

Is There a Doctor on Vápnafjörð(r)?

Disability, Health, and Embodied Difference in Vápnfirðinga saga

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on *Vápnfirðinga saga* [The Saga of the People of Weapons' Fjord], a somewhat less discussed member of the so-called *Íslendingasögur*. It will be argued that disability, health, and embodied difference are in fact not only of interest to the saga author, but an organizing theme for the narrative as a whole. The article is structured around the plot's advancement rather than thematically, a choice meant to show the discursive and practical development of attitudes towards embodied difference within the text.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article se concentre sur *la saga Vápnfirðinga* [La saga du peuple du fjord des Armes], une saga quelque peu moins discutée de ce qu'on appelle les *Íslendingasögur*. Il sera démontré que le handicap, la santé et la différence incarnée ne sont en fait pas seulement des sujets qui intéressent l'auteur de la saga, mais constituent un thème organisateur pour l'ensemble du récit. L'article est structuré autour de l'évolution de l'intrigue plutôt que de manière thématique, un choix visant à montrer le développement discursif et pratique des attitudes envers la différence incarnée dans le texte.

Yoav Tirosh? Yeah, I heard about the guy. I think he's a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Iceland. Palgrave Macmillan published his *How Genre Governs Creation in the Medieval Icelandic Sagas* in 2025. Dude's obsessed with his silly comics @RealMundiRiki. Yoav Tirosh's research is part of a grant from the University of Iceland Recruitment Fund, grant number 1010-1013145.

“Surely there is not much of the spirit of Christian forgiveness in a man who, to avenge his father’s death, makes five attempts to ambush and kill the perpetrator’s son!”
(Hollander 155)

Introduction

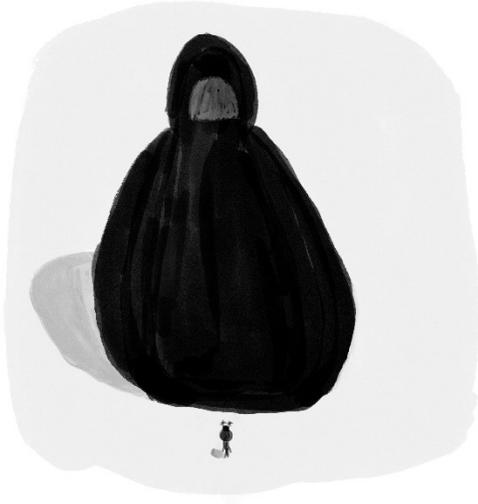
The body has become the focus of much research and scholarly attention in the last few decades, with the realization that bodily experiences and bodily perceptions have a noticeable impact on literature. This shift is best expressed by scholars opting for “bodies” rather than “body” when discussing images and understandings of the corporeal side (Butler; Künzler). Beyond issues of gender and sexuality, the body is a scene of meaning negotiation. As is being demonstrated much in recent years, one discovers that many avenues of interpretation open up to the student of Old Icelandic sagas that opts for focussing on the body: even in its silence, the body speaks volumes (Heiniger). This has become ever more clear in research that applies observations from Disability Studies to saga research. While caution should always be placed on not imposing our own interpretations on a text from the past that sees us as its “unintended readers” (Sayers 19; Sexton 149–150), the overwhelming evidence for bodily concerns in saga literature demands our attentions and clarifies that the authors and their intended readers were in fact very preoccupied with issues of disability, health, and the body.

This article focuses on *Vápnfirðinga saga* [The Saga of the People of Weapons’ Fjord], a somewhat less-discussed member of the so-called *Íslendingasögur*.¹ The saga’s single extant medieval text witness (AM 162 c fol) consists of only one or two leaves,² and its post-medieval manuscripts give clear indications that the manuscript they copied from was often corrupted beyond reading. Its narrative—which centres around *Vápnafjörður* in Northeast Iceland—consists of two main parts, the first concerning the two friends and in-laws Brodd-Helgi Þorgilsson and Geitir Lýtingsson, and the second their sons Bjarni Brodd-Helgason and Þorkell Geitisson. These men and their affairs are well documented in various prose sources from the thirteenth century onwards, as well as in the poem *Íslendingadrápa* (ÍF 11, xv–xxv), which Jónas Kristjánsson had dated to the twelfth century (dating that has remained inconclusive (Bjarni Einarsson)). Heller states that “im Mittelpunkt des ersten Teiles steht die Idee der Freundschaft” [In the center of the first part stands the idea of friendship] (171; my tentative translation).³ The article is structured around the plot’s advancement rather than thematically, a choice meant to show the discursive and practical development of attitudes towards embodied difference within the text. It will be argued that disability, health, and embodied difference are, in fact, not only of interest to the author, but an organizing theme for the narrative as a whole.

The saga's first feud

The very first scene in *Vápnfirðinga saga* highlights ability and overcoming adversity, achieved through the author's witty writing.⁴ Helgi Þorgilsson notices that his kinsman's bull is attacked by another bull in the pen, with the assailant on the winning side. To help the losing bull, Helgi attaches to its head an ice-spur, giving it a literal edge in the battle. This occasion also attached the spur to Helgi through the nickname Brodd-Helgi, Spur-Helgi. In this scene, we already see a discussion that will be prevalent throughout the text: if the weakness of the bull constitutes embodied difference, Helgi helps him (or his owner, Helgi's kinsman) overcome this. This act then becomes inseparable from Helgi via his name. The fact that Brodd-Helgi's act has both a helping and a violent side to it stresses the two sides of disability and embodied difference that are established in the text; in this saga, like the spur in Helgi's name, the body becomes a theatre where both friendship and generosity can be exhibited, but also where the very same relationships can be torn apart. Next, the saga describes how sheep go missing from the farm of Brodd-Helgi's grandfather, Þorsteinn hvíti [the White], who lives in Hof in Vápnafjörður. His grandson Brodd-Helgi, at the age of 12, has the likely thief Svartr outlawed and then goes to confront and ultimately kill him. On his way to the deed, he again uses prosthetics, which serve to supplement his age-related embodied difference; he places a flagstone on the front of his body, protecting him from fatal strikes. Upon his ascent to Smjörvatn, where Svartr is residing, the outlaw notices this *knáligr* man (ÍF 11, 25), which John Tucker translates as "capable" (ÍF 11, 25; *Saga of the People of Vopnafjord* 314). The word *kná*, a cognate of "to know," designates "to be able to," or "can" (Orel 218),⁵ with *knáligr* therefore focusing on the ableness of would-be assassin Brodd-Helgi; it is as if his use of prosthetics influenced the shape of his whole body.

After these feats of youth, the saga's other main family of protagonists are introduced: the Krossvíkingar. Geitir Lýtingsson is to be Brodd-Helgi's friend turned bitter enemy, while his sister Halla Lýtingsdóttir is to be his wife turned bitter ex. The third Krossvíkingar sibling, Blængr, is introduced as "rammr at afli ok hallr nokkut í gøngu" (ÍF 11, 27). John Tucker translated this as "a very strong man but somewhat stooped when he walked" (*Saga of the People of Vopnafjord* 315). The choice of translating "ok"—usually translated as "and"—as "but" stresses the contradictory associations between strength and embodied difference that exists in *modern* society, and/but not always in the high and late medieval Icelandic world. Geitir Lýtingsson and Brodd-Helgi's friendship is



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What Helgi the Viking feared the most was the toll that caregiving might take on his lovemaking.

Figure 1: Helgi the Viking - Yoav Tirosh @RealMundiRiki.

unsettled when their attempt at obtaining the wealth of a murdered Norwegian sailor is foiled. Geitir and Brodd-Helgi suffer from mutual suspicions and, perhaps, feelings of guilt over the crime. Their childhood bond is disrupted even further when Halla—who is by this point married to Brodd-Helgi—takes ill. After she informs her husband Brodd-Helgi of her sickness, he makes overtures of love and devotion, only to quickly find a young and wealthy—not to mention healthy—new wife. Helgi then removes Halla from their shared household and denies her of her dowry to boot. This ill-treatment of an ill person will be mirrored later in the saga by an alternative approach to sickness, one that strengthens ties through healing rather than cutting relationships due to the challenges that it presents. At this juncture, though, the illness of Helgi’s wife is enough to wedge their relationship apart. It is clear that Brodd-Helgi’s actions were not necessarily within the social norm; “Þegar spurðusk þessi tíðendi um heraðit, ok lagðisk illr rómr á, því at Halla var vinsæl af öllum mönnum” [The news spread quickly throughout the district and was greeted with little applause, for Halla was popular with everyone] (ÍF 11, 36–37; *Saga of the People of*

Vopnafjord 320). Other people in the district, therefore, felt that this was not the obvious *modus operandi* for one who discovers that his wife is sick. Later in the saga, when her brother Geitir is away from Krossavík, Halla sends for her ex, Brodd-Helgi. Upon his arrival, “hon bað hann, at hann skyldi sjá meinit. Hann gerði svá, ok kvazk honum þungt hugr um segja. Hann hleypir út vatni miklu ór sullinum, ok varð hon máttlítil eptir þetta” [She asked him to have a look at her sore. He did this, and said it seemed a grave matter indeed. He pushes much water out of the boil, and she became exhausted after this] (ÍF 11, 44; Crocker and Tirosh 120). She then asks him to remain with her for the night, but is refused. This is one insult too many, and Halla finally tells Brodd-Helgi off for abandoning her. Helgi goes back to Hof in a bad mood, and Halla dies shortly after. Sigríður Baldursdóttir (89–90) diagnoses Halla’s disease as echinococcosis which is transmitted by tapeworms, and argues that the treatment Halla demands of Brodd-Helgi, as well as her wish that he remain with her overnight, is consistent with the handling of the disease that is prescribed in the fifteenth-century medical treatise found in AM 696 II 4to. According to her interpretation, by not staying with Halla and keeping her awake during the peak of her disease, he is essentially contributing to her death. Sigríður also reads this interaction as symbolic of their relationship; her disappointment, exhaustion, and subsequent death as reflective of Brodd-Helgi’s mistreatment of Halla throughout her illness (Baldursdóttir 90). Brodd-Helgi’s neglect of his husband duties must have had an emotional—and perhaps medical—contribution to Halla’s death (see also Crocker and Tirosh 119–21).

As Halla’s health and marital situation deteriorate, her brother Geitir and husband Brodd-Helgi get into another dispute involving Þormóðr, a þingmaðr of Geitir, and his mismanagement of a shared wood with Þórðr, a þingmaðr of Brodd-Helgi. This dispute is anticipated by Þormóðr’s earlier introduction: “Í þann tíma bjó sá maðr í Sunnudalr, er Þormóðr hét ok kallaðr [stikublindr]” [In those times there lived in Sunnudalr that man who is called Þormóðr and was nicknamed *stikublindr*] (ÍF 11, 27, my emendation; my translation).⁶ The nickname “stick blind” could be a reference to some unchronicled incident involving Þormóðr and a stick; perhaps with a lasting eye injury. It could also be seen as a pun that almost predicts the trouble that will be caused by Þormóðr’s failure to divide the bounty of the woods equally.⁷ Regardless, here a man with a nickname designating embodied difference, either mental or sensory, is the source of a dispute between the two former friends. The text continues to tie the man’s fate with his by-name, when Brodd-Helgi catches wind of Þormóðr’s approach to his farm to summon him for cutting down his shared woods with Þórðr. Brodd-Helgi—who never misses an opportunity to incorporate props into his portfolio—tells his men: “Þér skuluð hoggva yðr sviga stóra ór viði ok stafi marga” [You must cut yourselves great switches of wood and many staves] (ÍF 11, 40; *Saga of the People of Vopnafjord* 321). He prepares for an attack in response to the cutting of the

woods by cutting wood. Then, when Þormóðr and some of his companions die at the hands of Brodd-Helgi and his men, the chieftain has the bodies wrapped in small branches (*hrís*). When Geitir sends a force to retrieve the bodies from Brodd-Helgi, he devises his own plot; disguised as coal-makers coming from the woods, a select group of his men secretly smuggle Þormóðr and his companions' bodies. In death, as in life, Þormóðr's fate is tied—literally and figuratively—with wood (see also Bourns 2023).

Following Þormóðr and Halla's deaths, relations between Geitir and Brodd-Helgi reach an all-time low. Several manoeuvres and manuscript lacunae later, Brodd-Helgi finds his death, most likely by the hands of Tjörvi, whose nickname *inn mikli* denotes a large size, implying that he is large and likely strong. Somewhat later, the narrative sees Tjörvi being *de facto* sacrificed by Geitir to appease Bjarni Brodd-Helgason, who has vengeance on his mind. But the avenging son is egged towards further bloodshed by his stepmother, Þorgerðr *silfra*.⁸ The scene of Geitir's death, marked by problematic transmission, is of interest. After the killing of Brodd-Helgi, his son Bjarni is treated by his uncle Geitir—who is also his father's direct or indirect killer—much like a son. This is reminiscent of *Brennu-Njáls saga* [The Saga of Njáll the Burner]⁹ and that murderous protagonist's warm attitude towards his foster-son Hǫskuldr, whose father's death he allowed. Like Njáll, before his death, Geitir has visions of blood on a cloth near his bed and, presumably, all around his house. To this Bjarni responds: “mun þat vera blóð í augu þér fyrir sakir elds/elli.”¹⁰ Jón Helgason reads the last word as “ellz,” designating fire, but “sakir elli” could be suggested as another possible reading, with the last letter unclear. Therefore, this text could be translated as: “It must be blood in your eyes because of the fire/old age.” Both readings offer medical interpretations that are meant to shoo away an ominous paranormal event. The killer gaslights his future victim here by dismissing a paranormal premonition and instead turning to ageism as a way of distracting Geitir from his impending doom.¹¹

Later, after Þorgerðr eggs Bjarni and he is set upon killing his kinsman, he complains about his leg becoming numb, Geitir responds “ligg þú þá kyrr á” [Lie still then] (ÍF 11, 52; *Saga of the People of Vopnafjord* 328). This numbness of the leg invites an understanding of the body that is dominated by the religious model, a religious understanding of embodied difference. The condition here could be read as a God giving Bjarni an opportunity to avoid the violence he is about to commit through physical means (Baldursdóttir 96).¹² That being said, this interpretation ignores of the interesting dynamics that take place here and mark this scene as the structural midpoint of *Vápnfirðinga saga*. When Bjarni complains about the numb leg, Geitir naturally takes the role of caregiver and offers advice for treating Bjarni's (non-consequential) health predicament. Bjarni responds to this show of care and friendship with violence, striking Geitir

on his head. However, we are told that “Ok jafnskjótt sem hann hafði höggit Geiti, þá iðraðisk hann ok settisk undir höfuð Geiti, ok andaðisk hann í knjám Bjarna” [And as soon as he struck Geitir, he regretted it and set Geitir’s head on him, and he died on Bjarni’s knees] (ÍF 11, 53; my translation).

It could be said that the first half of the saga portrays characters who reside in an uncompromising world, where a show of weakness amounts to showing an enemy an opening from which to strike. When people do not follow through with their societal duties and refuse to give the care required by the ones that are dependent on them, society adopts a kind of chaos that reigns supreme in the first half of the saga. The ill-treatment of the bodies of the living also extends to the ill-treatment of the bodies of the dead; Brodd-Helgi’s pitiless handling of Geitir’s men’s bodies goes hand in hand with his pitiless handling of his role as Halla’s husband. It is surely no coincidence that *Vápnfirðinga saga*’s earliest extant text witness shares its manuscript with *Ljósvetninga saga*’s C-redaction, where Eyjólfur’s mishandling of his brother’s wounded body results in the sibling’s death (see also Tirosch 2025). Rather than leave matters on a sad note, the saga moves to offer us a glimpse of hope through the continued struggle but eventual reconciliation of the next generation.

The saga’s second feud

The killing transforms Bjarni, who eases his murdered uncle Geitir’s pain during his last moments. From this point on in the saga, Bjarni strives for peace—or, at any rate, avoidance of conflict—with the Krossvíkingar, and does this through the machinations of healing. As Sigríður Baldursdóttir has pointed out, this is not an intuitive understanding of Bjarni’s character, who is called Víga-Bjarni [Killer Bjarni] elsewhere in Old Norse literature (Baldursdóttir 96; see also Sigurðsson 146–157), not a nickname usually awarded to FIFA Peace Prize laureates.

At this juncture, Þorvarðr *læknir* [the Healer] of Síreksstaðir appears. About him it is reported that “Hann var vinsæll, ok var þá kallat, at hann væri beztr læknir þar í heraði” [He was popular, and it was said that he was the best healer there in the district] (ÍF 11, 53; Crocker and Tirosch 121). Þorvarðr constitutes a (very literal) healing element on the area of Vápnafjörðr, and despite belonging to Bjarni Brodd-Helgason’s political camp and sphere of influence, his presence and abilities facilitate peace. The notion of a healer as peacemaker is not unique to *Vápnfirðinga saga*. In *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, the chieftain protagonist, who is also a trained *læknir*, shows kindness and a constant conciliatory attitude towards his friend turned political rival turned killer Þorvarðr Snorrason (see also Bragason). In addition to the healer’s attempts at peaceful resolution, we will see that the political association with a healer functions as a form of social currency.

Another character who appears in the story at this point is Þorkell Geitisson, son of Geitir, who returns from his travels abroad. Following this, he embarks on an unrelenting attempt at ending Bjarni Brodd-Helgason's life, as revenge for his father's fate. His first action is to gather a force of men to meet Bjarni during his travel up to the mountains. When Þorvarðr læknir gets wind of this, he immediately informs Bjarni, thus helping him evade a violent encounter. Later, Þorvarðr binds a man's broken leg, and upon his sojourn home, he meets a man of Þorkell Geitisson's named Kollr. Þorvarðr surmises that Kollr's mission was somehow connected with spying, as indeed it was. Þorvarðr informs Bjarni Brodd-Helgason of this and is then sent to report to Þorkell a fictive number of men present at the Hof farm, thus deterring him from attacking. Here Þorvarðr again moves to de-escalate a situation, acting in Bjarni's favour, but in a manner that delays violence rather than giving Bjarni an edge in battle. The fact that he catches onto the plot to spy on Hof after a visit where he helped heal a man's broken foot highlights his function as physician and role in maintaining peace in the district.



**Thorkel the Viking's
intense napping would
often clash with the
demands of bloodfeud.**

Figure 2: Thorkel the Viking - Yoav Tirosh @RealMundiRiki.

The series of episodes where Þorvarðr ensures the well-being of the district is interrupted by two tales of Þorkell's attempts at Bjarni's life that are

frustrated by the would-be avenger's health issues. In the first incident, Bjarni travels over a certain heath in the district, when Þorkell and a force of men suddenly appear before him and close in on him. Bjarni, as befitting a son of Brodd-Helgi, quickly thinks of a clever ruse. He has a chopping block set up and dressed to look like him, fitted on a horse, and while his two companions ride with it as if it were Bjarni, he runs away into the woods to hide.¹³ The success of this plan lies in Þorkell's ocular abilities; during this episode the narrator informs us that "Þorkell var maðr eigi skygginn" [Þorkell was not a far-sighted man] (ÍF 11, 56; my translation). Þorkell, who suspects that it is not really Bjarni riding with the fellows, relies on the reports of his men, who confidently ablesplain him that it is, in fact, his enemy. By the time the ploy is revealed, Bjarni had escaped to safety.¹⁴ In another instance, Þorkell invites his kinsmen the Droplaugarsynir to his farm, and tells them that he intends to attack Bjarni in Hof and burn his farm if necessary. His invitation of the Droplaugarsynir shows that he means business; these are two of the most formidable warriors of Northeast Iceland, who managed to kill—at the eventual cost of both their own lives—a local *goði* in the eponymous *Droplaugarsona saga*.¹⁵ They agree to attack on the morrow, and retire to their beds. We are then told that "Þorkell var lítt heill jafnan ok tók opt bráða sótt" [Þorkell was always of frail health and would often become suddenly sick] (ÍF 11, 57; my translation). Indeed, at that very night, such a health challenge occurs, and Þorkell must announce to the Droplaugarsynir that he cannot fulfil his promise to attack and dissuades them from attacking without him. They declare him a coward and leave his farm.¹⁶ For the present context, the importance of these scenes is twofold. First, they tie the saga thematically to the overall theme of health and control of violence, which is present in its first part but made even more apparent in the saga's second part. The other function is that they set the stage for Þorkell's recurring battles with health; this foreshadows the issues he will later have recovering from the battle wounds he receives in his final showdown with Bjarni. The delayed vengeance through illness could be read into the religious model of disability, tying health with the operations of God and the Church. But this overlooks the thematic importance of Þorvarðr læknir and his facilitation of peace.¹⁷ While I cannot argue against there being Christian undertones to Þorkell's bouts with health, this is not the only story being told.

After much manoeuvring and narrative delays, Þorkell Geitisson and Bjarni Brodd-Helgason eventually meet to do battle, outside the farm Eyvindarstaðir. In a few of the post-medieval manuscripts, Þorvarðr is curiously mentioned among the list of fighting men. In other manuscripts, the character that appears in the battle is named Þórarinn or Þórðr (see ÍF 11, 61). Considering Þorvarðr's efforts to maintain peace in the district, his appearance at the battle seems counter-intuitive. While it is unclear whether or not this character is indeed meant to be Þorvarðr—considering the inconsistent manuscript evidence—his

presence in the battle is not necessarily in conflict with his portrayal in the saga as otherwise conflict averse; this character's reaction to the battle is to hide behind a turf wall at the edge of the field, thus avoiding it.¹⁸ Were the physician Þorvarðr to find himself among the fighting parties, this seems like a likely reaction.¹⁹ The outcome of the battle is that some of the men are killed, and some, including Bjarni and Þorkell, are wounded. Two of the fallen men are called, in the Íslensk fornrit edition of the saga, "Synir Glíru-Halla," the sons of Squinting-Halli, as Jón Jóhannesson interprets the name (ÍF 11, 62, footnote 3). In the extant post-medieval manuscript, Halli is given various other by-names, some of uncertain origin. This interpretation adds a supposed sensory disability where it was possibly not present in the medieval version of the saga.²⁰ The fact that later on Bjarni Brodd-Helgason invites Halli to move to Hof to where he will be provided with fatherly care implies a degree of dependence that might or might not be connected with sensory disability (or other difference associated with his older age).²¹ Another noteworthy battle casualty is Eilífr, who "fell ok fyrir Hallbirni, ok lifði hann þá at kalla" (ÍF 11, 62). This could be translated as "fell by the hands of Hallbjörn, and continued to live, so to speak." While it is reported later that Eilífr's wounds are tended to, this sentence reveals that this



When battle broke, Thorvard the Viking realised that becoming a healer to avoid bloodshed might have been ill-advised.

Figure 3: Thorvard the Viking - Yoav Tirosh @RealMundiRiki.

near-fatal wound hurt the man in a manner that presumably made him a dependent for the rest of his life.²² The wounded are brought back to their respective farms, where Þorvarðr læknir treats Bjarni and his men. When it becomes clear that Bjarni is on the mend, he hears that Þorkell's health is not faring so well. He therefore sends Þorvarðr from Hof to Krossavík to treat his rival and kinsman. Þorvarðr receives a cold welcome, but is allowed to stay and give care to Þorkell, who treats the healer with friendship and respect afterwards. Sending Þorvarðr to heal Þorkell and the peace that results from it between the Krossavík chieftain and the healer are the first step in the peace that will occur between Þorkell and Bjarni. As Rolf Heller summarizes about this saga: "Das Gute hat die Kraft, das Böse zu überwinden—gute Taten schaffen Freunde" [Good has the power to overcome evil—good deeds create friendship] (178; my questionable translation).

Vápnfirðinga saga's second half, then, shows us—the eager yet unintended audience—a clear path to peace that is facilitated through the body. The injuries associated with a feuding society also offer an opportunity to heal and stop a developing strife on its tracks. We cannot ignore the role of the physician here; when, in the saga's first half, the belligerent Brodd-Helgi played the role of an *ad hoc* healer, the pus removal operation was a success, but the patient Halla died. The importance of Þorvarðr's arrival at the scene, both as an agent of peace and as an agent of health, cannot be stressed enough. His knowledge and ethics come together, and he offers a kind of medieval holistic view of the body's wellbeing as intrinsically tied to society's wellbeing.

Conclusion

A look at *Vápnfirðinga saga* by focusing on embodied difference gives a better appreciation of the narrative as a whole. It is embodied difference and the way that different characters interact with it that shapes the saga's conflicts and their result. If Brodd-Helgi rejects his wife using her chronic illness as an excuse, it is through disease that the surviving family members recreate their ties. The role of the physician here is crucial, since he is at once a political player whose main motive seems to be a selfless bargain for regional peace, while also being used by Bjarni Brodd-Helgason as a bargaining tool. Is *Vápnfirðinga saga* particularly interested in embodied difference, or is this body-focused interpretation possible for any of the *Íslendingasögur* if we squint at them using this particular prism? The amount of knowledge that has been produced in the decades since disability studies have been introduced to Old Norse studies hints to the potentiality of a disability-focused look at every member of the *Íslendingasögur* corpus, and beyond.²³

NOTES

1. Besides the *Vápnfirðinga saga* scholarship cited throughout this article, see also Jesse Byock's work on this saga, which focuses on his feud analysis and its connection to traditional storytelling structures (Byock 1982; 1994).
2. The so-called *Þorsteins þátr stangarhögs* could read as both an episode that is external to *Vápnfirðinga saga* or, as the present author is inclined to believe, as a part of it (see also Baldursdóttir 76). Of less relevance to the present debate is the issue of immanent sagas, stories that existed as separate units within Icelandic tradition, discussed at length in the context of the Eastfjords by Gísli Sigurðsson (2004).
3. Sigríður Baldursdóttir (62, 66) rightly points out that analyses of this saga tend to focus on its first part concerning Brodd-Helgi and Geitir Lýtingsson and often gloss over their sons Bjarni and Þorkell's feud.
4. The concept of authorship has been seen as ever so problematic in recent decades. When an author is mentioned in this article, it is referring to "distributed authorship" of the kind established by Slavica Ranković and more recently expanded by Stefanie Gropper. See also Slavica Ranković and Miloš Ranković.
5. Cleasby and Vigfússon (345) suggest "*I know how to do a thing, I can*" and, like Zoëga (244), call this a defective verb.
6. The Íslensk fornrit editor Jón Jóhannesson preferred the reading of the nickname "stikublígr," which is also consistent with a few of the manuscript readings as well as scribal emendations, e.g., JS 434 4to 90v where another scribe noted "stikublígr" as a variant reading. The nickname *stikublígr* is of uncertain meaning; *Vápnfirðinga saga* translator John Tucker translates this quite literally as "Stick-Starer," without explaining what this could possibly mean (*Saga of the People of Vopnafjord* 315). Jón Jóhannesson reads the *stiku*-component as a measuring stick, and glosses the nickname as "naumur maður," a miserly fellow who frequently stares at a measuring stick (ÍF 11, 27, footnote 4). Finnur Jónsson (193 (353)) suggested that the nickname denoted a man whose stare is straight like a stick, while Paul Peterson (226) suggests treating the two components separately, with the *stiku*- part indicating a "lanky" fellow and *blígr* as a man who stares. Since most manuscript readings suggest "stikublindr," I consider the *stikublígr* reading as a correction meant to settle *Vápnfirðinga saga* with the "historical" premise of *Landnámabók*, while at present we are more interested in the literary qualities of the text. In some manuscripts Þormóðr is called Þórólfr (e.g., AM 563 b 4to, 11v) upon introduction, putting to question whether or not the Þormóðr who fights with Þórðr over the woods is the same person.
7. These puns are not unprecedented in saga literature, not even in the context of Icelandic woods. See Poilvez (112) on a similar joke made in *Ölkofra saga* on the expense of the burning of woods and the term for outlaw *skógarmaðr* (literally: woods' man).

8. Similarities are evident to *Ragnars saga lóðbrókar*.
9. Despite this being a controversial translation of what is usually called *The Saga of Njáll the Burnt*, I opt for this equally grammatically correct reading in order to highlight what I understand as Njáll's direct responsibility for the burning of his household and family. See also Tirosh 2014.
10. Reading based on "Syv Sagablade" and AM 162 c fol. 4r.
11. This dismissal of someone's legitimate concern is reminiscent of how the medical model is used to control disabled people's bodies. Sometimes a medical explanation is nothing more than a distraction.
12. I would thank Christopher Crocker for pointing this out to me. On the religious model, see Wheatley. This understands disability in the Middle Age as a multifaceted experience tied with positive and negative interactions with the church, for example with healing, charity, accessibility limitations, and blame narratives.
13. The choice of a chopping block is riddled with irony; its association with execution might not have been intuitive in those days (though in Icelandic folklore it does appear in the context of chopping off heads, see *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* vol. 5, 76), but it is noteworthy that Bjarni is saved by the very thing that spells death for others. Also, the fact that he retreats to the woods when his father had disposed of an entire woods earlier as a feud's escalation is also noteworthy; if his father had his way, perhaps the woods would no longer be there in which to hide. The only extant medieval (fragment) text witness of *Vápnfirðinga saga* is collated with *Ljósvetninga saga*, which also has a scene where a fleeing man evades a vengeance expedition by fleeing to the woods; this, following a clever ruse devised by a blind man (see Tirosh 2019, 144–146).
14. See Crocker for the "Ocularcentrism" of the medieval order of senses.
15. Which, incidentally, is also extant in AM 162 c fol.
16. This is a classic case of they who smelt it dealt it, because in *Droplaugarsona saga*, Helgi Droplaugarson pulls the same move on Þorkell when the latter asks him to join him on a different violent venture. A fragment of *Droplaugarsona saga* also appears in AM 162 c fol., so the intertextuality here (whether it originated in the sagas' oral origins, their original composition, or even their manuscript redactions) can hardly be a coincidence.
17. See also Spray on the Hamlet-like narratives of saga literature.
18. This is a good opportunity to thank Jósep Jósepsson of modern-day Vopnafjörður who took my wife and me to see the remnants of this very turf wall.
19. "I don't recall ever fighting Godzilla, but that is so what I would've done" Futurama.
20. Like with Þórmóðr stikublindr earlier in the saga whose name in the edition was changed due to having a different nickname in *Landnámabók*.

21. Bjarni Brodd-Helgason seems to be on the prowl for a father-figure; later in *Þorsteins þáttur stangarhöggs* he also offers the aged viking Þórarinn to be a replacement son. This act recreates the accepted proposition of Þorsteinn *fagri* to Þorsteinn *hvíti*, Bjarni Brodd-Helgason's great-grandfather, to be a replacement son due to his brothers' killing of the older man's son Þorgils (See also Crocker).
22. On the concept of dependence in the case of Icelandic clergy, see Patzuk-Russell and Tirosch.
23. Todd Michelson-Ambelang's doctoral thesis is an example of the wide extent of disability descriptions in the Icelandic sagas. See also Christopher Crocker's online *Bibliography of disability and the medieval Icelandic sagas* <https://cwecrocker.com/bibliography-of-disability-studies-and-the-medieval-icelandic-sagas/>.

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