then he is responsible for the dog even if another owns it; but not if he concerns himself not with the dog.)

Such a description suggests, at least legally, that dogs were not tied to a specific place, but could choose to follow certain persons, and those persons could choose whether or not to enter this relationship in which both belonged to each other, and seemingly relied on each other for security and welfare.⁹ The house, while the source of food and shelter, is not the founding point of the relationship, and would be provided only through the actions of one on behalf of the other.

Further links between the canine-human relationship and a sense of belonging can be seen in two examples from the *Sagas* that do not fit into the category of an intruder-focused view of the dog. In *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 43) we see a *dýrhundur* (deerhound) accompanying Egill in his shepherding work; and in *Barðar saga* Gestr's dog-companion, Snati is given an extensive role in Gestr's narrative. In both cases it could be proposed that the companionship of the dogs enable these men to carry a sense of home with them while traveling away from a home-place.¹⁰ Notably, the *dýrhundur* is taken by an eagle, apparently to the burial mound of Þórólfr *bægifótr* a local troublemaker (in life and in death). The restless dead in the *Sagas* are explicitly associated with the home, and always return to their farms with an apparent view to destruction through possession or killing of the animals (Byock 1982: 133–134; Ólason 2003: 164–165; Miller 2004: 128; Martin 2005: 75–81; Kanerva 2013: 205, 2014: 220). In cases where animals are apparently possessed by the dead, they are responsible for the destruction of both hay and humans. Given the tendency of the dead to disturb those things with whom human figures relate in the formation of the home, the abduction of the dog in the example of Egill and his *dýrhundur*, while taking place outside of the central farm enclosure, may be linked to post-mortem disruption of the home. If Egill's companionship with the dog were to evoke feelings of home, the taking of the dog can be seen as a feature of further hauntings to come from this undead source – indeed, his master, Þorbrandr, informs Egill that this should be seen as indicative of significant events to come, and the haunting of Þórólfr is again alluded to in the conception of the bull, Glæsir (discussed below).

SHEEP

Certain animal-human relationships may be seen as capable of evoking “home-feelings” outside of a central place, and a further example of this is emphasized by the language around the collecting of the sheep at the end of summer. In medieval Iceland (as today), certain sheep would be taken to roam the mountain pastures in the summer, and then brought down to the farmstead in the autumn; and while there may be no recorded term for a “home-sheep”, the annual round-up was referred to as the *heimtur í haust* (home-bringing in autumn [Cleasby and Vigfússon 1874: 251]). While such a phrase practically denotes the bringing down of the sheep to the central home-place, it might also be perceived as indicating that the home itself was not complete until the sheep had returned: perhaps the sheep could be perceived as having taken part of the home with them that needed to be returned.

One of the later *Sagas*, *Grettis saga*, shows clear signs of home-making (or searching for a home) alongside and entwined with interactions with sheep. Grettir, the eponymous hero, is notorious

for his abuse of animals in his youth, but less so for his friendships with animals as an adult. While in exile as an outlaw, Grettir is technically banned from residing at conventional farmsteads, and so must seek his home elsewhere. In the first of his interactions with sheep, the incessant bleating of a ewe on the roof of his shelter causes Grettir to regret having killed her lamb because of the distress it has caused her; he subsequently seeks – or is able to seek – shelter and homeliness with the mysterious, cave-dwelling Þórir who herds sheep in the valley (Jónsson 1936: 199–200). In the second, Grettir is holed up on an island off the north coast of Iceland shortly before his death. It is an island of sheep, where local farmers believed their animals safe from predators. Along with his brother Illugi and one other man, Grettir makes a home for himself on this island, and it is unsurprising that the sheep are slaughtered for food – all except one. This lone ram, affectionately termed Hösmagi (Grey-belly) by the men, is kept alive because of his ability to provide amusement (or comradeship) for the makeshift household. It seems that, despite abusing animals in his childhood, Grettir chooses to constitute his final home in a sheltered place with his brother and a single sheep that it can be said he has befriended (Jónsson 1936: 273; Evans 2017: 275–278).

CATTLE

The phrase used to describe the milking of cattle (specifically in *Grágás*) uses the same verb (*heimta*) as the bringing home of the sheep, implying that milking may likewise be considered as the reclamation of something from nature for the constitution of the home (or the reclamation of something “home” from the cow). While dogs seem to have had the potential to evoke home-feelings through their bark and companionship, cattle may have provoked such feelings through the production of milk. The recognition of these multi-species communities is indicated by depictions of cattle (and other milking animals) in the laws as animal-workers (Evans 2017: 99), perhaps as a sort of *heimamaðr* (home-person).

Cattle needed regular milking, and the importance of the care of, and responsibility towards domestic animals is emphasized throughout *Grágás*; specifically, the idea that animal work should be undertaken by skilled individuals who understood the animals under their care. One example of the laws around careful animal handling that is of particular interest to this paper, is the rule that causing animals to miss a milking time was an offense worthy of outlawry:

Ef maðr recr bu fe manz aNars eða laetr reca sva at mals misir.
eða hann vilde máls lata missa. þat varðar fiorbaugs Garð
(Finsen 1852b: 112).

If a man drives milking-stock of a second man or allows them to be driven in such a way that they miss a milking time, or he wanted to let them miss a milking time, that becomes lesser outlawry.

Lesser outlawry stipulated a man be exiled from Iceland for three years, and this is a serious punishment for what, to us, might seem a trivial crime, but nonetheless one rooted in awareness of animal care, as both mishandling and missed milking times could be dangerous to animals. *Búfé* “milking-stock,” literally translates as “household-live-stock,” and there are two reasons why such a term might be used to refer to milking animals. First, the ownership of milking animals is required before a man can be legally considered a householder (Finsen 1852a: 134); and second, this term reinforces the close link between milking animals, requiring the most careful attention and care, and the members of the household who would have been responsible for this care.

The milking of animals was undertaken by female servants (or the householder’s wife at lower status farms), as opposed to the more male activities of driving, searching for, and slaughtering of animals.¹¹ This would have given a high level of responsibility to these women, as milking is the best time to check the health and wellbeing of the animal. Milking, as the apparent realm of lower status women, is often overlooked in the *Sagas*, written as they are from a largely elite male point of view, or concerned with elite male stories. However, the closeness of the milk-cattle to the farmhouse is emphasized in a number of sagas (for example *Bandamanna saga* ch. 12, *Grettis saga* ch. 33, *Gísla saga* ch. 12), and in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the place of milking, the *stöðull*, seems to be explicitly associated with the homefield or the route to and from the home-farm, as well as the continuing haunting of Þóroldr *bægifóts*:

fóru þeir heim, ok váru þá náttmál, er Þóroddr kom heim á Kársstaði, váru þá konur at mjóltum; ok er Þóroddr reið á stöðulinn, hljóp kýr ein undan honum ok fell, ok brotnaði í fótrinn; (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935: 170).

they went home, and it was night when Þóroddr came home to Kársstaðr. Then were the women at the milking, and when Þóroddr rode past the milking pen, one cow ran away from under him and broke her leg.

This event in *Eyrbyggja saga* leads to the drying up of the cow, her isolated grazing near the remains of Þóroldr *bægifótr*, and the conception and birth of the bull Glæsir, who subsequently grows up in the homefield, *jafnan heima með kúneytum* (always at home with

the milk-cows [Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935: 172]) until he turns against the household and kills his owner (arguably possessed by Þórólfur). The linking in these chapters of the home, milk cows, and milking pens with potential supernatural happenings, when hauntings are often performed against the home and its animals, and the language of milking draws on the language of home-bringing, strongly suggests the activities at the milking pen, at least in certain circumstances, evoked a sense of the home. Such an interpretation seems logical if we embrace the idea of home as practice: milking animals is perhaps one of the most consistent routines of the medieval Icelandic farmstead. An association between milking and the creation and continuation of the home raises interesting questions for the studies of shielings: seasonal milking sites at a distance from the central farm. It might have been the case that home-feelings were transported with the women who worked these sites, as they continued their daily bringing home of milk from the *búfé*.

SENSATIONAL ANIMAL STUDIES

The sensory aspects of animal-human relationships, both in these texts, and in archaeological interpretations of Icelandic farm sites have yet to be fully explored, but this paper proposes “sensational animal studies” is key for understanding the evocation of home in these sources. The discussion undertaken above would not have been possible without considering the sensory interactions between humans and animals in their environments: the barking of dogs, the milking of cattle, the catching, herding, and minding of sheep: these are interactions focused on sensory encounters – and consideration of such encounters would undoubtedly assist in the interpretation of relationships in the study of archaeological sites in Iceland. However, such an approach is not without its challenges. Taking a sensory approach to archaeological material means reassessing the relationships between materials, movements, and bodies, and prioritizing embodied subjective and intersubjective relations in past contexts (Lash 2019). The specific persons involved will affect the relations established and how these are experienced and maintained: a person’s history and culture can affect their senses, as well as age, gender, and ability (Hoan 2019).

In a particularly useful example of sensory-aware interpretation, Armstrong Oma cites Early Bronze Age Rogalanders who lived with sheep: to them, this is a particular relationship (and they were probably used to the smell) – to others, they would have been “the Sheep People” in both livelihood and olfactory nature (2018: 135). Likewise, Icelanders would have had specific ways of experiencing their worlds. The visual perception of boundaries, such as walls and buildings, may have not been the most prominent aspects of settlements in Iceland, as turf-built buildings and enclosures would have blended

into the landscape around them. In contrast, aspects of settlements like smoke, and the sounds and smells of metalworking, animals, or cooking, may have made a greater impression on those approaching the farm. Herders, and those milking cattle/ewes, would have communicated with their animals via acoustic methods, and animal responses would co-create relationships that bound the participants with the accompanying actions. In playing a formative role in how places, persons, and interactions are remembered, sensory information would contribute to the creation and adoption of personal identities, and the development of feelings of home (Mills 2014: 86). Even though discussion of senses and feelings may seem soft and untouchable, bodily and sensorial encounters were a constitutive part of living in the past, and these bodies cannot be ignored, in either our archaeological interpretations or our literary analyses (Marila 2017; Nyland 2019: 349). As mentioned in the opening of this essay, the stories in the *Sagas* came from *somewhere*, and in turn, by studying the multi-sensory animal-human relations that in part constituted the home-ness of the Icelandic farm, these texts can give back to that somewhere, allowing more multi-faceted interpretations of our archaeological material.

Acknowledging the importance of sensory approaches to Icelandic archaeology is not a new thing, with the excavations at Vatnsfjörður in the west of Iceland specifically encouraging a wide range of different types of analyses. However, while the studies of landscapes at Vatnsfjörður attempted to develop a system of measuring and recording sensory experience in the area around the farmstead, the surveys focused overwhelmingly on human-environment relations (Aldred 2007), and remained anthropocentric, focusing on human action and motivation within a socio-economic context. However, Aldred (2018) has more recently argued for a viewing of animals as co-constitutive subjects in the past (specifically in discussion of the annual sheep round-up), and further develops a set of methods by which a multispecies archaeology might work on Icelandic sites, particularly through the concept of the “extended community” of animals and landscapes.

A multi-sensory, multi-species approach to sites that have received extensive excavations, and at which significant evidence for animal presence has been suggested (such as Vatnsfjörður, Sveigakot, and Hofstaðir), would enable deeper interpretations of animal-human relations in home spaces to be explored. For example, the presence of dogs at Hofstaðir, as indicated by mounds of gnawed bones, might indicate a specific encouragement of these animals to occupy certain spaces because their presence, their sight and sounds and smells, may have been reassuring for the inhabitants of the site within a wider idea of dogs and humans belonging together (Lucas *et al.* 2009). This sense of home may have been especially important at a site like Hofstaðir, which was a site of seasonal importance, with a fluctuating household (Lucas and McGovern 2007). At Vatnsfjörður, the proposed

animal-buildings are arranged in such a way as to project the sounds of the animals outwards, away from the central place, perhaps suggesting that this home (at a relatively wealthy Viking-age farm) was more securely established, and the sounds of animals could instead be used to extend the auditory range of the farm (and the home) into the highlands on the one side and the fjord on the other (Evans 2017: 147–157). At Sveigakot, in contrast, the experiencing of anymals seems internally important, with the byre acting as a multi-purpose building in which humans and anymals (or their lingering sensory impact) would have mixed regularly and meaningfully: perhaps indicating a less secure household that needed more persistent evocations of home within the central activity areas (Evans 2017: 165–171).

CLOSING REMARKS

This essay set out to examine how domestic animals may have acted as home-markers and evokers of home-feelings in medieval Icelandic sources, and how exploring the multi-sensory relations between persons, place, and the idea of home may lead to deeper understandings of homes and anymal presence in the past.

The home-place in medieval Icelandic sources is not just a place, or just a household, but a community, involving both the animate and inanimate: animals and hay and workers and walls. The home both is, and is constantly created by the routines of community activity, particularly milking, herding, and feeding anymals. By looking at where anymals are placed in the Sagas, their relationships to the home-place and the humans that inhabited these spaces, it can be speculated not only that animals were capable of evoking “home-feelings” (of a variety of sorts), but also that the home-place may not have been tied to a physical location as much as manifested through relationships, of which the anymal-human relationship was one. This partible home, or continuum of home-feelings, could extend from a central place (the farmstead), or be created in exile through formative relationships with anymals.

The multi-species communities of Viking-age and medieval Iceland deserve a multi-species analysis that takes into account the wide range of sensory features of their activities, places, and relationships. Humans and anymals are living, breathing, affective and affected persons and in dwelling together, their lives are interrelated with both the material remains of their bodies and spaces, and the stories told about them. By examining home-feelings through a multi-disciplinary approach, and with an awareness of the relational constituent parts within such feelings: animal, vegetable and mineral, this paper hopes to have shown how a holistic focus and an interdisciplinary method could be used beyond Icelandic sources to build more multi-faceted understandings of the past.

NOTES

1. The term *anymal*, coined by Lisa Kemmerer (2006) is used to indicate “animals other than the species of the speaker” – in this case, all animals other than humans. What can often be lost in Animal Studies research, or indeed, in the term Human-Animal Relations is the fact that humans are animals too. The use of *anymal* and, on my part, *anymal-human* relations is designed to acknowledge this, thereby reducing feelings of distance and superiority that may be invoked by speaking of Human-Animal Relations and promote discussion over such verbal activism. I will use *anymal* in this paper appropriately, and “animal” when referring to both *anymals* and humans.
2. Isolated lines of the so-called “Gnomic Poem” of which these stanzas form a part, may be dated to the tenth century – for more detailed analysis of the poem and its composite parts, see McKinnell (2007).
3. Both *bú* and *staðr* are used in the Sagas and laws to indicate a farmstead, but this article will focus on the pairing *heimr/heima* as terms encompassing meaningful place, relationships, and action, as well as the closest cognate to the English “home”.
4. For more information on dating the Sagas, see Phelpstead (2020: 169–174). Regarding *Grágás*, while some fragments survive from twelfth-century contexts, the main manuscripts of these laws survive from the thirteenth century, placing them in a similar context of recording to our earlier saga texts. They offer a productive point of comparison with the Sagas, and an additional building block with which to approach the physical remains of Iceland – although it should be noted that they are different types of text to the saga material, with specific functions: not least to explore an ideal view of how society should operate.
5. The site at Sveigakot for example, shows significant variation in building styles and materials before adopting more traditional building methods in the tenth century (see Evans 2017: 158–193 for an overview of the various excavations).
6. An extensive review of animal-buildings was published by Berson in 2002, although it should be noted that Berson’s survey only includes roofed structures and has a geographic bias towards the south of Iceland (due to the locations of earlier excavations). Since 2002 there have been some sites, for example Hofstaðir (Lucas et al. 2009) and Pálstóftir (Lucas 2008) at which unroofed structures have been proposed as part of animal management systems; and extensive excavations at Sveigakot and Vatnsfjörður that have examined potential animal buildings in great depth. A new review of structures related to *anymal* activity and *anymal-human* interactions is long overdue.

7. While pigs are not discussed in the analysis below, it should be noted that their roles in the *Sagas* are not insignificant, especially in the defence of the home-place and household, and in association with women (for example, in *Harðar saga*, and *Gull-Póris saga*).
8. In the medieval bestiary tradition, entries for the dog sometimes stated that dogs could not, by nature, live without human company (e.g., Barber 1993: 72). Legally it seems, medieval Icelandic dogs could not.
9. An extreme example of this is Björn's feeding of his dog at the main table in *Bjarnar saga* (ch. 13), which is viewed ambiguously by other characters in the saga (Nordal and Jónsson 1938).
10. While not permitted within the length of this current article, I believe that further studies on animals and belonging in the sagas could usefully consider Snati in context with the wider trends of belonging explored in *Barðar saga* (see Merkelbach 2020).
11. *Bjarnar saga* (ch. 12) shows an exchange of insults indicating that milking sheep is seen as a task too distasteful for the householder's wife.

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