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Intertwined Threads:

The Value and Function of *Vaðmál* as Cloth and Money, and Beyond

Meghan Anne Korten

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Doctoral Committee:
Sverrir Jakobsson, supervisor
Agnes Arnórsdóttir
Helgi Þorláksson

Intertwined Threads: The Value and Function of Vaðmál *as Cloth and Money, and Beyond*

ISBN 978-9935-569-08-0
ORCID https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6919-5552

Abstract

Vaðmál was the main commodity currency and trade good of medieval Iceland but also a pragmatic fabric for clothing and other textile needs. While previous scholarship has focussed on *vaðmál's* role in the economy and gendered labour relations, this study considers how the material qualities of this textile impacted its value as currency and export good, but also its role as a social object used in display and extra-economic exchange. In doing so, it investigates the economic, social, and cultural impact of *vaðmál.* It aims to demonstrate an expanded understanding of *vaðmál* to mean a material, economic, and social object, which in turn reveals intertwined connections between the different sectors of the home, the political, the social, gender, the economic, and international exchange. Focussing on written evidence from the late eleventh to late fourteenth century, this dissertation uses a close reading of the *Íslendingasögur, samtíðarsögur*, *Grágás* and *Jónsbók*, and *máldagar,* charters*,* and annals to determine the intended meaning of *vaðmál* via specific terms (*vaðmál*, *vara, varavoð, söluvoð, hafnarvoð, gjaldavað,* and *mórent*) to gauge the function and context of use to categorize by function and subsequent value. The main findings of this project are that all five functions—material, aesthetic, fungibility, biography, and expense and exclusivity—demonstrate an intertwined meaning of cloth and money that are not easily distinguished from each other, especially when considering the *chaîne opératoire* and stages of consumption of a textile object, and these functions reflect the needs and desires of this medieval society. *Vaðmál's* impact is that it was a tool used by people to meet goals and to help them live their lives: it was an object used to differentiation in social relations, used to form relationships, used to communicate identity and status within society, and use to connect Iceland to markets and cultures abroad through trade. *Vaðmál* was a complex textile imbued with multiple social and economic meanings, separately or at the same time and by the same or different people, which ultimately show cooperation for survival and success, but also to establish position and prestige in society.

Ágrip

Vaðmál var aðalgjaldmiðillinn og verslunarvaran á Íslandi á miðöldum. Það var jafnframt hagnýtt hráefni til klæðagerðar og annarra nota. Áherslan í eldri rannsóknum hefur einkum verið á hlutverk vaðmáls í efnahagskerfinu og hvernig það tengist starfssviði kynjanna. Þessi rannsókn beinist hins vegar að því hvernig efnislegir eiginleikar og gæði efniviðarins höfðu áhrif á vaðmálið sem gjaldmiðil og útflutningsvöru. Einnig félagslega vídd vaðmáls þar sem það var hagnýtt til að tjá stöðu einstaklinga í samfélaginu. Með því móti er sjónum beint að efnahagslegum, félagslegum og menningarlegum víddum vaðmáls. Rannsóknin miðar að því að dýpka skilning á efnislegu, efnahagslegum og félagslegum víddum vefnaðarvöru og undirstrikar þannig samþætt tengsl ýmissa þátta heimilisins, hins pólitíska, hins félagslega, þátt kyngerva, en einnig efnahagsleg og alþjóðleg samskipti. Í ritgerðinni eru hagnýttar ritaðar heimildir frá 12. öld til 14. aldar, einkum Íslendingasögur, samtíðarsögur, Grágás, Jónsbók, máldagar, fornbréf og annálar. Á grundvelli þessara heimilda er greint hvað er nákvæmlaga átt er við með sérhæfðum hugtökum eins og vaðmál, vara, vöruvoð, söluvoð, hafnarvoð, gjaldavað og mórent og mælikvarðar og verðgildi þeim tengd. Leitast er við að greina fimm helstu nýtingarform vaðmáls, þ.e. sem efnislega, fagurfræðilega, í viðskiptum, við tengslamyndun og sem félagslegt aðgreiningartæki. Sýnt er fram á vefnaðarvaran sjálf og notkun hennar sem gjaldmiðill eru samofin og verða vart aðskilin. Það á einkum við um innri þætti framleiðsluferlisins, “la chaine opératoire” og margvíslegar leiðir við notkun vaðmáls. Þessi atriði endurspegla þarfir (sl. desires) samfélagsins á því tímabili sem um ræðir. Vaðmálið var tæki fyrir fólk að sinna hlutverkum sínum og ná fram markmiðum sínum innan þessa miðaldasamfélags: Það var notað til að sýna mannamun, skapa tengsl og miðla sjálfmynd og stöðu einstaklinga í samfélaginnu. Einnig fólst notkun þess í að tengja Ísland við erlenda markaði og menningu. Vaðmál var fjölþátta vefnaðarvara með margháttaða merkingu sem er til marks um samvinnu innan samfélagsins til að tryggja lífsskilyrði en einnig stöðu og mannamun innan þess.

Table of Contents

List of Figures/Tables

List of Key Terms

alin, öln	ell, a standard measure of approximately elbow to tip of finger, *c.*49 cm
bóndi	partner to *húsfreyja,* male head of household
fararefni	the material means used to travel abroad
gjaldavaðmál	*hafnarvaðmál*-type *vaðmál,* late 15th-century type
gjöf	gift; different types: friendship (*veizla, vingjöf, fjórðungsgjöf,* tíundargjöf), marriage (*tilgjöf, morgungjöf*, *bekkjargjöf*)
hafnarvaðmál	*vaðmál* dominant in export trade from the fourteenth century on, measured by assessment and later by weight, length, and thread count
heimanfylgja	dowry payment
hundrað	standard measure of 120 ells of *vaðmál*, using the old long hundred of 120
húsfreyja	housewife, partner to *bóndi*, female head of household
innan stokks	within the threshold
klæði	cloth, clothes
kúgildi	cow-value currency
kvarði	a 20-ell measure
máldagar	church inventory records
messuföt	liturgical vestments
mundr	bride-price payment
mórent	russet, striped *vaðmál*
pakkavaðmál	*vara*-type in 60-ell length bundles
próventa	prebend contract
röggvarfeldr	“shaggy” pile-woven *vararfeldr*
skreið	stockfish

skrúðklæði	‘fancy’, decorated cloth
stika	2-ell measuring stick
söluvaðmál	*vara*-type of *vaðmál,* 2-ell width and 20-ell length *voð,* generally used for trade and export
tjöld	wall-hangings of houses and churches
utan stokks	beyond the threshold
vaðmál	twill cloth used as commodity currency
vara	*vaðmál* cloth dominant in export trade in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, measured by length; includes *mörendr, vöruvaðmál, söluvaðmál, pakkavaðmál*
vararfeldr	*vaðmál* cloak of standard quality
váð	length of cloth as it comes off the loom, (also *váð, voð, vóð*)
vöruvaðmál	*vara*-type of *vaðmál*
vefstaður	vertical, warp-weighted loom
þrískeftr	2/2 twill weave cloth

Table 1. Primary Sources

Category	Titles	Published Work
Law codes & Regulations		
	Búalög	*Búalög um verðlag og allskonar venjur í viðskiptum og búskap á Íslandi*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson and Sögufélag (1915, 1916, 1933). *Búalög: Verðlag á Íslandi á 12.-19. öld,* ed. Arnór Sigurjónsson (1966).
	Grágás	*Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid,* vol.2 ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen (1852). *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, eds. Gunnar Karlsson, Kristján Sveinsson, Mörður Árnason (1992). *Laws of Iceland: Grágás* I. transl. Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, Richard Perkins (1980). *Laws of Iceland: Grágás* II. transl. Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, Richard Perkins (2000).
	Jónsbók	*Jónsbók: The Laws of Later Iceland*, transl. Jana K. Schulman (2010). *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga,* ed. Már Jónsson. (2004).
Samtíðarsögur		
	Árna saga biskups	*Íslenzk fornrit* 17. *Biskupa sögur* III. Ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (1998)
	Brot úr miðsögu Guðmundar	*Biskupa sögur* I, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, *et al.* (1858)
	Guðmundar saga dýra	*Sturlunga saga*, vol. 1, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (2010)
	Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar, Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka	*Sturlunga saga*, vol. 2, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (2010), *Biskupa sögur* I, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, *et al.* (1858)
	Íslendinga saga	*Sturlunga saga,* vol. 1, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (2010) *Sturlunga saga,* vol. 2, ed. Jón Jóhanneson (1946)
	Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur	*Íslenzk Fornrit* 16*, Biskupa sögur* II, ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir (2002)
	Jóns saga ins Helga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 15. *Biskupa sögur* I, ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, Peter Foote (2003)
	Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar	*Sturlunga saga*, vol. 1, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (2010)
	Lárentíus saga biskups	*Íslenzk fornrit* 17*. Biskupa sögur* III*,* ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (1998)
	Páls saga byskups	*Íslenzk Fornrit* 16*, Biskupa sögur* II, ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir (2002)

	Sturlu saga	*Sturlunga saga,* vol. 1, ed Örnólfur Thorsson (2010)
	Svínfellinga saga	*Sturlunga saga,* vol. 2, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (2010)
	Þórðar saga kakala	*Sturlunga saga,* vol. 2, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (2010)
	Þorgils saga og Hafliða	*Sturlunga saga,* vol.1, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (2010)
	Þorláks saga byskups	*The Saga of Bishop Thorlak/ Þorláks saga byskups*, transl. Ármann Jakobsson and David Clark (2013)
	Þorláks saga byskups C	*Íslenzk Fornrit* 16*, Biskupa sögur* II, ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir (2002)
	Þorláks saga byskups yngri	*Íslenzk Fornrit* 16*, Biskupa sögur* II, ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir (2002)
Íslendingasögur* and *-þáttur		
	Bandamanna saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 7, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (1936)
	Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss	*Íslenzk fornrit* 13, *Harðar saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991)
	Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa	*Íslenzk fornrit* 3, *Borgfirðinga saga*, eds. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (1938)
	Brandkrossa þáttr	*Íslenzk fornrit* 11, *Austfirðinga sögur,* ed. Jón Jóhanneson (1950)
	Brennu-Njáls saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 12, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1954)
	Droplaugarsona saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 11, *Austfirðinga sögur,* ed. Jón Jóhannesson (1950)
	Egils saga Skallagrímssonar	*Íslenzk fornrit* 2, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar,* ed. Sigurður Nordal (1933)
	Eiríks saga rauða	*Íslenzk fornrit* 4, *Eyrbyggja saga,* eds. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (1935)
	Eyrbyggja saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 4, *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (1935)
	Finnboga saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 14 *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson (1959)
	Flóamanna saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 13, *Harðar saga,* eds. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991)
	Fljótsdæla saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 11, *Austfirðinga sögur,* ed. Jón Jóhanneson (1950)
	Fóstbræðra saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 6, *Vestfirðinga sögur*, eds. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943)
	Gísla saga Súrssonar	*Íslenzk fornrit* 6, *Vestfirðinga sögur,* eds. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943)
	Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar	*Íslenzk fornrit* 7, *Grettis saga,* ed. Guðni Jónsson (1936)
	Harðar saga Grímkelssonar eða Hólmverja saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 13, *Harðar saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991)

	Hreiðars þáttr	*Íslenzk fornrit* 10*, Ljósvetninga saga,* ed. Björn Sigfússon (1940)
	Hænsa-Þóris saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 3, *Borgfirðinga saga,* ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (1938)
	Kormáks saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 8, *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1939)
	Laxdœla saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 5, *Laxdæla saga,* ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1934)
	Ljósvetninga saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 10, *Ljósvetninga saga,* ed. Björn Sigfússon (1940)
	Reykdœla saga og Víga-Skútu	*Íslenzk fornrit* 10, *Ljósvetninga saga,* ed. Björn Sigfússon (1940)
	Vatnsdæla saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 8 *Vatnsdæla saga,* ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1939)
	Víga-Glúms saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 9 *Eyfirðinga sögur,* ed. Jónas Kristjánsson (1956)
	Víglundar saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 14, *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson (1959)
	Vöðu-Brands þáttr	*Íslenzk fornrit* 10, *Ljósvetninga saga,* ed. Björn Sigfússon (1940), *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* vol. 4, trans. Theodore M. Andersson and William Ian Miller, ed. Viðar Hreinsson (1997)
	Þorskfirðinga saga/ Gull-Þóris saga	*Íslenzk fornrit* 13, *Harðar saga,* ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991), *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* vol. 2, trans. Anthony Maxwell, ed. Viðar Hreinsson (1997)
	Þorvarðar þáttr krákunefs	*Íslenzk fornrit* 23, *Morkinskinna*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson (2011)
	Ölkofra þáttr	*Íslenzk fornrit* 11, *Austfirðinga sögur,* ed. Jón Jóhannesson (1950)
Documentary Sources		
	Flateyjarannáll	*Islandske Annaler indtil 1578,* ed. Gustav Storm (1977 (1888))
	Skálholtsannáll	*Islandske Annaler indtil 1578,* ed. Gustav Storm (1977 (1888))
	Skálholtsannáll	*Islandske Annaler indtil 1578,* ed. Gustav Storm (1977 (1888))
	proventá (prebends), letters, *máldagur (*inventories, charters)	*Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1 (1857-76), 2 (1893), vol. 3 (1896), vol. 4 (1897), 6 (1900-04), 8 (1906-13)

Other Old Norse Sources		
	Haralds saga gráfeldar	*Íslenzk fornrit* 26, *Heimskringla* I, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (2002)
	Jómsvíkinga saga	*Jómsvíkinga saga,* ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (1875)
	Konungs skuggsjá	*Konungs skuggsiá,* ed. Ludvig Holm-Olsen (1945)

Preface

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Introduction

Vaðmál is type of twill woollen cloth fabric that has had a deep, enduring influence on the history of Iceland. This homespun cloth was essential for meeting dress and other functional textile needs throughout Iceland's history[1] and moreover as a measure of stuff it was crucial as the dominant commodity currency and a viable medium of exchange for the domestic economy in place of less-available silver,[2] but also international trade as *vara* and *hafnarvaðmál* from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, whereafter it was succeeded by *skreið* (stockfish) as the main commodity export, but continued to be exported centuries after in the form of *hafnarvaðmál*.[3] It permeated basically all levels of society, including economy and trade, politics and law, religion, labour, and the household, but also dress, culture, and identity. This was a society where power was land- and household-based and this farm by-product was perfected as its production, producers, consumption, and export were all controllable.

Vaðmál has been variably defined in terms of its function as cloth and commodity currency: homespun cloth, wool cloth with a twill pattern in the weave, something that is spun and/or woven at home, and more broadly as coarse or roughly woven cloth.[4] These are all quite broad definitions

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[1] This weaving technique was introduced by settlers and became the dominant cloth type, was continually produced into the modern period, was revived during the home industry era of the twentieth century, and is still woven for personal pleasure, and furthermore used today in Icelandic brands' marketing, drawing on Iceland's long wool tradition. See advertisements from *Kormáks & Skjöldar*™ https://www.mannlif.is/hus-hibyli/islenskt-vadmal-sem-aklaedi-a-husgogn/ and https://designmarch.is/programme/2021/icelandic-tweed and *Farmer's Market*™ https://is.farmersmarket.is/pages/verslunin. This homespun twill cloth was also produced for practical use, see this example from the national archives woven *c.*1940-50: https://sarpur.is/Adfang.aspx?AdfangID=372246.

[2] While the Norse economic system was based on silver, gold, and luxury goods as the basis of wealth accumulation and display in their economic system, especially refined silver in the form of coins, jewelry, or hack silver, valued and measured by weight, no coins were minted in Iceland in the period but were used in a "display" and "bullion" economy, and not a system of coin circulation. There were other commodities traded and in circulation, (*i.e.*, cow-value (*kúgildi*) and butter) but none were as ubiquitous as *vaðmál* and the use of silver decreased, but coexisted, alongside *vaðmál*. Svein H. Gullbekk, "Money and Its Use in the Saga Society: Silver, Coins and Commodity Money," in *Viking Settlements and Viking Society*, ed. Svavar Signmundsson, 176-188 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornleifafélag and University of Iceland Press, 2011), 181; James Graham-Campbell, "'The serpent's bed' Gold and Silver in Viking Age Iceland- and Beyond," in *Viking Settlements and Viking Society*, ed. Svavar Signmundsson, 103-131 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornleifafélag and University of Iceland Press, 2011), 102; Jane Kershaw, "Economy, Currency, and Value in the Viking Age," in *Silver, Butter, Cloth: Monetary and Social Economics in the Viking Age*, ed. Jane Kershaw *et.al*, 1-14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 10, 12.

[3] This cloth money was important in the medieval period, but its economic role continued and resonated throughout the following centuries as a measure of value and had a lesser role in export trade into the early modern period.

[4] Old Norse-Icelandic *vaðmál* comes from proto-Indo-European **váðmál*, from *váð* and *mál*, "cloth" and "measure." *Váð* refers to a garment, cloth, or fishing net while *mál* means "measurement"; together they refer to the measure of value in relation to cloth. "*vaðmál*," *Íslensk nútímamálsorðabók,* Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum https://islenskordabok.arnastofnun.is/ord/44296 (Accessed September 26, 2023); Richard Cleasby and Guðbrand Vigfússon, "*vaðmál*," *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 1874. http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/html/oi_cleasbyvigfusson/b0673.html (Accessed February 23, 2021), 673.

which can also be applicable to other types of cloth such as in rural production and to *vaðmál* produced outside of Iceland,[5] and Icelandic *vaðmál* could also be a very fine quality weave.[6] They also do not account for *vaðmál*'s functions beyond cloth, both as money and measure of value but also as a social object as clothing also serves to communicate visual codes of identity and social values, sartorial display, and group membership.[7] A multifaceted definition leaves room to account for flexibility and change within the meaning of *vaðmál* across the sources as society changed and reacted to both internal and external influences: *vaðmál* is cloth that was also used as currency but also for fabric and social needs.

This dissertation stems from a curiosity about the choice of a textile for the main currency and measure of value which medieval Icelandic society applied to a new land, seeming to demonstrate an intertwining of traditional gender roles and responsibilities. The two meanings of *vaðmál*, a type of cloth and a form of money, seem at odds with each other as these concepts have been typically treated separately in academic research. These dual meanings seem incongruent when viewed with the lens of 'separate spheres' of influence, with men's '*utan stokks*' role in the legal regulation, sale, and trade of *vaðmál* set against women's '*innan stokks*' role in domestic textile production, despite anomalies to this binary such as men's role in fulling cloth or women adopting men's roles in special circumstances.[8] This contrast is especially acute when considering its use in examples of male violence and politics in killing compensation payments settled at the

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[5] The term is also found in other countries and languages, in variations such as *Vadmel*, *valmel*, *val(le)m*, *vammel*, *valmuld*, *vaimel*, *watmœl*, *wadmal*, *wathmal*, as it was produced or exported to these countries, and was also used as currencies there too, particularly in Norway. "*vadmel*," *Textilnet.dk Dictionary*, Den Gamle By http://textilnet.dk/index.php/Vadmel (Accessed March 22, 2025).

[6] *Vaðmál* was not always coarse but were medium and fine grades as well, such the fine quality *smávaðmál.* They of course have differences in comparison to luxury cloth, such as samite (a silk twill), but these types are not comparable. Coarse does not mean inexpensive, as vast quantities of lower or medium quality cloth would be used to make sails for ships, some of which could be quite large and would require specialized production and likely would have been supervised by housewives. Eva Andersson Strand, "Weaving Textiles: Textile Consumption for Travel and Warfare," *Viking Wars* 84, 1 (2021), 176, 178, 181; Helgi Þorláksson, "Um sterkar konur og sterk segl," in *Sögur af háaloftinu: sagðar Helgu Kress 21. september 1989* (Reykjavik: 1989), 43-44, 49-50; Helgi Þorláksson, "Gráfeldir á gullöld og voðaverk kvenna," *Leiðarminni: Greinar gefnar út í tilefni 70 ára afmælis Helga Þorlákssonar 8. ágúst* 2015 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmentafélag/ Sögufélag, 2015), 460.

[7] Karina Gröemer, *The Art of Prehistoric Textile Making—The development of craft traditions and clothing in Central Europe* (Vienna: Natural History Museum Vienna, 2016), 428; Marie-Louise Stig Sørensen, *Gender Archaeology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 124; Marie-Louise Stig Sørensen, "Reading Dress: The Construction of Social Categories in Bronze Age Europe," *Journal of European Archaeology* 5, 1 (1997), 4; Jane Schneider, "The Anthropology of Cloth," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16 (1987), 409.

[8] Textile production has been "assumed[d] a priori… women's work, a conclusion largely supported by the classic study of the gendered division of labour", especially since it was one of few arenas of women's lives in past that is highly "visible." Cathy Costin, "Gender and Textile Production in Prehistory," in *A Companion to Gender Prehistory,* ed. Diane Bolger, 180-202 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 183.

alþingi (national assembly) compared against women's creative actions in spinning and weaving the cloth within the bounds of the farmstead.[9] In addition, men most likely held control of this product of women's labour, as the male householder was generally the one who owned and had the right to sell this cloth, but the impact of women's work was still influential as their labour shaped the economic landscape. Even so, *vaðmál* was socially and economically significant, despite the cloth's ordinariness and association with female work in the domestic sphere, and when this overlapping of gendered associations is set alongside the inseparability of the two meanings of *vaðmál*—cloth and money—it can be seen how medieval Icelanders' lives were more cooperative and intertwined than separated. This shifts away the idea that *vaðmál* reflects separate spheres of male and female interests that have competing or coinciding interests, that it is more than economic and more than cooperative between male and female sphere, but instead as representing a product of collective self-creation.[10]

This thesis will demonstrate, shown through the various values that *vaðmál*'s functions reveal, that this material object was interwoven into virtually all areas of medieval Icelandic life and involved people on all levels of society, and subsequently, that the variety of values that it could hold over the textile's life cycle show that its adaptability and range of uses were part of the reasons why it suited to be adopted as the main commodity currency. This reflects mutual influence and impact that such material objects could have on virtually all aspects of medieval life. The first part of this chapter will outline the motivations, aims, and arguments of the project; detail the theoretical perspective of the project; discuss some remarks on terminology and the methodology adopted and outlines the textual analysis approach; while the second parts will provide a historical context to set this material good within its sociohistorical context; review the relevant prior research on the topic; and ends with an outline of the manuscript and concluding remarks.

[9] Female textile production of *vaðmál* has even been highlighted as "ritual" power and men feared women's textile work as an extension of female witchcraft (*seiðr*), which does not necessarily align with the timing of *vaðmál*'s peak production or importance; perhaps it can instead be considered more of an "othering" by the authors against a pre-Christian conception of female power, an earlier time period than the narrative sources and beyond the scope of the project. Michèle Hayeur Smith, *The Valkyries' Loom: the archaeology of cloth production and female power in the North Atlantic* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2023), 28.

[10] To borrow a term from David Graeber and David Wengrow. David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2022), 9.

Part 1: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Aims and Objectives

The interaction and intersection of the meaning and function of *vaðmál* has been underexplored. More scholarly attention had been paid to *vaðmál*'s separate natures as trade good, with its important and ubiquitous economic role, and as textile, with its prolific presence in the archaeological record reflects its practical use as a textile,[11] and less on its interwoven identity where the material aspects of this cloth trade good provide the basis for its economic value but also its function and value beyond the economic sphere. Reasonings for why this cloth was adopted as money, and, more importantly, how this cloth-money was understood in the past, as can be uncovered from the accounts in the medieval textual source material, have not been fully explored. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to advance the understanding of *vaðmál* as both material object and economic standard, demonstrating the multiplicity of meanings that *vaðmál* could hold in its various functions, and explores what these functions in turn can tell about how and why *vaðmál* was desired for both itself and for the outcome of possessing it, that is, the effects it engenders.[12]

With that aim in mind, this dissertation seeks to answer queries related to the main research question: what do these two meanings of *vaðmál* consumption, that is, the functions it is given in the sources, tells us about value in medieval Icelandic society? How was *vaðmál* valued—whether as clothing or money, or both simultaneously or at different times in its lifecycle—and what factors determined this worth, what areas of society and whether that influenced its different uses? How did *vaðmál*'s material properties—durability, quality, rarity—influence its use and social meaning? Reflecting on the medieval conception of this cloth-money, what did these functions mean to the people in the society producing, consuming, but also writing about it? Are these meanings and values stable or do they change over the period under study?

[11] See especially Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag: Vaðmál í utanlandsviðskiptum og búskap Íslendinga á 13. og 14. öld* (Reykjavík: Fjölföldun Sigurjóns, 1991); Michèle Hayeur Smith, "Thorir's Bargain: gender, vaðmál and the law," *World Archaeology*, 45, no.5 (2013): 730-746, "Weaving Wealth: cloth and trade in Viking Age and medieval Iceland," in *Textiles and the Medieval Economy: Production, trade and consumption of textiles, 8th–16th centuries*, eds. Carsten Jahnke, Angela Ling Huang, 23-40 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015), "Vaðmál and Cloth Currency in Viking and Medieval Iceland", in Jane Kershaw, *et al.*, *Silver, Butter, Cloth: Monetary and Social Economies in the Viking Age, Medieval History and Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), *The Valkyries' Loom.*

[12] Susanna Harris, "From value to desirability: the allure of worldly things," *World Archaeology* 49, 5 (2017), 681-699; at, 684.

The objective of this project is to identify the different functions of *vaðmál* as represented in the medieval written sources and analyze how they reflect different social values. Adopting a diachronic perspective, it locates and compares examples to formulate a meaning of *vaðmál* that addresses both the material and economic standard aspect and recommends new considerations of *vaðmál* that has a broader meaning reflecting sociohistorical change. By addressing these objectives, this dissertation offers a holistic analysis of *vaðmál* in medieval Iceland, demonstrating their intertwined functions as economic resources, social tools, and material objects. This research will contribute to broader discussions in medieval Icelandic history and textile studies, offering new insights into how *vaðmál* shaped medieval Icelandic life.

Theoretical Framework

This project leans on material culture studies for its approach to understanding the role of *vaðmál* as represented in medieval sources. In her article "From value to desirability: the allure of worldly things", Susanna Harris uses various examples of material objects to express value as a judgement made based on desire—desire for the object and also for the results of having the object—and offers a framework of five principles by which people desire objects, especially for textiles, which she labels material properties; expense and exclusivity; conspicuous sensory appeal; object biography; and fungibility. This is value reflective of a relationship between people and things.[13]

This framework can be applied to the study of *vaðmál* to help understand its meaning and function; to look at how it was desired in its various functions and what were the effects of those desires can reveal the different values that this cloth-currency could hold in medieval Iceland, beyond economic value alone. *Vaðmál* is a textile that exhibits all five principles of the desirability of material objects, and the importance of this conception of value is that is allows a greater scope beyond understanding *vaðmál* to signify economic value alone, or beyond studies that prioritize *vaðmál*'s economic value over other values. Value is important for understanding how past societies viewed and interacted with their material culture, as the term *vaðmál* reflects meaning as both cloth and money, this suggests *vaðmál* has value beyond economic alone, value beyond the traditional way of thinking about money as cash passing hands but additional desires based on the

[13] Susanna Harris, "From value to desirability," 682-84.

material properties of the cloth and what effects owning that cloth-money brings in medieval Icelandic society—possessing warm clothing, visually appealing clothing, and multifunctional currency, demonstrating connections between people, and providing benefits and power stemming from expensive and exclusive exchange.[14]

First, looking at clothing worn by people across the social spectrum and what these clothes represent, Harris argues that the material properties of an object are relational and not fixed, but rather depend on environment and individual, and so "textiles are desirable when their material properties and presence enhance a person's capacity to be, or act in, a given situation."[15] This principle of material property, in that desirability enhances a person's ability to act in a certain situation, can be applied to *vaðmál* as it was valued as a coarse to fine fabric woven from wool and the technical properties of wool make it suited to variable climate conditions (*i.e.,* wet, wind, cool) and for a range of activities (*i.e.,* work, walking outdoors, sea, fishing). Wool, twill fabric was desirable for clothing in the Icelandic context and enabled warmth and comfort when participating in typical medieval, everyday activities.

Second, examining characteristics such as pattern, colour, and fineness, Harris argues that the conspicuous, sensory appeal of objects can appeals to the senses and influence others' perception and behaviour by attract or hide attention using visuals that conform or violate aesthetic norms.[16] This aesthetic principle is relevant for *vaðmál* in a cloth and clothing aspect, when *vaðmál* was used as part of a costume to mark identity or visualizing status, whether display or concealment, especially used in characterization of individuals in narrative accounts. The use of *vaðmál* fabric in descriptions of aesthetic appeal or visualization of decorative hangings and design of clothing was desirable to draw or hide attention and to provide messages of individual and community identity, aiding in posturing power and authority in society.

Third, assessing the fungibility of textiles, that is acting as part of a system of exchange and regulates systems of exchange, Harris argues that the fungible properties of an object is that it

[14] Such as, that is a standard used in custom by the community for making payments. Glyn Davies, *A History of Money: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), 25. Dalton describes the main functions of (primitive) money as the medium of exchange, means of payment, unit of account, and standard of deferred payment. George Dalton, "Primitive Money." American Anthropologist 67, no. 1 (1965), 46. For a consideration of value, see David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); for early medieval money, see Rory Naismith, *The Making of Early Medieval Money* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023).
[15] Susanna Harris, "From value to desirability," 684.
[16] *Ibid*, 688-89.

is value for how readily it can be exchanged in a system of exchange and might hold a fixed price or have standards of shape and size, and thus "enables the ready exchange of goods and services, and systemizes the transfer of payments, debts and obligations."[17] This saleability principle is relevant for *vaðmál* in that it was a standardized a commodity currency and standard of value in its domestic and foreign systems of exchange in demand from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, in different ratios and qualities as commodity currencies— *vara*-cloth which transitioned into value (*vöruvirt*) and also *hafnarvaðmál* later known as *gjaldavaðmál*—and had society-wide applicability, from the household to church, politics, and trade. *Vaðmál* was a reliable quality product valued across society and down social strata as a basis of accounting and medium for transactions for the poorest to highest status medieval Icelanders and an "Icelandic" trade product valued by their foreign trade partners.

Fourth, connecting specific textiles to people, places, or ideas, Harris argues that object biographies that enhance the value and desirability of an object because it is part of a web of social networks and the value lies in the object's connection to other people or ideas rather than its explicit worth or composition, and its ownership can enhance an individual's position in society through the connections it offers.[18] This principle of object biography is relevant to *vaðmál* in that its exchange can create networks and relationships, it reflects distribution networks and Iceland with *vaðmál* as an "Icelandic ware/cargo", and also that some *vaðmál* articles are connected to specific people in stories and annals, owned by or made by a specific person to create a connection to an important person, such as gift-giving by or wills from high-status persons. This was a social textile that was used as a tool in the creation and maintenance of relationships and alliances, but also in honour and physical connections to important people, visualizing and enforcing networks.

Fifth and finally, considering that textiles are laborious and expensive to make but happen on a scale of coarse to luxurious and small to large, Harris argues that textiles can provide a "tangible, relative scale of expense, at once limiting accessibility and creating exclusivity", either including or excluding people/groups according to the ownership by quality or quantity of the textiles but also in the level of skill, expense, scale, and accessibility of their production that can be limited to certain social classes.[19] This principle of expense and exclusivity, in that its desirable

[17] *Ibid*, 693.
[18] *Ibid,* 691-93.
[19] *Ibid,* 687.

because of limited accessibility, is relevant for *vaðmál* as while there is limited applicability when considered it on a small-scale of simple clothing, when considering larger textiles such as sails or large amounts of *vaðmál* in transactions or large volumes exported or the tools and resources required to produce *vaðmál*, the exclusive nature and expensive cost of this textile come to light; cloth does not need to be luxurious to be expensive. This was an expensive cloth because a large quantity of *vaðmál* is presumed to have been exported as trade goods, but also exclusive as it required a certain level of skill, expense, and scale for surplus production, in addition to represents female work and restrictions on access to tool and technology.

This framework of five principles of value as desirability allows us to expand how we can think about this textile and its role and value in medieval Iceland, to grasp how *vaðmál* can be understood, functioning as cloth and money, as it could be valued in multiple and concurrent ways. It has been applied to this project as five main points guiding the organization of this thesis, each chapter applying these principles to understand the function and value of *vaðmál*. These functions relate to and influence each other, providing reasoning for why it can be valued in different ways.

Applying Harris' approach for valuing material objects like textiles highlights their deep integration into every level of society. If we look beyond economic value we can consider *vaðmál* production and consumption as cultural reproduction, production in terms of textile technology and cloth technical structures and consumption in terms of the use of cloth and cloth-money within its social-spatial context on the various levels of household (production, consumption, knowledge and knowledge-sharing, labour, exchange), local and regional (exchange, trade, politics, regulation, tithes), national (exchange, regulation, politics, trade), international (taxes, trade, exchange), and also interpersonal and religious contexts. By looking from these different levels, it shows that *vaðmál* was a tool used to obtain and maintain position in society, and involved economic, social, and cultural capital to support such navigations.[20] This thesis will use the idea of variable values and desires to show the mutable function and meaning of *vaðmál* in medieval Icelandic society, that taking a broader perspective to include the social allows for a wider scope for accounting of variability in the definition of *vaðmál*.

[20] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy*, trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 2, 199, 202.

Argument and Significance

By integrating into the study of *vaðmál* current theories in textile studies, gender and power, and the agency of objects,[21] this study posits an expanded understanding of *vaðmál* to mean a material, economic, and social object, which in turn reveals intertwined connections between the different sectors of the home, the political, the social, gender, the economic, and international exchange. *Vaðmál* was a material thing with its own influence and this study highlights the following novelties:[22] the material properties of wool create value for how it affected the *vaðmál* clothing wearer's activities but also its efficacy as a durable trade product that had to travel a long, dangerous, and wet route; its sensorial aspects create value in how *vaðmál*'s visual aspects effected perceptions of that person wearing such clothing; its role as a social object creates value in how it could effect a person's status, honour, prestige, and power in local politics or international trade, social networking and diplomatic exchange; and the return from the export of *vaðmál* could include amassing cultural products and institutions within Iceland. Here, *vaðmál* is seen as a collective social product, a reflection of society, resources, and technology:[23] it was the result of the work, power, influence, and regulation of society as a collective, the result of applying cultural knowledge and technology and using the available resources in order to function and flourish in a new land, aiding in the development of a distinct society. However, it is important to note that collective participation does not mean all benefitted equally from this development nor that its production or consumption gave equal access to wealth and power; as with many things, it was something that people learned to take advantage of and exploit to build wealth or manipulate labour for their own benefit.

Using the perspective of textile history, this project views textiles as tools and social objects,[24] active objects with agency that "can be seen to construct, maintain, control, and

[21] Objects, including textiles, are "active agents in history. In their communicative, performative, emotive, and expressive capacities, they act, have effects in the world." Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *American Historical Review* 110, 4 (2005), 1017.
[22] Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, 28, no. 1 (2001), 4.
[23] Eva Andersson Strand, *et al.*, "Old Textiles – New Possibilities" *European Journal of Archaeology* 13, no. 2 (2010), 150-51.
[24] For example, see Elizabeth Coatsworth, "Survival, Recovery, Restoration, Re-creation: The Long Life of Medieval Garments," in *Refashioning Medieval and Early Modern Dress*, ed. Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Maren Clegg Hyer, 59-73 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019) and Mary McWilliams and Jochen Sokoly, *Social Fabrics: Inscribed Textiles from Medieval Egyptian Tombs* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 2022).

transform social identities and relations,"[25] but also act as "points of access for reading cultural formations on a wider scale."[26] In addition, it situates *vaðmál* in the context of dress studies to highlight the importance of display and visualizing identity.[27] It uses gender theory to show how the function and impact of textiles serve to expand discussions on power by highlighting different types of power and powering beyond traditional types, moving beyond dichotomies of have or have not to examination of contexts that determine the degree of power that could be held based on intersections of identities.[28] It uses the concept of agency from material culture studies in that textile objects can hold multiple values simultaneously by the same or different people and also have multiple lives and different values can be conflated or separate over an object's life cycle.[29]

This research project is focussed on the eleventh to early fifteenth centuries, ending when *skreið* began to dominate the export economy and *vaðmál* changes from standardization by length to weight, with the shift from *vara-* to *hafnarvaðmál*-type for exports in international trade, and change in terms from *hafnarvaðmál* to *gjaldavaðmál* and *merkurvaðmál*, wider *vaðmál* assessed in new lengths and by thread count, which take over local payments.[30] Thus the turn of the fourteenth to fifteenth century is a useful place to end, when types, production, and terminology change. This large timeframe is useful for considering the preconditions for *vaðmál* being the main cloth coming from settler cultural knowledge of textile production, in addition to the aftermath of *skreið* domination of the economy, considering continuities and changes over time. The focus here is on the consumption of *vaðmál* via its different functions, and less on the consideration of its production and regulation. Other scholars have done excellent, thorough work discussing the production of woollen cloth in terms of the medieval Icelandic context of wool processing, spinning, and weaving, especially Marta Hoffman and Elsa E. Guðjónsson. In terms of regulation, Helgi Þorláksson has examined legal stipulations concerning the specifications for cloth to be

[25] Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), 15.
[26] E. Jane Burns, "Why Textiles Make a Difference," in *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings,* ed. E. Jane Burns, 1-18 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 13.
[27] Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, "Reading Dress, 94.
[28] Mary Beard, *Women and Power: A Manifesto.* London: Profile Books, 2017; Theresa Earenfight, "A Lifetime of Power: Beyond Binaries of Gender," in *Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power, 1100-1400,* 271-293 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2019), 275.
[29] For example, see Karina Gröemer, "Recycling of Textiles in Historic Contexts in Europe. Case Studies from 1500 BC till 1500 AD," in *Recikliraj, ideje iz prošlosti. Arheološki Muzej u Zagrebu. Filozofski Fakultet Sveucilišta u Zagrebu,* ed. I. Miloglav, A. Kudelić, J. Balen, 75-98 (Zagreb: Institut zu Arheologiju. 2017).
[30] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 260.

exchanged, that it was assessed by male regulators at markets places and points of sale with legal ramifications for false measures. However, less has been said about the role of the producers in this regulation, that textile work is embodied, tacit knowledge that requires skill to be able to produce cloth according to legal regulations, which will be addressed in the third chapter.[31]

Methodology and Sources

To determine the intended meaning of *vaðmál*, this study looks at examples of *vaðmál* in secular and religious narrative sources, legal texts, and official documents from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. It uses textual analysis to explore how the function and value of *vaðmál* are represented by analyzing patterns of words and concepts in textual descriptions of *vaðmál* uses (function)—*vaðmál* and cognates or synonyms—to compare how *vaðmál* functioned in different written sources and looking at fluctuations or stability in meanings. It looks at the context of the examples' functions, a framework of representation of cloth and clothing in a real, functional sense; of cloth as money in extra-economic contexts that play a greater social role; or money in the context of an economic exchange or use to measure the value of a secondary item; or a combination of both, physical cloth used as the medium of payment in an economic transaction. It considers and compares how the use and context of these terms can both correspond and differ between source types. The range of values for *vaðmál* are assessed in reflection on social needs and desires, considering why it was an appropriate material for medieval Icelandic and Norse North Atlantic societies to use for currency while also ascertaining its reciprocal impact on that society. By examining how *vaðmál* was used and represented in the medieval sources, we can consider what *vaðmál* meant to medieval people, while also acknowledging differences and similarities to modern definitions of *vaðmál*, as it is a term used beyond the timeframe of this project.

The references to the production techniques for medieval Icelandic textiles—woven on the warp-weighted loom, spun with spindle and distaff, processed via cards, and made from sheep's wool—can be found in descriptions in literature, traditions learned from ethnographical studies,

[31] Knowledge and preparation to meet these standards involves all stages of production, from breeding strategies for the appropriate type of fleece, to spinning yarn to the appropriate thickness and hardness, to weaving cloth in the correct method and with precision so that is even along its weave. All these choices take skill and occur before such cloth would make it to the point of exchange.

and textile tools surviving in the archaeological record.[32] The focus of this thesis is written sources and thus will not focus on the latter two.[33] As such, *vaðmál* references can be found in a variety medieval Icelandic sources including the *Íslendingasögur* and *-þættir* (the family sagas and short stories), the *Samtíðarsögur* (contemporary sagas compilation, including *Sturlunga saga* compilation and some *biskupasögur*), the law codes *Grágás* and *Jónsbók*, and the legal text *Búalög*, and in annals and the church accounts known as *máldagar* (See Table of Primary Sources). These are not meant to be an exhaustive representation of *vaðmál*, but rather an overview and comparison across time periods and sources to see the range of use, how *vaðmál* was thought about and used in the past and contemporary present.

These various references do not all represent *vaðmál* the same way. The written texts can provide useful sources of information for the ways that people thought in the past, and not just reflections of a past "true" way of things, a mirror to the saga age of events, rather it is also a reflection for the age of writing and how they thought about the past. These written sources reflect the medieval author's bias and changes made by scribes and copyists, thus saga-age stories can change when transitioning from oral to written to copied, sometimes interpolating contemporary meanings on types of *vaðmál* from the past or confusing ancient terms. We can consider the saga-writing-age stories as windows into the past with a "historical" double-vision reflecting older and younger meanings, rather than a direct reflection as with a mirror, and these meanings can be drawn out when considering the examples within their sociohistorical context.

This project uses examples from the medieval Icelandic law codes: twelfth-century *Grágás,*[34] thirteenth-century *Jónsbók,*[35] and fifteenth- to seventeenth-century *Búalög*.[36] These are

[32] See especially the work of Michèle Hayeur Smith, Lise Bender Jørgensen, and Ingvild Øye.
[33] See the literature review for a discussion of what previous researchers have added to the discussion about *vaðmál*.
[34] *Grágás* is the Commonwealth period law compilation, surviving in *Konungsbók* (GKS 1157 fol.) written *c.*1250-70 and *Staðarhólsbók* written *c.*1260-70. This thesis uses Dennis *et.al.*'s translations, which relies on the *Konungsbók* version, with additions from *Staðarhólsbók*.
[35] *Jónsbók* was written by Jón Einarsson in 1281 on behalf of the Norwegian crown and reflects legal adjustments after Iceland's submission to Norway based on both earlier *Grágás* and the 1274 Norwegian law *Nyere Landslov. Jónsbók* represents an amalgamation of Icelandic law, with about 56% coming from *Grágás,* and changes for Norwegian rule and control, especially tax and fine payments now made to the king and royal officials replacing the *goðar* system. The failed earlier law code *Jarnsíða* is not included in the study because its limited adoption does not apply when looking for *vaðmál*'s role in society in descriptive or prescriptive law. Jana K. Schulman, *Jónsbók: The Laws of Later Iceland: The Icelandic Text According to AMS 351 fol. Skálholtsbók eldri.* transl. and ed. Jana K. Schulman. Saarbrücken: AQ-Verlag, 2010), xiv-xv. For more on the role of the Norwegian crown in forming *Jónsbók*, see Julian Valle "Jónsbók and the monarchical project for Iceland," PhD dissertation (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2024).
[36] These late medieval prescriptions reflect earlier customs recorded in later manuscripts.

written compilations surviving in later manuscripts that rest on earlier recited oral laws and customs for Iceland and Norway of earlier centuries.[37] Some clauses continue, some are dropped, some are amended, and some are added. These law codes are largely prescriptive sources that do not necessarily describe a reality, but rather expectations or desires, and those may differ according to area of Iceland, social status, or Icelanders' or Norwegian kings' desires for society, but are useful for giving an idea of norms and understandings of material objects such as *vaðmál* and are important sources for the regulation of prices, rights in sale and exchange, labour expectations, contexts of use, standardization of production, regulation of sale and exchange of products, and protections for purchasers and merchants, including penalties for incorrect measures and the sale of bad quality cloth; that is, how *vaðmál* was expected to be used as a standard value.

This project also draws on examples from the so-called contemporary sagas, using a close reading of the stories to extricate references to *vaðmál*. This includes the "secular" *Sturlunga saga* compilation[38] and the ecclesiastical *biskupasögur*, as both are considered contemporary sagas about the events of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, written *c.*1200-1300 and reflect *vaðmál* in secular and religious everyday life and the innerworkings of households, in addition to the public life of politics, social connections, and economic activity. These works were written quite close to the time of events and sometimes the author would also be a subject, as the case of Sturla Þórðarson and *Íslendinga saga* or Einarr Hafliðason of *Lárentíus saga.*[39] The contemporary sagas have been considered historical and narrative sources, textual artefacts that act as a "medium of cultural memory" and "a mine of information on the culture and mindset" of the time and people that created them and thus reflect contemporary concerns of the civil strife, social upheaval, violence, and destruction; secular versus religious tensions over control of land and income; and Iceland's relation to the outside world, especially with the Norwegian crown and the Catholic church.[40] Here

[37] Stefan Brink, "Law," in *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Jürg Glauser, *et al.*, 185-197 (Leck: De Gruyter, 2018), 187.
[38] Survives in incomplete redactions *Króksfjarðarbók* (AM 122a fol) and *Reykjarfjarðarbók* (AM 122b fol). For a discussion of the historiography on this source and the use of the terms *Sturlunga saga* and *Sturlungaöld*, see Viðar Pálsson, "The End of the Commonwealth: *Sturlungaöld* in Early Scholarship," *Scandinavian Studies* 96, 1 (2024), 1-23.
[39] Guðrún Nordal, "*Sturlunga saga* and the context of saga-writing," in *Introductory Essay on* Egils saga *and* Njáls saga*,* eds. John Hines and Desmond Slay, 1-14 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 4; Jon Vidar Sigurdsson, *Viking Friendship: The Social Bond in Iceland and Norway, c. 900–1300*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 111; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, "Lárentíus saga," *Íslenzk fornrit 17,* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1998), lxv.
[40] Úlfar Bragason, "Sagas of Contemporary History (*Sturlunga saga*): Texts and Research," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, 427-46 (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 433, 440.

the concern is especially with references which discuss *vaðmál* in terms of its regulation and use as a commodity currency, the different uses in its function as cloth and clothing, and descriptions of its use in society in the struggles for power and position in this period of unstable social and political position in Iceland. The contemporary sagas reflect a contemporary economic situation and to a lesser extent also on clothing terms and details of production, rather focus on political and social motivations for writing, rather than didactic purposes or general descriptions of daily life used for enforcing a certain social system or way of life.

This project also uses a close reading of the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*. The stories are set in a roughly ninth- to eleventh-century pagan past but deriving from earlier oral tradition and the later thirteenth-century and some fourteenth and fifteenth centuries writings, yet hold a strong social or didactic function of teaching cultural values and beliefs to the audience, and so the later thirteenth-century and later writings reflect contemporary and past ideology and values, and so are an important source for social norms and expectations—in both the distant and near past—with information about social structures and daily life, especially the private realm and internal dynamics of the family. Here the focus is on *vaðmál* references for legal regulation and use as commodity currency, different functions as cloth and clothing, and descriptions of the methods and stages of textile production.[41] The distance between stories' setting and writing have left questions of authenticity of representations of life in a past that is distant from the time of writing; however, they can be useful sources for examining how people of the age of saga writing thought about the past and their own clothing, culture, and economy.[42]

[41] For a recent discussion on dating the *Íslendinagsögur,* see Ármann Jakobsson and Yoav Tirosh, "The 'Decline of Realism' and Inefficacious Old Norse Literary Genres and Sub-Genres," *Scandia* 3 (2020), 102-38.

[42] These sagas have variously been considered to represent a true account of the events described, or literary works of later authors based on the oral storytelling tradition but concerned with impressing cultural ideas and social norms on a contemporary audience, or neither with the view of sagas as contemporary writing about a distant past but still sharing some ideas, especially of honour, revenge and family, and some aspects based in a historical reality. Vesteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, trans. Andrew Wawn (Reykjavik: Mal og menning, 1998), 20; Vésteinn Ólason, "Family Sagas," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, 101-18 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 101-18; Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 66; Jesse Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), 36; Carol Clover, *The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, (1982) 2019), 16-17; Axel Kristinsson, "Lords and Literature: The Icelandic Sagas as Political and Social Instruments," *Scandinavian Journal of History*. 28, no. 1 (2003): 1-17; Helgi Þorlákssson, "Að vita sann á sögunum. Hvaða vitneskju geta Íslendingasögurnar veitt um íslenskt þjóðfélag fyrir 1200?" *Leiðarminni: Greinar gefnar út í tilefni 70 ára afmælis Helga Þorlákssonar,* 3-24 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenska bókmentafélag/ Sögufelag (1987) 2015), 4, 23-24.

Documentary sources of charters, church records, and annals reveal information about cases of dispute, records of accounts and holdings in estates, and regulations for the use and pricing of *vaðmál*. Such sources tell of specific, micro-level records of exchange, value, individual textile items, and the people who produced, gifted, sold, exchanged, or consumed these materials, but the evidence leans towards the upper levels of society and ecclesiastical households. The *Diplomatarium Islandicum* (*Íslenzk fornbréfasafn*), is the main collection of these surviving documentary accounts recording churches and private estates. It includes the *máldagar* (sg. *máldagi*), records of the inventories and landholdings of churches and their rights and obligations. These accounts tell of the specific material holdings of church in specific years, which can be used to trace difference in terms and materials used in different areas and different time periods. The annals record exchange, value, individual textile items, and people who produced, gifted, sold, or exchanged cloth, but leans towards the upper levels of society and ecclesiastical households. These sources are generally considered to be more representative of historical 'fact' in their nearness of recording to specific event, sparse recording of historical events and people, documenting ownership, and recording transactions, and as such are especially useful for the association of specific events or textile transactions associated with specific persons, such as a gift from an important person to his associate, and gives specific dates for these accounts, as compared to the literary sources which has less certain dates; however, these annals include accounts of events of the past, both near and distant where such historicity is less certain.

In the use of medieval sources reflecting a long time period, here the concern is not with recovering a "historical truth" for the past, but rather acquiring some understanding of how later medieval people thought about social structures and interpersonal interactions in the past, overcoming the issue of distance between time of writing and the time of events by using these sources as later medieval conceptions of their own historical past, but that this conception also represents a reality of the distant past, especially as regards clothing technology and types of clothing that could be worn by saga-age people.[43] The examples do not necessarily have to represent real people, but rather the value lies is that such things were accepted as a possible reality for the past. Foreign but also local merchants could also act as social documents of attitudes

[43] John Peter Wild argues that textile production is diverse and has regional trends that resist change over time due to factors of climate and geography. John Peter Wild, "Textile Industries of the Ancient World to AD 1000," in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* vol. 2, ed. David Jenkins, 7-29 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

towards trade as a means of building wealth and status compared to traditional land-based production. This also applies to sale and exchange, where real transactions involved payments or valuation in *vaðmál*. These sources reflect a general reality of for the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, and earlier for accounts of clothing descriptions and some exchange. Utilizing a variety of sources including the family sagas allows a fruitful range for the dimension to the study of the past that would be missing if one focussed only on traditional historical documents.

Limitations and Exclusions

The thesis focuses on written sources, with secular, religious, literary, and documentary representations of *vaðmál*. While these sources have proven useful as information on the function and meaning of *vaðmál*, there are some limitations in using written sources, mostly represent the later end of the period under study, as records of events of an earlier oral culture, as discussed above. This limitation may be overcome by considering continuity in culture and cultural products, that the writings were sourced from oral culture not too far removed from that contemporary culture and considering the strong mnemonic nature of the oral tradition, and they are a distinct style not based on earlier European models.[44] The sagas act at 'totemic artifacts' or social memories that relate the past to the present.[45] The law codes developed in the later period and should be understood in their proper chronological order of adoption and period which used in, but it also must be noted that they also reflect an earlier oral law custom and have their origins in the law codes memorized by the law speakers at the *alþingi*.

While trying to be inclusive of sources that provide evidence of *vaðmál*, not all sources can be included due to scope and time. It does not include iconographic material. We can read textiles like a text (common root in Lat. *textere*, "to weave"), and it is possible to read the *vaðmál* fragments that survive, such as archaeological records and museum artifacts; however, this study has excluded research on physical remains of *vaðmál* as that is beyond the scope of this project and the expertise of the researcher. Instead, it reads what medieval authors wrote about *vaðmál*, the impression left behind. Nevertheless, we can rely on the work and expertise of others, and there

[44] Else Mundal, *Dating the Sagas* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013), 2.
[45] E. Paul Durrenberger, "The Icelandic Family Sagas as Totemic Artefacts," in *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*, ed. Ross Samson (Glasglow: Cruithne Press, 1991), 14; Gísli Pálsson, *From Sagas to Society* (Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1992), 24; Gísli Sigurðsson, "Eddas and Sagas in Medieval Iceland," in *Vikings*, ed. William F. Fitzhugh and Elizabeth I. Ward, 186-187 (Washington: The Smithsonian Press, 2000), 187; Chris Callow, "Reconstructing the Past in Medieval Iceland," *Early Medieval Europe* 14, no. 3 (2006), 297, 299.

have been studies done by others which have contributed information to the study of *vaðmál*, and also records of textile finds including *vaðmál* are found in the excavation reports in Iceland; the reader is encouraged to look there for such information, some of which has been included here as secondary references. Similarly, it excludes seals,[46] leaden cloth seals which were attached to textiles produced by a certain textile city and according to certain standards, which became more common in cloth production and trade from the twelfth century.[47] While seals can be very useful to indicate the type of cloth that was imported or exported from an area, this is beyond the scope of this project and is more informative for foreign cloth being imported into Iceland, rather than telling of the production of local woollen cloth.

This project is also not including records of accounts of *vaðmál* abroad or in written literature whose focus is on foreign places, *i.e., Orkneyinga saga* and kings' sagas, because the focus here is on the meaning and function of *vaðmál* in Icelandic society and for Icelanders. It also excludes certain genres that are not indigenous, such as the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, because the focus is, again, on the function and impact of *vaðmál* on Icelandic society, rather than focus on external aristocratic or ecclesiastical households.[48] Some of these sources are also beyond the timeframe of this project, which terminates in the early fifteenth century with the changes in Icelandic cloth trade and shift to exports based on weight, which may have been a result of adjustment to foreign standards and units, especially later when the Hanse dominated Icelandic and Norwegian trade. It is also excluding foreign reports on imports or dealings of Icelandic cloth or merchants.

Terminology

When discussing the meaning or definition of *vaðmál*, terminology is a useful method in the search for details of this textile, especially looking at specific terms used in the literary or documentary sources. Justifying and defining which terminology was used an important step when considering meanings of *vaðmál*, considering what terms the authors used when referring to *vaðmál*, as cloth and/or money. There are various synonyms related to *vaðmál*, some may not infer

[46] For a recent investigation of seals in Iceland, see Guðrún Harðardóttir, "Images in seals of chapters and bishops in the medieval dioceses of Norway and Iceland," PhD dissertation, University of Iceland, 2023.
[47] For a study on cloth seals found in Iceland, see, Svavar Níelsson, "Cut from the Cloth: Leaden cloth Seals in Iceland," Master's thesis, University of Iceland, 2021.
[48] The non-use of this source material is largely because it is beyond the range of time possibility for this project, but it would be a fruitful place to expand the research in the future.

it via the context or supplementary adjectives and can be classified as *vaðmál*, some imply cloth in general or only as a unit of account, and there is variation in context of use, frequency of use, and use by source type. It is difficult to find examples that provide the same level of classification that technical analysis of physical textile pieces can provide, however terminology in literary sources can be useful nonetheless because they allow for greater interpretation of meaning and function than archaeological textiles since they often lack any identification with the person who used it in the past. This section will identify and define terms that can be understood to represent *vaðmál*, in various forms or qualities, referring to cloth of a standard measure and value.

Vaðmál was given legal definition in lawbooks as a cloth currency.[49] Twelfth-century law code *Grágás* defines *vaðmál* as a legal tender (ON. *lögeyrir*), by length, with one unit being six ells length, two ells breadth, new and unused; some clauses stipulate the medium of payment in *vaðmál*, even exclusively.[50] Thirteenth-century law code *Jónsbók* continues this legal definition of standard *vaðmál* by length.[51] The later *Búalög,* an evaluation of trade items, also sets standard and equivalent values for *vaðmál*, such as the *c.*1460 (AM 157 B 4to) clause by weight and length.[52] This dominance of *vaðmál* as the main type of currency necessitated the explicit determination of what qualified it as standard value that could be used for payments. This legal definition based on standard values means that *vaðmál* was a currency and it is important to have a clearly defined

[49] Some have argued that the early roots of the term *vaðmál* have nothing to do with a type of cloth at all, it was only a standard of measure, *e.g.*, Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing,* (Stroud: The History Press, 2007), 146: "in the earliest sources, the term *vaðmál* probably does not describe a type of cloth at all, but might simply refer to cloth woven to a standard measure." However, there are references to *vaðmál* used as cloth in the 'ancient' past (see chapter one) and in noneconomic contexts, presuming the adoption of a type of cloth for an economic context yet with a practical use for dress.

[50] *Laws of Iceland: Grágás* II*, The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from other Manuscripts,* trans. Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, Richard Perkins (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), 206-07; *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, eds. Gunnar Karlsson, Kristján Sveinsson, Mörður Árnason (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1992), 476. Other stipulations include good quality, new and unused, three-shafted, measured along middle or selvage, annual measures, and local *þing* variations in length (*i.e.,* three-ell or four-ell ounce unit *þingslagsaurar*), or the twenty-ell length unit known as *váð* measured by a "thumb-ell" (adding a thumb-length (about an inch) for every two ells to provide reassurance in case of discrepancies). *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 207; *Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid*, vol. 2 ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Brødrene Berlings Bogtrykkeri, 1852), 316; Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 98-101.

[51] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga hver samþykkt var á alþingi árip 1281 og endurnýjuð um miðja 14. öld en fyrst prentuð árið 1578,* ed. Már Jónsson (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2004), 212, 213-214.

[52] It was measured as a hundred of *vaðmál* ("aull uadmala hundrut") and *vara* ("hundrat alana uaurv") and all hundreds should weigh a *vætt* (weight), with the 40-ell length *vaðmál* ("xl. alna langt uadmal"), 60-ell length *hafnarvaðmál* ("lx. alna langt af helmingarlags uadmali"), and 50-ell long *merkurvaðmál* ("l. alna langt uadmal af merkr uadmali") each valued at a *vætt*. *Búalög um verðlag og allskonar venjur í viðskiptum og búskap á Íslandi,* ed. Jón Þorkelsson and Sögufélag (Reykjavik: Sögufélag, 1915, 1916, 1933), 6.

standard of value when using cloth to obtain the relative value of other products, especially for values given in kind, but also that changing values and types are reflected in legal revisions.

Grágás' legal definition includes the key term *þrískeftr* ("three-shafted) and this provides an important detail of the construction techniques used to produce *vaðmál*, and this tells that *vaðmál* was a twill weave.[53] Three shafted refers to the use of three heddle rods (*sköft*, sg. *skaft*; or *vefsköt*)[54] while weaving. Heddle rods played an important role in determining the number of weaving sheds, as the heddle rods pulled the warp threads apart and left a space through which the weft thread would be passed horizontally (See Fig. 1). Having three heddles means that this cloth would have been woven in a 2/2 twill pattern, or, in other words, that each individual weft would pass over two and then under two warp threads, offset by two in the next weft pass; this creates a slight diagonal pattern (see Fig. 2). What is important to note here is that requirement for standard quality *vaðmál* cloth was that it was to be woven in a 2/2 twill

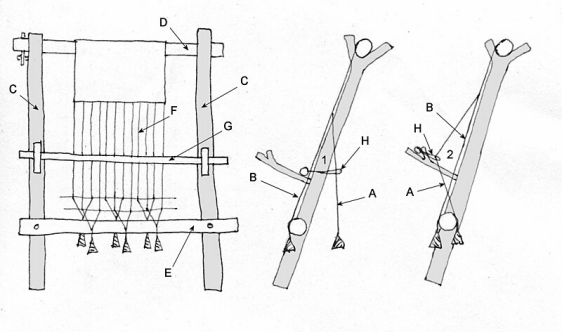

Figure 1: Warp-weighted loom indicating a heddle rod (G) and shed (2). Source: Mistouke, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

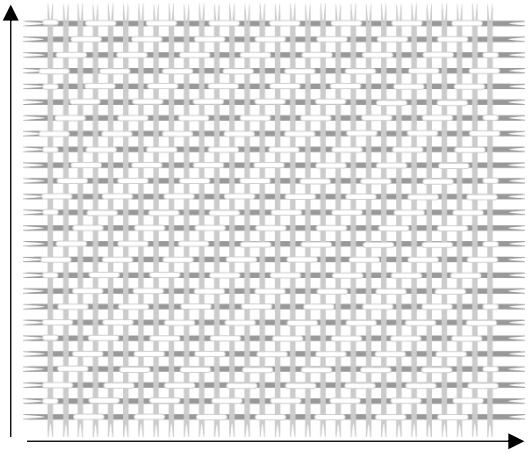

Figure 2: 2/2 twill structure, with vertical warp and horizontal weft threads.

Source: Jauncourt, CC BY-SA 3.0, altered. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>, via Wikimedia Commons

[53] Addition 430, of Árnes þing *c.*1200, *Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid*, 316. This provides key details of the construction techniques used to produce *vaðmál*, that the requirement for standard quality *vaðmál* cloth was weaving "three-shafted" (ON. *þrískeft*), making a 2/2 twill weave pattern. Quality according to dimensions makes sense, when considering how cloth is woven, as a good-quality piece of cloth would have equal tension and width along the entirety of the selvedge (the narrow strip or edge of a piece of woven cloth which prevents its unravelling), rather than bunching and uneven edges of a poor-quality piece of cloth, and this takes experience and skill to ensure. By noting that there was a person who would check the quality of the cloth to see if it met breadth qualifications highlights the importance that the cloth would meet requirements to be considered worthy of use as standard value, that it had to meet standards of quality and not any woollen cloth would suffice.

[54] A heddle is a loop of thread that is tied around a warp or group of warp threads so that they can be raised or lowered so to open a shed for the weft thread to pass through. The shed is the term for the opening in the warp that is created by moving the heddles. The individual heddles would be tied to a heddle rod so that the group of heddles could be lifted simultaneously so that the weft thread could pass through along the width of the loom. Without heddle rods one would have to move the warp threads by hand taking more time and effort; multiple rods allow for more complicated weaving patterns, for if using only one rod will have a simple over-under pattern with a stiffer fabric, while three rods allow a more complex pattern and more space between such crossing-points creates a more flexible fabric.

pattern, since it used three heddles, and was not plain (tabby). It does not state anything further about what "fine quality" would mean in terms of fibre choice or thread count.[55] It must be noted that the introduction of twill, as compared to tabby weave, meant advancement and change in fabric possibilities: the fabric of twill is looser, more elastic, and has different patterns than plain weave; it differs in its drape and texture, and the looseness of the twill weave accentuates the softness and insulating properties of wool but also changes the construction of clothing by making possible to sew narrow clothing articles like trousers and sleeves.[56]

Vaðmál can be considered a general term that includes subtypes of different qualities and construction and generally ends with -*vaðmál* or -*váð* (alterative spellings *vað*, *vóð,* or *vað*). There are two main groups of subtypes, *vara*- and *hafnarvaðmál*-types, and the main different is how they were used in transactions. *Vara* was always measured by length, as specified in *Grágás,* while *hafnarvaðmál* was subject to assessment (*virðingafé* or *metfé*) according to quality (both the buyer and seller had a legal viewer and valuer, *Jónsbók* stipulates six men, three from each side of transaction).[57] This changes in the fourteenth century and later was measured by standards of weight, length, and thread count, wherein the terms *gjaldavaðmál* and *merkurvaðmál* come into play.[58] The standard units of measure seem to be linked to the length that was possible to weave on the loom, first six ells but later the twenty-ell *váð* as the full length of cloth when it is cut from the loom, which Marta Hoffman argued is a change in practice in response to longer weaving possibilities on the horizonal loom used on the continent from the eleventh century onward.[59] Longer and shorter lengths also occur depending on context of use and time period and as a result of fulling, but increments of six were useful for local payments and twenty for larger payments,

[55] Michèle Hayeur Smith argues that standardization of legal cloth indicates a thread count of four to fifteen for the warp and four to eight for the weft threads. Michèle Hayeur Smith, *The Valkyries' Loom*, 65.
[56] Lise Bender Jørgensen, "Textile Production," in *Creativity in the Bronze Age: Understanding Innovation in Pottery, Textile, and Metalwork Production*, ed. Lise B. Jørgensen, J. Sofaer, M. Stig Sørensen, 67-73 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 70; Lise Bender Jørgensen and Antoinette Rast-Eicher, "Innovations in European Bronze Age Textiles," *Praehistorische Zeitschrift* 91, 1 (2016), 80-81, 87.
[57] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins,* 478; *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga,* 304.
[58] See Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 26, 210ff. Falk also classifies *vaðmál* in the same two categories, with *vara* including *vöruváð/vararváð, varningr*, and *söluváð* and that it was always a single colour (*einlit*) in the natural sheep's colour and sometimes in the more valuable striped type of *vara* (*mórent*); on the other hand, he states that *hafnarváð* refers to *vaðmál* goods subject to assessment and is a type of simple cloak material, stemming from *yfirhöfn* for overcoat. Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde: Mit Besonderer Berücksichtigung der Terminologies* (Kristiania: Kommision bei J. Dybwad, 1919), 51.
[59] *Ibid,* 234, 259. Marta Hoffman, *The Warp-Weighted Loom: Studies in the History and Technology of an Ancient Implement* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964), 197-98.

trade, and tax payments (later eight ells) and it is not clear whether this was the woven length with selveges intact or cut to size with edges hemmed (or left raw).

Vara (pl. *vörur*) is the legal standard mentioned in *Grágás*, but includes *vöruvaðmál, söluvaðmál*, and *pakkavaðmál. Vara* refers to cloth trade goods, and, while it could have a more general trade good meaning depending on context of use, it frequently refers to *vaðmál* as the chief export and trade good until around the end of the fourteenth century, marketable cloth intended for exchange, but after the decline continues as measure of value (*vöruvirt*).[60] The *vara* category is legal cloth of two-ells wide and six long, with 6-7 warp threads that were tightly z spun and unplied and weft threads loosely z spun, with the value of twenty-ell *váð* being 26 2/3 marks (but also see 18- and 20-ell lengths).[61] *Vöruváð*/*vöruvaðmál* was generally suitable for smaller and local transactions, used for various purposes, and in various qualities, and was not necessarily fulled. *Söluváð/söluvaðmál* was similar to *vöruvaðmál* but was better quality as was often fulled (denser) and always referenced as a full length of cloth as it comes off the loom (20-ell *voð,* after losing 2 ells to fulling) because it was primarily intended for sale (*sölu* from *sala* "sale") and export; it disappears at the end of the fourteenth century.[62] *Vöruvaðmál* and *söluvaðmál* seem to have been similar, both types of *vara*, but the first more suited to local exchange in increments of six ells and not as fine or dense while the latter more suited to larger payments and trade done in increments of twenty ells and was finer and denser since would be fulled; both seem to have been worn by everyone but the former perhaps used for general clothing while the latter was more suited for outer wear clothing that needed greater water resistance and might be in 18-ell lengths in such contexts. The production of six-ell lengths likely continued alongside longer lengths as shorter lengths were better suited to small transactions and individual household use for clothing needs, whereas the longer lengths were better suited to larger transactions or overseas trade where they later could be cut up and sold in smaller units. *Pakkavaðmál*, on the other hand, refers to *vara* that was traded in Iceland and not to *vaðmál* used in clothing locally, but likely was the same cloth just using this term for a trade context and in larger increments as it was exported in packs of sixty ells each (1 *pakki* = ½ *vætt*) and would be wrapped in lower quality *vöruvaðmál* or sewn smaller pieces,

[60] Cleasby, 679: "wares; in Norway chiefly of fur, in Icel. of wadmal." Old Norse *vara* from Middle Low German *ware*, from Proto West Germanic **waru*-, from Proto Germanic **warō*, from PIE **wer*-. Related to Sw. *vara*, Dutch *waar*, OE *waru*, Dan *vare*, Germ *ware*, Engl *ware*. Orel, *Germanic Etymology,* 450.
[61] Helgi Þorláksson *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 231, 259.
[62] *Ibid,* 228, 230.

or perhaps even the same cloth as inside to show customer the wares.[63] *Vara* thus represents specialized Icelandic production in the fourteenth century in several qualities and quantities, with different terms for similar or the same product, but declines in the fifteenth century as an export good but lives on as the *vöruvirt* measure of value.

Vararfeldr (pl. *vararfeldir*), a special type of *vara* used for *feldr*, means trade cloaks made to a standard quality, a set size and quality that would be used as an export good to be sold abroad, often the main export product of a journey, was valued at two ounce-units, and the stipulated size was four thumb-ells (204.8 cm) long and two broad.[64] *Röggvarfeldr*, or shaggy pile-cloaks, refers to these cloaks with a supplementary pile added as woven (*röggvarvefnaður*); *Grágás* stipulates thirteen piles of *tog* were required across the width.[65] These were common trade items from tenth to twelfth centuries, Elsa Guðjónsson suggests they could have been the *faldones* (woolly garments)—previously-discussed by Jón Jóhannesson—traded by the Saxons for Prussian marten skins, but stopped being produced in Iceland around *c.*1200, but there are no indications in the sources why (perhaps a change in fashion).[66] References to *feldir*, *vararfeldr*, and *röggvarfeldr* infer cloaks made according to regulations of standard quality of size and number of piles and used as a trade product domestically and internationally. Jón Jóhannesson does not differentiate between them, all three were cloaks that were made of *vaðmál* (unless prefixed with *skinn,* then were of fur, hides, or leather), the ground cloth into which the pile was inserted; *skinnfeldr* were perhaps

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[63] *Ibid*, 224-25, 250, 388. Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins: Saga íslenskrar utanlandsverslunar 900-1200* vol. 1. (Reykjavik: Skrudda, 2017)*,* 74. Not named for sacks. Falk states the name came from being packed in bundles (*pakka*) for shipping, with each bundle being a certain number of pieces of cloth of fixed length and width, appearing during the time of Hanseatic trade. Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde,* 50. Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 387.

[64] Defined by Cleasby as "cloaks marketable in the trade." Cleasby, 679. A thumb-ell is an ell plus a thumb-width, about an inch, added to every ell in case of fluctuation in dimension across the cloth to meet the regulated standards quality. *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 476.

[65] Cleasby "a tufted-cloak", 507. During the weaving process piles—a lock of *tog* (the outer wool) or a piece of unspun woollen thread—were laid in the shed and wrapped or knotted around warp threads between wefts during weaving (a supplementary weft pile weave). This gives the appearance of sheepskin or fur; *vararfeldr* and *röggvararfeldr* were made using the same construction techniques but different number of piles added, six or thirteen, and with the latter higher quality as it was denser, more insulating, and water-resistant, valuable as protective clothing in inclement weather. Elsa E. Guðjónsson describes the process of adding of the pile to the weave when discussing the woollen pile woven fabric found at Heynes in 1959 (two reused fragments sewn together, the larger fragment a 2/2 twill, 9 cm warp and 4 cm weft thread count, hard-spun, fine, uneven z-spun warp and slightly-spun, coarse, even s-spun weft threads and the smaller fragment a 2/2 twill with slightly-spun, coarse, z-spun warp and slightly spun, coarse, s-spun weft threads). She states that origin of pile weaving in Iceland is not known, but might be from settlers or Celtic slaves, however the pile knot in this construction might be unique to Iceland [at least, as known in 1962], but other types have been found in southwest Asia, north Africa, and Europe. Elsa E. Guðjónsson, "Forn röggvarvefnaður," *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* 59 (1962), 3, 66, 68, 69, 71.

[66] *Ibid,* 68, 70.

more common in older centuries or in Norway, and context is necessarily to ensure whether cloth or skin (or a combination of both) is being referenced.[67]

The second type of *vaðmál* is *hafnarvaðmál*, a finer type and originally refers to cloth intended for personal use or measured on case-by-case basis by assessment (*metfé*) instead of standard values, but this changes in later centuries when it was measured by length, weight, and thread-count. The term's origins might be linked to the verb *hafa* which indicates something that was owned or personal property or stemming from its function as clothing for outer clothes as the term *yfirhöfn* (overclothes). *Hafnarvaðmál* is posited in the legal sources in opposition to standardized *vara*, but after *c.*1300 it also represents standardized cloth, first by weight (*vætt* of *helmingarlagsvaðmál*, *merkuvoð*, and *tíu aura voð*),[68] later in the fourteenth century by length (ells of *helmingarlagsvaðmál*, *merkuvoð*, and *tíu aura voð*),[69] and in the fifteenth century by width and thread count (warps per ell for *gjaldavoð*, *merkuvoð*, and *tíu aura voð*).[70] *Gjaldavaðmál* is noteworthy becase it marks the shift in *vaðmál* terms for types used in local payments, from twenty-ell *vöruvaðmál* to eight ells of *gjaldavaðmál,* a denser cloth than *vara*, in tax payments; these changes in terms reflect changing production standards in accordance with the needs for local and foreign payments.[71] The later terms are mostly outside of the period under study and have been used modestly here; here classification by weight or the earlier value by assessment are more relevant.

Vaðmál is often plain cloth but could also have additional decorative elements like the russet-coloured striped cloth *mórent*, the stripes were presumably woven into the cloth (whether natural or dyed colour is unknown). The term is used adjectively with *vara* or *hafnarvaðmál*, but also alone, and was slightly higher value than plain *vaðmál* with a rate of five ells, later per six

[67] Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga* I, (Reykjavik: Almenna bókafélagið, 1956), 268-69. In contrast, Falk thinks that *vararfeldr* is the same as *skinnfeldr*, *feldr* being a square piece of skin of a certain size and sewn together from several sheepskins and named *vararfeldr* when used in trade, and could have a cloth lining, and that *röggvararfeldr* was an imitation of the shaggy or furry effect with the addition of the pile-weaves. Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde*, 74, 175. Elsa E. Guðjónsson describes them as rectangular, woollen pile mantles. Elsa E. Guðjónsson, "Forn röggvarvefnaður," 68-69.

[68] *Helmingarlagsvaðmál* was 3 *váð* per *vætt* of 40 ells each and 2 ½ ells wide; *merkuvoð* was 2 ½ *váð* per *vætt* of 50 ells each and 2 ½ ells wide; and *tíu aura voð* was 2 *váð* per *vætt* of 60 ells each and 2 ½ ells wide. Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 259-60.

[69] *Helmingarlagsvaðmál* was 16-ell *váð* per *vætt*, 3 in 1 *hundrað*; *merkuvoð* was 20-ell *váð* per *vætt*, 2 ½ in 1 *hundrað*; and *tíu aura voð* was 24-ell *váð* per *vætt*, 2 in 1 *hundrað. Ibid*.

[70] *Gjaldavoð* was 220 warps per ell, 2 ½ ells wide; *merkuvoð* was 260 warps per ell, 3 ells wide; and *tíu aura voð* was 320 warps per ell, 3 ¼ or 3 ½ ells wide. *Ibid*.

[71] *Ibid,* 260.

ells, per ounce-unit; there is also *grárendr,* grey-striped cloth, which is not given a legal value.[72] *Mórent* thus seems to be an adjective for *vaðmál* that developed to stand on its own as a noun.

There are other descriptive adjectives and nouns that do not specifically use *vaðmál* but imply the cloth was made of *vaðmál* based on sociohistorical context; there are also some terms that imply *vaðmál* but with less certainty; there are other terms that have a *vaðmál* suffix, but we know very little about them. This may be due to their greater use as clothing than economic role, that it they might not have important or played a short role in trade and so did not warrant a clear or legal definition, and the understanding of the fabric material is unclear or has been lost, such as *munaðavoð* whose specifications are unknown and *stakkavaðmál* which is are understood in relation tunics with the prefix *stakkr* and is left up to interpretation.

Wool (ON *ull*) is a broad and inclusive adjective used in examples of cloth and clothing but implies *vaðmál*. *Váð* is an older term for woven cloth in Old Norse (becomes *voð* in Icelandic) and refers to cloth or fabric as it comes off the loom.[73] *Váskufl* is a portmanteau of *váð* and cloak (*kufl*) and refers to a rain cloak of *vaðmál* but could also be dyed which gives it a higher value than a regular cloak. *Klæði* (noun, n.; also, verb *klæða*) is a general term used for cloth, or in plural clothes, in a general sense, which can be used to indicate *vaðmál* but with caution, as it can refer to linen (ON. *léreft* or *lín*) and silk (ON. *silki* or *sæi*), however these are more likely to have been imported than produced in Iceland.[74] On the other hand, *skrúðklæði* was fine-quality cloth and assessed on a per-case basis for price rather than by a standard value, and this might also refer to *vaðmál,* but also other fabrics, with decorative elements aded (*i.e.,* embroidery, silk embellishment, tablet-woven bands on edges).[75] All of these can imply *vaðmál*, since it was the main wool fabric produced in the period, and this study has included a few examples using these terms when context indicates woollen cloth.

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[72] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 477-8; Cleasby, 436; *Jónsbók: The Laws of Later Iceland*, 301, 305, 404; *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga,* 212, 213-214; Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 226.

[73] Cleasby, 683. "*váð*," Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon in *Íslensk orðsifjabók* (1989), https://malid.is/leit/v%C3%A1%C3%B0 *Váð* comes from the Proto-Germanic **wēdiz* "piece of cloth, garment," which comes from the Proto-Indo-European **h₂ew* "to braid, to weave; enjoy, consume" and Proto-Indo-European **wedh-*, and extension of **aw* "weave". Old Norse *væða* (to clothe) also descends from **wēdiz* through **wēdijana* "to clothe, to wear." George Sherman Lane, *Words for Clothing in the Principal Indo-European Languages* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1931), 14; Vladimir Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 460.
Falk argues that *klæði* refers to foreign cloth. Hjalmar Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde,* 50. However, there are also other terms besides *klæði* that also refer to cloth in a general sense, such as *dúkr*, and should be flexible about this understanding.

[75] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 476, 478. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga* I, 368-69.

As *vaðmál* means a measure of stuff, it is also a unit of account, money without the cash element but only comparative value of other items in kind against the *vaðmál* standard. This is accounted with *alin* and *hundrað.* The ell (ON. *öln* or *alin*)[76] measure was applied as a standard to measure cloth dimensions and the standard unit was six ells of woven cloth corresponding to an ounce of silver, the base unit of legal currency.[77] Helgi Þorláksson states that if only ells are specified, it refers to physical *vara* before 1400, but after only *vara* as a unit of account.[78] The old Icelandic ell was *c.*49 cm, the natural ell, but later increased and varied, particularly when Iceland adopted the Hamburg ell (*c.*57 cm) and then the Danish ell (*c.*62.5 cm) for consistent measures in trade.[79] The ell was adopted and adapted over the period of study, but constantly remains a measure of value in payments and exchange, albeit in varying price ratios; however, the ell measures length in general and more than just cloth, so reference to *vaðmál* depends on context.

There are two tools known used to measure *vaðmál*: the *stika* and *kvarði.* They were introduced at the end of the twelfth century by Bishop Páll Jónsson of Skálaholt with the support of lawman Gizurr Hallsson as a national standard to deal with problems of too many different measuring tools in use, both local and foreign.[80] The measuring tools were first to be kept at the *alþing,* with the *kvarði* marked on the church wall (*Grágás*), but later under the jurisdiction of the lawman at the national level, against which each parish's sheriff (*sýslumaðr*) would base his tools for local farmers to use for assessment (*Jónsbók*) of local transactions.[81] Cloth was to be inspected

[76] Cleasby, 13. The ell is an old unit of measure of the length from elbow to the tip of the middle finger, the so-called "natural ell" based on an average man; this is the same concept as the ancient cubit, but the value and the length of the ell varied over time and by country. Often these officially regulated units of measure would be hung on church walls or other public spaces to measure commodities at public marketplaces, such as at 2-ell *stika* measure on the wall the church at Þingvellir in Iceland, which shows how churches played an important role in commerce in the past as centres for trade and markets. Today, such ell-rod measures are found on the wall of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, on the fourteenth-century ironwork on an eighteenth-century door of the Stånga Church in Gotland, and the Old Town Hall in Regensburg, Bavaria with ell, foot, and fathom markers near the door.

[77] Cleasby, 13. *Grágás* tells of changes to the values given to the ell, telling of historic values, wherein the value for 1 ounce-unit was in *c.*1000 18 ells, *c.*1100 48 ells, *c.*1200 45 ells, and *c.*1300 36 ells. *Laws of Iceland: Grágás* I*, The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from other Manuscripts,* trans. Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, Richard Perkins (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), 253.

[78] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 224.

[79] Gísli Gestsson argues that, based on his review of surviving *stika*, which show inconsistent lengths of 47.1 to 63.2 cm, there is not an indisputable ell length, but rather that has always been various lengths and need to look at context to determine which ell is being specified. Gísli Gestsson, "Álnir og kvarðar," *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags* (1968), 76.

[80] "Páls saga biskups," *Íslenzk fornrit 16. Biskupa sögur II.* ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2002), 315. Gísli Gestsson, "Álnir og kvarðar," 45. *Laws of Iceland: Grágás* II*,* 350.

[81] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 207. *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 216. While there are no extant medieval ell-measuring-sticks, some have survived from later centuries and are recounted by Gísli Gestsson. Ells

by lawful viewers and the person measuring was to choose where to measure the cloth, in the middle or selvage, when the width fluctuates presumably due to issues of tension.[82] These legally-regulated measuring tools were intended for quality assurance for standards and accurate tools used as a defense against dishonest sales,[83] as fraudulence (false measures or tools false ells, generally when there was a difference of one ell or more across a twenty-ell length) was punished strictly with lesser outlawry in *Grágás* and later in *Jónsbók* with the payment of personal compensation paid to the king.[84] This clause marks a shift from outlawry and social punishment to a monetary fine paid to the king as financial punishment. These tools acted to protect the integrity of *vaðmál* as a unit of currency and indicate the importance of regulating the quality of cloth that was used in economic transactions at the point of sale, tools and legal regulations intended to protect the buyer and seller in these transactions.

The second measurement is the term hundred (ON. *hundrað*, pl. *hundruð*), 120 ells of *vaðmál* as a standard for measure of value. The term hundred in early medieval Iceland refers to the "long hundred", following the older Germanic duodecimal hundred (120), rather than the Latin decimal hundred (100), but both systems were in use in medieval Iceland, the short hundred was used alongside the long hundred, mostly in the later medieval period, but mainly in the context of ecclesiastical affairs; the difference is partly determined by terminology, but mostly by context of use.[85] This unit is helpful for measuring larger amounts of cloth, especially when used in domestic

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varied in length according by country and time, but the old Icelandic ell was about 49.2 ±1.7 cm. Gísli Gestsson, "Álnir og kvarðar, 68.

[82] This mostly likely means moving to measure along the longitudinal middle if the selvage edges fluctuate in width enough that it is not possible to measure in a straight line down the outside edge(s) of the cloth. The English term selvage refers to the left and right (longitudinal) edges of the cloth which is formed when the weft thread loops around the first warp thread(s) on the next pass, thus creating a stable edge along the length of the cloth that does not unravel; the top and bottom are known as the transverse edges, the starting and finishing edges of a piece of cloth. The Icelandic term *jaðarr* might also refer also to the top and bottom edge of the fabric, as defined as the extreme edge of something, or stripe or border, and not specifying a difference between the top/bottom and left/right edges. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon in *Íslensk orðsifjabók* (1989). https://ordsifjabok.arnastofnun.is/ faersla/8192/faersla; *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 207.

[83] *Laws of Iceland: Grágás* II, 18; *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 64.

[84] Maintaining a consistently even width requires experience and skill for even tension, to avoid bunching, which could be most visible along the longitudinal length of the cloth as it forms a double-funnel shape with a narrowing in the centre, and the law suggests measuring in the middle if there is at least a 5% difference. Presumably, if the narrowest part met the required two-ell width, the cloth would be considered lawful, but best if consistent width along the cloth's length. Lesser outlawry (*fjörbaugsgarðr*) for fraudulent tools (*stikur rangur* or *kvarða ranga*) or false ells of homespun (or linen) with 5% deviation, and foreigners (*austmenn*) had the same punishments as Icelanders. *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 183, 189-90, 207, 472; *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1, ed. Jón Sigurðsson (Copenhagen: S.L. Möller, 1857-76), 318. Amended 1314. *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 216, 223-4.

[85] They could be differentiated by using the terms *tíræð* (ten-tenned, decimal) or a hundred of silver (hundruð silfrs), rather than just the term hundrað, heil hundruð (whole hundred), or tólfræð hundruð (twelve-tenned, duodecimal).

transactions or when referencing a large amount that is to be exported, such as a hundred hundreds, which is 14,400 ells. This is also the measure which was used to check the quality of the cloth, that the width remained equally broad along its length so that there was not a difference of more than one ell breadth in every twenty. As with the ell, the hundred is a general measure for other things beyond *vaðmál* and use of examples depends on context. Nevertheless, the hundred and ell are useful terms when exploring how *vaðmál* was used and demonstrate the economic value of *vaðmál* when applied as a unit of comparative value and are not always representative of transactions using cloth.

Thus, as *vaðmál* was cloth that was used for valuation and with further purpose as a textile, references to *vaðmál* can be found in the source material by not only looking just for the term *vaðmál*, but also various synonyms or with added auxiliary terms. The different terms show *vaðmál* as a gradient of coarse, rough to fine, soft cloth and with different monetary values based on intended use or quality. Some terms imply the same type of cloth but produced in different dimensions or are different terms for the same product used at different times in history.[86] Some are broad and inclusive terms that can refer to cloth in a general sense, but context can identify the meaning and intention of the type of cloth referenced. Not all terms are used equally or concurrently across the source material but can refer to *vaðmál* because their technical constructions mean in some way that it is a specific amount or quality of woollen cloth. The multitude of examples using this expanded pool of terms demonstrate that wool and woollen cloth was both a part of daily life and an important economic product. The sources under study may have been largely written by and focus on men and their various activities, but the world of textiles and textile production can be seen in these sources, nevertheless, if we shift our frame of reference.

Cleasby, 292-93. *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 207; Jens Ulff-Møller, "The "Practica" Arithmetic in Icelandic-Scottish "Long Hundred" Calculation," in *Rechenkunst & Mathematik in der frühen Nuezeit*, ed. Rainer Gebhardt (Annaberg-Bulcholz: Schriften des Adam-Ries-Bundes, 2023), 4-6; Jens Ulff-Møller, "The Use of an Archaic British-Scandinavian Counting System in the Icelandic Non-monetary Economy, Exemplified by the Icelandic Land Registers," in *Cashless Payments and Transactions from the Antiquity to 1914*, ed. Sushil Chaudhuri and Markus A. Denzel (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008), 33-34, 51.

[86] Choices made at the production stage would affect the final product: wool type, preparations, and the intended purpose of the cloth. Sheep's wool varied in quality according to the sheep's age, sex, and breed and the wool's location on the sheep's body and thus used in different ways to produce different qualities of cloth. Finer quality cloth suited high quality clothing, while a coarse rough cloth suited sacking or work clothing; both types were useful but varied in economic value.

Part 2: Historical Context and Literature Review

Historical Context

Textiles can reveal a plenitude of information about people and their society. *Vaðmál* is more than just a type of cloth but is a textile that reflects the resource adaptation of medieval Icelandic people to meet their own needs and desires.[87] This section will situate this material good within its sociocultural conditions to contextualize its influential role in this society, fluctuating over the long period under study.

Vaðmál represents textiles' role in cultural transition. It had been produced in Iceland since settlement as settlers of Norse cultural background (western Norway and the British Isles, including Celtic influence)[88] brought their textile traditions with them to Iceland and it was produced on a household scale, with some surplus for exchange and export.[89] These Norse origins can be seen in early textile production techniques, including textile tools for weaving cloth on the vertical warp-weighted loom (*vefstaður*)[90] and hand spinning with drop spindles (*haldasnælda*) and distaff (*rokkr*);[91] these were tools that were common in Scandinavia the British Isles and thus reflect the textile culture of the settlers.[92] *Vaðmál* was woven with threads z/s spun, with the warp

[87] Eva Andersson Strand *et al.*, "Old Textiles – New Possibilities," 150-51.
[88] Genetic studies have provided estimates of gender ratios of Scandinavian versus British Isles origins for the settlers, showing in general a higher ratio of the former for male and a higher of the latter for female settlers. See Agnar Helgason, *et.al.*, "mtDNA and the Islands of the North Atlantic: Estimating the Proportions of Norse and Gaelic Ancestry," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 68, 3 (2001), 735.
[89] The textile practices of the settlement era reflect Norwegian textile technology traditions, including accessories and jewelry, colour, spinning and weaving tools used, and twill and tabby types of weaves, z/z spin direction, but later changes to z/s likely reflects British Isles tradition. Michèle Hayeur Smith, "Ethnicity," In *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Medieval Age,* ed. Sarah-Grace Heller, 125-140 (Bloomsbury, 2018), 132-4; Eva Andersson Strand, "Textile Production, Organisation and Theoretical Perspectives on Trade in the Scandinavian Viking Age," in *Textiles and the medieval economy: production, trade, and consumption of textiles, 8th-16th centuries*, ed. Angela Ling Huang and Carsten Jahnke, 8-22 (Oxford: Oxbow, 2018), 16ff.
[90] Marta Hoffman, *The Warp-weighted Loom,* 114.
[91] Here drop-spinning was done using the drop-spindle and distaff. Eva Andersson, *The Common Thread: Textile Production during the Late Iron Age-Viking Age*, transl. Märit Gaimster. (Lund: University of Lund, 1999); Ragnheiður Traustadóttir, "Spindle Whorls from Urriðakot," *Nordic Middle Ages—Artefacts, Landscapes and Society*, ed. Irene Baug et.al., 317-329 (Oslo: University of Bergen, 2015), 327.
[92] The choice of tool depends on tradition but also the fibre being used and how the wool was prepared. Dorothy K. Burnham, *Warp and weft: a textile terminology* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1980), 22, 28-29. Such possible mixture of textile cultures can be seen in the poem "Darraðarljóð," with its rare visuals of a loom and weaving, which might stem from the medieval Icelandic culture of the thirteenth-century time of writing when preserved in *Brennu-Njáls saga,* from an earlier pagan era of practice of *seiðr* linked to female textile work*,* or an even older tradition from the homelands of the Norse and Celtic settlers. Ingibjörg Eyþórsdóttir discusses how the poem itself is of mixed origins (Norse, Gaelic, Anglo-Saxon), and notes how it might represent a modified working song for female spinning and weaving work with its rhythm and of chanting connected to ritual magic of transformation. The poem is of uncertain origins but rooted in Nordic, Celtic, and Christian practices along with practical aspects of textile work in its visual descriptions that might have been intended as mnemonic aid for cooperative female textile

(vertical) threads z-spun (clockwise) and weft threads (horizontal) s-spun (counter-clockwise); in general, warp threads need to be smoother and harder-spun (tighter twist) to create a thread strong enough to support the weaving. *Vaðmál* was woven in a 2/2 twill pattern and produced in a range of quality grades from coarse to fine according to intended use, but all under the umbrella term of *vaðmál*.[93] Being a twill, this weave structure means that the loom was required to have more than the natural shed and thus use shed rods; a 2/2 twill would have four sheds, the natural shed and three artificial sheds that were created with the addition of heddles on the warp-weighted loom. The warp-weighted loom had a long-lasting tradition in Iceland and was used into the eighteenth century, long after the horizontal loom had been adopted in continental Europe. The textile technology involved in *vaðmál* production demonstrates the connections new societies had to their cultural homelands with the transmission of know-how, knowledge, and tools to their new homes and the changes and adaptation that occurs in that environment with different access to resources and their own needs and desires, which may be different from their homelands.

This weaving tradition was brought to Iceland when settled from the ninth century on as part of the greater Norse exploration and colonization of the North Atlantic during the Viking Age and developed into a society distinct from their homelands over the period of 930 to 1262/4 known as the *Þjóðveldisöld* (Commonwealth Period).[94] Indigenous secular and religious institutions developed and were established as the land-based bases of power for the ruling elite with independent, decentralized political system.[95] There was civil conflict in the twelfth- to mid-

work. Ingibjörg Eyþórsdóttir, "Darraðarljóð—gluggi til annarra heima: Galdur, seiður, leiðsla eða sýn?" MA dissertation (University of Iceland, 2014), 28, 32-34, 96, 127, 129.

[93] While there are examples of plain (tabby) weave, twill dominated with 2/2 being the most common type. Twill is not unique to Iceland (woven twills are millennia older than this period, with perhaps the earliest from the Bronze Age, a 2/2 wool twill from Martkopi, Georgia late third millennium) but the weaving characteristics of twill, z-spun yarn, and wool fabric were part of the dominant textile tradition of northern European textiles since the second century CE. Lise Bender Jørgensen and Antoinette Rast-*Eicher*, "Innovations in European Bronze Age Textiles," 81-2; Phillipa A. Henry, "Changing Weaving Styles and Fabric Types," in *Land, Sea and Home*, ed. John Hines et.al., 443-456 (Leeds, Maney Publishing, 2004), 444; Lise Bender Jørgensen, "Northern Europe in the Roman Iron Age, 1 BC – AD 400," in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* vol. 2, ed. David Jenkins, 93-102 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 101.

[94] Iceland is thought to have been fully claimed by the tenth century, but emigration continued for a longer period. Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power and Social Change 1000-1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11.

[95] Chieftains (*goðar*) representing personal followers (*þingmenn*), and local communities of householders (*hreppar*) at the *alþing* and local assemblies (*þing*). The balance of power was disproportionate and land-based with fewer chieftains representing a larger, less influential group of followers of medium and smaller householders, plus lower status servants, slaves, and women who were economically and politically dependent. Iceland at this point is not a state, but a sort of "ethnic community with a strong resemblance to a nation." Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of*

thirteenth-century (*c.*1180-1262/4) over land and power with increased centralization of land and power as a few wealthy families controlled multiple chieftaincies as regional power bases. Iceland submitted to Norway in 1262/4, becoming a tributary tax land of the Norwegian crown, then later a dependency under Danish rule from 1380 with the Kalmar Union.[96] The Iceland-Norway connection was constantly important.[97] While Icelanders initially sailed on their own ships, Norwegian merchant ships provided the means for Icelanders and goods to travel back and forth across the North Atlantic, and, after submission, Iceland was also an important source of revenue for the Norwegian crown through taxes and trade, therefore had a vested interest in maintaining this connection. Despite being self-sufficient, trade was especially very important for the flow of goods and people to and from Iceland.[98]

Settlers continued but adapted their Norse barter economy based on coins and weighted silver of standard measures in ounces and marks, but lacking local silver sources, woollen cloth became the main commodity currency and was based on length in ells and later weight.[99] *Vaðmál* had been produced and used as currency to a lesser extent in Norway, Gudbrandsdalen in particular was important place of wool production, but played a greater role in Iceland as wool was easier to produce there than Norway.[100] Sheep husbandry[101] was well-suited to Iceland's natural

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Iceland 21, 22-25; Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland*, 83; Orri Vésteinsson, "A Divided Society: Peasants and the Aristocracy in Medieval Iceland," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), 137.

[96] Iceland paid taxes to the king in return for peace and protection but remained a distinct legislative unit with its own law, however power structures changed as the *goðar* system was replaced by rule by the king's representatives, effectively changing it from a legislative power to a law court. Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, 92; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, "The Norse Community," in *The Norwegian Dominance and the Norse World c.1100-c.1400,* ed. Steinar Imsen, 59-73 (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2010), 64.

[97] Bergen was especially important for trade, more so in the 1300s when it became as staple for Norwegian and its tributaries, as commodities were brought from the North Atlantic islands where it would be redistributed to foreign merchants to take to further markets. Helgi Þorláksson, "King and Commerce: the foreign trade of Iceland in medieval times and the impact of royal authority," in *The Norwegian Dominance and the Norse World c.1100-c.1400*, ed. Steinar Imsen, 149-173 (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2010)," 155; Helgi Þorláksson, "Iceland and the Kings of Norway in the Middle Ages," in *Networks in the Medieval North: Studies in Honour of Jón Viðar Sigurðssoni,* ed. Ben Allport, Rosalind Bonté, and Hans Jacob Orning, 165-187 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 166, 183.

[98] The shift to foreign ships did not mean the end of Icelandic participation in trade, Icelanders continued to be active in trade: owning stock in trade ships, hired to work on trade voyages, shipping their own goods abroad themselves, but the ships were also a means of transportation to/from the continent. Steinar Imsen, *The Norwegian Dominance and the Norse World c.1100-c.1400*, (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2010), 25; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, "The Norse Community," 63, 69; Stephen Pax Leonard, "Social Structures and Identity in Early Iceland," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 6 (2010), 148-150.

[99] 1 mark = 8 ounces, 1 ounce = 6 ells or 3 *örtug*. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga* I (Reykjavik: Almenna bókafélagið, 1956), 396.

[100] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 511.

[101] The Icelandic sheep was a North European short-tail breed, noted for its dual coat (staple of long, coarse, outer *tog* fibres and short, fine, inner *þel* fibres), variable colours, short-tail; compare the Southern European sheep, which

environment and transhumant pastoral agricultural practices, with settlements concentrated in the more fertile coastal areas and using the nearby homefields for fodder and outlying land for seasonal grazing—cattle and sheep intensive—but increasingly coastal regions too over the mid-thirteenth to early-fourteenth centuries with the increasing importance of fishing.[102] Multigenerational and extrafamilial households[103] provided a surplus of exploitable labour for cheap cloth production, and the seasonal fluctuations of farming suited textile by-work on a household-provisioning scale; the household was the site of textile production and different stages involved all members that varied by gender, age, and social status, at the different stages of production.[104] These factors contributed to the domination of wool as the main type of fibre for textile needs.[105]

Vaðmál woollen cloth was a continuation of a culturally Norse custom in a new environment, applying and expanding their known textile culture, production techniques, and animal husbandry practices to a new home which was better suited to sheep husbandry. *Vaðmál* as fabric and currency thus shows settlers maintaining textile traditions of and cultural connections to their homeland. *Vaðmál* played a more significant role as commodity currency in Iceland than Norway, however, it was an important good traded there as well. Acclimatization to a changed environment enabled woollen cloth to fulfill the demand for clothing and a commodity currency

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had longer tails, were larger, and generally whiter in colour. Skin and fleeces were also valued as export products and for parchment but are more by-products than determinants for breeding strategies. Steven Hartman, *et.al.*, "Medieval Iceland, Greenland, and the New Human Condition: A Case Study in integrated environmental humanities," *Global and Planetary Change* 156 (2017), 130, 133-4; Jón Haukur Ingimundarson, "Of Sagas and Sheep," PhD dissertation (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1995), 56, 58.

[102] Farming strategies for the use of sheep for milk and meat products versus wool products from the Icelandic sheep fluctuated over time in response to social and economic needs, climate changes in cold periods *c.*1200 to 1300, volcanic eruptions and disease which affected animal and human mortality rates, and a shift from freehold farms towards tenancy for small farmers who depended on sheep for meat and milk and wool for eating but also for clothing. Ulf Sporrong, "The Scandinavian Landscape and its Resources," in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, vol. 1, ed. Knut Helle, 13-42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22-3, 34; William R. Short, *Icelanders in the Viking Age* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), 9, 11; Bernadette McCooey, *Farming Practices in Medieval Iceland,* PhD dissertation (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2017), 29.

[103] A household was typically a married couple, children, extended family members, slaves, servants, or other farm workers, with exceptions to this norm. All people were legally required to be tied to a household (*lögfastr*), as a family member or farm labourers in year-long work contracts, with a few exceptions for poor who moved between the commune's households for board and lodging.

[104] Steven Hartman, *et.al.*, "Medieval Iceland, Greenland, and the New Human Condition," 128.

[105] Flax was likely originally cultivated in Iceland but imports likely helped to meet linen needs; imported cloth included linen and luxury cloth like silk, but the need for ordinary cloth far exceeded the economic viability of large import quantities. Wool was the best option for a native fibre source to meet cloth needs as it was well-suited to Iceland's environment, demography, and low-labour, high-yield farming strategy: highland summer grazing and wintering in home pastures and the long summer days used for hay making and outdoor work and short winter days for wool processing and work indoors or close to the home-farm. Wool processing is labour intensive but is counter-balanced against labour availability and wool work's suitability as by-work done in between or alongside their other responsibilities, such as food preparation, milking, and childcare.

and trade good in Iceland in the medieval period, and had important cultural, economic, social, and environmental impacts on Icelandic society. Examining *vaðmál*'s role and its webs of relations with various arenas of within society shows that it played an active role in the development of a successful medieval society. Next, it is necessary to discuss how other scholars have understood *vaðmál* and its function in medieval Icelandic society.

Literature Review

The study of *vaðmál* is not new and prior scholars have researched on the importance of this cloth in Icelandic history. This section will review prior research on *vaðmál,* and the body of research outlined here acts as a foundation for further research in the study of *vaðmál*, especially the works of Helgi Þorláksson, Elsa E. Guðjónsson, Marta Hoffman, Nanna Damsholt, and Michèle Hayeur Smith. Some have looked at *vaðmál*'s place within textile culture, others have looked at its economic significance, and others have demonstrated its impact on women's roles and responsibilities. This study aims to add to this body of research in its exploration of the meaning and function of *vaðmál* in its medieval context by demonstrating the different types of value *vaðmál*'s meaning and function can communicate: material properties, aesthetics and display, fungibility, social objects, and expensive and exclusivity in textile production and trade.

Vaðmál has been part of Iceland's textile heritage for centuries as a common type of woven fabric used for cloth and clothing, and thus it understandably has been included in studies of textile history and women's production of cloth: especially note the works of Hildur Hákonardóttir, Halldóra Bjarnadóttir, Hrefna Róbertsdóttir, and Anita Sauckel for Icelandic textile heritage and for more general Norse studies see the works of Ingvild Øye, Else Østergård, Lise Bender Jørgensen, Ulla Mannering, Eva Andersson Strand, Christina Petty, and Ben Cartwright.[106]

[106] Hildur Hákonardóttir, *et.al*, *The Warp-Weighted Loom-Kljásteinavefstaðurinn-Oppstaveven* (Hordaland: Skald forlag, 2016); Halldóra Bjarnadóttir, *Vefnaður á íslenzkum heimilum á 19. öld og fyrri hluta 20. aldar* (Hafnafjörður: Bókaútgáfa menningarsjóðs og þjóðinafélagsins, 1966); Hrefna Róbertsdóttir, *Wool and Society: Manufacturing Policy, Economic Thought and Local Production in 18th-century Iceland* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2008); Anita Sauckel, "Silk, Settlements, and Society in Íslendingasögur," in *Social Norms in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Morawiec *et al.*, 35-50 (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019); Ingvild Øye, "Tools and Textile Production in the North Atlantic," In *Shetland and the Viking World: Proceedings of the 17th Viking Congress,* ed. V. Turner *et al.*, 245-250 (Lerwick: Shetland Heritage Publishings, 2016); Ingvild Øye, *Tracing textile production from the Viking Age to the Middle Ages: tools, textiles, texts and contexts* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2022); Else Østergård, *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland*. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2004); Lise Bender Jørgensen, *North European Textiles until AD 1000* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992); Ulla Mannering, *Iconic Costumes: Scandinavian Late Iron Age Costume Iconography.* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017); Eva Andersson Strand, "Tools and textiles—production and organisation in Birka and Hedeby," in *Viking*

Elsa E. Guðjónsson has been one of the most crucial researchers of Icelandic textiles, for a range of textile types, tools, and production techniques including *vaðmál*, spinning, weaving, and the warp-weighted loom. She studied reconstructions of the warp-weighted loom, in consultation with weavers, and provides detailed images and descriptions of the loom and its individual parts with Icelandic and English terms, an especially significant contribution as these looms rarely have survived, none from the medieval period, and also for including the perspective of experienced weaver.[107] Elsa discusses spinning in Iceland, including the older method using the drop-spindle (*haldasnælda*), a key process in textile production.[108] She deconstructs the weaving done by valkyries in the eleventh-century skaldic poem *Darraðarljóð* from *Njála saga*, comparing the poem to parts of the Icelandic warp-weighted loom, focussing on the shed rod (*yllir*, also *skilskaft*) which she argues was used for weaving the twill *vaðmál* cloth, that the poem is describing the actual process of weaving.[109] She analyzed shaggy-pile woven cloth (*röggvarfeldr*) in her examination of two fragments, looking at the methods of construction, examining the specific weave, spin direction and twist of the yarn, materials, and method of pile insertion, while also comparing them to the written sources on *vararfeldr* and other named woollen cloth in the medieval sources, but also to other contemporary pile fabrics and arguing for the unique place of the specific Icelandic pile-weave construction.[110] Elsa E. Guðjónsson wrote many other key works on textiles and especially embroidery, more recently the posthumous *Með verkum handanna* stems from her years of work on medieval Icelandic embroideries.[111] Key works have highlighted here, but her work laid the foundation for studies in textiles in Icelandic history; as regards *vaðmál*, her

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Settlements and Viking Society Papers from the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Viking Congress, ed. Svavar Sigmundsson 16-23, (Reykjavík and Reykholt: University of Iceland Press, 2009); Christina Petty, "Warp Weighted Looms: Then and Now Anglo-Saxon and Viking Archaeological Evidence and Modern Practitioners", PhD Thesis (Manchester: The University of Manchester, 2014); Ben Cartwright, "Making the Cloth that Binds Us. The Role of Textile Production in Producing Viking Age Identities," in *Viking Worlds: Things, Spaces and Movement*, ed. Eriksen *et al.*, 160-178. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014). More recently, see also the *Fashioning the Viking Age* project run by Eva Andersson Strand *et al.*; more information and publications at https://natmus.dk/historisk-viden/forskning/forskningsprojekter/fashioning-the-viking-age/.

[107] Elsa E. Guðjónsson, "Some Aspects of the Icelandic Warp-Weighted Loom, *Vefstaður*." *Textile History* 21, 2 (1900): 165-179.

[108] Elsa E. Guðjónsson, "Um rokka, einkum með tilliti til skotrokka," *Árbók Hins íslenzka fornleifafélags,* 88 (1991): 11-52.

[109] Elsa E. Guðjónsson, "Jarnvarðr Yllir: A Fourth Weapon of the Valkyries in *Darraðarljóð*? *Textile History* 20, 2 (1989), 185, 186, 193. See also Ingibjörg Eyþórsdóttir's MA dissertation on this poem, "Darraðarljóð—gluggi til annarra heima: Galdur, seiður, leiðsla eða sýn?"

[110] Elsa E. Guðjónsson, "Forn röggvarvefnaður."

[111] Elsa E. Guðjónsson, *Traditional Icelandic Embroidery* (Reykjavík: Iceland Review, 1985) and *Með verkum handanna: Íslenskur refilsaumur fyrri alda,* ed. Lilja Árnadóttir, Mördur Arnason, trans. Anna Yates (Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands, 2023).

work is essential for understanding the practices of and tools involved in the different stages of production and tools, and changes over time.

Marta Hoffman's 1964 work *The Warp-weighted Loom* is a seminal work including information on *vaðmál* and textile production in the Nordic area. It compares living to past societies' weaving traditions for information on the warp-weighted loom, which had previously been primarily focussed on looms in classical antiquity, and discusses the tools and loom types used in cloth weaving and terminology for techniques and tools in different languages. Hoffman's work relies on the skills and knowledge of modern weavers, using traditional equipment instead of modern, to fill in gaps in the technical knowledge of warp-weighted-loom-weaving that museum looms and written sources could never fill, in addition to medieval literature and documentary evidence.[112] She adopted the approach that "a study of popular tradition and of existing looms of the old type can greatly increase an understanding of the textile production of much older periods," applying living knowledge to information on the past.[113] She also provides detailed information on *vaðmál*'s definition in terms of types and rules of production and compares it to medieval European guild regulations for such cloth, placing Iceland's regulation within a greater contemporary context and questions link between these two different types of communities and weaving styles.[114] She notes certain peculiarities of the Icelandic warp-weighted loom, versus other countries', in the adopted *meiðmar* and *lokuþollar*, which may have been the outcome of the change to the standard of the twenty-ell length, a change she argues was likely stimulated by European competition with the horizontal loom's capability to weave longer lengths (up to 60 ells).[115] Hoffman's work is essential for understanding practices in weaving and innovation in use of the warp-weighted loom and the products that it could weave, drawing on both practical information from weaver's and descriptions of the loom's use in the nineteenth century, but also from archaeological information from textile remains and written evidence of its use and regulation, especially in Iceland. The work is dated, as it was written in 1963, but remains valuable as it relies on a lifetime of work and laid the groundwork for today's textile scholars who have the advantage of advancements in scientific methods (isotope analyses, SEM microscopic, etc.) and new finds; much of her work still stands.

[112] Marta Hoffman, *The Warp-Weighted Loom*, 1-2, 7.
[113] *Ibid,* 13.
[114] *Ibid,* 15.
[115] *Ibid*, 197-98.

Nanna Damsholt has also contributed to the understanding of *vaðmál* as an important economic product, particularly emphasizing the role of women in its production when looking for explanations for "strong women." This stems from tenets of second-wave feminism and its push for female representation, including looking for powerful women equal to men or acting like men, including the work of Ólafía Einarsdóttir in highlighting the stronger position of Icelandic women relative to European women before the institutionalization of the Church in Iceland, particularly as housewives.[116] In a summary of *vaðmál*'s production and its social context, Nanna argues that the images of women in the thirteenth-century sagas were a way for its authors to impose an image of a golden age of the landowning women of prior centuries who were held in higher esteem than in their own time with the church's restrictions on women, describing a golden age that eventually disintegrated. Damsholt uses the position of women in cloth production and the supervisory role of housewives in *vaðmál*'s production, in addition to other advantages that higher status housewives held, to argue for greater economic rights and freedom of movement for these women, compared to those of lower status and other Nordic countries.[117]

Jenny Jochens,[118] Judith Jesch,[119] and Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir[120] have written important works on the history of women and their lives and work in medieval Iceland as evidenced by a range of written sources. These works have largely look at textiles as a female-produced product. Jenny Jochens especially looks at the everyday life of women, emphasizing the role of the housewife, the importance of *vaðmál* economy to Iceland, notes the important role of women in the production of *vaðmál.*

The most significant scholar of *vaðmál* studies is Helgi Þorláksson, who has written critical works on the important role of *vaðmál* in domestic and international trade.[121] *Vaðmál og verðlag* is the seminal work on *vaðmál*, examining the importance of cloth exports from Iceland to Norway in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, examining it in terms of value and prices, querying to whom such trade would have been important, and asking why it would have been in demand in

[116] Ólafía Einarsdóttir, "Staða kvenna á þjóðveldisöld: Hugleiðingar í ljósi samfélagsgerðar og efnahagskerfis," *Saga* 22, 1 (1984): 7-30.
[117] Nanna Damsholt, "The Role of Icelandic Women in the Sagas and in the Production of Homespun Cloth," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 9, 2 (1984): 76-77, 80, 86, 90.
[118] Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1991), *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).
[119] Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991).
[120] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020).
[121] Helgi Þorláksson, "Gráfeldir á gullöld og voðaverk kvenna," *Vaðmál og verðlag.*

Norway. It focuses on economic value, looking at its trade and fluctuations in prices, and it draws on the saga literature, documentary sources, but also later accounts as well, including the *Búalög* collection of prices and wages. The work includes research on the changing prices of domestic goods and standards of value, controls on prices and price fixing, outlines the different characteristics and types of *vaðmál*, the production and use of *vaðmál* whether it was for self-subsistence or extensive for export, export and foreign traders in Iceland from the British Isles and Norway and that Norway's ability to produce their own woollen cloth for export was limited by their environment, and *vaðmál*'s competition with other cloth. He argues that *vara* was dominate in trade in the thirteenth century, produced for merchants, and *hafnarvaðmál* (finer and wider at 2.5 ells) became significant alongside *vara* in the fourteenth century, but the trade in *vara* ended *c.*1350 and became more relevant domestically, whereas in the fifteenth century the term *hafnarvaðmál* disappears and *gjaldavaðmál* dominates *vaðmál* payments in the fifteenth century. References to ells made before 1400 likely refer to instances of *vara* cloth in exchange, but later references only refer to it as a unit of account. He also notes that trade was probably quite fixed before 1250, never more than a third of what could be produced in the country, and people would have known how much they needed for payments and produced only how much they needed; stored cloth would have been limited due to demands for use of the cloth (wherein it would be consumed and thus removed from the circuit) and for new cloth, but some would likely be saved for travel funds. Prices would have been fixed by those in power, and *vara* was standardized in the twelfth and thirteenth century, and higher quality *hafnarvaðmál* by weight in the fourteenth, but in the fourteenth century there was a decline in prices due to internal reasons of changes in work customs, higher internal demand for the cloth, and to do with demand for fish and butter and other foodstuffs for higher prices, but mostly *vara* disappeared from trade because of its impracticality as foreign export currency, only acting as a unit of account for fixing prices of other products, at the end of the fourteenth century. Iceland was largely self-sufficient and had fixed or stable rules in domestic trade as reflected in price ratios, production was rather fixed and in tight restrictions. He argues foreign trade had a limited impact on wool farming and production, even though this was the main export, but *vaðmál* production was significant for domestic needs and impacted agriculture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[122] Helgi Þorláksson revisits this work on the key role of *vaðmál* in trade in the more recent work on Iceland's international trade history, *Líftaug*

[122] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 432-3, 438, 505-6, 508-9, 510.

landsins.[123] In all, this scholar's work has been influential and extensive for the study of *vaðmál*'s role in Iceland's domestic and export economy, with its fluctuating levels and prices reflecting domestic issues.

In contrast, Helgi Guðmundsson has argued that the role of *vaðmál* as export product has been overestimated in terms of its importance to medieval Icelandic society, rather that its role was used in narratives of nation-building based on the ideal of the self-sufficient medieval Icelander as the "noble savage" in the vein of nineteenth-century nationalism and that Iceland's control of the export of luxury Greenlandic and Canadian products such as walrus and narwhal ivory (naming these places the "El Dorado" and "Klondike" of the time) were more significant. His reasoning is that the "high-culture" that developed in Iceland could never have come out of these conditions and the limitations of *vaðmál* trade—with fears of the danger of waterlogged cloth but also the low-status nature of cloth compared to prestige goods—but rather that expensive luxury product trade suited the necessary wealth accumulation and close contact with foreign nations that was more appropriate for building "the high-culture" unique to Iceland compared to other North Atlantic islands and tributaries.[124] This work emphasizes the advantages that high-value, low volume luxury trade had over low-status trade, but ignores the possibility of wealth accumulation from high-quantity bulk trade but also the material advantages of *vaðmál* cloth for export goods.

Michèle Hayeur-Smith has written several articles and a book which highlights her research on the anthropological and archaeological aspects of *vaðmál*, gender, and textile production in medieval and early modern Iceland.[125] Her inclusion of studying textile fragments has been beneficial to the study of *vaðmál*, revealing information on the actual use of this cloth in medieval Iceland as uncovered from fragments coming from archaeological excavations and stored in the National Museum of Iceland archives. This includes fabric types, thread count ranges, and comparisons between sites and across time. Her research has been valuable for showing the homogenization in cloth production reflecting the period of standardization and peak export, moving from a variety of weave types and thread counts to a limited range and provides evidence

[123] Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins.*
[124] Helgi Guðmundsson, *Land úr landi* (Reykjavik: Háskólaútgáfan, 2002), 49, *55ff.* See *also Um haf innan: vestrænir menn og íslenzk menning á miðöldum* (Reykjavik: Háskólaútgáfan, 1997).
[125] Michèle Hayeur Smith, *The Valkyries' loom*, "Vaðmál and Cloth Currency in Viking and Medieval Iceland," "Weaving wealth," "Thorir's bargain," "Some in Rags and Some in Jags and Some in Silken Gowns," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 16 (2012), 509-528.

of the influence of Celtic women among Norwegian-dominate culture of the settlers.[126] She argues that women held a significant, understated role in society through the weaving of this wealth.

This project seeks to add to this body of information but differs in that it looks at the additional values that the cloth could hold in society from to its monetary nature and cloth functions. These two meaning are irreconcilable from each other and impact its use and understanding in society, showing that the cloth material and design serves to complement its nature as an economic product, useful for emigrant community that had limited access to silver and a greater capacity for sheep husbandry than their ancestral homelands, which offers an explanation for why cloth played a more significant role as commodity currency in Iceland than Norway. *Vaðmál* reflects the work of many levels of society through production and exchange and facilitated inter- and intra-societal connections, from individual farms to communities of practice and law to secular and ecclesiastical institutions. This is then reflected in the five distinct functions of this cloth currency's use, as discussed in the theoretical framework.

Overview

The following describes the structure of the manuscript. It begins with the introductory material discussed. The three body chapters look at how *vaðmál* functioned and is organized by its functions as cloth, money, and simultaneously cloth-money. It ends with a concluding chapter of what these functions reveal about value and desirability in medieval Icelandic society.

Chapter One explores *vaðmál* as cloth. The first part examines its function as clothing, valued for its material properties being made of wool. It looks at examples in the law codes, the *Sturlunga* compilation, the *Íslendingasögur*, and documentary sources which reference cloth and clothing using the term *vaðmál* or related terminology that demonstrate *vaðmál* as the material used for clothing that aids the wearer in a task or is suited to the context. These expressions of textile function are analyzed for what they express about medieval conceptualization of *vaðmál* as a textile, wool as suited to the lifestyle and activities of a farming society living in an environment often cool and harsh. The second part looks at *vaðmál* in an aesthetic clothing function, visualizing messages of identity and status in the written sources. It looks at examples mainly from the law codes and saga material which reference cloth and clothing using the term *vaðmál* and the contexts

[126] Michèle Hayeur Smith, "Weaving wealth," 28.

of use that use this cloth to demonstrate messages of status and social position. These expressions of this function of textiles are analyzed for what they tell about the medieval authors exhibiting as social mores and status symbols, and how this represents a certain message of everyday and ordinary life.

Chapter Two looks at *vaðmál* functioning as money in its role as measure of value and commodity currency in the economic system. It looks at examples found in the law codes, the *Sturlunga* compilation, the *Íslendingasögur*, and documentary sources which reference an explicit monetary function, an economic or measure-of-stuff understanding. These expressions of this function of textiles as money are analyzed for what these transactions tell us about what medieval society valued, both economically and socially, and about resources and how society adapted to and used their environments, but also what these transactions tell about organization of society and then relationships between different sectors of society.

Chapter Three examines the irrevocably cloth and monetary aspects of *vaðmál*, having an additional extra-economic function as social objects and trade goods. The first part looks at *vaðmál* functioning as a social object creating or upholding social connections between families and allies, cloth acting in socially significant exchanges that impact the perception and position of the giver and receiver in the exchange or connect the owner to important persons in their society or the past. It looks at examples from a range of sources including law codes, the family sagas, the contemporary sagas, and annals and documents. These expressions of this function of textiles demonstrate how material objects such as cloth can create relationships between people and between people and objects, affecting relationships, influencing social position, and leaning on the reputation of other significant people to build one's own position in society. The second part looks at *vaðmál* functioning as an exclusive and expensive object, something that is used to distinguish people from others and to support the dynamics of power and authority in society but also examines how regulation at the production stage helps to create an exclusive object and particularly discusses gendered relations of production and consumption. It looks at examples from the law codes, *Sturlunga* compilation, the *Íslendingasögur,* and some documentary sources which reference how *vaðmál* was the main export commodity, legally standardized and used to facilitate the movement of other goods, people, and ideas in and outside of Iceland. These expressions of this textile function as cloth commodity are analyzed for what they tell about trade, cloth and material culture trends in medieval Europe, and how people were able to build a reputation and wealth inside and

outside of Iceland through the accumulation and export of this cloth currency, in addition to the impact of textile technology culture on society and what informal regulation of cloth production can tell us about the collaboration and interaction of different members of medieval Icelandic society.

As these five functions demonstrate both a cloth and monetary function, these two meaning are often conflated and cannot necessarily be distinguished from each other; as cloth and money it is a tangible item reflecting an abstract concept. These examples examined here from the law codes, the *Sturlunga* compilation, the *Íslendingasögur*, and documentary sources demonstrate how the term *vaðmál* can represent a cloth at various points in a textile's life cycle, from loom to sale-cloth to use in clothing, including references of physical cloth being used as money in a moment of exchange, but cloth with intended future non-economic use. These examples are analyzed for what desires they engender in terms of material properties and standards of value, that there may be multiple values acting simultaneously. Thus, these ideas will be gathered in the concluding section which is a discussion analyzing the patterns of *vaðmál* function across the five chapters. It ends with addressing any problems with the outcome of the study, and highlights areas for future research.

Conclusion

Vaðmál was produced and used in Iceland over several centuries and had a dynamic life as cloth and currency, as is seen in the use of various terms and prefixes used in accounts of *vaðmál* and its fluctuating values as a commodity currency. It began as a simple, domestically produced and used homespun cloth, but this meaning became more complex and specifically defined as it became used as a commodity currency and trade good but was also produced and used in Iceland into the early modern period. It is beneficial to have a flexible, comprehensive definition of *vaðmál,* looking at temporal changes and differences according to the time of source material, to account for development, use, alteration, and abandonment over its long life as an important fibre material, commodity currency, and export product—reflecting fluctuations in importance and use for local cloth needs and role in export economy under varying terminology, reflecting the material evidence in the archaeological record that demonstrates currency-type cloth before it was legally

standardized,[127] reflecting changing terms for the same or different types of *vaðmál* and even anachronistic ones in written sources accounting events of long past, and reflecting the dynamic nature of textiles themselves that have stages of use that can occur concurrently or in an asynchronous manner.

Thus, this project adopts an inclusive understanding of *vaðmál*, combining the two definitions—the legal definition of new and unused cloth currency, two ells broad, and with a relatively consistent width along its length, with technical definition of 2/2 twill, z/s spun, and a thread count of 4-5 warp threads per centimetre—to include both aspects of *vaðmál*, commodity currency measure and material object. *Vaðmál* was a simple, woven wool twill cloth that was made in the home and functioned both materially as fabric but also nonmaterially as a commodity currency and measure of value that could be used in domestic economic transactions and as an exported trade good. This cloth has different names, uses, purposes, and meanings at different stages of its life, but also can hold multiple meanings at the same time.

The definition and meaning of *vaðmál* is complicated and leads to the question of whether we can view the two meanings of cloth and money as separate or simultaneous. Did the medieval use of the word *vaðmál* infer either cloth or money, both at the same time, or exclude one in favour of the other in specific contexts? This question guides this thesis and is to be kept in mind; it is useful for structuring our frame of mind and approach. It will be dealt with later in the next chapters which examines the specific uses of the term *vaðmál* and its cognates, moving from its meaning as cloth to its meaning as money and ending with the amalgamated meaning as both cloth and money and what that tells us about the varied functions and values applied to *vaðmál*.

[127] Excavations at Ketilsstaðir revealed such a textile, thought to be apron straps. Michèle Hayeur Smith, Kevin P. Smith & Karin M. Frei, "Tangled up in Blue': The Death, Dress and Identity of an Early Viking-Age Female Settler from Ketilsstaðir, Iceland," *Medieval Archaeology* 63, no. 1 (2019): 110.

Chapter 1: *Vaðmál* as Material and Aesthetic Cloth

As a textile, *vaðmál* reflects the people of medieval Iceland provisioning for themselves as this society was self-sufficient in terms of making their own clothing out of *vaðmál*, in a range of fine to coarse wool fabric (in addition to linen fabric, with flax believed to have been grown until *c.*1110).[128] Settlers were able to take their cultural traditions of clothing technology and production and transfer it to the to the Icelandic environment. The result was *vaðmál* cloth as the dominant type of cloth produced and used locally, valued for the material nature of the cloth itself.

Cloth descriptions are not a major component of the Icelandic saga literature, and when it is included it is often for a specific purpose, often to give a sense of a person beyond their explicit actions, such as indicating status or personality, providing "visual and tactile information for the reader, … infusing their text with greater sensory impact and giving their readers a fuller experience."[129] For the medieval period, it is often used to describe luxurious and splendid garments to emphasize the status of nobility, but was also used in the opposite sense to infer a sense of "satire, irony, or ambivalence" onto the characters described.[130] As *vaðmál* was wool fabric and could be of varying qualities, narratives which included identifiers that indicate wool or *vaðmál* material usually did so for the purpose of situating a character in a specific context and would thus show what was considered culturally appropriate clothing for certain circumstances or for was used for characterization of identity and status.

The first part of this chapter addresses how medieval Icelanders were able to produce wool cloth that was able to shelter the body by covering it as clothing or as cloth by protecting it against harsh environmental conditions (*i.e.,* rain, cold, wind) or protect body parts in certain work conditions (*i.e.*, extreme cold or heat), which is also important in a society that had a lot of movement of people all over the country (between farms for labourers on moving days, for priests and bishops travelling for services, visiting parishioners and churches, and scribal work, and for people travelling for (*al*)*þing* meetings, between landholdings, and visiting family and friends).[131]

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[128] Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins*, 38. A recent study of the Icelandic church embroideries has argued that it is possible that both flax and hemp were grown and processed in medieval Iceland, maybe for linen textile purposes. Git Skoglund, Jenni Suomela, Krista Wright, "Icelandic church embroideries on flax and hemp linen," *Fornvännen* 119, 1 (2024), 282.
[129] Monica L. Wright, "Literary Representations," in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Medieval Age,* ed. Sarah-Grace Heller, 159-172 (Bloomsbury, 2018), 159.
[130] *Ibid*, 160, 161.
[131] Gröemer, *The Art of Prehistoric Textile Making*, 428-9; Stefán Karlsson, "The Localisation and Dating of Medieval Icelandic Manuscripts," *Saga-Book* 25 (1998-2001), 140.

This is seen in examples that indicate wool clothing worn for activities that take place outside, as Iceland has a variable climate that is inclined to windy, cold, and wet weather, and this is especially illustrated in examples with *söluváð* cloth used for clothing in wet and rainy conditions.

The second part of this chapter addresses how medieval Icelanders were able to produce wool cloth that projected internal and external aesthetic meanings to the cloth(ing) worn and used by medieval Icelanders. These literary representations of aesthetic *vaðmál* cloth were intended to project messages about their individual and group identities in terms of age, status, gender, and ethnicity. This is seen in examples of decorative and descriptive cloth(ing) which visually communicate status, style, beauty, and personality, presenting themselves to their peers, readers, and world but also to appeal to the senses in expressions of aesthetical beauty but also represent everyday life in medieval Iceland.

This chapter aims to attest the material cloth aspect of *vaðmál,* without the economic measure of value. It will show the practical, material value of this cloth which was necessary for it to hold economic value. In addition, it will demonstrate *vaðmál*'s impact beyond the economy into medieval Icelandic society and culture in terms of how people dressed themselves but also beautify themselves and their surroundings and what standards there might have been for this. By doing so, the examples discussed below will show how medieval Icelanders were able to subsist and prosper in their environment, taking advantage of available natural, technological, and social resources to develop their society, build social status, and differentiate between themselves as individuals.

Part 1. Value in the Material Properties of Wool *Vaðmál*

Vaðmál is cloth and this includes fabric for clothing. One can imagine there are numerous ways that a piece of fabric can be used to cover or warm a body, but some examples of explicitly stated *vaðmál* mentioned in the source material indicate tangible, physical cloth, and no expressed economic or cloth-measure meaning inferred beyond the use of the word of *vaðmál*, as cloth for household use or cloth that has transitioned out of the trade cycle back into the household for domestic use. Cloth acts here in Harris' material function as cloth and clothing that covered and clothed people and that was desired for its physical and technical qualities which suit the

environment and needs of society in their everyday life activities, in terms of a native cloth source.[132]

Vaðmál was desired for the technical properties of wool as fibre and as woven material.[133] The wool of the Icelandic sheep is dual layered, with the staple having long, coarse, outer *tog* fibres and short, fine, inner *þel* fibres, and a high lanolin (fat) content, with the *tog* providing durability and strength to spun fibres,[134] the *þel* helping to insulate,[135] and the lanolin and bulky fibre providing water resistance to woven fabric, but also natural moisture and odour wicking properties, soil resistance that allows the fabric to be worn longer in between washes,[136] and flame resistance,[137] and is comfortable enough to wear next to skin.[138] *Vaðmál* cloth was also fulled (cleaned and then beaten) after weaving, which makes the cloth shrink slightly and results in a denser cloth. These practical elements link the material, tangible qualities of woollen cloth to its value as wool fabric suitable to meet clothing and cloth needs in a wet, cool medieval Icelandic environment.

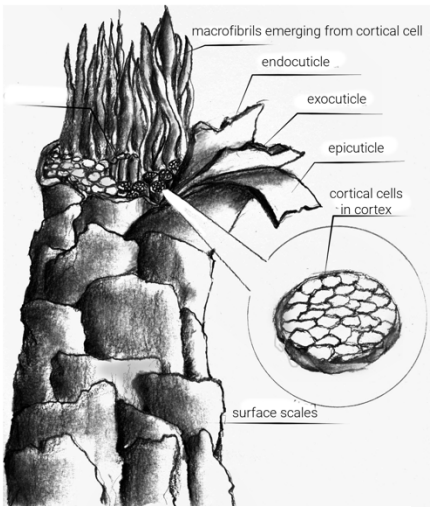

Figure 3: Microscopic structure of wool fibre

Source: Ogodej, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons; text translated

The descriptions of *vaðmál*'s use as cloth and clothing in this chapter demonstrate how wool's technical properties show its value via its function of sheltering and warming bodies.[139] Wool cloth provided warm, protective, water-resistant clothing that suited every day life plus the outside work of seafaring and fishing societies of Iceland and the North Atlantic, and the places to which it would have been exported, and for travelling in cold, wet, or stormy weather, and in

[132] Susanna Harris, "From Value to Desirability," 684-85.
[133] *Ibid,* 682-83.
[134] It provides elasticity, flexibility, and resistance for the cloth to withstand and retain shape despite stretching, bending, compression.
[135] The high bulk of fibres allows to retain body heat even when wet.
[136] It has self-cleaning properties due to keratin proteins.
[137] It has a high ignition point, low rate of flame spread, and self-extinguishes. This is seen in woollen cloth that burns clean when submitted to a burn test.
[138] Compare these characteristics to other fabrics: silk or cotton fabrics do not hold up to wet or sweat-producing situations as well as wool or linen (representing the four main pre-modern fabric types), as silk stains easily and cotton retains odour and wetness.
[139] Susanna Harris, "Smooth and cool or warm and soft, investigating the properties of cloth in prehistory," in *North European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles X,* eds. E. Andersson Strand, *et al*, 104-112 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009), 106.

general to keep the wearer warm in a cool, variable climate. Wool cloth was also used for furnishings such was wall-hangings which provided warmth by covering walls inside houses to prevent drafts or heat loss. It was also used for utilitarian-cloth purposes in people's daily tasks such as sails, tents, and sacks, but also for decorative textiles. *Vaðmál*, as cloth, fit well into the context of medieval Icelandic society, filling the need for an appropriate textile material sourced from and able to be produced from the local environment and resources while also being suited to the climate and setting of normal working conditions and daily activities.

Law codes

Grágás and *Jónsbók* law codes both include references to *vaðmál*. *Grágás* includes the regulations on what constitutes valid *vaðmál* and some for the production of cloth, but rarely refers to *vaðmál* as a piece of cloth and clothing and more often in general terms and not specifically being of wool or a type of *vaðmál*. Instead, the term is usually set in an economic and trade context, and this is especially true for references to *vararfeldr*. *Jónsbók* is similar, in that the references to *vaðmál* and its cognates are focussed on its role as measure of value and the trade aspect, rather than as cloth. This economic aspect will be discussed further in the next chpater on *vaðmál* as currency. As such, there are a few examples about *vaðmál* as pieces of cloth in the legal sources.

The term *vaðmál* appears in *Grágás* twice as cloth in a practical sense, likely so rarely because textiles were not a common concern of law codes but also because it more commonly uses more generic or specific terms for cloth when discussing a topic related to the functional nature of cloth: *klæði*, *skrúðklæði* for higher quality cloth, or other terms for clothing that imply a specific function, such as *messuföt* (liturgical vestments).[140] *Klæði*, a general term for cloth,[141] is seen in an example from the section concerning commune obligations, where *Grágás* notes that householders who pay assembly attendance dues hold obligations to support people within their commune (*hreppur*), in addition to the members of their own household and tenants, by giving tithes and food gifts. This includes the obligation to board, feed, and clothe dependants, provide them with clothing ("klæðe"),[142] and a later stipulation states vagrants were only to receive

[140] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 478, 18.
[141] Hjalmar Falk argues that *klæði* refers to foreign cloth, to be understood in opposition to locally produced cloth, but as this clause specifically stipulates linen and wool to be used for the burial practices—both fibres that were produced locally—this demonstrates a more general understanding of the term. Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde,* 50.
[142] *Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid*, vol. 2, 172.

assistance by providing them with shoes and clothing ("til scva eða til fata"), here using the term *fata* which refers to the overall costume or attire.[143] These clauses refer to cloth or clothing in a general sense rather than a particular material or type of clothing, but also do not exclude clothing made of *vaðmál*.

Vaðmál appears as a functional material object in *Grágás* in the Christian Law Section in a funerary context concerning the burial of the dead. It stipulates cloth provisions for *mortualia*, that a dead body is to be brought to church as soon as possible and there needs to be cloth provided to prepare the body for burial, likely for a shroud, and specifies *vaðmál* or linen as the fabric to be used for this (provided from the dead's property or by the man who brought the body to the church).[144] The material property makes its suited to the task; it is a readily available, local fabric that can cover the body to hide it from sight, mask smell of decomposition, and absorb bodily fluid before burial but also marks a difference from prior pagan burial practices which may have been ritualized differently by clothing the dead in clothing costumes and accoutrements rather than the simpler Christian practices of winding sheets or a shroud.

Jónsbók is like *Grágás* in that *vaðmál* references are focussed on their monetary and trade role, rather than as specific items of cloth and clothing, and references to cloth and clothing use the word *klæði*.[145] The personal rights chapter includes an examples that states charges can be laid if one pulls a hood over someone's head or if tears clothing ("hetti at hælfi manni eða rífr klæði")[146] and a similar case can be found in the chapter on theft in the stipulation that it is a forgivable offense if one mistakenly take another's clothes ("klæðum") if is the same kind or colour.[147] The tenancy chapter includes a clause that deals with the possession and management of a farm, stating that the tenant who leases a farm has the right to move into the farm when six weeks of summer have passed and is allowed to use the pasture and bring his clothing and household utensils ("föt sín og búsgögn") into the house.[148] These clauses discuss cloth as a general category and are more concerned with damage or rights to property, property that is articles of clothing noted as *föt, hetta,*

[143] *Ibid*, 178. Cleasby, 145, "fat".
[144] *Ibid*, 5. Erika Sigurdson, *The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland: The Formation of an Elite Clerical Identity*, (Boston: Brill, 2016), 116.
[145] *Jónsbók: The Laws of Later Iceland,* xv. This is to be expected, as it is an updated and amended law code greatly influenced by the earlier law code, but there are some differences (about 56% drawn from *Grágás*, according to Schulman). It is also important to note that this reflects a later period and so society, power structure, and political authority has changed.
[146] *Ibid*, 82.
[147] *Ibid,* 7.
[148] *Ibid,* 161.

and *klæði* as clothing in a general sense and does not specify (or exclude) the material from which they were made or context in which they were used.

Overall, these law codes are not concerned with presenting information about how people dressed in the past, how they used their fabric for specific purposes, or how textiles functioned in daily life. Instead, it is focussed on prescriptive regulations for different aspects of life, for obligations, duties, and responsibilities to kin, friends, and dependants, but also the protection of clothing as property; these clauses are regulations that offer comprehensive rights and obligations for clothing as property, inclusive of *any* items of clothing. On one hand, this reflects the nature of the source material, that a law code is not overly concerned with descriptive accounts of clothing and costume, but on the other hand, this might reflect the possibility that the term *vaðmál* lost its association with the use of this material for specific articles of cloth and clothing in a solely sartorial function and instead has been integrated into medieval Icelandic authors' mentality to represent solely commodity currency or trade-goods, an understanding of *vaðmál* which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Samtíðarsögur

The contemporary sagas include some examples of fabric in a functional sense as cloth and clothing, but rarely naming *vaðmál* specifically. *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* mentions that, in 1210 in the West Fjords, Ámundr and his wife were working in a hayfield, him scything and her raking, while she was also carrying and breastfeeding their infant "reifabarn," with *reifar* being the swaddling-clothes used to wrap an infant.[149] While this account does not specify the material, in contrast, an *Íslendingasögur* example below does include swaddling made of specific material, *vaðmál* or sealskin, which could be considered as a possibility for this context as well.

Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar tells that when his ship had been wrecked near Hornstrandir in the West Fjörds in a storm in 1186, Bishop Guðmundr Arason needed assistance to leave the ship since he had been injured and he was lowered off the grounded ship with a length of *vaðmál* ("láta síga Guðmund ofan í vaðmáli fyrir borð").[150] This is clearly a piece of cloth and

[149] "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar," *Sturlunga saga*, vol. 2, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, 230-245 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2010), 919. Cleasby, 490. Related to *reifar*, "cloth in which an infant is wrapped," likely from *rífa* for rip or tear, and infers a root in strips of cloth that are wound, or cloth reused for wrapping around the infant. "reifar," *Íslensk orðsifjabók*. https://ordsifjabok.arnastofnun.is/faersla/14965/faersla

[150] "Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar," *Sturlunga saga*, vol. 1., ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, 100-22, 171-74, 176-80, 196-209 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2010), 113.

does not describe an article of clothing, however, this might be considered part of an economic context because this cloth was likely taken from the cargo of the ship and thus intended for export, perhaps in the twenty-ell *váð* length, but it still acting in a functional way as an explicit reference to a physical piece of cloth acting as a sling to help the injured body to be transported off the ship.

Íslendinga saga includes several terms used for cloaks or jackets that use *vaðmál* or are likely to be made from that material. Þorgils Oddason is described, at the *alþingi* in 1120, to be wearing a sealskin cloak over his byrnie and wearing trousers ("selskinnskufli yfir brynjunni utan og var gyrður í brækur").[151] *Ólpa* (or *úlpa*), a kind of outer cloak is mentioned in an account from 1230 when one of Sturla Sighvatsson's men wanted to buy a good cloak ("úlpu góða") from Bjarni, who refused to sell and instead hid it.[152] Sturla Sighvatsson is described getting prepared for battle in 1238 by dressing in a blue woollen cloak ("blárri úlpu") and a jacket with russet-flecked with sleeves ("mórendri flekku og ermar"), and a little byrnie ("litla brynju"), with the *flekka* being the innermost and the *úlpa* being the outermost garment of those listed here.[153] Here we see the term *mórent,* striped *vaðmál* which was more expensive than plain, but also clothing which could have been made of *vaðmál*, as with other examples below, and can be considered a likely material for these examples as well.

We can also see *vaðmál* used to describe clothes from an ecclesiastical context, not just secular. *Kápa* refers to a round, closed, sleeveless outer garment with a hood, noted by Falk to be worn often in the context of travelling in cold and wet weather and usually made of *vaðmál*. Priests also wore *kápa*, and the term was expanded to include ecclesiastical functions, such as for a monk's cowl or the *kantarakápa* for a canon's cloak.[154] *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar* includes an anecdote from 1200 where Snorri of Skálavík is praying to Bishop Guðmundr and a man appears in an ecclesiastical vestment, a dark *kápa*, with sprinkling vessel ("maður í kápu dökkri").[155] This cloak appears here without any description of the material from which it was made, possibly made from *vaðmál* as it was a common fabric used on ecclesiastical estates, which will be seen in the next section.

[151] "Íslendinga saga," *Sturlunga saga*, vol. 1, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2010), 29.
[152] *Ibid*, 328. Cleasby, 472.
[153] "Íslendinga saga," 417. Falk, *Altwestnordisches Kleiderkunde,* 172.
[154] Falk, *Altwestnordisches Kleiderkunde,* 185, 197. Cleasby, 334.
[155] "Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar," 180.

Other examples using generic terms are harder to read because they could refer to woollen cloth such as *vaðmál*, but also to linen or other imported cloth. *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* tells of an attack on Hrafn's farm Eyrr in 1213 when Þorvaldr killed Hrafn and ransacked the house, including stealing some cloth: cloth or clothing ("klæðum") and hangings or household textiles ("húsbúnaði"), with unspecified materials.[156] However, a raid in 1199 in *Guðmundar saga dýra* does specify the fabric stolen: Þorgrímr alikarl Vigfússon and his men stole from the farm at Leyningr linen and *vaðmál* to make some clothing for themselves ("léreft og vaðmál til klæða sér").[157] Despite this uncertainty in the meaning of terms referring to cloth in general, there are a few examples which also include the term *vaðmál*, and this supports the idea that term *vaðmál* but also more general terms can represent woollen clothing from this period, in contrast to non-woollen cloth(ing).

There are few terms describing clothing made of *vaðmál* in the *samtíðarsögur*, one *flekka* and two pieces of *vaðmál*, and instead more often uses fabric-nonspecific terms for cloth(ing) items such as *reifar*, *brækur, úlpa,* and *kápa*. This does not exclude the possibility that these items were made of *vaðmál* material, but perhaps that the conception of the term has shifted, as these sources represent a later period, but more so that the nature of these sources are different and reflect a stronger historical rather than literary narrative. They generally present a different image or understanding of the function of *vaðmál* in this later medieval society which, perhaps, may be due to a difference in intention of the authors in that they were writing a different type of saga, that they were less concerned with narrative and character descriptions, with presenting ideas of identity and projecting characters' intentions and feeling through clothing choices, than they were with describing the issues of politics, violence, and power struggles in this era. It may also be due to a greater focus on the conceptualization of *vaðmál* as a term referring to its role as commodity currency and standard of value, which shall be expounded in the second chapter when discussing *vaðmál* as cloth commodity currency.

[156] "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar," 928.
[157] "Guðmundar saga dýra," *Sturlunga saga*, vol. 1, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, 123-171, 174-76 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2010), 165.

Íslendingasögur

The *Íslendingasögur* also has a few examples of *vaðmál* as fabric, cloth which could be used to shelter the body in harsh elements of cold, wet, or bad weather, due to the usefulness of the wool fabric in that particular context and environment. Fifteenth-century *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, accounting the events of Grettir's life taking place in the eleventh century, tells of the titular character Grettir Ásmundarson hiding in a cave on Fagraskógarfjall in West Iceland after he had been outlawed. It recounts his use of a piece of grey homespun cloth ("grá vaðmáli") to cover the mouth of the cave which he uses to protect himself from the elements but also to hide from others after being condemned to outlawry for his (murderous) actions.[158] The cloth here is stated only as a piece of fabric and is not described as an article of clothing, yet it is still being used to protect Grettir's body from the environment, keeping him warm by blocking any cold wind, rain, or temperature, in addition to hiding his location as to protect his body from physical attack, as he is an outlaw outside of social protections.

Vaðmál cloth is also shown to wrap a body to warm and protect it. *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, written around the fifteenth century, includes an anecdote explaining the origin of the name Þorkell skinnvefja ("skin-swathed"). The story tells that as a baby Þorkell had been swaddled in seal skin because *vaðmál* has been hard to come by ("þar er mjök var illt til vaðmála"), indicating that in the present saga age, or time of writing, *vaðmál* had been the normal choice of cloth used by Icelanders to a swaddle baby and keep it warm.[159] This example is located in a distant, quasi-historical Norwegian past, around the ninth century, of the people of Hálogaland, but it is still useful for examining how *vaðmál* was thought to have been used in the distant past. Swaddling cloth is not an article of clothing but can be assumed to be a length or piece of cloth that would be wrapped around a small body, and that this cloth potentially could be used for other purposes as well, previous to or after its use in swaddling, as it could be old remnants of cloth or clothing that has softened after long use and would be gentle against a baby's skin as the cloth served to cover and warm the little body.

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[158] "Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar," *Íslenzk fornrit* 7, *Grettis saga,* ed. Guðni Jónsson, 1-290 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1936), 187.

[159] "Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss," *Íslenzk fornrit* 13, *Harðar saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 99-172 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991), 108. This is due to lack of sheep in the arctic where set. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "Behind the cloak, between the lines: Trolls and the symbolism of their clothing in Old Norse tradition," *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2017): 336-37.

Vaðmál is also seen in articles or assemblages of clothing that covers and warms the body, particularly noted in the *Íslendingasögur* as part of the greater accoutrement of adult aged men and is especially noted as outerwear. This is seen with another frequent item of clothing that is included in descriptions of characters' dress, the cloak (*feldr*), also known as *vararfeldr* (trade-cloak) or *röggvararfeldr* (shaggy-pile-trade-cloak).[160] While *vararfeldr* holds an economic meaning as trade good, the written sources also include examples of this material used as clothing and thus has an additional functional material role. The fourteenth-century *Kormáks saga* includes an episode of the tenth-century death of Váli of Válastaðir, near Hrútafjörðr in the West Fjords. After killing Váli at Þambardalr, Halldór and Bersi covered Váli's body with his *vaðmál* cloak ("vararfeldr") that he had been wearing, before going off to declare this killing.[161] Here, this *vaðmál* cloak had been an adult man's outerwear, but also bears a subsequent use to cover a dead body.

The term *röggvarfeldr* highlights the special addition of tufts of wool, known as piles, that imitate the look of a fur cloak.[162] The addition of these piles is aesthetic, as it is meant to look like fur, but also functional, as it increases the water-resistance and ability to keep a body warm in cold, wintry, or wet weather, and the piles have the added benefit of increasing the warmth of the cloak with additional insulation, adding an extra layer of protection from rain and wind that is lifted off the body, and having a quicker drying time than regular woollen cloth, as demonstrated by Julia Hopkin's experiments comparing plain cloth, sheepskin, fur, and pile-woven fabric.[163] *Grettis saga*

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[160] See earlier note on Falk's understanding of meaning of *feldr* and *vararfeldr* on p.22 n.68, that *feldr* also has ancient associations with fur or leather products and context is needed to see if can differentiate a cloth or animal-skin meaning. Jón Jóhannesson, on the other hand, argues that the two terms refer to the same garment, which was made for the purpose of imitating animal fur, and that they stopped being exported because Norway had sufficient supply from other sources in the north and that whole-fur cloaks and clothing went out of fashion and Icelanders shifted their export production to focus on *vaðmál* instead. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga* 1, 365. Fur continued to be in fashion for centuries, but styles changed to it being used for trimmings rather than whole garments, as seen in the trimming of royal clothing in the inventories of Swedish King Gustav I's (r. 1523-60) royal court in the sixteenth century. Cecilia Aneer, "Textile Housekeeping, Circulation and Reuse: The Swedish Royal Wardrobe as a Material Resource, c. 1540–1560," Textile History (2025), 3, 4, 8. https://doi.org/10.1080/00404969.2024.2437182.

[161] "Kormáks saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 8, *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 201-302 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1939), 263.

[162] See the recent film *The Northman* (2022) for an example of what such a cloak could have looked like in the costume of the character Fjölnir the Brotherless, when he leads the attack in Norway. Falk describes these as round cloaks of shaggy frieze, with a head-hole in the middle, and argues that they were produced to imitate fur. Falk, *Altwestnordisches Kleiderkunde,* 177.

[163] Caroline Priest-Dornan, "Trade Cloaks: Icelandic supplementary weft pile textiles," *Medieval Textiles* 28 (2001), 10. Hopkin's experimental archaeology study comparing the effects of water on *vararfeldr*, pile-woven cloth, sheepskin, and fur shows that the pile textiles were advantageous due to properties relating to drying and reusability after water saturation. They retained heat and was the most insulating when wet (comparable to the sheepskin when it was dry), dried fast (comparable to the plain fabric), and were a more effective insulator when the pile side was turned in. In addition, it had the advantage of being lighter than sheepskin and had a faster drying time while also

Ásmundarsonar describes one occasion where Grettir Ásmundarson used his cloak ("hann hafði röggvarfeld yfir sér") to cover himself while sleeping on a bench and to hide from a ghost, tucking one end under his feet and the other behind his head in order that he could see through the opening at the neck.[164] This *vaðmál* cloak functioned as Grettir's outerwear, but was also adaptable for bedding, used to cover his body when sleeping outside of a bed, which indicates the mutability of this cloth. Helgi Þorláksson has noted *vararfeldr*'s role as portable bedding for temporary rests, particularly Þorgeir Ljósavetningagoði at the *alþingi* when contemplating Christian conversion.[165]

Vaðmál clothing also served the general function of protecting the body, especially in inclement weather or wet, cold, or harsh environmental conditions. The suitability of the innate physical properties of wool is reflected in several examples that describe the clothing of saga characters who are living, travelling, or doing other activities in hazardous weather. Wool cloth is also a useful material for working clothes as it is flexible, durable, soil-resistant, and remains useful when wet. This is seen in contexts such as fishing, where the wearer is expected to get wet, and character clothing descriptions designate items made from *vaðmál* cloth, such as trousers (ON *brók*, pl. *brækr*).[166] *Finnboga saga ramma,* written in the early fourteenth century and describing the tenth century, tells of the young boy Urðarköttr (Finnbogi Ásbjarnarson) wearing *vaðmál* trousers ("söluváðarbrókum") while helping some fishermen, made by his foster mother Syrpa (the saga tells how he had been living with his foster parents at Eyrr in Flateyjardalr in North Iceland).[167] Fourteenth-century *Fljótsdæla saga* also includes descriptions of tenth-century clothing when describing a child working in *vaðmál* trousers ("söluváðarbrókum"), in addition to a shirt, hat, and gloves, wearing this costume when he is sent off to the mountains to gather the flock in preparation for a storm.[168] The term *söluváð* indicates that these trousers were made of

retaining comfort against skin, as the skin (fur and sheepskins) became rougher after drying and would therefore need to be resoftening after drying. Julia Hopkin, "Raincoats or Riches? Contextualising *vararfeldir* through multi-perspective experiments," *Archaeological Textile Review* 63 (2021), 39-40, 42.

[164] "Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar," 119. Although the *Íslenzk fornrit* editors refer to this as a fur cloak, shaggy-pile (*röggvar*) actually refers to this weaving technique of adding wool tufts and results in a fur-like appearance.

[165] Helgi Þorláksson, "Skyggnst undir feldi," *Brunnur lifandi vatns: afmælisrit til heiðurs Pétri Mikkel Jónassyni prófessor sjötugum 18. júní 1990,* ed. Guðmundur Eggertsson, 73-78 (Reykjavik: *Háskóli Íslands,* 1990), 73, 77.

[166] Falk states that shorter breeches were common in this period, worn to the knees and the lower portion of the legs would be covered with hose (*hosur*) or wrapped in bands (*vindingar*), but there were also longer breeches that went to the ankles or under the feet (*ökulbrékr, leistabrækr*). Falk, *Altwestnordisches Kleiderkunde*, 117, 118, 126.

[167] "Finnboga saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 14 *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, 251-340 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1959), 257.

[168] "Fljótsdæla saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 11, *Austfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jón Jóhanneson, 213-296 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1950), 274. These mittens could have been made from *vaðmál*, such as the pair of children's mittens sewn from 2/2 twill found at Heynes, Hvalfjarðarsveit, West Iceland in 1960 which have recently been radiocarbon

this type of *vaðmál*, which is presented as been appropriate clothing for work like fishing and sheep herding, as it was fulled to make a denser fabric. The context of use for these *vaðmál* trousers and overall costume indicates that woollen trousers were part of a suitable assemblage of clothing that would protect the wearer while fishing and while in a winter storm. They would keep the boys warm in these working conditions, despite the likelihood that they would get wet, because wool's insulating properties helps trap heat against the body and keep it warm despite being wet.

In addition to work, *vaðmál* is presented as the appropriate material for outerwear for travelling, especially in inclement weather. One example is the *kufl*, a simple, long cloak that would be the outermost garment, noted by Falk as mostly made from *vaðmál* and commonly worn by fishermen, sailors, servants, and for disguises, but we can see here also a travelling garment for chieftains as well.[169] In thirteenth-century *Brennu-Njáls saga* the chieftain Gunnar Hámundarson is described to be wearing a *kufl* on his journey westwards, noting he wore a hooded cloak ("váskufl") worn over a russet-striped tunic ("söluváðarkyrtil mórendan").[170] The *váskufl* functions to protect Gunnar from wet weather and storms while travelling. *Vararfeldr* was also useful as outerwear for outdoor travel, noted in *Fljótsdæla saga* to be worn by the brothers Helgi and Grímr Droplaugarson while outside in a winter storm, described wearing *vaðmál* cloaks ("vararfeldum") in addition to trousers ("brækr") and that the cloaks buttoned under their arms ("hnepptir að undir höndum"), also stating that the brothers normally wear this for their walking clothes.[171] These garments, *söluváð* tunic (*kyrtill*) and *vararfeldr* cloaks, function to visualize in the audience's mind that Gunnar was prepared for any weather in his travels and will protect his body in case of inclement weather and that the brothers were quite bundled up and used these articles of clothing to protect themselves in rough weather. They are useful in a practical sense as protective clothing to wear outside, due to the technical properties of wool and fulled *söluvað* that keeps the wearer warm even while wet, in their noneconomic purpose as items of clothing meant to keep a body warm and protected when outside in the natural elements including rain and stormy weather.

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dated to 925-1030 CE. Charlotte Rimstad, *et al.,* "Icelandic mittens from archaeological contexts," *Archaeological Textiles Review* 66 (2024), 53-53.

[169] Falk, *Altwestnordisches Kleiderkunde*, 166.

[170] "Brennu-Njáls saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 12, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1954), 59.

[171] "Fljótsdæla saga," 294.

Vaðmál is also noted as clothing to be worn for swimming in the frigid ocean water. *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* includes two episodes where Grettir dons *vaðmál* swimming clothes. In the first instance, in Staðr, Norway, Grettir takes off his clothes ("klæðum") and puts on a cloak with *söluváð* trousers ("í kufl einn klæða ok söluváðarbrækr") before swimming. In the second, at the island of Drangey in North Iceland, Grettir puts on a *vaðmál* cloak and girded his clothes in his belt ("söluváðarkufl ok gyrðr í brækr") before swimming.[172] These articles of clothing are clearly functioning as clothing, being used to warm the body while in frigid waters and serves no economic function despite the use of the term *söluváð*—perhaps also demonstrating the post-sale, practical aspect of cloth currency or trade goods used by a consumer—but rather illustrating the beneficial use of this fulled fabric in rainy and wet context.

Wool cloth like *vaðmál* was used to produce sails, a key utilitarian textile throughout the period under study, first in the age of Norse exploration, raiding, and trading including the transport of settlers to Iceland and then continued throughout the medieval period with the important role of the ship on the sea-road across the North Atlantic and along the coasts of Norway.[173] Ships and seafaring were a constant importance to the economy and politics in the maneuvering of local Norwegian nobles and rulers, defence in foreign relations, and interactions with North Atlantic allies and tributaries, but also with the movement of goods and people. Sails would have varied in terms of size of ships (*knorr, langskip,* cog, etc.) and appearance (fibre material, colour, stripes, etc.) but wool cloth was a key component for Scandinavian and particularly Norwegian ships, as heavy, greased wool cloth was suited to rough sea conditions of the North Atlantic.[174] *Konungs skuggsjá,* a speculum literature dealing with politics and morality, tells of the practice of using *vaðmál* for sails, in a dialogue of a father advising his son that he should always be prepared when travelling by sea by having *vaðmál* on board to repair sails: "hafðu tvau hunndrat vaðmala eða þriu mæð þer askip þau er til sæglbota se fallen æf til þarf at taca."[175] There was a significant need for sheep and grazing lands to supply the wool for Norway, despite evidence for increased size of grazing lands when sails were introduced to Scandinavia,[176] and Iceland and other North Atlantic

[172] "Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar," 130, 238.
[173] Four-shafted twill (*vaðmál*), but tabby (two-shafted) and three-shafted twill are also known to be used for sails.
[174] Lise Bender Jørgensen, "The Introduction of Sails to Scandinavia: Raw materials, labour and land," in *N-TAG TEN: Proceedings of the 10th Nordic TAG Conference at Stiklestad, Norway 2009,* ed. Ragnhild Berge, Marek E. Jasinki, Kalle Sognes, 173-181 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2012), 173.
[175] *Konungs skuggsiá*, ed. Ludvig Holm-Olsen (Oslo: I kommisjon hos J. Dybwad, 1945), 6.
[176] Lise Bender Jørgensen, "The Introduction of Sails to Scandinavia," 179.

communities (also Shetland, Faroes) had plenty of grazing lands and supplied Norway with *vaðmál* exports, including cloth for sails. Sails represent total society's labour input—the labour of sheep herders, wool workers, spinners, weavers, sewers, sailors, and ships owners all coordinated into a vehicle that influenced society, economy, and politics.

While sails would have been trade-goods (purchased whole or sewn from cloth-lengths) exported from Iceland, they were also gifted as prestigious gifts as sails represent huge financial and labour investments, as discussed below in chapter three. An example is found in a *þáttr* which tells of an Icelandic trader gifting a sail to King Haraldr *harðráði* Sigurðsson (r.1046-1066) when travelling to Niðaróss in Norway. Þorvaldr *krákunef* offered the sail to the king as a gift, likely new and made in Iceland and thus *vaðmál*, as there would have only been enough sheep's wool, and not flax for linen, to make such large textiles. The king refused, stating that he had previously been given a poor-quality sail by an Icelander, and the sail was given to Eysteinn *orri* instead, but the king regretted his choice after the sail proved its quality, called a treasure and that the king had never seen a better sail.[177] A sail was an invaluable gift for a noble or king not only to power a ship but also to visually enforce their power and intimidate others through its size, especially if a large ship, and colour or stripes used in decoration which would express a wealthy basis of power.[178] Kings valued sails throughout the medieval period, Norwegian kings had ships for defense from foreign or local adversaries, used for military defense by petty kings, monarchs, and nobles and pretenders in civil wars, and there would have been a great demand for Icelandic cloth exports for sails for their fleets' ships. *Vaðmál* was used to make sails in Iceland for a long time, into the twentieth century.[179]

These examples of *vaðmál* fabric and clothing articles demonstrate the practical function of pieces of fabric to help with tasks in daily life in medieval Iceland, whether living in a cave, associated with childcare, protecting the body while working or travelling, or protecting the body in cold or inclement weather or while swimming, but extends to occasional activities like sailing. The term does still refer to the desirability of *vaðmál* cloth for its material property, in that it can

[177] "Þorvarðar þáttr krákunefs," *Íslenzk fornrit* 23, *Morkinskinna*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, 237-39 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2011), 237-39; William Sayers, "The Gift of a Sail in a Tale about King Haraldr *harðráði* Sigurðarson: Textile and Text," *Maal Og Minne* 113, 2 (2021), 199.
[178] Christopher Westerdahl, "Sails and the Cognitive Roles of Viking Age Ships," in *Maritime Societies of the Viking and Medieval World,* eds. James H. Barrett and Sarah Jane Gibbon, 14-24 (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2015), 16.
[179] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 293.

enhance action in a situation in its support of the body in its activities. When physical cloth or clothing are mentioned, other terms than *vaðmál* are generally used when describing pieces of fabric, especially the term *klæði.* It seems that if the term *vaðmál* is explicitly stated or inferred using cognate terms such as *söluváð, váð* or *vararfeldr*, it is reserved mainly for references where the narrative highlights the benefits of the material aspect of woollen clothing, that in addition to clothing the body it serves to cover, warm, and protect the body from the environment, such as bad weather, or helps the person act in a certain situation, such as working clothes or swimming.

Documentary sources

Many of the documentary sources—inventories, contracts, and annals—are concerned with using *vaðmál* terms in context of accounting of the value of an estate, payments made in *vaðmál* or as amount of *vaðmál* paid in kind, or as a specific or unspecific amount of cloth that is gifted, as detailed in later chapters, but there are examples accounted as material cloth intended for clothing. This is seen in the *proventá* (prebend) of wealthy people intending to retire at monasteries or to become monks or nuns, giving property in exchange for living there for the rest of their life. They usually specified an amount of cloth they were owed annually for clothing allowances. Three *próvenda* for Reynistaðir include provisions for annual clothing allowances that were to be given from the *staðr*. In 1380 the priest Jón Bjarnason negotiated with Abbess Oddbjörg for his sister Guðrún and himself he would bequeath property including goods valued in *vara* ("virdu til voru") and they were also to receive for their annual clothing needs eight ells of iron-grey cloth, twelve ells of white *vaðmál*, and twelve ells of linen for himself and eight ells of *vaðmál* to cloth for his poorer sister ("arliga til klæða ser viij alner iarngrátt. xij alner huit vadmal ok xij. alner lereptz... viij alner vadmals til klæða henni").[180] In 1394 Loðinn Skeggjason made an agreement with Abbess Ingibjörg for provision of a hundred of *vaðmál* yearly for six years and afterward twenty-ell *váð* yearly to cloth himself, half in black and in white and also two ells of linen ("hundrat i vadmalum…tuituga vad til klaeda ser halft suarta oc huita oc tvær alner lerept arliga"), specifying the later *hafnarvaðmál* that was wider.[181] In 1399 the priest Arnór Jónsson negotiates with Abbess Ingibjörg to receive a hundred *vaðmál* or twenty-ell *váð* and six ells of linen ("hunrad vadmala

[180] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 3, ed. Jón Þorkelson (Copenhagen: S.L. Möller, 1896), 357-58.
[181] *Ibid,* 498.

edur tuituga vod og sex alner lerept") in addition to *vaðmál* bedding ("vadmals sæng").[182] There is also a *próventa* for Þingeyrar in 1394 for the couple Jón Eyjólfsson and Helga Loðinsdóttir to receive a yearly provision of black and white twenty-ell *váð* and six ells of linen ("tuituga vad hvart þeirra huitt ok suart ok þar til sex alnar lerept bæði saman").[183] In 1413 *síra* Björgólfur Illugason negotiates for his daughter Steinunn and relative Sigríður Sæmundsdóttir to live at the cloister and be educated (*læring*, likely practical textile skills but also reading and writing), stipulated that they were to receive twenty-ell *hafnarváð* in annual clothing allowance ("tuitogha hafnar vod huarri þeirra til klæda ser ærliga").[184] These examples presumably describe cloth suited for making clothing to meet the daily needs of nuns, monks, and other people living a simple life at monasteries, clothing in plain colours and simple wool (black and white, likely natural colours of the sheep wool) and linen, which would be repaired or replaced annually according to the bequeathment. These donors were all wealthy people, as they owned enough property to be able to give away and thus represent elite people also wearing various types of *vaðmál*—here likely *hafnarvað*-type based on the late fourteenth- to fifteenth century dates, to cloth themselves and provide for other cloth needs such as bedding and personal hygiene, but in contexts of simple living in a religious community.

Other documentary records account the clothing allowances and needs of a range of people living on ecclesiastical estates, which also indicate the range of roles and types of workers who lived and worked at the bishopric estate farm but also its surrounding farms and tenant land. The extensive accounts of the steward at Hólar from 1387–88 include various kinds of *vaðmál* in its accounts of property, payments, tenant income, and workers' wages, including listing the payments and values by cloth material, colours, and amounts of different kinds of *vaðmál,* in addition to other media such as animals, *skreið, kúgildi,* and silver. These inventories use the terms *vaðmál, vara, hafnarvað,* and twenty-ell *váð* pieces ("tuituga vað"), sometimes alongside other units of measure including ells, ounces, marks, and quarters, and some instances specify ells and *vaðmál* in white, black, and sheep-black ("saudsuarter"). The 1387 inventory mentions sailors having material for *vásklæði* and *hafnarváð* that was unfulled ("uþæfdar"). The 1388 work payments inventory specifies particular uses for *vaðmál* as clothing as it states *hafnarvaðmál* had

[182] *Ibid*, 641.
[183] *Ibid,* 500.
[184] *Ibid*, 752.

been used for the bishop's hose ("i hafnar vadum firer hosnna klæde er hann fieck biskupi") and for priest's wardrobe ("prestaburu") and bedclothes ("reckiu klæda").[185] This account is illuminating for details concerning the practical use of *vara* and *hafnarvaðmál* as cloth material into the fourteenth century, *hafnarvaðmál* as finer *vaðmál* for bedding, specific colours that were common or acceptable for the clergy to wear in this period, but also redistribution of *vaðmál* in the greater community of the bishopric with the black cloth sent north. These Hólar inventories, therefore, demonstrate the wide use and utility of *vaðmál* for clothing, bedding, workclothes, and other cloth needs across the spectrum of people who lived and worked at the bishopric, paid to the estate and to the workers, and even worn by the bishop himself.

In the list of items owned by church in their inventories (*máldagar*) the term *tjöld* is prominent. These are wall-hangings, often called tapestries, but the term tapestry refers to a weaving technique that has images woven directly into them when produced, whereas *tjöld* better refers to plain woven textiles that hung on the walls of houses or churches. If decorated, they would have images embroidered into them, such as *reflar* which were decorated with laid-and-couch embroidery, or painted hangings, known as *steintjald*. Falk notes that most secular houses would have these wall hangings as well, mostly undecorated and made from *vaðmál* and twill (*ferskept*).[186] Many of the churches record one or more *tjöld* in their inventories, such as the churches of Nikuláskirkja, Vatnleysa, Þerneyjarkirkja, Maríukirkja, Skarð, Jónskirkja, Reykhólar in the 1269, *c.*1269, and 1286 *máldagar* instigated by Bishop Árni Þorláksson, many of which note that the hangings wrapped all around the church.[187] The 1318 *máldagi* of the church of St. John the Baptist at Auðkúlustaðir includes one *tjald* that went all around the church and another that was made of twill ("ferskieptu tiolld").[188] These inventories generally do not describe the hangings in detail, except a few which are presumably decorated because of their description as beautiful or with images of saints, but they could regardless be made of plain *vaðmál* cloth or embroidered or painted on *vaðmál* ground cloth, as seen in a description of mourning grey *vaðmál*

[185] *Ibid*, 413-419. The use of colour adjectives in particular indicates the additional practical function of this cloth, as were acceptable colours for clothing worn by clergy in this period.
[186] Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde,* 214.
[187] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 2, Jón Þorkelsson (Copenhagen: S.L. Möller, 1893), 62, 65, 66, 115, 117, 118, 119, 170, 259, 260, 261.
[188] *Ibid,* 474.

adorning the royal hall in Jutland in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, and at least some of the unspecified *tjöld* must have been of *vaðmál*.[189]

The documentary sources, here the *próventa* and *máldagar* of church and monasteries, attest to the widespread role of *vaðmál* in these largely ecclesiastical contexts. While the nature of these sources leans to the ecclesiastical context, they still reveal a range of uses for *vaðmál* by both clergy and secular people living or working on these estates or tenant lands. Woollen cloth was thus considered a practical and useful fabric type across the spectrum of medieval Icelandic society—including cloth and clothing needs in religious households and in the various holdings of a bishopric.

This section has discussed a range of examples which demonstrate the material function of *vaðmál* cloth, coming from various sources and contexts of use, both secular and religious, and representing the period from the ninth to early fifteenth century. The focus here was on the use of terms related to *vaðmál* and woollen cloth, *vaðmál* as *vara, söluvað, hafnarvað, tvítug váð, vásklæði,* and (*rögg*)*vararfeldr*. These cloth references provide information about how *vaðmál* functioned as a material object used to protect (cover) and clothe (warm) medieval Icelanders' bodies, valued by them for these material properties (warmth, protection) as seen in the contexts of use and persons associated with the *vaðmál* clothing. It seems *vaðmál* was a practical choice to fill needs of medieval Icelandic people across the spectrum of society—workers, chieftains, nuns, elite—for a native fabric source and *vaðmál* was shown to be useful for clothing worn for the activities of everyday life such as working, travelling, and warming indoor space.

While the sources tend to use general terms or colours when describing cloth(ing), they do use specific *vaðmál* terms or they can be inferred by context of use. The law codes generally used generic terms but also include regulations for *vaðmál*'s production. The *Íslendingasögur* included examples[190] more appropriate to everyday life, especially as fabric that was suited for outdoor work and travel, such as the *söluváð* cloth worn for wet weather but also the benefit of the material aspect of (*rögg*)*vararfeldr* over sheepskin or fur in wet weather, but also special items like sails. General terms such as *klæði* are retained in the later contemporary sources but with less direct use of *vaðmál* terms to infer the material aspect of clothing and instead name types of clothing, perhaps

[189] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 293.
[190] It should be noted that there are more examples of the term *klæði* and other general clothing terms in the *Íslendingasögur,* but they are too numerous to gauge comparison of amount used and it is not the purpose of this chapter.

reflecting the dominance of the economic function in the law makers' or scribes' conceptions, rather than the functional aspect beyond currency, preferring to use more generic terms for clothing, or even that they do not consider the fabric and its material properties relevant to include in the narrative. The *Íslendingasögur* and contemporary saga describe men's clothing worn at political gatherings, ecclesiastical garb, battle and raiding wear, work and outerwear for difficult weather; there is no reason to believe that women would not have worn clothing also made from similar material, as they also would have needed durable, water-resistant, and warm clothing for working inside and outdoors, travelling, and daily life. Both sources also include terms that infer plausible *vaðmál* material, as terms coincides with cloth trade goods and because wool was the main type of cloth used in this period. The documentary sources reflect people, poor and wealthy, provisioning for themselves with *vaðmál* cloth to be used for clothing, but also the possible of *vaðmál* for decorating and, more practically, possibly warming houses and churches as *tjöld.*

These various references to *vaðmál* at the level of fabric primarily reflect Harris' desirability principles of material properties, especially in the *Íslendingasögur, Grágás,* and *próventa* stipends where *vaðmál* terms demonstrate value for their function as wool for clothing. These various examples of *vaðmál* garments demonstrate that wool was a common fibre used in clothing in medieval Iceland, that the construction process and materials that make the various types of *vaðmál* cloth were chosen to suit to the actual activities described in the sagas. Wool clothing was domestically produced and therefore cheaper and more readily available than imports and available for a broader range of society, which reflects the everyday and ordinary use in clothing but also the specific needs of overseas kings for heavy-duty sails or churches for furnishings and funerary cloth. The value of *vaðmál* for its material properties reflects the desires of this society, that there was a need for durable, warm, accessible cloth and *vaðmál*, which could range from very coarse to finer quality, reflected the activities of a sea-faring, farming, and outdoor work society, suited the nature of outdoor, and indoor, work in a cool, wet climate, and could get wet without ruining the cloth(ing); this last aspect will be addressed further in the third chapter on trade goods. Such cloth and clothing, therefore, would be desired by a people known for sheep farming and other outdoor work, overseas trade and travel, and travelling across country for politics and meeting with friends and family. It seems everyone in this rural society wore *vaðmál*, but the elite's included *söluvað*-type *vaðmál* clothing among other more splendid articles of coloured, silk, or embroidered cloth, worn with and over their *vaðmál* garments. When looking at

the meaning of *vaðmál* as cloth, not only do we see evidence of the practical material aspect, but also the aesthetic impact of the cloth, especially seen in *vaðmál*'s visual function in the source material to communicate messages of social status and identity through visual codes of cloth material and colours, as will be discussed next.

Part 2. Display and Perception of Identity through *Vaðmál* Cloth

Cloth holds an important position in every society, not only to clothe the body but also to visualize information about the clothed person and their relationship to others within that society.[191] It communicates to the viewer or reader messages about the individual in terms of birth and social status, that outward appearance was strongly connected to one's inner nature and character, but also concerning gender, age, and ethnicity. This occurs within the context of fashion trends and expressing personal choice.[192] Cloth also expresses how an individual relates to a group, both membership within and beyond the group, to align with or separate oneself from a certain community or level of community, especially for dress in cultural norms and traditions,[193] but cloth also serves a key social or psychological function in establishing position and competition between members of society.[194]

While the practical function of *vaðmál* for cloth(ing) reflects available resources and cloth production technology, this also tells of the material needs of a rural, farming society with no towns or cities and lacking a formal aristocracy, which means that there was less need for grand sartorial display such as at royal courts. There were, of course, opportunities for display at feasts, weddings, and other such gatherings, but this was never the level of opulence and social stratification as other societies in contemporary Northern Europe with larger treasuries and better access to towns, markets, and long-distance traders. Those who could afford extravagant, rich clothing were a smaller portion of the medieval Icelandic population as well, perhaps only those on the *goðar* level or clergy who would wear the *messuföt* for service, and they likely would have

[191] Textiles are portable, displayable, and performative material objects used to decorate bodies and homes to express ideas of cultural ideas of wealth and beauty, with meanings tied to the cloth's form, design, and genealogy which can be separate from its basic form. Sørensen, "Reading Dress," 98.
[192] Although Sørensen argues that personal choice is learned or socialized, and so there are limits to what is considered individual versus representing a society's style of visual display. Sørensen, "Reading Dress," 131.
[193] Jitske Jaspere, *Medieval Women, Material Culture, and Power: Matilda Plantagenet and Her Sisters* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2020), 33, 91, 105.
[194] Jane Schneider, "The Anthropology of Cloth," 409.

filled their clothing needs with imports or smaller scale individual, higher quality clothing production.

However, despite its apparently ordinary nature, *vaðmál* was also desired for its aesthetic function as clothing and decorative cloth, in the visual display of decorating and shaping bodies and surfaces with cloth with the intention of visually communicating messages which impact (positively and negatively) other's opinions and actions through their perception of the clothing.[195] Medieval Icelanders made choices about the fabric used for clothing themselves and decorating their spaces, choices concerning fibre material; local versus foreign cloth; type and style of garment; colour, multicolour, patterns, and stripes; and use of decoration and trimming. The choice of wearing, buying, or displaying *vaðmál* items would thus communicate ideas of identity in terms of economic status, group membership, and individual expression via fashion. This is particularly apt for the narrative sources, where clothing and utilitarian (non-clothing) textiles were intentionally chosen for specific garments, cut and designed for a specific context, used particular colours or decorations, and set within a certain context of use.[196]

The examples of *vaðmál* discussed in this section are examined in light of these aspects of display and perception, decoration for sensory appeal and for communicating identity. Descriptions of specific articles of clothing that are labelled as *vaðmál*, or its synonyms, are used to indicate intelligence, character, wealth, among other aspects related to the social status of individual characters but can also function in the formation of identity by hiding or switching identities, and these individual characteristics serve to visualize aspects of identity, whether age, status, or identity within a community, but also served to appeal to the senses for aesthetical beauty, which in turn reflected one's prosperity status. This is an especially important function of clothing for the narrative primary sources because it is a story, and clothing descriptions are important for setting the scene and establishing the nature, personality, psychology, and actions of different characters. The descriptions of the dress of these characters help to situate the reader in terms of social context and provide expectations for the appropriate behaviour for these characters and can

[195] Susanna Harris, "From value to desirability," 682-83, 688.

[196] There are examples of non-clothing textiles in the *Íslendingasögur*, such as tents, sails, blankets, wall hangings, but they generally do not use adjectival descriptors for material composition (*i.e.*, woollen tent), instead largely use nouns (*ex.* tent or hanging, *tjald*) and so their fabric-types are unknown (in the written sources) but likely were *vaðmál* considering its preferential use in domestically production. This also includes booths covered with *vaðmál* while in use at trade sites in the summer or the wall hangings mentioned covering the walls of the main halls at Sauðafell (1229) and Flugumýri (1253). Imported goods are a different story. "Íslendinga saga," 311, 642. Gunnar Karlsson, *Fornir hættir: Húsakostur og verkmenning* (Reykjavik: Háskólaútgáfan, 2022), 67, 169.

act as key visual codes for the audience or reader and *vaðmál* could be used in a narrative way to display what was 'normal' for a particular group or to hide an identity and pretend to be of another.

These *vaðmál* terms occur in the sociohistorical context of increasing types of fabrics and complexity of technical and design of textiles which were being produced from the late medieval period onward with the rise of guild production and increasing complexity of weaving techniques, fabric designs, and materials.[197] This is especially seen in literary sources contrasting wool clothing against fine, foreign, and colourful fabric, however, there was also a gradient of *vaðmál* types and qualities, including finely woven cloth or striped cloth that was worth more and by its nature had a more distinct visual impact as a decorative cloth that has a higher value than plain cloth, both in terms of economic value but also aesthetical value. In addition, comparing the term *vaðmál* to other generic terms for cloth(ing) (*i.e.*, *klæði*) or specific terms for clothing types (*i.e.*, *kápa*) might also serve to emphasize the ordinary or simple nature of *vaðmál* cloth rather than fabric to be worn by a high class (i.e., *treyja*) or in contexts of feasts, politics, or battle where one should present their best visual self.

This section will look at the different ways *vaðmál* cloth functioned aesthetically in a specific context and for a specific purpose, in essence how *vaðmál* was a material object used as a narrative device for communicating messages to the viewer and audience about the character's self-expression through their body and clothing. It will demonstrate how the assemblage of a character's costume can be used to communicate visual codes, information that is not explicitly stated, about their nature, status, and identity. Here, *vaðmál* has largely functioned to demonstrate associations with the ordinary, everyday nature of the persons wearing or using the cloth.

Law codes

The medieval Icelandic law codes hardly deal with display and clothing, and even less concerning the clothing aspect of *vaðmál*, but a few clauses do express limits on what can be worn in terms of sartorial stipulations. The first is a cross-dressing stipulation found in the miscellaneous articles section of *Grágás* which includes using the term *klæði* to state that the penalty for a woman wearing men's clothes ("kona klæðiz karl klæðom") and for a man dressing in women's clothing

[197] John Munro, "Three Centuries of Luxury Textile Consumption in the Low Countries and England, 1330–1570: Trends and Comparisons of Real Values of Woollen Broadcloths (Then and Now)," in *The medieval broadcloth: changing trends in fashions, manufacturing, and consumption,* ed. Kathrine Vestergård Pedersen and Marie-Louise B. Nosch, 1-73 (Oxford: Oxbow, 2009), 2.

("karla af þeir klæðaz kuenz klæðnaðe") is lesser outlawry.[198] This indicates that there is a difference in the appearance of men's and women's clothing, and there are limits in their overlap but this applies to clothing design not material.

The marriage and inheritance chapter of *Jónsbók* includes a sumptuary law concerned clothing allowances for more expensive types of cloth (*skrúðklæði*, clothing made of fine cloth) used in garments (*búningr,* the overall assemblage of clothing).[199] The amount and type of this expensive cloth ("skrúðklæða búnað") was regulated in relation to how much property a person owned or if they were of a specialized profession such as scholar or elevated social status such as a king's retainer, and was amended in 1294 to include any clothing given as a gift.[200] Specific articles of clothing of costly material ("skrúð") are named in the allowances, including the *treyja* with a *kaprún*, ("treyju með kaprúni af skrúði", jacket with a hood of *skrúð*), *kyrtill* ("skrúðkyrtil," kirtle of *skrúð*), *ólpa* or *kápa* cloak double-lined with fur ("ólpu eður kápu tvídregna fyrir utan gráskinn")—some terms which also have been mentioned in the context of *vaðmál* clothing—and the collective costume is referred using the terms "búnað" (*búningr*) and "klæði".[201] Scholars, the king's retainers, or travellers are exempted from these regulations and are permitted to wear whatever they wish, wear weapons, or wear clothing purchased abroad, respectively.[202] Disobedience from this law resulted in a fine.[203] While the clause regulates what clothing people can wear based on their means, it is interesting that their means were judged according to the cloth standard, a double-cloth meaning of cloth being the standard measure for regulating and also cloth being regulated for sumptuary allowances.[204]

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[198] *Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid*, 203-4. The family sagas involve examples of cross-dressing, such as justification for divorce in *Laxdœla saga* with Guðrún and Þórðr, with her sewing her husband Þorvaldr Halldórsson a shirt with a low-cut neck, and his wife Auðr being accused of dressing in breeches with goars and leg wrappings and given the nickname Bróka-Auðr. *Cf.* the use of leg wrappings (*spjörr*) in formation of identity below in the example from *Gull-Þóris saga.* "Laxdœla saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 5, *Laxdœla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 1-248 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1934), 94, 95.

[199] Cleasby, 89, "búnaðr."

[200] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 149.

[201] *Ibid*. Falk states the term *treyja* came from Germany via Old French in the twelfth century, it was a jacket that could be long and have sleeves and was worn over the *brynja* or under the *kyrtill* with battle clothing or armour. He states the *kaprún* came to Iceland *c.*1200 and the term comes from the Old French *chaperon*. It refers to a common type of headwear in medieval Europe, often of wool or lighter fabrics depending on season, that later developed with a long tail on the hood. In Iceland the *kaprún* refers to a short cloak or collar with a hood that would lay down the back when not on the head and often richly decorated or made of fine materials. Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde*, 97.

[202] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 149.

[203] *Ibid*, 311.

[204] This clause has been discussed in my article "Textiles, Dress and Politics: A Diachronic Perspective through the Case Studies of Ancient Rome and Mediaeval Iceland," coauthored with Zofia Kaczmarek, in *Textile Crossroads:*

These clothing items and their fabric and decoration were considered extravagant clothing only to be worn by the wealthy (those owning twenty hundreds or more) and those of certain social status, including scholar, travellers, and king's men. The clause was introduced in the new law code that was written in the context of recent submission to the Norwegian crown, a time where Icelandic cultural connections to Norway and Europe was strong, including acting as the king's representatives in Iceland and travellers going to Norway for political issues and for religious consecration. Norway had recently experienced several decades of civil war that ended with a consolidated kingdom under Kings Hákon Hákonarson (r.1217-1263) and Magnús *lagbætir* Hákonarson (r.1263-1280), both kings who reinforced their power through legal reform (*Landslov, Járnsíða,* and *Jónsbók*) and promoting European courtly literature and chivalric culture by sponsoring translations of the popular chivalric sagas, which Icelanders played a great role in translating. It is interesting that this new sumptuary law includes a mix of new and old clothing terms—*kyrtill* and *ólpa* alongside the new *treyja* and *kaprún,* terms with Old French roots and military connotations, which emerged *c.*1200, rather than the older terms used in the *Íslendingasögur* such as *vararfeldr,* which declined in exports *c.*1200—at a time of developing courtly culture, recent civil strife in Iceland and Norway, and changing fashions in relation to political and cultural changes. It hints at a desire for using clothing to identify with these new cultural mores and to express new social differences and status with foreign fashions that seem to be taking root in Iceland, a practice which the law code condemns as a bad custom that is causing debt and preventing social support of the poor.[205] As with many sumptuary laws, the intention can be interpreted in multiple ways, whether intended to express social status, promote new fashion styles, enforce support for local textile industries over foreign imports, a means of social control to uphold religious and moral norms, or being due to concerns of economic deprivation.[206] This

Exploring European Clothing, Identity, and Culture across Millenia. Anthology of COST Action "CA 19131 – EuroWeb," 325-337, eds. Kerstin Droß-Krübe, Louise Quillien, and Kalliope Sarri (Lincoln: Zea Books, 2024), 329-30.

[205] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 149. Hans Jacob Orning discusses the *riddarasögur* using clothing as signs for hierarchy in terms of dress, manners, and emotions to separate the king's followers from the rest of the people, using examples in *Tristams saga,* translated in Iceland in 1226 and thus can be a contemporary example to *Jónsbók* of similar attitudes of expressing hierarchy through clothing and fabric material. Hans Jacob Orning, "Reception and Adaptation of Courtly Culture in Old Norse Society," in *Friendships and Social Networks in Scandinavia c.1000-1800,* eds. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Thomas Småberg, 115-151 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 124-126.

[206] Sumptuary laws also indicate what material and types of clothing were considered luxurious or more valuable and local or import, acting as an important source of information on clothing and fabric in a society where little to no medieval clothing articles have survived to the present. It would be an interesting point for further research to compare against depictions of clothing in the manuscripts, against fragments of textiles in archaeological

clause includes details about local and foreign clothing materials and visualizations of wealth via clothing, but it seems to be more concerned with the economic means of people wearing such clothing and condemns their prioritizing new fashions over obligations of social support.

The clothing regulation in *Grágás* is concerned with regulating clothing allowances based on gender identity, that there were specific clothing representing female or male dress and is not concerned with differences of social status or fabric material. In contrast, the clothing regulation in *Jónsbók* is concerned with social differences based on wealth and other special roles in society, which would be displayed with specific materials ("fancy" cloth, fur, double-lined) or clothing articles (*treyja, ólpa, kyrtill*). These seem to be articles of clothing which can be seen to represent the dress of higher status people and even foreign fashions, especially the material from which the clothing was made. This can be compared directly against the material of the subject of this thesis, *vaðmál*, fancy cloth versus ordinary material. *Vaðmál* presumably would have been considered plainer material and valued for functional aspects and use in the everyday and normal activities of people across the social spectrum, as discussed in the previous chapter and below (*i.e.,* walking, travelling working), and contrasted against *skrúð,* which could refer to foreign, expensive fabric like silk. However *vaðmál* was woven in a range of qualities too and *skrúð* might also refer to finer woven *vaðmál* fabric or that which was decorated with embroidery with coloured, gold, or silver thread, fur trimmings, or tablet-woven bands, and perhaps represents what one would wear in contexts when one needed to emphasize social differences and position via dress (*i.e.,* feasts, *alþingi*, battles).

Samtíðarsögur

The contemporary sagas rarely include examples that use *vaðmál* terms to display status or indicate decorative functions, rather it seems to use other terms or is a genre that is less interested in portraying character traits through clothing choices. One exception is an account from *Svínfellinga saga* which describes the events surrounding the brothers Sæmundr and Guðmundr Ormsson's deaths at the hands of Ögmundr Helgason and his men. The saga offers a detailed physical description of the brothers and their men, armed with weapons, while the party was riding on the road to Kirkjubær, ominously in fog and pouring rain, just before meeting Ögmundr's party.

excavations, or against contemporary foreign examples. Ulinka Rublack and Giorgio Riello, *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws in Global Perspective, c.1200– 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 13-15.

The saga offers additional description of only for the clothing worn by the brothers. Sæmundr was in a bi-coloured red and green tunic ("hálflitum kyrtli, rauðum og grænum") with a *söluváð* cloak cast over him and the edges sewn together ("kastað yfir sig söluvoð, ok voru saman saumaðir jaðrarnir") since it was raining, and this cloth was called a cloak ("yfirhöfn") a few lines later. Guðmundr was in a blue tunic and had a striped cloak ("í blám kyrtli ok hafði yfirhöfn stríprenda"), with the material unspecified.[207] It is possible that Guðmundr's cloak could be of the same material as Sæmundr's, since they are both called *yfirhöfn*, and while the colours of the cloak are not stated, Guðmundr's is specified as striped, similar to *mórent vaðmál* and indicates a possibility of *vaðmál* material for the cloaks. Regardless, this example shows that the author of the saga intended to use the *söluváð* material in the characterization of the two brothers, upstanding men as Sæmundr was the *goði* of Svínafell, on the way to their death, dressed in cloaks and fashionable bi-coloured and blue *kyrtlar* and armed with weapons.

If we include the examples of overclothes discussed in the previous chapter, we can see that they can be used to indicate a higher social status. This includes Bjarni's valued cloak ("úlpu góða"), Sturla's blue and striped cloaks ("blárri úlpu," "mórendri flekku og ermar") worn for battle, a distinguished sealskin cloak worn at the *alþingi* by Þorgils Oddason, or the apparition in an ecclesiastical dark cape ("kápu dökkri").[208] These articles of clothing can perhaps be considered similar to the finer dress listed in the *Jónsbók* regulations, as compared against the plainer and ordinary *vaðmál* clothing found in the *Íslendingasögur* discussed below; these sources seem to use different terminology for clothing to indicate higher social status and lower social status, perhaps reflecting different time periods and their fashions, but also different intentions for the different genres. The exception is Sæmundr's cloak, but as *söluvaðmál* was the *vara* intended for sale it could be a slightly higher quality (or valued) *vaðmál* considered appropriate to associate with the wealth of a chieftain, one able to use this valuable trade good for his clothing when needed, such as cover in rain, whereas in the earlier examples of *söluváð* used for appropriate clothing for young and inexperienced men in the *Íslendingasögur,* it is used in characterization by the saga authors, or perhaps is even just an association with a typical, adult male costume with an "Icelandic"-type material, as seen in *Hreiðars þáttr* discussed below. It seems likely that *vaðmál* was a common

[207] "Svínfellinga saga," *Sturlunga saga*, vol. 2, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, 550-566 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2010), 561-63.
[208] "Íslendinga saga," 472, 417, 29; "Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar," 180.

fabric available to all medieval Icelanders, if they had the means, and it depended on the context of use and also the intentions of the saga authors in how they wanted to situate and characterize those wearing or using *vaðmál.*

Íslendingasögur

Twill cloth was a common fabric type and could signal a certain social class or represent a stage of life, but also can be applied widely as "everyday" cloth.[209] It fits within general European cloth standards for clothing, with wool cloth being one of the three main types of fabric of the period (in addition to linen and silk), especially if considering average people and not the few, overrepresented elite with luxury cloth. This is especially "normal" cloth and clothing for everyday and work tasks even for elites, as seen in the previous chapter.

The first way that *vaðmál* was used to visualize an identity is in the representation of age. The previously-mentioned example from *Fljótsdæla saga* describes *vaðmál* trousers ("söluváðarbrókum") as part of the overall costume worn by the nine-year-old boy working herding sheep in the mountains, young, simply dressed, and dressed appropriately for shepherding work on the farm and signals the child's identity and role on the farm.[210] This is also seen for a young man described in the late fourteenth-century *Gull-Þóris saga,* here using a shirt (*stakkr*)[211] in an anecdote explaining Grímr Eyjólfsson's nickname, taking place in the Þorskafjöðr in the West Fjords in the early tenth century. He is described to be wearing a white *vaðmál* shirt ("vararváðarstakki") in addition to white trousers ("hvítar brækur") and his legs wrapped with bands ("vafið að neðan spjörum"), which were the reason for his nickname "Vafspjarra-Grímr," for bands that were wrapped around the legs instead of using stockings.[212] There is a lengthy description of both Grímr's character and costume, including the *vaðmál* shirt ("vararváðarstakki"):

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[209] This can also be contrasted with "í litklæðum" (coloured), which could indicate non-everyday clothing and mark social status, a foreigner traveller abroad, special occasions, or sexual attraction; it was used as a literary technique with the symbolism to mark individual character, but this depends on the context. Jane Christine Roscoe, "The Literary Significance of Clothing in the Icelandic Family Sagas," Master's thesis (Durham: Durham University, 1992), 9-10, 118.

[210] "Fljótsdæla saga," 274.

[211] Falk describes *stakkr* as a type of smock-like shirt, usually thigh- or knee-length, and generally made of *vaðmál* but could also be of skin. It would be worn over the *kyrtill* or shirt. Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde*, 162-63.

[212] *Þorskfirðinga saga/Gull-Þóris saga, Íslenzk fornrit* 13, *Harðar saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 173-227 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991), 197. Cleasby, 673. Falk states *(vaf)spjarrar* are lower-leg wrappings, synonymous with *vindingar*, that had replaced *hósur.* Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde,* 127.

> Grim Eyjolfsson was tall and always sat warming himself by the fire. He was considered almost an idiot. When he got up from the bench, he wore a white common wool cape, white breeches, and his legs were wrapped in swathing bands. Therefore he was called Swathing-Band Grim. No one knew how strong he was. He was nothing to look at.[213]

The term *vararváð* and articles of clothing are used to characterize Grímr as a simpleton, plain, and question his strength (a mark of manliness), using the unremarkable aspects of this cloth to show Grímr as an insignificant, simple character whom we should expect little of in the story. However, later in saga he is shown to be smarter than this simple portrayal and so exceeds expectations for his character, participating in traditional male activities like killing, battles, and being outlawed. Here, the clothing also serves to indicate the personality, status, and coming-of-age of the character, with clothing and fabric used as a literary device used by the saga author to communicate his identity through visual codes and to mark a contrast from earlier behaviour against a man who acts like an anti-hero, that a change in clothing 'makes' a man.

Vaðmál clothing can be used to indicate the ordinary, used to situate a story in an everyday context when they are described as part of what we can consider a costume of ordinary clothing of adult men. This includes the clothing of adult men, especially notable as outerwear. This includes Valli's cloak ("vararfeldr") in *Kormáks saga*, Gunnar's hooded rain cloak ("váskufl") and striped tunic ("söluváðarkyrtil mórendan") in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Helgi and Grímr Droplaugarson's walking clothes including *vaðmál* cloaks ("vararfeldum"), and Grettir's trousers and cowl for swimming ("söluváðarbrækr," "söluváðarkufl ok gyrðr í brækr") in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar.*[214] These are all presented as appropriate clothing for adult male outerwear for rainy weather, walking and travelling, and swimming. In the case of the brothers Helgi and Grímr Droplaugarson, they wore cloaks ("vararfeldir") for travel in a winter storm, but the saga states that they wear *vaðmál* cloaks ("söluvaðmálkuflum mórendum"), trousers ("brækr"), and cloaks ("feldir"), and weapons as their everyday outfit ("Þeir voru svo búnir hversdaglega"),[215] indicating *vaðmál* clothing (*söluvaðmál* and *mórent*) was considered normal material for regular, everyday activities of upper class, adult men (their paternal grandfather was *goði* Þiðrandi Ketilsson and, according to the *Fljótdæla* account of Droplaug's inheritance, maternal grandfather was the

[213] "Gold-Thorir's saga," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* vol. 2, trans. Anthony Maxwell, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, 335-359 (Reykjavik: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997) 345; "Þorskfirðinga saga" / "Gull-Þóris saga," 197.
[214] "Kormáks saga," 263; "Brennu-Njáls saga," 59; "Fljótsdæla saga," 294; "Grettis saga," 130, 238.
[215] "Fljótsdæla saga," 243.

Shetland *jarl* Björgólfr (*Droplaugarsona saga* states her father was Þorgrímr of Giljar)), slightly more expensive as it was coloured and striped (*mórent*), but is not presented as a prestigious costume. Despite the clear narrative use of an everyday costume to signify their readiness for conflict by being armed, this example demonstrates that *vaðmál* clothing was part of ordinary costumes that could be worn in daily life, representing normal clothing rather than anything lavish, even for the upper classes.

Vaðmál clothing, such as cloaks, can also be included in a greater clothing assemblage to project information about the identity of saga characters and thus communicate visual codes of status but also character, especially when considered in a gradient of quality and when compared against finer clothing, but also signal group membership with family and personal alliances. *Brennu-Njáls saga* which describes Þórhallr Ásgrímsson wearing a russet-striped cloak ("kasti mórendu"), presumably of *vaðmál* with the use of term *mórent.* It tells how the sons of Njáll Þorgeirsson, Þórhallr's foster-father, laughed at him and asked how long he would own it, to which he answered whenever he would defend his foster-father, and Njáll remarks that he better wear it when convenient.[216] Njáll was known to be a great law man (*lögmaðr*) and he had tutored Þórhallr in law, later known as the third greatest lawman in Iceland. Einar Ól. Sveinsson states that this is the only instance where the term *kast* is used in the middle ages, it is later used for the gowns of milkmaids and thus seems a feminized article of clothing, but indicates plain but coloured cloth.[217] It is not clear why Þórhallr chose to wear this and Ármann Jakobsson speculates that it is perhaps teenage fashion experimentation or genderbending, but this and other instances of crossdressing (*i.e.,* Njáll's feminine *silkislæðr*) are part of the saga's critique of the negative and destructive effects of a misogynistic society.[218] It might also be that the cloak, feminized and not as expensive or decorated as the costumes later described when going into battle, signals Þórhallr's youth as he has not yet proven himself man in law via a successful lawsuit, and the mockery of the cloak and statement of loyalty to his foster-father Njáll foreshadows his role assisting in the lawsuit for the burning of Njáll and his household at the *alþing* in 1012. The sons might have laughed at Þórhallr for wearing a feminine garment of inexpensive material, perhaps a less commanding cloak compared to other types like a *feldr* or one highly decorated that might be expected of Þórhallr as

[216] "Brennu-Njáls saga," 295.
[217] *Ibid.*
[218] Ármann Jakobsson, *Nine Saga Studies: The Critical Interpretation of the Icelandic Sagas* (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2013), 216, 237.

the son of a *goði,* but instead signalling that actions are more important than appearance alone and Þórhallr proved loyal to his foster-father.[219]

Vaðmál clothing could also be used to hide one's social position, indicating a lower social status in comparison to finer clothing. *Brennu-Njáls saga* tells of the prominent saga character, Gunnar, dressing him down to conceal his true status when he wants to find out information. The story describes what *goði* Gunnar Hámundarson wore on his journey from Hlíðarendi in south Iceland to Hrútsstaðir in west Iceland, disguising himself as a peddler, a person of lower social status, as part of a plot to determine how to legally recover a kinswoman's dowry. He was advised by his friend Njáll Þorgeirsson to disguise himself as itinerant peddler Kaupa-Héðinn selling smithed wares, and was to wear a cloak ("váskufl") and underneath a russet-striped tunic ("söluváðarkyrtil mórendan", some manuscripts use "vöruvoðarkyrtill"), which were to be worn over top of his good clothes ("góðu klæða").[220] *Váskufl* has been used to signify woollen cloth above, and the *kyrtill* is presumably *vara*-type *vaðmál* cloth, with the terms *söluváð/vöruvoð* and *mórent*. Gunnar was of the highest social class, a chieftain who held political, economic, and social responsibilities for all the members in his *goðorð*; here, Njáll is aiming for subterfuge, transforming Gunnar from a farmer of significant status to masquerading as a travelling salesman dressed in *vaðmál* clothing, communicating that Gunnar was trying to act like someone from a significantly lower social status. Later in the story, it hints at the fabric appropriate to express Gunnar's social status, with a man recounting that he saw gold trim and red fabric ("eitt gullhlað ok rautt klæði") peeking out of Gunnar's sleeve.[221] As he was hiding his identity, here the *vaðmál* clothing functions to signal a costume of plainer, ordinary clothing suited to a traveling salesman

[219] By contrast, there are other terms which can be considered finer cloth, such as scarlet or those with expensive dyes, which would have been used to distinguish important individuals or at special occasions. Compare Þórhallr's clothing to the description of the Njálssons clothed with weapons when they were to go out killing: Skarphéðinn in a black jacket ("blám stakki") with a shield and axe, son-in-law Kári in a silk jacket ("silkitreyju") with a gilded helmet and shield decorated with a lion, and Helgi in a red tunic ("rauðan kyrtil") and with a helmet and a red shield decorated with a hart, and all in coloured (presumably dyed) clothing. "Brennu-Njáls saga," 231.The *stakkr* and *kyrtill* might also have been of *vaðmál* but the colours and decorations are emphasized here and can be contrasted to Þórhallr's striped "kasti mórend."

[220] "Brennu-Njáls saga," 59.

[221] *Ibid,* 64. Both Cleasby and Robert Cook translate *gullhlað* as "lace", but Anita Sauckel defines it as tablet-woven trim or braid with woven-in gold threads. Cleasby, 268. "Njal's saga," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* vol. 3, trans. Robert Cook, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, 1-220, (Reykjavik: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997), 28. Anita Sauckel, *Die literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den Íslendingasǫgur und Íslendingaþættir* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2103), 151.

rather than his social status as a chieftain, compared to his "good clothes" of higher quality material and colour.

A similar case is found in *Laxdæla saga*: when travelling at night near the farm Vatnshorn in Skorradalr in West Iceland, Þorgils Hölluson is described as exchanging his dark cloak ("kápu blárri") for a grey *vaðmál* cloak ("váskufl einn gráan").[222] In this case, the saga says that Þorgils was on a reconnaissance mission at the farm at Vatnshorn, trying to see if the farmer Helgi Harðbeinsson was home, and cloth functions as clothing to hide Þorgils' identity in terms of the colour and type of cloak he was wearing, dressing down with simpler clothing. The function of *vaðmál* here is subterfuge, clothing that is marking identity in terms of social status in that their own clothing would give them away.

The previously mentioned account in *Finnboga saga ramma* also uses *vaðmál* terms to signal social status. Here, it uses the term *söluváð* when describing how the poor couple Syrpa and Gestr adopted the exposed child Urðarköttr, pretending he was her own child instead of the son of Syrpa's foster daughter Þorgerðr Þorkelsdóttir and Ásbjörn dettiáss Gunnbjarnarson of Eyrr in Flateyjardalr. She had changed his costume, as the clothes the baby had been wearing were considered too fine ("var sá miklu ágætari") for what she could have provided and got rid of them, instead dressing him in *vaðmál* trousers ("söluvoðarbrækur"), as mentioned before when he was wearing *vaðmál* trousers and skin *stakkr* ("skinnstakki og söluvoðarbrókum") while working catching fish.[223] This case emphasizes his clothing as suited for poor, ordinary, working people, purposely in contrast to his true identity and insinuates that Syrpa knew this was the child of her former foster daughter and intentionally dressed him lower than his true social position in order to protect and hide him from his father, who had ordered him exposed. Here, the *söluváð* functions within the overall costume description of the child as an aesthetical visual cue contrasted against finer clothing originally worn, that signifies his status in society, a marker of clothing appropriate for a particular group of people, but this poor child turns out to be a more significant person that this simple characterization signifies.

A final example shows how *vaðmál* could be used to demarcate group membership, here between the Norwegian king's men (*hirðmenn*) and common people (*alþýða*). The early thirteenth-century tale *Hreiðars þáttr* tells of the brothers Hreiðarr and Þórðr Þorgrímsson travelling from

[222] "Laxdœla saga," 185.
[223] "Finnboga saga," 257.

Iceland to Norway, as Þórðr was a merchant on trade journey, and their proper/improper courtly manners. They met King Magnús *góði* Óláfsson (r.1035–1047) in Bergen, as Þórðr was also a king's courtier (*hirðmaðr*), and were invited to stay at his court.[224] Hreiðarr was dressed simply in "ankle-length trousers with a grey cloak" ("í ǫkulbrókum ok hafði feld grán yfir sér") but as they were to be staying in the royal household, Þórðr advised his brother to dress appropriately and wear fine clothing ("góðan búning"), as they could afford it. Hreiðarr refused to wear such clothing ("skrúðklæðin") and instead had an outfit made of ordinary *vaðmál* ("vaðmálsklæði," "skerum vaðmál þá til"), whether is trade goods brought with Þórðr on his journey or purchased in Norway is unstated, which was simple but was noted to change his appearance into a completely new man."[225] This tale sets side-by-side the clothing choices of the two brothers, fine clothing appropriate for a king's courtier versus simple *vaðmál* of a common man. This is set in the era of adopting European courtly manners, culminating with the *Hirðskrá* (Magnús *lagabœtir* Hákonarson, r. 1263 to 1280); the *þáttr* simultaneously presents the benefits of acquiring skills and manners at the king's court while also highlighting Icelanders' collective cleverness and potential.[226] Hreiðarr thus does not improve himself, as Þórðr suggested with the counsel of *skrúðklæði,* and his character does not change despite meeting two kings, Magnús *góði* and later Haraldr *harðráði*. The simpler woollen *vaðmál* clothing is presented as distinctive from the more elaborate clothing of the courtiers, setting Hreiðarr apart from other people in the king's household but he does prove himself clever and capable without them.[227] It also shows that *vaðmál* was used as fabric for clothing worn in Norway, noting that the outfit was to be cut (*skera*) from *vaðmál* indicating a new outfit; it was not an outfit appropriate for high-status courtiers who would have worn fancier cloth (*skrúðklæði*) but Hreiðarr's new *vaðmál* outfit was acceptable to be worn by a guest of the king. The contrast in the clothing choices and expectations of an Icelandic *hirðmaðr* as royal subject (Þórðr) against that of an independent Icelandic commoner (Hreiðarr) as free to express opinions and to choose sartorial comfort over fashion might be considered authorial self-reflection on Iceland's identity in relation to Norway, the travel story of the *þáttr* perhaps

[224] "Hreiðars þáttr," *Íslenzk fornrit* 10, *Ljósvetninga saga,* ed. Björn Sigfússon, 245-260 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1940), 250.
[225] *Ibid,* 253.
[226] Lucie Korecká, *Cultural Memory in the Icelandic Contemporary Sagas: Constructing Continuity at a Time of Transformation* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2025), 106-107.
[227] Ármann Jakobsson, *A Sense of Belonging: Morkinskinna and Icelandic identity, c. 1220,* transl, Fredrik Heinemann (Odense: University press of Southern Denmark, 2014), 278, 287.

representing different attitudes than the *Íslendingasögur* in the relationship to the king and Norway. Hreiðarr is less refined yet is not excluded but received by the king, he is different but not dissimilar at the same time.

Thus, it seems that, as with the *samtíðarsögur,* here *vaðmál* is presented as a common fabric for clothing for a medieval Icelanders across a range of social classes, but clothing choices depended on the context of use and how the saga authors intended to present these characters, in terms of their personality, looks, and inner values. Thus the decorative function of *vaðmál* serves as visual signs indicating visual appeal and communicating identity in these sagas.

Documentary sources

In terms of aesthetics, fashion, and style, the documentary sources are also interesting to see what colours, decorative techniques, and fashions were in style and, subsequently, were forbidden, based on inventory lists but also letters from bishops about the rights of clergy and parishioners. Generally speaking, the cloth and clothing item listed in the *máldagar* records are lists of items owned by church that are to be used for services but also include everyday items such as bedding and other basic cloth needs. These inventories more often list cloth by their functions rather than material and lesser-value cloth items are generally listed in general terms include less details and do not state their fibre material (*i.e.*, *dúkr, ábreiðsl, stakkr*). The finer cloth examples, such as various types of liturgical vestments (*messuklæði*) used for service and cloth used for decorating the church space (*tjöld*), include descriptors which specify the material or colours to note the value and splendour of such items, such as luxury fabric like silk or foreign cloth (*i.e.*, *silki, guðvefr, baldrskinn*) or the colour of vestments according to the liturgical calendar.[228] For example, the 1391–93 *máldagi* from Grenjaðarstaðr lists the vestments and decorative cloth by article type and by fabric material only if was of costlier stuff: it lists nine copes, two dalmatics, two gowns, seven chasubles, six altar cloths, and two handcloths, but also several items with fabric or decoration named such as two striped tablet (pax) covers, two fine coloured cloths, two striped lectern cloths, and a striped cloth for covering St. Martin.[229]

[228] See Fredrik Barbe Wallem, *De islandske kirkers udstyr i middelalderen* (Kristiania: Grøndahl and søns bogtrykkeri, 1910) for a thorough discussion of material and types of textiles found in the church inventories.
[229] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 4, ed. Jón Þorkelsson (Copenhagen: S.L. Möller, 1897), 20-21.

In cases where the material of the cloth is excluded, it is likely that some would have been made from *vaðmál* as it was the main fabric of the period and was commonly used for payments to the church, *i.e.*, tithe, tolls, and rents, and probably would have been used for simpler items or clothing worn under finer garments, for example, a bishop's gown worn under and covered by a finely decorated cope. Smaller or poorer churches or lower clergy might not have had the financial means or need to buy or commission much liturgical or decorative cloths or foreign linen or embroideries—such as the magnificent, gold-embroidered, *c.* thirteenth-century *Opus Anglicanum* maniple, stole, and apparel from Hólar (Þjms. 6028a, c, d, e)—as bishops and could instead have their hangings and robes made from predominantly available, local *vaðmál*; this is an assumption based on availability.[230]

Similar to the sumptuary law in *Jónsbók* regarding clothing allowances based on personal means and social position, the *Diplomatarium Islandicum* also includes two letters from bishops prohibiting priests from wearing certain clothes: a 1269 letter from Bishop Árni Þorlákssson, known for his support of church reform, stipulated that priests were now forbidden from wearing red, yellow, green, bi-coloured, or striped clothes ("raud klædi gul eda græn eda half skipt eda rend utan j hosi") and a 1345 letter from Bishop Jón Sigurðsson ruled that all clergy were forbidden from wearing clothes with gores ("fiolgeirvnga").[231] *Rend* might include *mórent vaðmál,* but this is believed to have disappeared *c.*1300, and could be a similar type of striped cloth.[232] Thus, not only was *mórent* popular in secular clothing, multicoloured and striped clothes seem to have been also popular among the clergy (or at least enough to provoke forbiddance), but this did not align with Christian principles of simple colours for non-liturgical clothing.[233] Thus, it seems that Icelandic clothing aligned with thirteenth- to fourteenth- century fashions of stripes, parti-coloured, patterned and marbled clothes, and gores which were popular in Scandinavia and

[230] Wallem argues that the bishops' fine vestments likely were privately owned by individual bishops. *De islandske kirkers udstyr i middelalderen,* 62. As the *biskupasögur* and annals give evidence of some bishops' gifting away vestments to friends, this is likely true and reflects the wealth brought into the church via their private funds rather than representing the church's funds.
[231] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 2, 25, 31, 791.
[232] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 228.
[233] Following the church reform movement, church decrees including the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 cautioned clergy to wear appropriate clothing that distinguished them from lay dress but also aligned with their principles of morality and frugality, including colours, style, and decoration. Thomas M. Izbicki, "Forbidden Colors in the Regulation of Clerical Dress from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) to the time of Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464)," *Medieval Clothing and Textiles,* vol. 1, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 105, 113.

Europe,[234] but also emulated the sumptuary laws enacted in response to these fashion trends and increased sartorial richness, regulating what could be worn and by whom in order to keep the social orders separate, but also to align with Christian practices and prevent excessive spending. With these three sumptuary clauses, this shows that Icelanders—secular and clergy alike—were informed and involved in the increasingly varied and swift fashion changes from the thirteenth century onwards in Europe.

In terms of *vaðmál*, however, there is less of an aesthetic or visualizing role as decoration in and of itself, but it was likely used for general clothing purposes and would be listed as fabric owned, paid, or gifted with an unknown purpose, such as the examples of coloured *vaðmál* used for *próventa* at monastic communities discussed in the previous chapter. However, hangings in houses, halls, and church seem common before 1300 as part of decorative and functional warming purposes. Such an example in the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Jómsvíkinga saga* which describes a royal hall abroad in Jutland which was adorned with grey *vaðmál* to visually announce the news of the queen's son's death, likely set in contrast to typical highly decorated hangings, as a display of mourning.[235] *Vaðmál* hangings could reflect an earlier, simpler form of hangings distinct from tapestries and embroideries, but also could be part of elaborate decorative textiles, especially as the ground cloth of painted or embroidered *tjöld*, in addition to altar cloths or liturgical clothing that could be plain for regular services but more elaborate for feast days and holidays, where perhaps they used finer materials or imported velvet and silk, or a mix of both, as the extant late medieval examples demonstrate.[236] These beautiful textiles could be a sign of wealth but also act as "devotional aids" for the priest, congregation, and the makers participating in services where they were in use, including female embroiderers and weavers.[237] The 1340 *máldagi* of Þykkvabær

[234] Multicoloured clothes had become popular fashion from the twelfth century on, whether stripes, bi-colour or parti-coloured, and patterned and marbled cloth, but in the fourteenth century shifted to mainly multi-coloured plain cloth. Camilla Luise Dahl, "*Mengiað klæthe* and *tweskifte klædher.* Marbled, Patterned and Parti-coloured Clothing in Medieval Scandinavia," *The Medieval Broadcloth: Changing Trends in Fashions, Manufacturing and Consumption,* ed. Kathrine Vestergård Pedersen and Marie-Louise B. Nosch, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009), 133, 134, 135.

[235] In the thirteenth-century account (in fourteenth-century manuscript, Holm perg 7 4to) of the semi-legendary kings' saga *Jómsvíkinga saga*: "Þa lét drottning [Þyri] tiallda haullina grám vaðmalum." *Jómsvíkinga saga. Efter skinnboken 7*, *4to å Kungl Biblioteket i Stockholm,* ed. Gustaf Cederschiöld (Lunds: Universitets Års-skrift, 1874-1875), 6.

[236] Wallem, *De islandske kirkers udstyr i middelalderen,* 54.

[237] Liturgical textiles can help to "celebrate aesthetic and spiritual welfare" and "combin[es] imagery and ritual practice", in the context of their use in service, but also for the makers: "the objects which helped make them (looms, embroidery tools, needles), enabled a nun to embody and perform her domestic responsibility to her sacred husband, while also being tools through which nuns could realize their spiritual potential and cultivate an

monastery lists three hangings, one beautiful that wrapped all around the large *stofa*, a second decorated with saints, and a third that was worn.[238] The *máldagar* can thus be useful sources for example of how richly decorated the churches, and secular estates, could have been, even possibly from *vaðmál* cloth (plain and decorated), albeit many accounts do not list the fabric material from which the inventoried items most were made and very few church textiles survive from this period, only later. There is a strong likelihood of *vaðmál*'s use for church hangings based on historical context, but this also can be expanded to *tjald* as booth covers and tents for travelling by land and sea, but there is not strong surviving written evidence; Wallem claims that *vaðmál* was common for church hangings before 1300 and Helgi Þorlákssonsuggests that some of the unspecified *tjöld* in the inventories must have been made of *vaðmál.*[239] This, however, also affirms the functional aspect of *vaðmál,* valued for practical use for warming rooms as hangings or visual appeal for decoration, a function that is considered normal and was an unremarkable part of daily life with wool textiles.

The examples discussed in this section have demonstrated how descriptions of *vaðmál* were used to communicate an image of simple, functional clothing, setting up these characters in ordinary activities of daily life—especially considered in contrast to other contemporary rich cloth materials of elites abroad or used for liturgical vestments and decorations in churches, such as the rich cloth noted in the *biskupasögur* and the *máldagar* church inventories—but *vaðmál* could also be fine cloth for elites as well, as discussed in the first half of this chapter. *Vaðmál* acts to mark both the functional aspect of the cloth's use, that is clothing, and acts as visual codes to signify the individual character's position in society. The visuality of plain, ordinary clothing and of colourful, striped clothing can communicate messages of situational context and of identity in terms of status, age, gender, and more. They were used to conceal a child's true social status, used a narrative device to indicate personality or character traits, or functioned to hide a person's identity when on nefarious business in *vaðmál* clothing, and in one case specifically for a chieftain riding on

appropriate religious demeanor." Emily Mary Parsons, "Good Habits Textile Work and the Creation of Monastic Identities at the Convent of Kirkjubæjarklaustur," MA dissertation, University of Iceland, 2018, 44.

[238] *Ibid,* 737.

[239] Wallem, *De islandske kirkers udstyr i middelalderen,* 217. *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 293. On the other hand, archaeological finds indicate use of tents on ships: the Oseberg ship burial had two tents with only their frames surviving (now lost), which would have been covered with fabric like *vaðmál.* Original finds report in Brügger, A. W., et al. *Osebergfundet*, 3 vols. (Kristiana: Universitetets Oldsaksamling, 1917-1927).

horseback. In this way, the *vaðmál* clothing is used for marking characterization in the saga stories, rather than indicating economic value or transaction.

These examples denote clothing that is generally suited to normal, uneventful activities and are insignificant, not worthy of notice nor mark any special occasion nor a prestigious person, which would use more ornate clothing or special clothing gifts that serve to elevate status. This can be contrasted with examples in the family sagas where high status persons wear elaborate or foreign clothes to indicate their position in society, such as the gifts in *Laxdœla saga* of the embroidered headdress ("motr hvítan, gullofinn") gifted from Ingibjörg Tryggvadóttir to Kjartan Óláfsson for his bride-to-be Guðrún, the set of new scarlet clothes ("öll klæði nýskorin af skarlati") gifted to Kjartan from King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway (r.963-1000), the set of scarlet clothes ("öll klæði skorin af skarlati") gifted to Óláfr *pái* Höskuldsson at Christmas from King Haraldr *gráfeldr* Eiríksson of Norway (r.*c.*961-970), the silk brocade suit ("pellsklæðum") gifted to Bolli Bollason from the Byzantine emperor, or the gift of a scarlet tunic and scarlet and fur cloak gifted to Þorvaldr *krákunef* from the earl in return for his sail-gift.[240] In addition, the *biskupasögur* provide examples of gifts from archbishops to bishops or from bishops to their friends,[241] such as the examples in *Lárentíus saga* of King Eiríkr (II Magnússon, r.1273–1299) sending vestments of *pellsklæði* (implies costly material or fur, or might be a *pallium*, but notes that they were made into dalmatics) to Iceland in 1286 as a result of a vow made to St. Jón Ögmundarson in a time of

[240] "Laxdœla saga," 131, 114, 60, 224-25; "Þorvarðar þáttr krákunefs," 237-9. Scarlet, in the medieval period, refers to a type of heavy-weight, fulled woollen cloth made from English wool and dyed with kermes (usually *Kermes vermillio*—however, note that other fabrics dyed with kermes are not referred to as scarlet, only the woollen) rather than the colour scarlet, which later came from the rich red colour it produced. This was a very expensive material due to the cost of the dye. The term scarlet only appears in the eleventh century (1007-1032 in Old High German, *c.*1050 in Latin), was mostly produced in the southern Low Countries and northern Italy but also in some in England in Lincoln from the thirteenth century, and scarlet production was at its peak in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries; this perhaps denotes the luxuries of the material world of the saga authors, rather than that of the saga characters or Kings Haraldr and Óláfr. John Munro, "Scarlet", in *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles c. 450-1450*, ed. by Gale Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Maria Hayward, 477-81 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 478-79. Little is said about dyes in the written sources but there were natural sources for dyeing material in Iceland, (see Guðrún Bjarnadóttir, *Jurtalitun á Íslandi* (Ölfus: Hespuhúsið, 2020) for more information on Icelandic plants used for dying), but other common to rare dyestuffs in the medieval period included woad (*Isatis tinctoria* L.) for blue, various madder for red (*Rubia tinctorum* L and related wild species *Rubia peregrina* L., *Galium boreale* L.), weld (*Reseda luteola* L), saffron (*Crocus sativus* L), safflower (*Carthamus tinctoris* L), or dyer's greenweed (*Genista tinctorial* L) for yellow, and insect dyes Kermes (*Kermes vermillion*), Armenian cochineal (*Porphyrophora hamelii*), and Polish cochineal (*Porphyrophora polonica*) for scarlet reds, marine molluscs of the Muricidae family for purple, and various others. Lise Bender Jørgensen and Karina Grömer, "The Archaeology of Textiles—Recent advances and new methods," *Portal*, 3, 2012 (2013), 57.

[241] See Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power. Feasting and Gift Giving in Medieval Iceland and its Saga* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015) for the role and impact of gift-giving for bishops in the *biskupasögur.*

trouble, Bishop Lárentíus Kálfsson's deathbed gift in 1331 to Einarr Hafliðason of splendid tapestries ("refla sæmiliga"), and the a very splendid mitre ("mítru harðla sæmiliga) that Archbishop Eilífr *korti* Árnason (r.1311-1332) sent to Iceland as a gift for Bishop Lárentíus in 1330.[242] This difference of choices in terminology of material is likely due to the bias of the source material, in that the *Íslendingasögur* are stylized and quasi-fictional and serves a purpose for the story, such as a rise to fame or hiding one's identity to fool another character, or even to set the clothing of the secular chieftains against the sartorial splendour of the Norwegian kings' courts or the rich ecclesiastical textiles and furnishings, a contrast set against the later events of the *biskupasögur* and annals written in the age of increased royal influence and pressure of taxes and the progressively influential Icelandic church with conflict over land rights and tithes. The *Sturlunga saga* compilation reflects less of these material property or conspicuous appeal values in the use of *vaðmál* terms, perhaps only in its utilitarian value as a cloth stretcher to carry a wounded man off a ship, and instead, examples lean more towards its economic function, or a combination of cloth and economic function, with decreased use *vaðmál* descriptors as a narrative tool but still deeply influential on medieval Icelandic society.

Cloth was used as a narrative device to provide verbal clues for characters and their motivations based on visual descriptions which communicate messages of intention, identity, and status to the audience. *Vaðmál* acts as a representation for what the medieval authors and their audience would consider normal clothing for people of a certain social status, including as poor, youth, adults, travellers, or working people, across a range of sources. In this regard, it appears that *vaðmál* clothing was the appropriate choice of visual material to represent the ordinary and every day on a medieval Icelandic farmstead, but finer *vaðmál* also extended to the clothing of the elite.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to demonstrate how even in its material and aesthetic functions, the cloth aspects of *vaðmál*'s function intersect: *vaðmál* is represented in the literature as a material item without economic inference but rather playing practical and communicative roles as

[242] "Lárentíus saga biskups," *Íslenzk fornrit 17. Biskupa sögur III,* ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1998), 231, 431, 440. Anna Sigurðardóttir proposes that these two tapestries were most likely made by the nuns at Reynisstaðr for the bishop. Anna Sigurðardóttir, *Allt hafði annan róm áður í páfadóm: Nunnuklaustrin tvö á Íslandi á miðöldum og brot úr kristnisögu* (Reykjavík: Kvennasögusafn Íslands, 1988), 97.

cloth(ing) that was valued by society to clothe themselves with warm and durable cloth, decorate their lives, and visualize messages of identity about themselves and others.

The first part of this chapter has shown how the descriptions of *vaðmál*'s use as cloth and clothing demonstrate *vaðmál*'s materiality value as a functional use for warm, water-resistant, durable clothing that suits farming, seafaring, and fishing societies of Iceland and the North Atlantic, and the various markets along the Baltic as well. Cloth was used in various ways, from clothing to sails to tents to decorative textiles. In this function, the cloth function represents the post-exchange (or outside of exchange) meaning of *vaðmál* as cloth that is measured, *vað*. If we accept that there could be multiple reasons for value and practicality, and do not divorce the two aspects of use and meaning, we can trust that the saga audience would have recognized both the tangible value and practical application of this cloth as suited to the activities taking place, of daily work tasks and ordinary activities. The second part of this chapter has shown how the descriptions of *vaðmál*'s use as a communicator of identity and decoration demonstrates *vaðmál*'s aesthetic value, appropriate for descriptions of the total costume of a character or describing the visual display of other types of textiles. Cloth acted as key visual codes communicating individuals in terms of character expectations and their identity in terms of age, social status, wealth, their psychological state, and their patterns of behaviour, revealing what the authors believed signified the dress of people from certain different levels of society, which in turn reveals information about medieval Icelandic society and its values, used to influence the perceptions of the audience concerning the characters, their identities and social status, and the expectations assigned to characters of such rank from that earlier time in medieval Iceland.

In these two functions, material and aesthetic, *vaðmál* had a social and cultural impact in allowing medieval Icelanders to dress themselves for inclement weather, work, and other activities of daily life but also allowing them to visually express individual and group identities in terms of clothing preferences and styles which reflect different aspects of age, status, gender, and ethnicity. *Vaðmál* is presented by the saga authors and documents' scribes as valued as locally cloth source, warm clothing, decorative cloth, and a way for people to express themselves, cloth functioning beyond the economic sphere and presented without monetary value, thus demonstrating that *vaðmál* was more than just a measure. *Vaðmál* represents a medieval society provisioning for themselves by taking advantage of the material resources of their environment by raising sheep in the readily available grasslands and producing a practical product which could also be used for

social differentiation and even made in surplus for exchange. Turning away from material and clothing focus, the next chapter will shift the focus to that important economic role in *vaðmál*'s function as a measure of value and commodity currency.

Chapter 2: A Fungible Textile: *Vaðmál* as Measure of Value and Commodity Currency

Vaðmál was fully realized in the economic system in its function as a measure of the value of objects, stated as an amount of *vaðmál*, or as the medium of payment, the means by which a transaction or exchange was facilitated, readily exchangeable for goods and services.[243] It is marked, using the terms *vaðmál*, *vara*, and *hafnarvað, gjaldavoð*, as the medium of the transaction, and law codes established set standard values of exchange between *vaðmál* and other goods according to fixed, legal rates or valued by legal assessors. While the dimensions, ratios, and weights changed over time, the essence of *vaðmál* as a 2/2 twill unit remained useful for the whole period: value resting in its exchangeability due to legalized standards rather than distinctness via fine quality. *Vaðmál* was adopted as measure and commodity currency because of its fungibility, which here is argued to be due to its wide applicability and ease of use in medieval Icelandic society over time, as discussed in the prior two chapters with the adaptation of a local fibre sources and using cultural technologies of production and dress, but this chapter will also show its wide-ranging application to virtually all aspects of medieval life and adjusting over time to new obligations of paying compensation, tithes, and taxes; it was a 'tool' connected to and was utilized by the power brokers in society—the farmers, chieftains, the king's men, and church leaders.[244]

Vaðmál's essential role in the domestic economy and export trade has been previously demonstrated by Helgi Þorláksson, who demonstrated its role as price measure and commodity; role in trade as export sent to Norway for fishermen, monasteries, and poorer urban inhabitants; range of types; and fluctuations in prices and main types.[245] Using examples from the *Diplomatarium Islandicum* and *Norwegicum* and from *Búalög,* he argues for different terms reflecting different rates and levels of standardization in different periods, according to dimensions, weight, and thread counts, with *vara* (including *vöruvaðmál* and *söluvaðmál*) dominating in the thirteenth century but *hafnarvaðmál* (including *gjaldavaðmál*, *merkuvoð*) increasingly from the fourteenth century.[246] This will not be objected here, and the variable rates

[243] Susanna Harris, "From value to desirability," 683, 693, 694.
[244] This aligns with Helgi Þorláksson's argument the root of standardization of *vaðmál* came from domestic needs, not due to foreign influence, or at least not directly and any similarities could be instead due to common inheritance of textile production techniques or measurement units. In contrast, the later *hafnarvaðmál* type measured by weight rather than assessment could have been an adaptation to Norwegian need for the cloth to align with international standards after Iceland became a tributary of the Norwegian king. Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 77.
[245] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag.*
[246] *Ibid,* 224, 235, 239.

of value are not significant here to the discussion. Rather, the focus here is shifted to examining how *vaðmál* functioned in Iceland and in what contexts such transactions using *vaðmál* took place: why *vaðmál* was adapted for commodity currency in the medieval Icelandic period and comparing its economic value to non-economic.

This chapter considers the types of transactions where *vaðmál* was used, the contexts of use, the intentions of the buyers and sellers and how these transactions reflect sociocultural or sociopolitical needs, and traces changing terms across sources and time. This will be examined by keeping in mind that textiles' production reflects the needs of society, development in its environment, and its level of textile technology, all factors that would have influenced medieval Icelandic society's choice to prioritize woollen cloth as currency.[247] The simultaneous material and fungible nature of *vaðmál* as cloth commodity currency demonstrates its wide and impactful impact on Iceland as a domestic currency and measure of value, but one that also value in its practical use.

Part 1: *Vaðmál* as Standardized Measure of Value and Payment in Kind

Vaðmál was legally defined as a standard of account, used to measure the value of items or of other items in transactions paid in kind. Thus, there is account of *vaðmál* as commodity cloth currency and measure of value in *Grágás* when it is used in a monetary context alone, without any clear reference to the presence of physical cloth in the transaction or valuation of goods and services. This section deals with the use of *vaðmál* as money in a purely abstract sense, including examples that show the value of property and objects and valuations of various types of payments including purchases, fines, debts, wages, rents, tithes, among other things. In these examples, there is no actual, tangible cloth that passed hands in the moment of exchange or valuation, or its presence is ambiguous.

Vaðmál is seen in the source material as a term used to measure the value of other things, goods, and services. This is only a measuring tool, an accepted standard, that acts to measure of the economic value of goods or objects, purely an abstract conceptualization of value. According to Helgi Þorláksson, the *vara*-type of *vaðmál* is used mainly as a unit of account in Iceland from the late fourteenth century onwards, with *hafnarvaðmál* (*gjaldavaðmál*) gradually taking over for

[247] Eva Andersson *et al.*, "Old Textiles – New Possibilities," 150-51.

domestic payments and cloth exports.[248] This expression of value demonstrates how that of woollen cloth as standardized currency had universally been accepted and permeated into different sectors of society; this can be seen in the various examples including value of landed and moveable property and animals.

When searching for examples of *vaðmál* as measure of value, the term *hundrað* can potentially also be used to find such examples, but it is not always clear whether that *vaðmál* was specifically inferred, rather than other currencies or media of payment; it could mean the cloth currency but is not definite. These examples include measuring value for determining individual rights, responsibilities, and capacity to act according to property means in contexts of households and communes,[249] taxation and limitations on travel outside of Iceland,[250] support of poor and dependents,[251] sumptuary law on personal clothing allowances;[252] providing valuations for landed and moveable property[253] and of property for tithing obligations,[254] for damages to landed and moveable property,[255] for goods,[256] property,[257] and lawsuit judgements valued in kind.[258] It was also as a unit of account in payments for foreign goods[259] or property[260], political rights of a

[248] Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 78.
[249] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska*, 37, 105, 181. Amendment 27 is not in the main version but in appended amendments. *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 118, 310, 146, 149, 405.
[250] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 97, 98, 227.
[251] *Ibid,* 99, 214, 318, 135, 141, 148.
[252] *Ibid*, 149.
[253] "Sturlu saga," *Sturlunga saga*, vol. 1, ed Örnólfur Thorsson, 51-99 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2010), 91; "Íslendinga saga," 188; "Íslendinga saga," 629.
[254] "Lárentíus saga biskups," 388, 390.
[255] "Íslendinga saga," 313; "Íslendinga saga," 364; "Íslendinga saga," 363-64; "Þórðar saga kakala," Sturlunga saga, vol. 2, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, 459-550, 738-740 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2010), 463; "Þórðar saga kakala," 509; "Þorgils saga og Hafliða," *Sturlunga saga*, vol.1, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, 7-46 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2010), 33.
[256] "Vatnsdæla saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 8 *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 1-131 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1939), 107.
[257] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1*,* 402.
[258] "Sturlu saga," 85. "Reykdœla saga og Víga-Skútu," *Íslenzk fornrit* 10, *Ljósvetninga saga*, ed. Björn Sigfússon, 149-243 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1940), 177.
[259] "Sturlu saga," 84; "Íslendinga saga," 297.
[260] "Sturlu saga," 70; "Íslendinga saga," 743; "Lárentíus saga biskups," 358, 384; *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 4*,* 253-54, 354-55.

goðorð,[261] debt;[262] payments in kind;[263] for services including rent,[264] wages,[265] legal aid,[266] hired killer,[267] tithes;[268] to pay fees and fines for unlawful offences;[269] to pay compensation for killings,[270] personal assault,[271] property damage and attacks,[272] sexual offences, and alimentation and rights to residence.[273] These examples have been mentioned to emphasize the wide range of contexts in which *vaðmál* as currency had been used, including political, legal, economic, and farm and household contexts; however, due to the uncertainty *hundrað* as unit of account for cloth specifically, they will not be discussed in great detail, with a few exceptions, and the chapter will instead focus on examples which do infer a clear cloth currency meaning, the terms *vaðmál, vara, hafnarváð, gjaldavoð*.

Law codes

As valid currency, the law codes show *vaðmál* as the unit used to measure value and such measures use the legal measuring tools named in *Grágás*: the two-ell rod (*stika*) and the twenty-ell measure (*kvarði*), and *alin* (ell). In this way, cloth-measures could assign value to something without cloth being present.[274] These tools are important markers of standardization of cloth for sale or export; they indicate a desire for quality assurance and defense against poor-quality production or dishonest sales practices via the nation-wide adoption of standard measures for *vaðmál* currency.

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[261] "Íslendinga saga," *Sturlunga saga,* vol. 2, ed. Jón Jóhanneson *et. al*, 229-534 (Reykjavík: H.F. Leifur, 1946), 472. Unless noted as here, all other references of "Íslendinga saga" refer to the Örnólfur Thorsson edition.
[262] "Flóamanna saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 13, *Harðar saga*, eds. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 229-327 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991), 314.
[263] "Íslendinga saga," 293, 328, 456; "Sturlu saga," 85; "Droplaugarsona saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 11, *Austfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, 135-180 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1950), 155.
[264] "Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar," 108.
[265] *Ibid,* 207.
[266] "Íslendinga saga," 451.
[267] "Sturlu saga," 84; "Íslendinga saga," 331, 396ff.
[268] "Lárentíus saga biskups," 349.
[269] "Guðmundar saga dýra," 164; "Sturlu saga," 84; "Íslendinga saga," 449, 456.
[270] "Íslendinga saga," 287; "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar," 245; "Guðmundar saga dýra," 137.
[271] "Íslendinga saga," 328, 247, 299, "Íslendinga saga," ed. Jón Jóhannesson, 472-5; "Sturlu saga," 87; "Þorgils saga og Hafliða," 15-16; "Guðmundar saga dýra," 143, 153, 145, 167, 175-76; "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar," 225.
[272] "Íslendinga saga," 328; "Sturlu saga," 63; "Íslendinga saga," 303-04; 63; "Íslendinga saga," 432; "Íslendinga saga," 224; "Íslendinga saga," 456; "Þórðar saga kakala," 476; "Guðmundar saga dýra," 154-55; "Guðmundar saga dýra," 167; "Reykdœla saga og Víga-Skútu," 180.
[273] "Íslendinga saga," 216, 331, 345.; "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar," 245; "Finnboga saga," 262.
[274] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 206-7.

Grágás includes a clause detailing process for organizing an overseas-journey when only one of two ship-owners want to travel abroad, that the ship is to be assessed for the value of all ship's gear and everything that they owned jointly, and specifies that it was to be valued in *vara* or refined silver ("virða skip það til vöru eða til brennds silfurs") and the one who wanted to travel can choose whether to take the ship or the price, if the price then was to go to the other's house to get the money ("sækja verðið") in two weeks and if the ship then go pay the price ("gjalda verð") at the ship in a week.[275]

Grágás deals with rights to harpooned drift whales, according to landowner and harpooner. It stipulates that if the land owner had it flensed, he was to value and weigh the drift whale, valuing it in *vaðmál* ("virða til vaðmála"), and that he must pay the harpooner his share at the *alþingi* in six-ell ounce-units and announce the harpoon-marks and price in *vaðmál* ("segja þar til skotsins og til verðsins að Lögberg, og skulu það vaðmál vera").[276] *Jónsbók* retains this clause, but only the valuation of the harpooner's share of a beached whale in *vaðmál*, ("virða... til vaðmála").[277] Here, the expectation is that the payment, measured in *vaðmál* and six-ell ounce-units, is made in *vaðmál* at the *alþingi*.

Samtíðarsögur

Most of the use of *vaðmál* as currency in the contemporary sagas, from the *Sturlunga saga* compilation and *biskupasögur*, is without inferring use of cloth and do not use terms that imply a specific *vaðmál* cloth comparison, instead using terms like *hundrað* alone to measure the value of estates and their goods, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It does, however, discuss payments for services rendered made in kind and in cash (*frítt/ófrítt*), which might include *vaðmál*. *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar* includes the payment of wages in 1202 to the couple Sigurðr Ormsson and Þuríðr Gizurardóttir for managing ("forráða") the estate of the bishop-elect Guðmundr Arason. They were to be paid a maximum of two hundred hundreds ("tvö hundruð hundraða"), with the payment to be made both in kind (cattle) and in cash ("fé bæði frítt og ófrítt"), for their running the financial affairs ("fjárvarðveisla") of the estate.[278] Only assumptions can be made about the term *ófrítt* based on the prevalence of *vaðmál* currency in this period and the

[275] *Ibid,* 148.
[276] *Ibid*, 359, 361.
[277] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 203
[278] "Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar," 207.

expected types of income the estate would receive, which could include payments of cloth made to the bishopric, as, for example, a portion of the tithe payment would be paid in *vaðmál*.

Íslendingasögur

Vaðmál as a unit of account, is also seen in the family sagas. It was used to express the economic value of other objects. One example expresses the value of a bag of *klæði,* the specific fabric not stated. In the early-fifteenth century *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, the circa eleventh-century character Gísli Ásmundarson conveys his valuation of a bag of clothing in a confrontation with his brother Grettir when riding with his men from Hraun south near the Hítará. When Grettir tries to take a bag of clothing from these elegantly-dressed men, Gísli states that he would rather part with thirty hundreds ("þrjá tigu hundraða") than this bag of clothing ("klæðasekks").[279] Here, Gísli is making a statement of how much he values the bag of clothing and is ambivalent to what kind of cloth was in the sack and its intended function (clothing or cloth for sale), not necessarily how much it is worth but rather to express how valuable the item is to him. Similar is the case of valuation for a costly object seen in an account of an eleventh-century exchange in the late thirteenth-century *Brennu-Njáls saga.* It tells of a bracelet given by Flosi Þórðarson of Svínafell in east Iceland as a bribe to the lawyer (*lögmaðr*) Eyjólfr Bölverksson of Otradalr of the West Fjords to entice help with the defense of a case at the *alþingi*, stating the bracelet's value as twelve hundreds of russet-striped *vaðmál* ("tólf hundruð mórend").[280] There was no cloth present, and the concept of *vaðmál* is present as the standard by which the bracelet being gifted was valued in order to indicate the extent of Flosi's generosity (or seriousness of the bribe). *Vaðmál* as a tool of economic measure is therefore used by the (later) medieval authors to express different kinds of payments and express the value of objects even in the time of *Íslendinagsögur*. As the standard for the valuation of goods and services, cloth did not have to be present or exchange hands to function in this role.

[279] "Grettis saga," 191.
[280] "Brennu-Njáls saga," 368.

Documentary sources

There are many church inventories that detail property or items value as an amount of *vaðmál.* Some account directly value property in *vaðmál*, such as in *c.*1150 where the estate of brothers Loðmundr and Dálkr Þórisson (with household utensils and animals) at the church farm at Breiðabólstaðr in Síða was valued in *vaðmál* ("uirt til vadmala"), from 1180 for Saurbæjar church in Hvalfjarðarströnd which owned fifteen hundred *vaðmál* in household utensils and furnishings ("til fimtan hundraþa vaþmala i busgognom oc husbuninge"), and *c.*1209 for Skarð hið eystra in Rangárvellir that the church owned forty hundred ells *vaðmál* ("til fiogurra tyga hundraða alna vaðmala") in ornaments, hangings, liturgical vestments, bells, chalices, and all furnishings.[281]

Others give an indirect valuation using ells or unnamed cash, such as *máldagi* from 1180 which states that St. Mary's church in Hítarnes owned ten hundred ells in household utensils and furnishings ("atta hundraþ alna j busgognom oc husbunaþe"), but the 1354 and 1397 *máldagar* name the church's goods as cash or in kind, *ófrítt,* 1354 "hundred ofritt innan gātta" and 1397 "c ofrijt innan gātta", which could include *vaðmál.* The 1397 inventory also includes "ij voder tvitugar" which was given to the church, which indicates the use of the *hafnarvað*-type *vaðmál* at this time and could possibly represent *ófrítt* as well.[282] The *máldagar* for St. Mary's church in Hraun (Staðarhraun) shift to more obscure terms over time: *c.*1120 accounts for a gift of "ij hundroþ fiogora alna aura j busgagne" to the church; *c.*1185 *máldagi* that it owned eight hundred ells in household utensils and furnishings ("atta hundraþ alna j busgognom oc husbunaþe"), in addition to *vaðmál* ("halft annat hunndroþ vaþmala"); 1354 inventory does not include *vaðmál* terms (just in hundreds) in its account of "jnnan gātta;" and the one from 1397 accounts for five hundred in "ofrijdu."[283] The account from 1206 for Reykjaholt lists the value of the church's moveable property, including stating the value of books, mass vestments, and church furnishings at sixty hundreds of *vaðmál* ("virðo til sextogo hvndraþa vaþmala") handed over to Snorri Sturluson by priest Magnús Pállson (who had taken over when his father Páll Sölvason died in 1185, the date of the previous *máldagi*), who moved to the estate there after separating from Herdís Bersadóttir and leaving their home at Borg *c.*1202. The same phrase is stated in the 1224 *máldagi*

[281] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1, 203, 265, 355.
[282] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1, 275; *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 3, 83; *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 4, 180.
[283] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1,169, 278, *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 3, 85; *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 4, 183.

("virdo til sextigi hundrađa vađmala"), inventoried when Snorri married Hallveig Ormsdóttir.[284] Broadly speaking, these church records indicate general valuation in ells or *vađmál* in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, which could refer to *vara* or *hafnarvađmál*, but valuation ("virt til") in *vađmál* throughout.

We can also see *vađmál* payments in the *próventa* discussed in the first chapter, where the focus was on the clothing provisions stipulated in the contracts. They also include what currencies they were paying or valuing their donations in, such as the Arnór Jónsson's contract in 1399 stating that it would be paid in *kúgildi* and *vara*-valued goods ("halft i kugildi edur voruvirt godz").[285] In this late fourteenth-century example, *vara* remains a unit of account for valuing the payment of other goods, and not necessarily the payment itself. A similar case is seen in the *c.*1400 inventory of the church at Hruni, taken when a new priest took over, which shows a mix of *vara* and *hafnarvoð* goods but also *vara* used for valuation. It states that the church owned four hundreds in *vara* ("iiij c voru"), eight hundreds in hafnarvoð ("viij c j hafnarvodum"), with the *hafnarváð* fifty ells in each hundred (*merkurvađmál* ratios) and 180 ells in *hafnarvoð* valued in *vara* ("og vtiju alna j huertt hundrad… Item halftt annat hundrad j hafnarvodum voruvirdum").[286] These fourteenth-century documents thus show a mix of *vara* and *hafnarvoð,* including *merkurvađmál,* but also the shift of *vara* to a unit of account rather than main medium of payment and the adoption of new ratios based on weight.

There are many more inventories of the various medieval churches, but these have been highlighted to show how the documentary sources also indicate that Church used the *vađmál* standard— *vađmál, vara, hafnarvađ*, but also more obscure terms that allow the possibility for being *vađmál,* such as *alin* and *ófrítt*—to measure the value of land and moveable property throughout the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. The long use of these terms that indicate the continued fungibility of this cloth currency unit, useful to the economy and society for accounting goods and transactions, especially here seen measuring items also in religious households.

This section has shown how *vađmál* and its associated terms have been used in these various medieval sources to confirm a fungibility function, a measure of value against the standardized cloth commodity currency used in a range of contexts including household, legal,

[284] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1, 350, 471.
[285] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1, 641.
[286] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 6, ed. Jón Þorkelsson (Copenhagen: S.L. Möller, 1900-04), 38.

political, and ecclesiastical. The rates were determined at a national level, as evidenced with the law codes, but they could also be determined locally, as evidenced by stipulations such as the king's agents and churches having their own measuring sticks. The range of contexts of use demonstrate its flexibility in the domestic economic system. It was used for such varying contexts as measuring the value of individual and estate property, moveable and land, owned or purchased, but also payments in kind or debts owed. *Vaðmál* seems more common in the twelfth- and thirteenth century law codes, contemporary and family sagas, and documentary sources with phrases *virð til vaðmála* or *vöruvirt* indicating valuation in *vara*-type *vaðmál*, but the later documentary sources adopt *hafnarvaðmál*-type terms for valuation, and if we adopt general terms of valuation (*ófrítt*, *álna*) there is the possibility that *vaðmál* is represented more widely. This usage reflects many levels of society including individuals, households, local community and politics, monastic and bishopric communities, and the national level of taxation and tithing.

Part 2: *Vaðmál* as Practical, Tangible Medium of Economic Exchange

Vaðmál 's function as commodity currency exhibits meanings as cloth and money which are inextricable from each other. This is a tangible good with practical function and widespread use in society, reflecting the activities of medieval Icelandic men, and somewhat of women. Here, examples will be addressed which conflate both meanings simultaneously: physical cloth used as money, a tangible item reflecting an abstract standardized value, a "measure of stuff." A purported real amount of cloth is used in a moment of exchange, but this cloth also has a real, future non-economic use that bears an important influence on why that cloth was used as money, as was seen in the two previous chapters.

This tangible cloth was used in a variety of economic contexts. It was valued by medieval Icelanders as currency for multiple reasons which fit into Harris' framework of desirability, including the desire for both its material properties as cloth and clothing and for its fungibility as a trade-good, commodity currency, and standard of value, but also not excluding the possibility of object biography or expense and exclusivity. Fungibility for commodity currencies requires that there be a desirability for that object at the end of the transaction, that the good used as money must have a second desire and function in society. When we consider how *vaðmál* was desired, we must consider that there were multiple and simultaneous desires at play for this commodity

currency, but here the function demonstrates a desire for locally, readily available, and useable currency that could be exchanged widely in different sectors of society.

As it was standardized this means that it was easily fungible with other types of payments and currencies within society, whether using barter to pay in kind or buying something on credit from a merchant in the summer and paying with *vaðmál* in following spring. This section will outline a variety of different contexts in which these exchanges are made, all of which display the use of *vaðmál* or associated terms to indicate its use in facilitating an economic transaction, an exchange of cloth-money for goods and services. These examples show *vaðmál* stipulated as a desired tender and used in payments for goods, fees, services, fines, compensation, including for debts, tithes, wages, rent, taxes, and more, summarized in Table 1. Cloth was influential in medieval Icelandic economic exchange as the main commodity currency, playing a real, tangible role, especially as this period is in the context of a larger global medieval cloth commodity trade boom of the later medieval period.[287]

Law codes

The law codes specify *vaðmál* as the desired currency for certain payments, which can be expected of a legal currency. *Grágás* lists the unit as accepted tender for financial agreements—*vaðmál* or *vararfeldr*—and even allows it as exclusive medium of payment), for repayment of hired stock, for lighting tolls, and for the capital tithe on property upon marriage.[288] These regulations concerning the demand for *vaðmál* as preferred tender in payments demonstrate that *vaðmál* was desired as a commodity currency but also that it was also not always available and there were other viable legal tenders; yet the stipulation for exclusive payment in *vaðmál* highlights the preeminent place *vaðmál* held as the main domestic commodity currency and measure of value.

Vaðmál was especially designated as the tender in which one could make tithes payments, and this tithe regulation indicates what types of commodities were useful for different sectors of society. The church tithe was an annual payment, introduced *c.*1096 by Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson,

[287] *Cf.* England and the Iberian Peninsula trading vast quantities and varying qualities of wool and woollen cloth—including comparable twill, as in the Portuguese *burello*—but also the export of woollen cloth from Central Europe as well, let alone the fine quality woollen cloth being produced and traded from the emerging textile producer cities in the Low Countries and Italy. This is a period of increasing high quantity, low(er) quality bulk trade of goods, including cloth, being traded across the vast European trade networks.
[288] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 156, 146, 173, 41, 34, 45, 110-11.

based on property ownership, debt-free property over and above their clothing.[289] *Vaðmál* is stipulated as the tender of payment across all four quarters of the church tithe and in regulations concerning the capital tithe (*tíundin meira*). Tithe nonpayment was a summoning offence.

Grágás details how the tithe payment is to be split into four quarters (church, priest, bishop, and poor) or if very small amounts given to the poor or church. All four quarters list *vaðmál*, *vara*, or *vararfeldr* among the specified acceptable tenders of payment, often being the first medium listed. The poor quarter was to be paid in *vaðmál*, *vararfeldr*, wool, fleeces, food, or livestock excluding horses ("í vaðmálum eða í vararfeldum, í ullu eða gærum…") before Martinmas (November 11), but if later, could be paid solely in *vaðmál*.[290] These are all items that are useful for the poor, whether to feed or clothe them or for them to use, or to be used to buy necessities for them. The bishop's and priests' quarters was paid in *vaðmál*, *vararfeldr*, lamb's fleeces, gold, or refined silver ("í vaðmálum eða í vararfeldum, í lambagærum…"), while the church needs' quarter which was to paid in wax, wood, incense, tar, or pieces of new linen suitable to church adornment, but specifies that this quarter can made be made entirely in *vaðmál* ("rétt er þótt vaðmál ein sé goldin").[291] A later clause stipulates that the church tithe was to be paid in the homefield in front of the main doorway of the designated church on fourth Thursday of summer (May 7 to 13), in the specified tenders, including *vaðmál* and *vararfeldr*, and could pay the entire tithe in *vaðmál* if desired ("í vaðmálum eða vararfeldum... ok kost á hann að gjalda allt í vaðmálum, ef hann vill það heldur"), but also includes incense and linen cloth, perhaps reflecting a growing church or changed access to imported materials.[292]

All these tenders are products that are useful for the function of the church, whether the bishop's estate or individual churches, but *vaðmál* and some others are also products that can be easily exchanged to purchase other goods and services that the church might need, or that would be useful for redistribution among the estate's workers, parishioners, or the poor and needy. This demonstrates *vaðmál*'s widespread use across different sectors of society, paid by farming households, accepted by priests, churches, and bishops, and then used to cloth the bishop, priest, household members, or redistributed as alms for the poor or to pay the wages of the estate's workers, or exchanged locally or exported for food, necessities, or luxuries. The practicality of

[289] The tithe is discussed in *Grágás* in both the Christian Law section and in its own Tithe Payment section.
[290] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 38.
[291] *Ibid*, 12, 16, 38, 39.
[292] *Ibid*, 12.

wool and wool cloth as the tender of payment is the versatility of its use across the whole spectrum of society. There are differences between each of their means and needs of each tithe quarter payment, with some types of payments being more practical materials for the support of indigent persons, such as cloth, livestock, and foodstuffs, and others for meeting the needs of running the church, such as cloth, incense, linen, and wax, and only the priests and bishops to receive gold and silver. However, *vaðmál* was listed in all payments and could be the only media, which indicates its wide, practical use but also that any tithe-qualified household that had sheep could be able to pay the tithe as could produce it themselves, in addition to high level of fungibility to be reused or exchanged for other local goods or imports, in additional to material use of cloth. This was cloth with wide-reaching applications and practicalities.

Grágás also demonstrates *vaðmál*'s practical use as payment for goods, fees, and services in secular settings. This includes purchasing hay as tending for animals at the *alþingi* (in ells) or indicated a tenant's right to hay (in ells of *vaðmál* or *klæðavoð*)[293] and payment for specific fees, such as payments of burial fees (in ells), fees for Sunday labour allowances (in cases of imminent risk only, with the caveat that must then gift an ell of *vaðmál*), and fees related to trade and the movement of ships and people between countries, such as landing tolls for Norwegians and Icelanders at home and abroad (in ells or ells of *vaðmál*, but also *feldr*, raw wool, lambs' fleeces).[294] It is specified for payments for priests' mass, holy day, and funeral services (in *vara* and ells), for the lawspeaker's wages (in hundreds of ells of *vaðmál*), and for reimbursement for alimentation of guests and dependants and insurance for loss of livestock (ells, hundreds, *vaðmál,* and *vara*).[295] Finally, *vaðmál* was also used to pay fines, penalties, and settlements in cases of dispute and judgements at the *alþingi*. This includes cases of illegal marriage due to kinship impediment (ells), personal compensation in intercourse cases (marks of *vaðmál*), and fines for selling foreign goods at a higher price than the established standard values (marks of *vaðmál*).[296] The range of contexts and use of *vaðmál* for payment in these different stipulations crosses different sectors of society, even demonstrating how it was adapted to pay the new tithe that emerged in the eleventh century as the church was becoming institutionalized, demonstrating the

[293] *Ibid*, 180. The *Konungsbók* version uses *vaðmál* as the medium, while *Staðarhólsbók* states 10 cows or their value (*kúgildi*; "eyri á tíu kýr eða kúgildi.") alone. *Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid*, 139.
[294] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 7, 21, 150, 479.
[295] *Ibid*, 191, 17, 43-44, 7, 18, 460, 191-92, 188, 77, 100, 107.
[296] *Ibid*, 116, 142, 151.

flexibility of this currency for a new financial obligation within in the established economic system.

When *Jónsbók* was established, the Christian Law section of the earlier *Grágás* was no longer included, as secular and ecclesiastical affairs began to be considered separate and the Christian Laws of Bishop Árni Þorláksson (*Kristinréttur Árna Þorlákssonar*) were established in 1275, which can be considered alongside *Járnsíða* and later *Jónsbók* but under the purview of the king instead.[297] This law retains the earlier tithe rules about the payment of the tithe in certain currencies as before, with *vaðmál* and *vararfeldr* listed for the bishops, poor, church, and priest quarters, and could still choose to pay "allt í vaðmálum."[298] Here it stipulates that all who owned at least ten six-ell ounce-units free of debt were to pay one ell of *vaðmál* ("greiða alin vaðmáls"), with increasing ratios if owned more property, up to a hundred ells paying six.[299]

Jónsbók also includes stipulations for payments for goods, fees, and services to be made in *vaðmál* cloth. It uses *vaðmál* for the purchase of animals and payment for animal tending.[300] It specifies certain services to be paid in *vaðmál*: rent of animals (if butter or hay not available, then to pay in ells of *vaðmál*), rent of land (assessed in butter, fodder, or food, otherwise in ells of *vaðmál*), poor support payments (ells), and compensation of lost or accidentally slaughtered animals (ells).[301] It also specifies *vaðmál* to pay fines: fox catching (ells), nonpayment of debt (ells and hundreds, and *vara* for a Bergen-specific clause), theft (*vaðmál* first, followed by other media), and for breaking contracts (mark of silver in Norway but hundreds in Iceland).[302]

One significant change in the later medieval period was new obligations to the Norwegian crown, to which Iceland had become a tributary. *Jónsbók* notes these changes with the new tax to the king stipulating twenty ells per household, ten of which went to the king and the other ten as assembly fees, based on the value of the property per working member of the household, with the

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[297] Earlier church and secular law were held together, but now church law is separate with bishops ruling by spiritual authority and the king's secular law under temporal authority. Lára Magnúsardóttir, "Icelandic Church Law in the Vernacular 1275–1550," *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law*, 32 (2015), 133.
[298] *Járnsíða og kristinréttur Árna Þorlákssonar,* eds. Haraldur Berharðsson, Magnús Lyngdal Magnússon, Már Jónsson (Reykjavík: Smárit sögufélags, 2005), 164-65.
[299] *Ibid,* 160.
[300] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 85, 310, 268, 270, 181, 183, 284. "Réttgoldinn í vaðmálum og allri skinnavöru og öllu kvikfé í slátrum og alls kyns mat. Í léreftum og í öllum austrænum varningi og járnsmíði, öllu eftir sex manna virðingu. Fella eigi til vöru eður búfjár en virða þó til fullra aura." *Ibid*, 292.
[301] *Ibid*, 218, 310, 147, 192. It was also lawful, or normal perhaps, to pay for dry sheep with twelve ells of *vaðmál* ("tólf álnum vaðmáls"), likely because those sheep were being raised for wool instead of mainly for milk and milk by-products.
[302] *Ibid*, 250, 290.

fine for nonpayment of this tax in *vaðmál*, skins, wool, or hides ("greiðast í vaðmálum og í allri skinnavöru, í ullu og húðum").[303] It also notes king's fines (only notes payment in *vaðmál*, skins, livestock, or sour food).[304] The *Saktal* list—penalties due to the king—indicates which terms were used for *vaðmál* and thus was types were exported in the fourteenth century: of these fines, it lists *vaðmál* first among legal tenders and the amendments of Magnús Eiríksson notes that it was to be in *vaðmál* in Iceland ("en hundrað vaðmála á Íslandi"). [305] The king complained about the poor quality of *vaðmál* exports in the 1329 amendment and names three specific types that needed to be produced properly—*vöruvoð*, *munaðarvoð*, *hafanarvoð*—in addition to all other types of *vaðmál,* indicating the importance of legal regulation of a changing and diversifying export product for which the king had first right of purchase, as stated in King Eiríkr Magnússon's 1280 amendment, as will be discussed in the sixth chapter.[306] The *Jónsbók* law code, thus, shows a continued use of *vaðmál* for a range of payments across the spectrum of medieval Icelandic society, now including taxes to a foreign ruler from a country that also valued the two types of *vaðmál* cloth, *vara* and *hafnarvað*.

Búalög includes accounts of wages paid for various work, a later source whose fifteenth-century manuscripts have roots in earlier periods than those extant, and those can be considered applicable for an earlier period. These are accounts of women working for a homeowner but paid wages for their work instead of working for themselves or solely for room and board. This includes wages of four ells plus two ells food for an average man's work and weaving women receiving eight ells in food per week, and varied rates by manuscript and home or putting-out work for weaving and working wool. *Búalög* clauses state that it is an average household's working woman's ("meðalhjóns vínnukona") daily work to work wool ("tæta," cleaning, sorting, and preparing rovings for spinning), they would be expected to work a pound per week and would be entitled to light and exemption from other work tasks. It also outlines the work of a women weaver ("vefkona"), paid seven to thirteenth ells for weaving a twenty-ell *váð* length or ten to twelve ells for weaving twenty-two ell *gjaldavoð*/*-vaðmál*, and would also be entitled to light and exemption

[303] *Ibid*, 97-98.
[304] *Ibid,* 292.
[305] *Ibid*, 234, 290.
[306] *Ibid,* 269, 302.

from other work tasks.[307] From the earlier to later medieval law, certain wages were continually being expressed in payments of ells, here, perhaps literally weaving their own wages.

Both wool work and weaving were stipulated different wages for working in or out of the home, with more for working outside in a putting-out type arrangement.[308] Some manuscripts reference production of *vara*-type with *tvitug voð* (twenty-ell *váð*) while others use the later *hafnarvaðmál*-type term *gjaldavoð.* The latter represents the adapted production of longer pieces of cloth in response to changes in textile production on the continent, according to the explanation by Marta Hoffman, with the introduction of the horizontal loom, and could be woven faster than the *vara* type.[309]

All these regulations concerning payments, religious and secular payments for goods and services, demonstrates *vaðmál* cloth as the medium in which payments were to be made, noted as *vaðmál*, *alin*, *vara, klæðvoð,* and later *gjaldavoð.* These later terms are useful for tracing changes in production techniques and in standards from *vara* type to *hafnarvaðmál,* as it was adapted from *metfé* (subject to assessment) to a standard value based on length and weight. This indicates *vaðmál*'s adaptability to changing society, especially in regulations concerning finanical obligations to the Church and to the crown, and the practicality of *vaðmál* as commodity currency, as there was physical unit of cloth in the transaction which was useful in a variety of contexts across the range of medieval Icelandic society, ranging from trade and exchange at ships or foreign harbours, to political and legal activity at the *alþingi*, to the work of priests and bishops at churches and payments made for religious and funerary purposes, to labour on farmsteads and in the household context.

Samtíðarsögur

The contemporary sagas also contain examples of *vaðmál* used in domestic economic transactions in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, including payments for goods, fees, services, and here also for compensation payments. Cloth was used to pay for goods, such as bartering in 1231

[307] From AM 157 B 4to, Holm 5 4to, AM 56 8vo, AM 42 8vo, and Holm 7 8vo. *Búalög um verðlag og allskonar venjur í viðskiptum og búskap á Íslandi*, 7, 9, 21-22, 23, 24, 27, 29, 32, 34.
[308] *Búalög um verðlag og allskonar venjur í viðskiptum og búskap á Íslandi.* 7, 9, 21, 23-24, 27, 29, 32, 34.
[309] *Tvitug voð* appears in AM 157 B 4to, AM 56 4to, and AM 42 8v, from the circa last quarter of the fifteenth century, while *gjaldavoð* appears in Holm 5 4to and Holm 7 8vo, from circa late fifteenth to sixteenth century; both likely are based on older accounts.
Marta Hoffman, *The Warp-Weighted Loom*, 197-98. Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 381, 388.

in *Íslendinga saga* where bargains ("kaupamang") were made over cloth ("klæði") and horses[310] and an insurance payment requested in *vaðmál* or sheep or other means ("og bauð að gjalda fé fyrir sauð þann, vaðmál eða sauð þann annan er þeir vildu").[311] It was also used in payments of several types of fees—landing tolls, tithes, burial fees, and payment of alms—to both religious and secular institutions. Þorvaldr Snorrason and Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson paid a landing toll (*landaura*) while abroad on Bishop Guðmundr Arason's consecration *c.*1202, in *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, when they were asked to pay the landing toll (*landaura*) to King Óláfr's sheriff when anchored in the Hebrides of twenty hundreds of *vaðmál* ("tuttugu hunduð vaðmála") for the twenty Icelanders on the ship paid. They did not want to pay, because they thought they would have to pay again in Norway, and there was a dispute that ended with the bishop agreeing to pay six hundreds in *vaðmál* ("sex hundruð vaðmála"), named as *vara* that had been taken on the ship as cargo to be sold abroad.[312] *Árna saga* tells of the Icelandic bishops Jörundr and Árni imposing an additional, temporary tithe in 1275 in support of a Jerusalem crusade. For six years all mass-priests were to pay an ounce of *vaðmál* ("eyri vaðmáls") per year and each assembly-fee paying farmer was to pay an ell of *vaðmál* ("alin vaðmáls"), which would be converted to gold or silver in Norway before being sent to Rome, based on Archbishop Jón *rauði*'s request to Pope John XXI that the "diversis rebus persolvitur" ("diverse goods") from Norway's tributaries would not be appropriate to send directly to Rome.[313] *Lárentíus saga* notes that after the drowning death of Sólveig Loptsdóttir in 1308, there was a conflict over her husband Þorvaldr Geirsson burying her at Munkaþverá instead of Bægisá, only paying that church a burial fee of twelve ells ("tólf álnir í legkaup") while giving much treasure to the monastery as an offering for her soul.[314]

Payment for services were also made in *vaðmál* in the contemporary saga sources, especially of wages. *Vaðmál* was paid for legal aid, twelve and thirty hundreds of *vaðmál* in a killing lawsuit in I117 in Iceland[315] and fourteen hundreds of *vaðmál* in an excommunication case related to the later *staðamál* conflict in 1288 in Bergen.[316] *Lárentíus saga* tells of the custom of

[310] "Íslendinga saga," 330.
[311] "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka," *Sturlunga saga*, vol. 2, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, 883-931 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2010), 890-91.
[312] "Hrafns saga hin sérstaka," 905-06.
[313] "Árna saga biskups," *Íslenzk fornrit 17. Biskupa sögur III.* Ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 1-207 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1998), 51; Joel D. Anderson, *Reimagining Christendom: Writing Iceland's Bishops into the Roman Church, 1200-1350* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023), 121.
[314] "Lárentíus saga biskups," 278.
[315] "Þorgils saga og Hafliða," 14.
[316] "Árna saga biskups," 190.

the bishop offering loans to the foremost lay and learned men, if they left valuables of gold or refined silver in pawn, calling them *vara*-loans ("vörulán"), thus presumably paid out in *vaðmál*, especially since it notes he kept the valuables if the *vara* was not repaid. It states that Eiríkr Sveinbjarnarson rented land at Flugumýri over four years for twelve hundred per year ("tólf hundruð árliga") and had repaid some of this in repairs to the Hólar estate, rather than paying back in *vara*.[317]

The contemporary sagas also have examples of *vaðmál* as the medium for compensation payments, restitution for harm and offenses committed and, often, due to a lawsuit settlement so compensates for personal disputes, killings, attacks, and bodily harm. *Vaðmál* payments were used to settle disputes over money which escalates into charges of outlawry and excommunications,[318] killing compensations were payments made in mixed media including *vara*,[319] and compensation claims against men involved in attempted killings[320] and personal assault by a woman, Þorbjörg Bjarnardóttir, to be paid in mixed media including *vara.*[321] In these payments *vaðmál* would be demanded specifically or listed first among possible tenders, demonstrating the prevalence and preference for cloth as currency, as seen in the range of transactions in this chapter, from household provisioning to royal and ecclesiastical fees to legal, political, and market transactions.

Íslendingasögur

While the family sagas include examples of *vaðmál* terms to represent solely a cloth meaning, it was also tangible cloth used in economic exchange for transactions of goods, fees, services, and compensation payments. Several examples demonstrate how cloth would be collected from surrounding farms and family members and used for payments including to merchants for imported goods. *Vöðu-Brands þáttr*, set in late tenth to mid-eleventh century and written in the late thirteenth century, tells of Vöðu-Brandr Þorkelsson *vaðmál* collected in the spring as payment for the cargo ("varningr") purchased on credit from Norwegian ship owners,

[317] "Lárentíus saga biskups," 390.
[318] Íslendinga saga," 214.
[319] "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar," 245, 225; Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka," 930.
[320] "Íslendinga saga,",119-120.
[321] "Sturlu saga," 96. We can compare this to the case in *Þorgils saga og Hafliða* where Hafliði Másson granted himself eighty hundreds in three-ell ounce units ("átta tigu hundraða þriggja alna aura") but prefers the payment in Norwegian trade goods, instead of Icelandic *vara*, in addition to gold, silver, or horses. "Þorgils saga og Hafliða," 46.

that he "collected every ell [*alin*] that was his to collect,"[322] and here *vaðmál* seems to have been produced for this payment based on ells gathered to be given to merchants.[323] Thirteenth-century *Laxdæla saga* tells of a tenth-century account of Kjartan Óláfsson had been travelling in West Iceland collecting a debt payment at Hvítadalr, a half mark of *vaðmál* ("hann heitir mér hálfri mörk vaðmáls") that was owed to his kin, Þórhalla *málga*.[324] *Gísli saga Súrssonar*, written around the mid thirteenth century with events dating to the later part of the tenth century, tells of Þorkell Súrsson travelling to a small farm in the Sandaós estuary to collect a debt that he was owed, collecting from the farmer's wife's some "vaðmáli" and she threw it over his horse's saddle.[325]

Vaðmál is shown in the *Íslendingasögur* in its role as commodity currency, especially used in payments for goods related to farming, such as the purchase of tending and animals. Thirteenth-century *Droplaugarsona saga* tells of a tenth-century offer to purchase fifty ewes for some *vara* ("kepyt að honum fimm tigi ásauður og gaf fyrir vöru") after a bad winter with famine.[326] Thirteenth-century *Hænsa-Þóris saga* tells of the tenth-century farmer's attempt to buy hay for his tenants after a bad summer, bad hay harvest, and poor planning for winter provisioning, and offering with silver and *vaðmál* as payment.[327] It was also used to pay for services such as wages. Thirteenth-century *Víga-Glúms saga* tells of Glúmr Eyjólfsson paying his worker Ingólfr Þorvaldsson nine hundreds of *vaðmál* ("níu hundruð vaðmála") after he performed a killing on his behalf, as he hadn't received any wages yet for this service.[328]

The *Íslendingasögur,* as with the contemporary sagas, have many examples of compensation payments, expected as feud is a common theme, and some use *vaðmál* cloth as the

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[322] "The Tale of Vodu-Brand," *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders,* vol. 4, trans. Theodore M. Andersson and William Ian Miller, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, 204-212, (Reykjavik: Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, 1997), 205; "Vöðu-Brands þáttr," *Íslenzk fornrit* 10, *Ljósvetninga saga*, ed. Björn Sigfússon, 124-139 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1940), 126.

[323] This aligns with the normal schedule of cloth production, as wool would be harvested in the fall and then processed over winter, in the slower season of farming and when the weather was poorer and there was much time spent in doors, and the finished cloth of presumably any surplus in the spring could be used for such payments and exchange.

[324] Laxdœla saga," 147-49.

[325] "Gísla saga Súrssonar," *Íslenzk fornrit 6, Vestfirðinga sögur*, eds. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, 1-118 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1943), 63. *Vaðmál* was not explicitly stated as payment for the debt but does mention it in context of the payment: the housewife helps him with a ploy by having her throw some *vaðmál* over the saddle of his horse and tells his companions that he was counting silver in the main room of her house, while he was actually meeting his outlawed brother Gísli in the nearby woods.

[326] "Droplaugarsona saga," 150.

[327] "Hænsa-Þóris saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 3, *Borgfirðinga saga*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, 1-47 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1938), 16.

[328] "Víga-Glúms saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 9 *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, 1-98 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1956), 46.

medium of the reconciliation payment. This includes compensation for damaged property: late thirteenth-century *Ölkofra þáttr* tells of such compensation paid at an *alþingi* at the beginning of the eleventh century, after some woodlands (of questionable quality) were burned and notes a settlement of six ells ("sex álna") of *vaðmál* to be paid immediately and Broddi Bjarnason prepared and measured it with a *stika* and threw a piece to each recipient in the suit ("Broddi hafði við búizk ok stikat vaðmál í sundr").[329] While this is more of a satirical and humorous tale than a historical account, it provides details on cloth as compensation payment, demonstrates the measuring tools in practice, and shows the lowest possible unit for payments in *vaðmál* by national standard, six ells, ripped in equal pieces, making it useless for future trade or exchange, perhaps limited use in small, local transactions, but little practical use as such small pieces of cloth could hardly make any sizeable garments. Together, these different examples show *vaðmál* valued for its fungibility and the ease of exchange in different sectors of society, represented in the family sagas in the areas of payments of debts by traders and housewives, wages and purchases of goods on farms, and compensation for damage to property and attempts on people lives.

Documentary sources

There are also quite many examples of *vaðmál* cloth used in payments found in the written documentary sources, including annals, royal letters, and church accounts, or as part of an estate's accounting of its holdings of goods owned. As this type of source is generally concerned with record keeping, it makes sense that there would be examples that show payments of purchases, fees, and services as they reflect the accounts and belongings owned or acquired by churches to give account of their worth and growth and also what people invested in their local churches such as with donations, material gifts, or building repairs; vows and gift-giving for the church will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter. These are sources that are largely concerned with larger events or significant people, particularly concerning the king's interactions with Iceland as Iceland was now a tributary for the king, with the Icelanders agreeing in 1264 at the *alþingi* to pay taxes to the king, in addition to other fines and fees to which the king would be

[329] "Ölkofra þáttr," *Íslenzk fornrit* 11, *Austfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, 81-94 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1950), 90-91.

entitled, many of those in the form of *vaðmál*.[330] As a legal currency, *vaðmál* is visible as a measure or medium for these payments made in documentary accounts, but changes to the amounts and types of payments in response to the social and political changes can also be marked in these documentary sources. These examples demonstrate the breadth of this currency's use in medieval Icelandic society—not just for secular business but also for royal obligations and ecclesiastical affairs.

There are accounts of the use of cloth in transactions in the annal sources, indicating use of *vaðmál* in payments for goods and property. This includes *vaðmál* as trade goods exported from the bishoprics, as an account from 1394 in *Flateyjarannáll* notes the equipment of a trade ship used by the bishop Pétr Nikulásson through Þorsteinn the lawman with sixty hundreds ("fyrir lx. Hundrada"), likely *vaðmál* when considering the context of a trade ship being prepared to go abroad and *vaðmál* being among income paid to the bishopric used to purchase church necessities and exported.[331] Land could also be purchased using *vaðmál*, as see in the witness-letter from 1393, where Árni Einarsson's paid *vaðmál* and slaughtered animals for his mortgage of ten on Ásláksstaðir paid to and witnessed by priest and *raðsmaðr* Sveinn Magnússon at Möðruvellir.[332] *Vaðmál* was also noted in other witness-letters of contracts of sale of land for *vaðmál*: in 1393 for Hrafnabjörg in Hörðudalr where the ten hundreds in *vaðmál* were paid half each in *vara* and white *hafnarvoð* ("tiu hundrud vadmala. half vara en half hvitar hafnarvoder"),[333] in 1417 for Torfastaðir and half of Skálanes nyrða in Vopnafjörðr to be paid in a mix of moveable goods ("lausafé") including *vaðmál, kúgildi,* a three-*stika*-length of cloth, and a kettle ("fyrir vj c í vaðmálum, fjögur kúgildi, þrjár stikur klæðis og ketil").[334]

The annals, recordings of yearly events inside and outside of Iceland in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, accounts *vaðmál* being used in the payments of fees such as royal taxes, church tithes, tolls, interest, and fines. *Skálholtsannáll* includes a report of the 1305 demand by the Norwegian ambassador Álfr Bassason of Krókr on behalf of King Hákon *háleggr* Magnússon (r.1299-1319) concerning taxes, known to be paid in *vaðmál* based on king's 1329

[330] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, "The Making of a 'Skattland': Iceland 1247-1450," in *Rex Insularum: The King of Norway and his "Skattlands" as a political system c.1260-c.1450*, ed. Steinar Imsen, 181-225 (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2014), 184.
[331] *Flateyjarannáll* 1394, Gustav Storm, *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Oslo: Dreyer, 1977 (1888)), 426.
[332] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 3, 491.
[333] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 8, ed. Jón Þorkelsson (Copenhagen: S.L. Möller, 1906-13), 16.
[334] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 4*,* 256-57.

complaint-amendment mentioned above, demanding that every man in Iceland should pay him an ell of every hundred, owning five hundreds or more ("at hverr maðr skylldi giallda honum alin af hveriu hundraði a Islandi. sa er ætti til v. hundraða eða meira").[335] *Flateyjarannáll* includes a request for additional funds via a crusade tax, similar to the previously mentioned demands of Bishops Jörundr and Árni in 1275 from *Árna saga*, with records from 1305 and 1375 in *Lögmannsannáll* (written by the scribe Magnús Þórhallsson between 1388 and 1394) of Álfr of Krokr requesting for the king an ell of every hundred that men had ("alin af hueriu hundraði þui sem menn ætti"), and the northern men's intercession promising an ell of every hundred for Rome ("at gefa alin af hueriu hundradi ok fara med a pafa gard"), vowed due to harsh winter.[336] Similarly in 1393 *Flateyjarannáll* includes the governor Vigfúss Ívarsson promising a supplementary tax to Queen Margret I (d.1412), probably in response to the costs of conflicts with Albrecht of Mecklenburg and the siege of Stockholm, but here specifies payment in *hafnarvað*, with Vigfúss and all the best men promising at the *alþingi* to give eight ells of *hafnarvoð* ("atta alnar hafnar voðar"). This marks a change payment of the royal tax from twenty ells of *vara* according to the agreement in *Jónsbók* to eight ells of *gjaldavoð*, evidencing the shift from *vara* to *hafnarvaðmál* in exports. Helgi Þorláksson argues this change reflects both external royal pressure to follow wider standards but also significantly internal factors as it was more economical for Icelanders to produce the *hafnarvaðmál* type than *vara* type, due to changes in wages for textile producers based on food prices.[337]

There are also accounts of fees collected by ecclesiastical institutions in the annals and documentary records. A letter from Þingeyrar cloister *c.*1200 tells about interest payments and sheep toll payments, listing Eyjólfr from Eldjárnsstaðir and Þorsteinn from Langamýri's sheep tolls as one and a half quarters of butter or *vaðmál* ("vaþmal")[338] while Bishop Þorlák's *Skriftabóð* (1178) tells of a fine of twelve ells of *vaðmál* ("tolf alnir uadmals") if a priest knocks over a chalice.[339] The bishopric was to redistribute some of its income to the community, such as the poor

[335] *Skálholtsannáll* 1305, Gustav Storm, *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Oslo: Dreyer, 1977 (1888)), 200.
[336] *Lögmannsannáll* 1305, 1375, 390, Gustav Storm, *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Oslo: Dreyer, 1977 (1888)), 412.
[337] *Flateyjarannáll* 1393, 423. Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 327. Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 79.
[338] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1, 396-401.
[339] *Ibid*, 243.

support in the 1211 *máldagi* for Álftamýri, Arnarfjörðr where eighteen ells of *vaðmál* ("atian alner vaþmals") were paid every autumn from the tithe.[340]

The *máldagar* also show *vaðmál* used in transactions such as payments and for services rendered. This includes various religious services, for ordinary and special occasions, as seen in the *máldagur* records: *vaðmál* payment for priests' services in 1179 inventories for St. Germanus church at Streiti and St. Mary's church in Ljótarstaðr in Rángárþing, in 1181 for St. Mary's church in Hítarnes, and 1180 for Reykjir in Kjalarnesþing where it specifies that farms could pay half in flour instead of *vara* ("giallda presti C alna. giallda miol af helminge ef sa vill þat helldr er þar byr en voro").[341]

Churches also had costs for holding services and the *máldagar* list these costs and also for the materials needed to outfit churches for holy days or special services: stipulating *vaðmál c.*1150 for outfitting the church farm for Maundy-Thursday and St. Peter's mass and priest's services at Keldugnúpr in Síða, *c.*1150 for church services for the season for the church farm at Dalbær in Landbrot, 1179 for lighting for all holy days from St. Mary's mass to Easter week at St. Peter's church in Ey in Landeyjar in Rángárþing, *c.*1220 for singing at St. Mary's church in Apavatn in Grímsnes,[342] and 1270 the priest's wages in geldings and *vaðmál*.[343]

The wages listed in the previously-mentioned 1387-88 accounts of the steward at Hólar in Hjartadalr are interesting because they provide details about tenders for payments, people paying or receiving *vaðmál*, and also examples of specific functions *vaðmál* had as fabric material. The 1387 account of Hólar's purchases includes ells for wages, use of *vaðmál* and *hafnarvaðmál* for rent, *tvítugur voð* to purchase household utensils and a kettle, *vaðmál* used to pay trade tolls, *hafnarvaðmál* and *vara* in payments, *vaðmál* for tithe payments, and also names black *vaðmál* sent north.[344] The 1388 account of tenancies on the *staðr*'s lands notes amounts and payments in the specified tenders of *vaðmál, vara,* and *hafnarvaðmál*, and while other tenders are also listed (cows, sheep, butter, marks) *vaðmál* is often listed first, specifying *vaðmál* for accounting the land dues, bishop's tithes, wine tolls, and payments and church tithes paid there.[345] The 1388 account of workers' wages at Hólar and surrounding lands are similarly accounted in *vaðmál, vara,*

[340] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1*,* 371.
[341] *Ibid,* 249, 257, 276, 268.
[342] *Ibid,* 201, 199, 257, 405.
[343] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 2, 83.
[344] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 3, 405-7.
[345] *Ibid,* 407-12.

hafnarvaðmál, and ells of various colours ("alnar svartar," "alnar hvitar," "alnar jarngratt," "margratt", "saudsuarter"), plus other tenders. While many workers' roles are unstated, it does name wages for the smith, groom, servants, shepherd, and female hay workers and chambermaids. Here, *vaðmál, vara,* and *hafnarvaðmál* are all used to account for a variety of payments for different activities and work that took place at the bishopric, likely representing *vaðmál* being redistributed into the local community.

Thus, these examples of goods, fees, and service payments found in the annals and *máldagar* documents indicate the long custom of using *vaðmál* cloth as the medium in transactions recorded about secular and ecclesiastical estates. There are a range of terms used in these examples, including *vara* and *vaðmál* and generic cloth terms represented in the late twelfth to late thirteenth centuries, but also in the late thirteenth to fourteenth century see *hafnarváð* as well, especially for the king's payments, church purchases, and some wages. This range of use and terms supports *vaðmál*'s wide and flexible application within the established system of economic exchange, part of why *vaðmál* was valued for its fungibility and how its production could evolve to meet changing needs of its secular and ecclesiastical users.

This section has examined the tangible function of *vaðmál* cloth as a unit of tender in various transactions, with specific usage ranging in the different sources—some indicate *vaðmál*'s use more for local and household exchange, others indicate *vaðmál* payments transiting internationally to make payments of royal obligation—but together they all point towards the fact that *vaðmál*'s function as fungible cloth commodity currency in its tangible cloth form is supported by its ease of use in many sectors of society. Its usage is reflected all throughout medieval Icelandic society; poor people, farmers, priests, bishops, and kings all paid and received *vaðmál* currency in household, political, religious, and market contexts. The terms vary—*vaðmál, vara, vararfeldr, klæðavoð, gjaldavoð, hafnarvað,* and *alin*—and while *vaðmál* and *vara* are seen throughout all the sources, others are restricted to earlier or later periods of our timeframe, *vararfeldr* in the twelfth-century law code and *hafnarváð* and *gjaldavoð* in later fourteenth- and fifteenth-century accounts and shift towards *vara*-valuation with *vöruvirt* in fifteenth century with *vara* remaining as an echo of its currency function when a unit of account alone, representing variations in types of *vaðmál* produced and adaptability to changes in fashion and technology. Together, this demonstrates this *vaðmál*'s many lives as cloth material and commodity currency—it was useful to a broad spectrum of society in both forms.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown a wide range of uses of this cloth commodity currency in its fungible function, that this standardized medium an active and dynamic part of the systems of exchange as a measure of value and legal unit of currency, as summarized in Table 1. The adoption of *vaðmál* as a standard value and measure of stuff demonstrates that cloth was valued, and this valuation was widely applied within the medieval economic system in Iceland but also changes in response to internal and external conditions over the period. As a commodified form of cloth, *vaðmál* had a significant role in society as currency that funded different kinds of activity and the movement of goods and people. *Vaðmál* is for mid- to late-medieval Iceland (and other North Atlantic areas, such as the Faroes and Shetland) what silver was to the Viking Age Norse society, fueling travels, economies, and social and cultural developments, both in terms of real cloth in large quantities and as intangible measure of value as commodity currency unit.

Table 1: Textile Functions

	Measure of Value found in Source	**Context of Use**	**Terms Used**
Measure of Value:			
Value of landed and moveable property	*Grágás, Jónsbók, Íslendingasögur,* documentary sources	trade, drift whale rights, riding, law case, church inventory, *próventa*	*virða til vöru, vöruvirt, virða til vaðmála, vaðmál, mórent, hafnarvoð, hundrað, klæði, *tvítug voð* (*maybe*)*
Value or Payment in kind	contemporary sagas, documentary sources	wages, church inventory	*frítt og ófrítt, hundrað*
Tangible Currency:			
Specified medium	*Grágás, Jónsbók, Kristinréttur Árna Þorlákssonar*	tithes	*vaðmál, vararfeldr, vara, alin, hundrað*
Payment for goods	*Grágás, Jónsbók,* contemporary sagas, *Íslendingasögur,* documentary sources	hay, barter, debt, foreign goods, trade goods, animals (live & slaughtered), land	*vaðmál, vara, hafnarvoð, klæðavoð, alin, hundrað, klæði, varningr*

Payment for services	*Grágás, Jónsbók,* contemporary sagas, *Íslendingasögur,* documentary sources	burial fee and funeral service, priests' and church services, rent intercessory vows, wages, alimentation, insurance, poor support and alms, legal aid, religious aid	*vaðmál, vara, vörulán, alin, hundrað, hafnarvað, vað, klæði, vosklæði*
Payment of fines or fees	*Grágás, Jónsbók,* contemporary sagas, documentary sources	trade and landing toll, legal fines, tithes, sheep tolls, special crusading tithes, religious fines, marriage cases, intercourse cases, labour allowances, tax, king's fines, debt, fox-catching, theft, break contracts	*vaðmál, vara, vöruvoð, hafnarvoð, munaðarvoð, alin, hundrað*
Compensation	contemporary sagas, *Íslendingasögur*	prosecution of priest, killing, personal assault and attacks, property damage	*vaðmál, vara, þriggja álna aurar, hundrað*

The first section demonstrated how *vaðmál* acted as a unit of measurement to express the value of goods and services, its fungibility, especially when explicitly stated as an amount of or valued in *vara* or *vaðmál*. Sometimes these examples had unclear indications if cloth was implied, especially in the use of the terms *alin, ófrítt,* or *vöruvirt*, and indicate the application of *vaðmál*-units of account to economic situations or are used in contexts where the goods being accounted are unclear. Other times it was more evident that a specific cloth type was used to measure the valuation. This ambiguity posits that the concept of *vaðmál* as a measurement was appropriate for use in a variety of contexts within these sources but also was adapted to the valuation system and trade in kind; whether cloth was present did not matter because its function as commodity currency, and therefore a measure of value, was well understood. This was seen in a range of examples including valuing landed and moveable property in contexts of lawsuits, trade and ship preparations, and rights to drift whales; valuing transactions such as wage payments made in kind, which included *vaðmál* among the listed acceptable tenders; and valuing the moveable property owned by churches in their inventory accounts. There is a wider range of contexts of use found if

extend the search to include the term *hundrað,* but its ambiguity concerning tender of payments has necessitated its exclusion from the study.

The second section looked as *vaðmál* acting as the actual medium used in a transaction or exchange, clear exchangeability of cloth for goods and services, and could be requested as the preferred medium of payment. In cases where *vaðmál* was simultaneously seen as cloth and money, it was 'money' at the point of sale, but it never lost its cloth connotation in practical and material function in future uses, as seen in some examples that display its use post-exchange. Some of the terms seen in these examples are more obscure and indicate cloth-measure, such as *stika* and *alin*, but many refer explicitly to *vaðmál*, with *mórent* and *vararfeldr,* or terms for *vara*, but *hafnarvaðmál*-types appear in the fourteenth century, including *tvítug voð, merkurvoð,* and *gjaldavoð,* marking a shift in the dominate type used in commerce but also the continuance of *vara* as unit of account in measuring value, as seen in the first part of the chapter. The use of a cloth medium of exchange was seen in a range of kinds of transactions and contexts, including payments for goods and services, compensation and fine payments in legal and religious contexts, rents, taxes, tithes, tolls, debts, and more.

The use of cloth as standard of value for the commodity currency *vaðmál* demonstrates what the medieval authors found to the most valuable and worthy of restitution in their society. As this period was one of great violence and unrest, there was then much death and damage to property, and as a result there needed to be legal channels to obtain compensation for damages. It is interesting to note that while this feud context is an expression of manliness, the importance of honour and restoring the balance via bloody vengeance or compensation payments, the resolution of compensation payments can be expressed in a female-associated item, as the stages of textile work visible in the *Íslendingasögur*—spinning, weaving, and wool-work—are associated with women. With these cloth-payments or unit of measure, the end to violence and destruction would be sourced from the so-called female sphere with woven cloth, that the transfer of cloth spun and woven by women could serve to end the cycle and restore balance, at least theoretically, when paid after the lawsuit settlement was determined at the *alþingi*. It seems to take women's presence in a so-called male sphere of influence to restore order, which is opposite to how women are seen usually as representing the *oikos* of family and household, as per Aristotelian ideas of gender, and

the product of women's work thus seem interwoven into legal and pollical sectors beyond the household and thus have indirect influence there.[346]

However, it has been noted that, in the *Íslendingasögur* and the *samtíðarsögur,* medieval Icelandic women were active in the political sphere in their role as whetting women who called their male relatives to revenge in the feud cycle through words and objects, such as Hildigunnr Starkaðardóttir in *Brennu-Njáls saga* throwing her dead husband Höskuldr Þráinsson's bloody cloak (*skikkja*) on her uncle Flosi Þórðarson as a charge demanding vengeance for his killing, using a bloody garment to demand blood for the spilling of this blood instead of peace through compensation.[347] This saga-age woman demanding bloody revenge with worn, bloody clothing in 1010 after a failed attempt at payment with silver wergild can be contrasted against *samtíðarsögur*-age men settling disputes through legal, financial settlement with legal "new and unused" clothing *vaðmál* as currency which were woven by the women of their household, both together representing women taking advantage of every tool in their toolbox to restore peace and family honour—bloody clothing and whetting words then later cloth-money. The contrast between a sterile cloth-payment and a charged bloody cloak suggest women's presence and role in both early medieval feuding society but also in the later period influenced by Christian and chivalric mores concerned with restricting violence and restoring social order, but also perhaps expresses anxieties about new methods of settling conflict in a society transitioning between the two; when the product of women's work became more prominent in the sources their whetting words became silenced in the sources, for while women appear here unconsciously empowering their male relatives and household by weaving settlement payments, they are only represented via units of woven cloth.

The implications of payment of the tithe being made in *vaðmál* should be noted as well. The tithe was, in theory, an opportunity for the accumulation of wealth for secular church-owners and the emerging institutional church but was not necessarily accumulation of an avaricious nature, as the church could use that income to purchase landed property and material objects and fund the operations of the churches, but this was limited as the average tithe was seventy ells per year.[348]

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[346] This also has interesting mythical connotations with the role of norns spinning the fate of men and valkyries weaving a battle scene found in Darraðarljóð. For the role of norns in spinning fate, see Karen Bek-Pedersen, "Are the Spinning "Nornir" Just a Yarn?" *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, vol. 3, ed. Judy Quinn, et al., 1-10 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 1-10.
[347] *Brennu-Njáls saga,* 280, 282, 290-92.
[348] Gunnar F. Guðmundsson, "Guði til þægðar eða höfðingjum í hag? Níu aldir frá lögtöku tíundar á Íslandi," *Ný saga* 9 (1997), 61.

However, perhaps more significant was those gained via donation or inheritance (liturgical vestments, church art, books, service utensils, and cloth for display), such as the above-mentioned *próventa,* or bishops using their own funds or church's fund to acquire property for the estate, such Bishop Páll Jónsson who is reported to have spent four hundred hundreds on furnishing Skálaholt church with bells, beams, tower, and three *tjöld* and also later raising money to build a shrine to St. Þorlákr at a cost of another four hundred hundreds.[349] While this account might be doubtful, it shows how the author emphasizes a bishop's generosity and piety in improving the material conditions of a bishopric. Churches and tithes were more significant as redistribution centres, especially for the poor tithe, the quarter stipulated to support the needy in the district, such as in the example from *Lárentíus* saga of Bishop Lárentíus promising to give away all the *vaðmál* gifts ("gafz í vaðmálum") to the poor.[350]

A further implication of the tithe is a social one: it created a vertical hierarchy for society, with the parishioners required to pay this tithe money to the bishop and priests instead of the primarily horizontal hierarchy of alliances between chieftains and their followers who were all farmers of varying means and social position and no rule from formal institutions but rather were small communities of local householders with local and national assemblies.[351] Access to power via politics was measured with the *vaðmál*-adjacent term hundred (*hundrað*), the minimum property qualification and assembly attendance due payments. With the tithe, power became institutional as it was connected to specific places with churches receiving a quarter and bishoprics receiving another quarter, but still also for the owner of a tithe church, as he would manage the church's quarter. As some secular leaders also functioned as priests or owned partial or whole *staðr*, this accumulation and redistribution of tithes and rents from church estates meant that church sites could be important sites of power struggles between secular and religious powers, but also legitimization of power with the status that control of redistribution could bring. The *staðamál* agreements in the twelfth century under Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson enforced the church reforms of Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson and again in the thirteenth century with Bishop Arni Þorláksson´s new church law moving the authority of *staðir* churches to the bishops, if fifty per cent or more was owned by the church. In this regard, *vaðmál* payments could be a tool used in

[349] "Páls saga byskups," *Íslenzk Fornrit* 16, *Biskupa sögur II,* ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 297-332 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2002), 300, 310.
[350] "Lárentíus saga biskups," 355.
[351] Sverrir Jakobsson, *Medieval Iceland: Politics, Patronage and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2025), 72.

the power struggle between secular and ecclesiastical authority in its role as the medium of payment of the tithe, payments that boosted the financial power of either the secular church owner or bishop.

A final implication is that the stipulations for tithe payments indicate the functional use of payments according to social status, indicating which media would be suited to the different status and functions. Gold and silver were more suited to be used by priests and bishops while foodstuffs and livestock were more practical for poor relief payments. However, *vaðmál* itself is seen for all four quarters, indicating the use and suitability for all ranges of social status, from poor to the high-status bishop, and for a wide variety of practical purposes, whether for clothing purposes; for church cloth needs such as burial of the dead or wall hangings; for resale or purchase of other goods like books or land; or even possibly as stored wealth, depending on the recipient. The wide-range applicability of the tithe payments in *vaðmál* reflects the entanglement of this textile into various layers of Icelandic society, that a domestic, female-woven product was used in various other sectors of society, including religious with the tithe payment.

The types of payments also reflect the importance of property ownership, of honour and balance of power of persons from different social backgrounds, but also the increasing power and position of the church. Compensation payment transactions could be used to demonstrate prestige, such as gaining honour from organizing respectable compensation law cases with large awards in *vaðmál* or expressed in units of account of *vaðmál*. Most of the payments deal with the results of fighting and raiding and the fallout of these actions, but a few of these deal with small items or personal property, whether stolen or damaged, and cheating in commerce, especially if also considered the contexts of the examples which use the term *hundrað* alone. Others deal with the church and the changing role of the bishop compared the power of secular power, and the different ways to acquire funds for the running of church affairs. All these payments, however, are playing a role in the greater game of these medieval subjects jockeying for power and position in their society.

Rent is an important payment to note in terms property's impact on power. There was a rise in tenancy and manorialism with the monopolization of land and power by both secular oligarchical families and the church as an institution, especially after the *staðir* conflicts (but also the crown after the Reformation when it claimed much of the church's properties, but this is beyond the scope of this project). Having tenants run multiple farm sites meant these farms could

produce surplus income via goods paid for rent, without the landowner being responsible for the labourers' maintenance, such as relying on the productive work of slaves or servants instead of these crofters' rent payments, while the landowner still provided physical protection and legal assistance if needed.[352] Land was power and wealth, especially as it was the qualification for access to political power, valued as an amount of *vaðmál*, especially the value of the increasingly large properties acquired by the landed elite, but also could provide significant income if owned multiple properties. Even the churches, bishoprics, and monastic institutions took part in the this and some churches could have extensive landholdings and therefore extensive rent income.

This chapter has sought to answer the question of why *vaðmál* was adapted for commodity currency in the medieval Icelandic period, how it was valued economically as compared to non-economically. The answer appears to be in the ease of use for woollen cloth in a wide range of types of transactions for contexts within and beyond the economic realm, but also how it adapted to changing circumstances with the use of both *vara*- and *hafnarvað*-types of cloth. It was used in different types of payments, such as household provisioning, livestock and farming provisioning, dealings of debt and credit with merchants, determining access to politics and used in lawsuit settlements, measuring personal property and worth, tax payments, and capital and church tithing; with standardization, it was practical use to exchange for other goods, such as food, animals, church goods, or imports. If you could not use the cloth, someone else could. It could be easily replaced if consumed for clothing, and while this woollen cloth was not a never-ending supply, it was still an easily 'renewable' one. *Vaðmál* was produced and consumed as currency because of a constant need for "new and unused" cloth, as seen in the wide range of uses for clothing, bedding, sails, decoration, but also for export to meet foreign demand in Norway, and these needs are reflected in examples demonstrating its collection from the local community of local producers and the bishopric being paid tithes, tolls, and rent, and loaning out *vara* but also exchange between coast and inland farming with the increased importance of fishing and *skreið* export. Consequently, this indicates wide range of applicability to virtually every area of medieval Icelandic society: the household, politics, law, the economy and exchange, the church, and even royal authority. This demonstrates the advantages of using a textile as currency, that it was practical and consumable, it held multiple functions and values simultaneously or consecutively in the same cloth object.

[352] Bernadette McCooey, *Farming Practices in Medieval Iceland,* 6.

Vaðmál was valued for its fungibility, its integration in the exchange systems, because it was useful to society: it filled the need for a locally sourced currency, one that ordinary people and powerful leaders all could use to buy and sell goods and services, and one that seemed in great demand for clothing, bedding, utilitarian cloth, hangings, tents, but also as export trade product. *Vaðmál* was a response to society's desires and their economic needs: by exploiting their natural environment with sheep husbandry and applying cultural knowledge of textile production techniques, they were able to 'mint' money through weaving and produce a sufficient subsistence and surplus supply of woollen cloth according to a legally defined standards to be used as commodity currency and trade good. It would have to be new and unused if used in payments so would need to be constantly produced, but it would be somewhat controlled production based on financial limitations of an average farmer, as discussed in the next chapter. This reflects regular demand and ease of use, one of Harris' principles of fungible textiles' desirability, but also the cultural values of the landed elite based on livestock farming as a basic social unit, sheep (and cattle) farming rather than other transient and seasonal occupations such as fishing, which were limited by those in power.[353] Prestige, honour, and status came from land-based wealth and the landed elite and religious authorities took advantage of multiple sources of income, including tithes, rent, taxes, dues, fine, and fees paid with the *vaðmál* currency.

Vaðmál reflects society making use of all resources available and shows an active system, not stagnant, with reactions to changes abroad in terms of fashion, trade systems, and technology, and at home with new ecclesiastical institutions and tax systems, but also continuation in textile traditions and currency standards with the continued use of *vara* as measure of value. The benefit of a practical commodity is its adaptability to new and changing systems, no need to remint coins with a new king or change to new fabrics with changing fashions, just the altering the length and density of the cloth for faster production with the introduction of *hafnarvoð*-types and the more time-consuming *vararfeldr* type disappears from exports because of change in fashions.

Wool cloth is valued through the whole medieval period in Iceland, adapting to the needs of society. Just as the material chapter demonstrated its practical adoption, here the context, mixed, use, and terminology show society adjusting its currency system to what it had available, adjusting to internal and external forces with new types being introduced, and harmonizing the economic and practical function. This extended to *vaðmál*'s role in international exchange as a key export

[353] Susanna Harris, "From value to desirability," 683, 687.

good, as will be discussed in chapter six, where the cloth funds overseas journey with different goals. It was also adapted to the social system in extra-economic transactions, as will be discussed in the next chapter with a quasi-economic and -social exchange of cloth goods for creating and maintaining social bonds.

Chapter 3: *Vaðmál* as Inseparable Cloth-Money

Part 1: *Vaðmál* as a Social Object

Heretofore, we have outlined *vaðmál*'s material and aesthetic cloth functions and its suitability as a measure of value and commodity currency, however this textile also extends beyond the economic or practical realm into what will be called extra-economic in its additional function as a social object. Extra-economic transactions are those that exist outside of the normal economic sphere or economic transactions that have an additional, important social role, especially in creating social obligations and are used to bolster one's (or family's) status or are tied to tradition; they are extra-economic because the value exists on both and economic and social level as they are tied to a person's position within society.

Using Harris' principle of object biography, this section will examine *vaðmál* as a social object in extra-economic exchanges, looking at how textiles can uncover webs of connections through a cloth object's life history. Object-subject association is part of its desirability due to the textile's ties to previous owners or to the relationship that is created or reinforced through the exchange. As textiles have a long operational sequence (*chaîne opératoire*) of production and multiple stages of use, there are many opportunities to build connections between people of various levels status and influence, and such connections will fluctuate.[354]

In this regard, *vaðmál*'s exchange enacts a social function by facilitating a connection between specific people, places, or ideas, with *vaðmál* being used as a 'tool' by medieval Icelanders in mediating their social relationships. These cloth objects are thus considered object biographies in that they absorb and retain the relationship created in the moment of that extra-economic transaction. These transactions have strict legal regulations and social obligations, in their form and amounts but also with the expectations that came for each party after the exchange; they are largely meant to create or uphold social connections such as personal and family relationships and act on both the economic and social level by operating as an investment in a social relationship. This category is an important one, as this was a society without a formal aristocracy and social connections were key as social status and honour were vital for creating and maintaining positions of power.

[354] Harris, "From value to desirability," 683, 693, 691.

This section will explore the function of *vaðmál* as a social object through the examples of creating new alliances through marriage gifts, renewing family status and wealth via inheritance payments, and creating or enhancing personal connections in its role gift-giving, thereby demonstrating its wide and enduring impact and influence on medieval Icelandic society. Each of these three types of extra-economic transactions will be treated across the source material to see how they use *vaðmál* to facilitate these payments, and what such payments reveal about how *vaðmál* was understood, but also demonstrate how things can empower people, especially how textiles and material culture can reveal the relationships between people or places and establish and reaffirm power and influence.[355]

Marriage: Dowry, bride price, bridal gift

The first example of *vaðmál* facilitating building relationships is in the family relationships established in the case of marriage arrangements. In the past, marriage had been considered more of a contract and political arrangement than with the concept of love. Families would create a social relationship as the new couple formed a contracted relationship and established a new household together and would bear children who had associations with both the wife and husband's families. These relationships would be formed via oral contracts (*handsal*), later written contracts, which saw a transfer of wealth to the marital couple. These are known as dowry payments and bride price payments but also could include bridal gifts from the groom to the bride.

Dowries (*heimanfylgja*) are assets which the bride brought into the marriage from her family while a bride price (*mundr*) is the bargain made between the groom and the wife's guardian upon engagement and legalizes the marriage and legitimizes and subsequent children.[356] Not all marriages show the transfer of both types of payments, but the intended purpose of both is the same: to facilitate the transfer of the couple from their natal household and to fund the formation of a new marital household, a new social unit. The property was essentially to be held in trust as family property for future generations' use, as inter-generational wealth, and not necessarily for the explicit use of the couple but rather for their children to inherit or use for their own marriage funds. Both the dowry and bride price payments were to be used by the couple to fund the

[355] Jaspere, *Medieval Women, Material Culture, and Power,* 8, 18, 112
[356] Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn: Staða kyjanna á Íslandi á 12. og 13. öld* (Reykjavik: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, Háskólaútgáfan, 1995), 148.

formation of a new household, control of the property depended on the type of marriage. Marriage gifts *morgungjöf* and *bekkjargjöf* were typically given to the bride by the groom for her personal use, the morning after the wedding for the former or at bride's bench during the feast for the latter, and her personal property to use to support herself in case she was widowed.[357]

Dowry and bride price payments are an important example of transactions which operate on both an economic and social level because they create a relationship between two families that have social benefits such as improving the family's position via association with the other. They are also considered an economic transaction because the woman is purchased from her family for an amount of property which was used to establish a new household. Payments for marriage contracts, originally oral contracts and later written, created relationships not only between the married couple but also between their families, consanguineal and affinal relationships of obligation.

Law Codes

Vaðmál was used for payments made when forming a marriage contract, arranged between the bride and groom's families through a verbal agreement known as *handsal,* an oral contract. *Grágás* includes clauses regulating the *mundr*, stating that when the bridal pair wanted to form a partnership (*saman*) they were required to make a betrothal agreement (*festamál*) that was fair to both them and their heirs, and was valid if the groom owned a mark or more in debt-free property when joined, a bride-price was paid (*mundr*), and they householded together for a least three winters.[358] This determines the eligibility of heir to inherit property, stating that it depends on their mother's status, that to be a lawful heir she must have been bought with a bride-price payment valued at mark in six ell-ounce measure ("þá er kona mundi keypt er mörk sex álna aura er goldin að mundi eða handsöluð eða meira fé ella"), with one mark of silver valued against 48 ells of *vöruvoð* (as *söluváð* was measured in twenty-ell length units, but *vöruvoð* most often in multiples of six).[359] This clause is based on the older Norwegian *Gulaþing* and *Frostaþing* laws which use ounces (*aurar*), but the Icelandic law system also used marks (*merkr*) and this clause reflects an

[357] Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property and Virginity: The Christianization of Marriage in Medieval Iceland 1200-1600* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2010), 357.
[358] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 123.
[359] *Ibid*, 49. There are other restrictions concerning age, physical and mental impairments, and incest but they will not be detailed here as they do not relate to restrictions due to payments in a form of *vaðmál*. See Jenny Jochens's chapter on marriage in *Women in Old Norse Society* for more information.

amalgamation of both units (it is in the *Staðarhólsbók* manuscript, *c.*1260-70, but not the earlier *Konungsbók, c.*1250), one mark in six-ell ounce-units, here based on *vaðmál* as a standard unit of account.[360] The *handsal* agreement would be followed by a marriage ceremony or feast (*brúðkaupsveizla*) where the relationship was publicly witnessed .

Jónsbók includes clauses regulating *heimanfylgja* and bridal gifts (*tilgjöf*), stipulating that the bride's parents or guardian had the right to settle the dowry, of which maximum one third could be cloth ("í klæðum"), and the *tilgjöf*, which was limited to sixty hundreds even if the groom could afford more and could never more than a quarter of his goods ("fé"), and this dowry was made in agreement with the groom.[361] The limit on the *tilgjöf* was an amendment from 1294 and likely amended to protect the property of the *ætt* from being given away in creating marriage alliances to the detriment of the *oðal* property that was intended for generational use. The qualification that only a third could be in cloth hints that the actual medium of the dowry could be fabric or garments intended for clothing, but this of course neither infers nor excludes that such fabric could be of *vaðmál*, as it is cloth used as currency, and was a strong possibility as it was the dominant fabric of the period, but likely that this dowry in the form of a trousseau would include a mix of fabrics including linen and wool cloth, or perhaps even other fabrics such as silk or fustian for wealthier brides.

Jónsbók marks a transition to written contracts, stipulating that contracts for the marriages of women (*kvennagipting*) and land purchases valued at six hundreds or more must be written, witnessed, and marked with a seal ("innsigli"), but the assets could be other media, property, and land.[362] It is interesting that not only was the transfer of women from one family to another through marriage transaction of this size lumped together with the purchase of land, but that these transactions were significant enough to require written proof; oral confirmation (*handsal*) was no longer sufficient for this transfer of women and the dowry or bride-price money. This was now a literate and lettered society.

[360] Stefán Karlsson bases the dating of these two manuscripts on a hand found in both and *Kringla*, suggesting that *Konungsbók* was written before Iceland submitted to Norway and *Staðarhólsbók* after, reflected in slight differences in content. Stefán Karlsson, "Kringum kringlu," *Landsbókasafn Íslands árbók* (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, 1976), 20-21, 23.
[361] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 121.
[362] *Ibid*, 217.

These clauses show that payments might include a dowry payment from the bride's family (*heimanfylgja*), thus a daughter's participation in the family estate by moving property to a new household, and was property that the husband absorbed into their shared property of the newly established household to be used with the consent of the wife; or a bride-price payment from the groom's family (*mundr*), moving property from the groom's family to the couple's; or the bridal gift (*tilgjöf*), which was the bride's property alone and intended as a dower support.[363] These payments help to legally bind horizontal relationships that connect families on the same social level, creating alliances with obligations of support in case of feuds, lawsuits, and battles and the site of the marriage ceremony would reinforce who had a higher social position, the family of the groom or bride; in contrast, concubinage relationships created horizontal ties between people of similar social status.[364]

Samtíðarsögur

Payments made at the point of marriage were meant to create alliances between families, horizontal social connections between people of a similar social status. Medieval Icelandic society had strong bonds of obligation between members of both affinal and natal kin, and marriage bonds added new connections and obligations. These were important type of social obligations upon which people could call in times of trouble, such as in battle and conflicts, but also in times of celebration. Family was one of the most important social units in this time and the presence of these payments for marriage demonstrates visible, public connections between families jockeying for power and position, especially in the turbulent late Commonwealth era. This was done using *vaðmál* in the context of both cloth payment and as a measure of value according to the cloth standard.

One example of the transfer of wealth to formalize a marriage is the account from 1200 in *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar* which tells of a bride-price payment. When he was travelling,

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[363] Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property and Virginity,* 351, 355, 356-57.

[364] Auður Magnúsdóttir, "Friends, Foes, and Followers: Power, Networks, and Intimacy in Medieval Iceland," in *Nordic Elites in Transformation, c.1050–1250,* vol.2 *Social Networks*, ed. Kim Esmark, et al., 215-236 (New York: Routledge, 2020), 217. For more on concubinage and clerical relationships, see also, Auður Magnúsdóttir, *Frillor och fruar. Politik och samlevnad på Island 1120-1400,* Göteborg: Avhandlingar från Historiska instituionen, 2001. Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir questions viewing women as objects in these exchanges, instead arguing that women could act as agents for the own wishes and goals, especially in the later medieval period. Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, "Marriage in the Middle Ages: Canon Law and Nordic Family Relations," in *Norden og Europa i middelaldern,* ed. Per Ingesman and Thomas Lindqvist, 174-202 (Aarhus: Jysk Selskab for Historie, 2001), 191.

Guðmundr Arason had stopped in Súðavík, Ísafjörðr to see his cousin Bárðr who was engaged to the daughter of Steinþórr Bjarnarson. Guðmundr gave a bride-price ("kvonarmundar") of thirty hundreds *vara* ("þrjá tigu hundraða vöru").[365] Here, *vara* is explicitly named as the medium for the bride price payment, that is, the financial contribution from the bridegroom's side of the family to make the marriage legal. Both the bride and groom's sides of the family could contribute financially to the marriage, despite financial or social differences between families, and this contribution could then be shared equally by the couple for the running of their household. Guðmundr is giving financial support to his cousin, an example of his generosity included in the middle of a list of other miracles and goods deeds. Here he reinforces their familial connection but also helps to establish a horizontal relationship between their and Steinþórr's families. This cloth gift reflects his charity in terms of a financial contribution to a family member to uphold their relationship, but also new connections of obligation, and that gift of trade goods has now been imbued with an association with the holy Guðmundr.

There are several examples of marriage arrangements in the *samtiðarsögur* which are quantified using the term *hundrað* in the dowry or bridal price arrangements and will solely be listed here as they do not provide any extra information regarding *vaðmál* in payment beyond unit of account, and it is uncertain if the moveable property could represent *vaðmál* or other media. This includes the 1172 written marriage contract of Þórir Þorsteinsson and Þorlaug Pálsdóttir which was a dowry of thirty hundreds ("þrjá tigu hundraða") from her father Páll Sölvason and marriage gift from Þórir of the same amount, thus aligning the Lundarmenn and Reykhyltingar (and Oddaverjar through them);[366] the 1232 marriage-reconciliation between Kolbeinn ungi Arnórsson's sister Arnbjörg and Snorri Sturluson's son Órækja, set via *handsal* with a dowry of two hundred hundreds ("tvö hundruð hundraða") and *mundr* of the estate at Stafaholt from Snorri, thus connecting the Ásbirningar and the Sturlungar;[367] and the fated 1253 marriage between Hallr Gizurarson and Sturla Þórðarson's daughter Ingibjörg, with a dowry of the estate in Sælingsdalr worth thirty hundreds ("þrjá tigu hundraða") and another ten hundreds ("tíu hundruð") from Ingibjörg's grandmother Jóreiðr Hallsdóttir and sixty hundreds ("sex tigu hundraða") from her father Sturla, connecting the feuding Haukdælir and Sturlungar families.[368] The wedding did not

[365] *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar*, 178.
[366] "Sturlu saga," 91.
[367] "Íslendinga saga," 346-47.
[368] *Ibid,* 629.

end the feuding, with the burning at Flugumýri, but the marriage lasted until 1261. These examples illustrate the size of payments made to connect families via marriage and to obtain peaceful resolutions to feuds and conflicts, but do not explicitly specify *vaðmál* as the form of payment as in the 1200 marriage above.

These dowry and bride price payments demonstrate wealth being passed down generationally from father to son-in-law and groom or groom's family to daughter-in-law and would then be used to support the couple as they formed a new household. The money was intended to create both vertical and horizontal relationships: financial support between parents and children and also to create alliances or friendships between families. These payments did not always hold to this intended effect, as marriages could end (sometimes disastrously), but the point is that this money, in *vara* as tender and less with *hundrað* as unit of account, was used to form socially significant relationships, creating bonds between families that meant obligations of support. In this regard, *vaðmál* played a key role in medieval Icelandic society, intersecting the influences of social, economic, and political realms.

Íslendingsögur

The Icelandic family sagas also include examples of marriages that create bonds between families and involve giving bridal gifts or marriage payments related to *vaðmál*, interestingly not gifts made in silver or other great treasures which seem more suited to the distant saga age but rather align more with such dowries and gifts as just discussed for the contemporary sagas. One such example is the gift of *vaðmál* cloth as part of a bride-price present. In *Eiríks saga rauða*, Leifr Eiríksson includes a Greenlandic *vaðmál* mantle ("vaðmálsmöttul grænlenzkan") among other costly gifts (a gold ring and an ivory belt) given to Þórgunna, a Hebridean woman, who he wishes to have as his bride because she is pregnant with his child.[369] This selection of a bridal gift, includes a *vaðmál* mantle, expresses the transactional nature of a relationship between a man and woman who are going to form a household together and can be considered as a type of bride price. This is an exchange of clothing to 'purchase' the bride, but without a price listed, perhaps a precursor to

[369] "Eiríks saga rauða," *Íslenzk fornrit* 4*, Eyrbyggja saga*, eds. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, 193-237 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1935), 210. While this example is stated as Greenlandic *vaðmál*, we can consider this example within the context of Iceland as while this cloth was produced in Greenland, in technical textile terms it can still be considered "Icelandic" cloth as Greenlanders emigrated with their textile cultural traditions and textile production change is slow. Else Østergård, *Woven into the Earth*," 62-63.

vaðmál cloth-currency in the marriage transactions of the type seen in the *samtíðarsögur*. The *vaðmál* mantle is included among other costly items in the payment, thus is also projects *vaðmál* cloth as a treasure rather than ordinary cloth but also uses it to publicly formalize and visualize a new social relationship, a marital partnership.

Similar to the contemporary saga examples, some only use the term *hundrað* and here a value is expressed and is unclear about the specific media paid. *Flóamanna saga* tells of a dowry payment accounted in *hundrað*: in her father's absence, Þórný Þorgilsdóttir's paternal uncle Hæringr had paid a hundred hundreds ("hundrað hundraða") for her dowry ("fylgja") when she married Bjarni of Gröf, but the saga had noted earlier than her father had left cloth behind for her dowry before he moved to Greenland.[370] Later, Þorgils tells his brother that this was a suitable amount for a dowry, but if he thought it was too much Hæringr was to take as much money from him as he wanted. This example is ambiguous as to whether actual cloth passed from the bride's family to the groom's family, but the earlier statement gives support to the idea that her dowry payment could have included the cloth left behind by Þorgils, used to establish Þórný and Bjarni's new household, but it is likely that the value also included other goods or land. Regardless, we can see it was appropriate term to use in such contexts and this example shows how *vaðmál* as tendeer and a measure of value could be used in a variety of situations, including the payment of a dowry to establish a new household.

Documentary Sources

There are a few written marriage contracts (*kaupmálsbréf*) that survive from the fourteenth century, the earliest extant examples of marriage contracts, which have been thoroughly discussed by Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir in *Property and Virginity*, and these contracts continue to include the *vaðmál* as the unit of measure for payments such as dowries and marriage gifts. A marriage contract from 1380 for Þórðr Bessason and Járngerðr Gilsdóttir states the value of landed and moveable property owned and gifted to the new household in *kúgildi, hundrað,* in *vara* and valued in *vara* ("vöru eða vöruvirtt" and "voru edr voruvird").[371] The marriage contract of Óláfr Sigurðsson and Jórunn Brynjólfsdóttir from 1381 uses the *hundrað* and *vöruvirðum* to value the landed and moveable property separate owned by the bride and groom, the value of the bridal gifts

[370] "Flóamanna saga," 313, 277.
[371] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 3, 351-52.

(*tilgjöf*, *bekkjargjöf*), and also the groom's father's and bride's brother's (her guardian) contributions to the betrothal and wedding feasts.[372] The 1405 marriage contract of Arnoddr Brandsson and Sigríðr Guðmundsdóttir includes her dowry ("heimanfylgja") of sixty hundreds in land at Víðivellir ytri in Fljótsdalr where there was 20 hundreds in livestock ("búfé"), and Arnoddr was to give marriage gifts (*tilgjöf* and *bekkjargjöf*) including 30 hundreds and 20 hundreds in refined silver and cloth ("j brendu silfri ok klædnadi") and a *morgungjöf* of 10 hundreds.[373] The phrase clarifying that some was paid in silver and some in cloth indicates that it potentially included *vaðmál* in the payment, especially as contrasted against refined silver, and in 1405 might mean a type of *hafnarvoð* cloth. There are other examples of written dowry contracts from outside the period of study that demonstrate the continued use of the *vaðmál* currency as the unit of measure for dowry payments, especially as there are more extant contracts from the fifteenth century onward as secular and ecclesiastical administration was relying more on written documents for supporting their political affairs and to support landownership claims.[374]

As demonstrated in these examples, marriage payments using the *vaðmál* commodity currency functioned extra-economically to solidify relationships between families and resulted in bonds of obligation and responsibility. These payments are financial payments (of property or wealth), but their intended use is to establish or maintain social relationships and personal or family positions, therefore existing on both economic and social levels as it is an exchange of valuable goods as an investment in a social relationship. The value of the textile object is in the social relationships it is entangled in, creating vertical connections between the families of the betrothed but also between the generations of guardians, married couple, and future children, but some examples like the Greenlandic *vaðmál* mantle indicate extended value as a precious item as well, beyond ordinary cloth. While most of these examples do not refer explicitly to cloth as payment, they infer it or reflect the unit of account as of cloth as currency in the measure of value in the exchange, indicating the social and economic status of one or both families (*ætt*) and the new household (*hjón*). They play an important role by enforcing status through these connections, and the quantity of cloth in the exchange is generally remembered in case the marriage ends, when property or equivalent value needs to be restored to the original families. The possible connections

[372] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 4, 13-14.
[373] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 3, 705-06.
[374] Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property and Virginity,* 57.

that this cloth offers, especially in its role as currency, serves to enhance the desirability of this textile type, as these connections can be visualized through the exchange.

It is interesting that in the creation of these marriages, generally strategic and elite, women were spent like gifts themselves with the aim of creating alliances. They were sent to their new households with the material goods of the dowry which were intended for reuse, especially in aiding the bride in establishing her own power and influence in her new household.[375] This could take the form of "cash" in the form of cloth money, or in the value of property (which could in itself bring in income from rent or farm produce) in the cloth unit of account, or other clothing goods that she would bring with her to use for household expenses or decorate to visually enforce the social standing and wealth of the household, such as a fine *vaðmál* mantle, hangings, or other valuable decorative goods. These marriage contracts would be legal arrangements between the legal male guardians and the groom and would involve a monetary transaction which exchanged the bride for wealth, but women could still make such arrangements advantageous for herself or actively be involved in bettering the social and economic situation of her natal family and newly established marital family.

Inheritance: Establishing Vertical and Horizontal Relationships

The second type of extra-economic payments, inheritance payments, operates in a similar manner as marriage payments in that it is passed between family members. Inheritance is the distribution of the deceased's property and possessions at the event of their death or wealth that is transferred while the owner is still living but owed to the heir. Inheritance has an expected order of operations, moving vertically, such as with father to son, but can move horizontally within the same generation, such as brother to brother, when the expected heirs do not exist.

There were also legal stipulations on who and how much could be inherited, vertically across generations between parents and children but also horizontally between marital partners and siblings, for example. These restrictions largely served to protect family property from being squandered and protected the rights of heirs due to receive such payments; this wealth was intended to ensure that the next generation is provided for, but also with the expectation that the inheritor is to maintain and grow this gift, especially when land, for the next generation upon their own death.

[375] Jaspere, *Medieval Women, Material Culture, and Power,* 18, 116.

This is a vertical social connection, drawing on the family's accumulated wealth to provide for members and to increase their legacy, and as such reinforced social order and family connections and identity.

The strict rules concerning rights and order of receiving inherited property ensured that the entitled received the inheritance they were owed, as evidenced in the listed degrees of rights in the inheritance chapter in *Grágás*.[376] Such payments demonstrate connections to a family group, *ætt*, and often also act as a marker of social position especially in the period of quasi-oligarchical political control by powerful family groups in the Sturlunga period. The inheritance payment was a cross-generational transaction with the passage of money, property, and social positions, such as assets, estates, land rights, or rights to chieftaincies. This was also a way to pass along material wealth and immaterial social privileges to both legitimate and illegitimate children and relatives, male and female.

Grágás

Grágás includes clear examples where *vaðmál* is used as the medium for inheritance payments or acts as the standard of value for the transaction, thereby passing property and wealth horizontally between family members of the same generation or vertically between family members across generations. As mentioned, *Grágás* details that to be a lawful heir, one's parents' marriage have a minimum *mundr* contract.[377] The Inheritance section also tells of the right of heirs to reclaim the property of a deceased who had died abroad, claiming it from the man who brought it back to Iceland: after he had the trade-goods valued in six-ell ounce-units he was to pay the heirs a mark of six-ell ounce-units for each ounce, to be paid out in refined silver, new linen, wax, Icelandic *vara*, or livestock according to the standard values of the district where it was to be paid out ("hann skal gjalda mörk sex álna aura fyrir eyri hvern hér ef hann vill. Það fé skal gjalda hér út í brenndu silfri eða í léreftum nýjum eða vaxi eða vöru íslenskri eða í búfé").[378] This indicates that valuation of property even abroad could be done in *vaðmál* (via the sex-ell ounce-unit) but also shows the different media in which such payments could be made in the twelfth century,

[376] For the weregild ring list, see *Laws of Iceland: Grágás* II, 3-4.
[377] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 49.
[378] *Ibid*, 64, 67.

including 'Icelandic' *vara*—perhaps the *pakkavaðmál* discussed in the next section. The cloth currency is used as the medium or measure of the payment owed to the heir.

Samtíðarsögur

The *samtíðarsögur* also include examples of an inheritance payments, but most often use the term *hundrað* as the unit of account indicating the value of the inheritance, likely expressing *vaðmál* only as a unit of account, but is unclear; sometimes *vaðmál* is specified as well. *Íslendinga saga* names *vara* as part of an inheritance payment in 1229 when Þórðr Sturluson gave his nephew Jón *murtr* Snorrason a hundred hundreds ("hundrað hundrað") from his inheritance from Hróðný Þórðardóttir to provide funds for Jón's supplies for his journey abroad, after Jón asked his friends for support in the form of trade goods (*vara*).[379] Inherited wealth can move in complicated manners between family members, as Jón was also the grandson of Hróðný, Þórðr's *frilla*.[380] It is unlikely that the full inheritance was in *vara* or spent on his trip abroad, more likely that an amount around ten hundred was used, as this seems to have been the typical amount used to fund a journey abroad (see the next section for more on travel funds).[381] Here, however, it specifies that *vara* is requested from the inheritance as the appropriate type of *vaðmál* for export to fund activities in Norway in the thirteenth century, or at the very least considered appropriate by the author.

Other examples use *hundrað* to value the landed and moveable property passed between generations. The 1177 estate of the above-mentioned couple Þórir Þorsteinsson and Þorlaug Pálsdóttir was valued at four hundred hundreds, distributed after they died on pilgrimage in Rome between their families and his *frilla* and illegitimate and legitimate sons, and after arbitration at the *alþingi*, her father Páll was granted Þórir's land and moveable goods but his sister Vigdís received forty hundreds from it ("fjóra tigu hundraða").[382] Especially of note are the estates passed down through the Sturlungar family. Each of the sons of Hvamm-Sturla Þórðarson received forty hundreds after he died in 1183. Sighvatr Sturluson used it to establish a household ("búsefna") at

[379] "Íslendinga saga," 321-2.
[380] Hróðný Þórðardóttir was Þórðr's mistress, from 1188 onwards. She was also the widow of priest and chieftain Bersi Vermundarson *inn auðgi* of Borg, and their daughter Herdís married Snorri Sturluson in 1197. Herdís and Snorri's son Jón *murtr* was therefore the grandson of Hróðný. Snorri had inherited Bersi's estate when he died in 1202, including Borg á Mýrum. When Jón asked for a dowry, he asked for the see and property at Stafaholt, but Snorri wanted to give him the estate of Borg along with the other property that his mother Herdís owned instead.
[381] Helgi Þorláksson, "Gráfeldir á gullöld og voðaverk kvenna," 455.
[382] "Sturlu saga," 92-93.

Hjarðarholt[383] while Snorri's was used by his mother Guðný and she gave the estate at Hvammr instead as bride price when he married Herdís Bersadóttir.[384] The 1237 estate of Þórðr Sturluson was distributed among his children and wife: his sons (with his *frilla* Þóra) Óláfr and Sturla received one hundred hundreds ("hundrað hundraða") each and Þórðr and Guttormr received eighty hundreds ("átta tigi hundraða") each, his (third) wife Valgerðr Árnadóttir received a hundred hundreds "(hundrað hundraða"), each daughter received forty hundreds ("fjóra tigi hunðraða"),[385] and Böðvarr, as the eldest son/ heir, received five hundred hundreds ("fimm hundruð hundraða"), and Sturla also received the estate Eyrr.[386] The 1241 estate of Snorri Sturluson, having earlier taken control of his stepsons' inheritance of eight hundred hundreds (átta hundraða hundraða),[387] was distributed by his son-in-law Gizurr Þorvaldsson and this included his nephew Egill Sölmundarson (from his sister Helga and Sölmundr Austmaðr) who was to receive no less than two hundred hundreds ("eigi minna en tvö hundruð hundraða") and Egill's sister Gyða was to receive whatever dowry ("heimanfylgju") she needed.[388]

These inheritance payments were passed between family members ranging from parent to child, uncle to niece or nephew, and to legitimate and illegitimate family, but generally between generations rather than across. All these payments demonstrate the importance of familial obligations, but also how generational wealth can be used to build power and prestige in a society experiencing great turmoil—especially the Sturlusons. While woollen cloth may or may not have transferred hands to facilitate the passing of money between deceased and heirs, as the term *hundrað* makes this ambiguous but possible, this is not as important as the idea of *vaðmál* as an indisputable and widely applied tender of money in medieval Iceland, a fixed amount of woollen cloth used to facilitate intergenerational connections through financial support. These transfers of wealth, both property and loose goods, played a socially significant role in maintaining family relationships but also in building generational wealth. This is especially true in the case of the Sturlungar family members mentioned above who built powerful estates and strong political

[383] "Íslendinga saga," 186.
[384] *Ibid,* 188. Snorri does not seem to have stayed at Hvammr with his mother and wife, rather lived at his wife's family estate at Borg until Snorri received Reykjaholt, thence they lived on their separate estates. Úlfar Bragason, *Reykjaholt Revisited: Representing Snorri in Sturla Þórðarson's* Íslendinga saga (Reykjavik: Háskólaútgáfan, 2021), 132-33.
[385] Potentially three: Halla (m. Tómas Þórarinsson), daughter from second wife Guðrún Bjarnadóttir, and illegitimate daughters Valgerðr and Guðrún, from mistress Þóra.
[386] "Íslendinga saga," 387.
[387] "Íslendinga saga," 290. Sons of Björn Þorvaldsson, Haukdæll, died 1221.
[388] "Íslendinga saga," 441.

connections. Yet, they could cause trouble with feuds and disputes over their distribution, but people could draw on friends and supporters, other social connections that could be built through other types of wealth transfer, the aforementioned marriage gifts or the undermentioned gifts of friendship.

Gifts: Connections and Obligations

The third form of extra-economic payments is gift-giving. This was an important transaction through the whole medieval period in Iceland. Friendship was an important relationship in a society without a state and men needed to seek their own supportive alliances beyond kin alone to protect themselves.[389] The formal, public, transfer of gifts (*veizla*, *gjöf*) between friends was a ritual, a political strategy, a social marker, and part of a system of reciprocity, and the act of gift-giving could serve to visually establish or enforce the relative social position of the giver and receiver.[390] Cloth gifts could also be given from the deceased to the living, thereby not only offering an object imbued with connections between giver and receiver, but also providing a physical object that can be beneficial for the psyche in coping with the absence of a beloved person by providing a physical object that acts to connect the living with an materialized memory of the deceased.[391] The medium of the gift was not necessarily what was valued (or the only value), rather that the transfer of an object visualized the connection and thereafter marking the object with this association to the giver/receiver, inferring a biography on that object—an object valued for that association.

Cloth gifts signalled slightly different things in different periods. They are often of expensive materials or types of cloth in the earlier period portrayed in the *Íslendingasögur,* where granted as stately gifts in horizontal relationships of patron-client redistribution system intended to assure loyalty and martial support in times of need. Cloth gifts are also found in the *samtíðarsögur,* with gifts reflecting a shift to vertical hierarchies in the socio- and politico-cultural context of centralization of power in fewer powerful families and an increasing institutionalization

[389] Helgi Þorláksson, "Friends, Patrons, and Clients in the Middle Ages," in *Friendships and Social Networks in Scandinavia, c.100-1800*, ed. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Thomas Småberg, 293-310 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 293-94.
[390] Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power: Feasting and Gift-Giving in Medieval Iceland and Its Sagas* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2016), 42, 145, 182, 191, 198. William Ian Miller, "Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid: Case Studies in the Negotiation and Classification of Exchange in Medieval Iceland," *Speculum* 61, no. 1 (1986), 23.
[391] Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words, 1019-20.

of the church, where gifts still played important roles in affirming alliances and personal ties between individuals across social and religious hierarchies, but it becomes perhaps less important to bestow gifts at public events than in written wills or semi-private gifts documented in bishops' sagas and annals.

Gift-giving created reciprocal bonds.[392] These gifts were key because they were visible, public markers of connections, especially to those of a higher status person, such as clothing gifts passed from a king to his subject, often gaining names and passed down generationally, as the object has gained a biography of its own because of this royal affiliation. This can be seen in the royal gifts of high-status clothing such as sets of scarlet clothes or headdress in *Laxdæla saga* from Kings Haraldr *gráfeldr* and Óláfr and also Ingibjörg to Kjartan, Óláfr *pái*, and Bolli. In this way, it boosts the status of the gift-receiver as there is a physical manifestation of their connection, one that is recalled every time Kjartan, Ólafr *pái*, or Bolli wore those clothes. However, there are also examples of 'ordinary' cloth gifts even for high-status people but also contrast with low-status cloth to show that *vaðmál* was valuable but could be of a range of less to more fine material.

While such royal gifts express vertical patron-client relationships, most of these gifts discussed in this chapter demonstrate connections that were built vertically through relationships across offices of institutions of state and church and horizontally across the social lines with peers, but could be also given to reinforce family relationships, both vertically down and horizontally across generations. They show how gifts in *vaðmál* were used as 'tool' to create and support relationships, gifting economically valuable cloth to bolster and reaffirm social position, power, and influence in society. Alliances and personal relationships were vital, especially in the Sturlunga period as disputes and feuds could escalate into violence and one needed to be able to call upon their friends and family for support, both for offense and defense, but also a sign of truce and obligation when there needed to be peace.

Law Codes

The law codes regulate the dispersion of gifts. *Grágás* regulates the right to give gifts for the soul and also friendship gifts ("vingjöf"), and the heir can only dispute this if the giver seems

[392] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Function of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, transl. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, 1966 [1925]), 11.

to be dispossessing him of his due inheritance and can summon him for a lawsuit.[393] *Jónsbók* lists legal types of gifts and the limits of their value, whether gifts to or from the king or friendship ("víngjafir"), stating that the giver cannot betray their heir by giving away what he is due or else the gift is invalidated. A man was free to give to whomever he wished a quarter ("fjórðungs gjöf") of what he had earned, over and above what he had inherited in land and moveable wealth, which was due his heirs, but he could give away a tenth-gift ("tíundar gjöf") of that inherited property.[394] Thus, gift-giving was a significant part of society that necessitated legal regulations.

Samtíðarsögur

Cloth gifts are a somewhat common occurrence across the sources. In *Þorgils saga og Hafliða* we see an example of a cloak used without a term qualifying the material from which it was constructed, but only the decoration added to it. An account from 1121 noted Þorgils Oddason giving Hafliði Másson gifts including an ornamented cloak ("feld hlaðbúinn"), which had been gifted to him from Sigríðr Eyjólfsdóttir (she was married to Jón Kálfsson of Höfðabrekka and their grandson Snorri was married to Þorgils' daughter Álof; Haflíði's wife Þuríðr was a cousin to Sigríðr through her mother Hallbera, and thus both granddaughters of Snorri *goði*).[395] Here, the cloak is included in the story because of its object biography in being associated with and providing connections between descendants of Snorri *goði*, representing Þorgils and Sigríðr's multiple relationships. *Hlað* refers to a decorated hem, most likely a tablet-woven border.[396] Yet the term *feldr* uses the same base term as *vararfeldr* trade cloaks, and while the material is unknown, it is likely the cloak was decorated *vaðmál,* the main local cloth-type in the period.

Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar includes the use a term we have seen before, *kyrtill*, a type of tunic, but here dyed and ornamented.[397] In a *jartein*-type story the title character, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, had travelled abroad with Bishop Guðmundr Arason and on their return from Norway in 1203 the bishop gifted Hrafn with brown cloth for a kirtle ("kyrtilsklæði brúnað" or "kyrtilsbúnað") which he divided among his men ("skiptu kyrtlum brúnuðum til manna"), among

[393] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 62.
[394] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 140.
[395] "Þorgils saga og Hafliða," 46.
[396] Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde,* 33. Falk describes *hlað* in discussion of decorative trimmings and bands, that the tablet-woven band could be used as the starting border (weft threads of the border used as warp threads for the fabric) or sewn onto the fabric.
[397] Cleasby, 367.

the two other valuable object of a studhorse and a sun-stone.[398] This same tunic is mentioned later when Hrafn was killed, stating it was one of the bishop's gifts stolen from his estate at Eyrr in the subsequent pillaging but was later abandoned when loading all the other stolen goods, stating that it was just a *vaðmál* gown (*vaðmál slopp*) or a badly worn tunic ("kyrtilinn vondr sloftötur") and failed to recognize its importance stemming from its association with the bishop—like a miracle that the true nature of the cloth was hidden.[399] In the descriptions of bishop's gift, the tunic is described favourably with terms that imply a valuable textile that would be suited to a bishop, with costlier dyed brown fabric (*brúnað*), not natural sheep colour, and ornamentation (*búnaði*) of some kind—Falk includes the example among his discussion of dyed tunics, splendid tunics, *skrúðklæði.*[400] In contrast, it is portrayed in a lesser manner at Hrafn's death, as worn, torn, or as simpler fabric—using the term *vaðmál*—however, this may be due to Hrafn's use of the clothing and thus being worn or explained as a miracle that the author infers the attackers ignorance and unworthiness of the cloth-gift meant they could not comprehend its true value (whether its biographical value or if the true material worth).[401] Regardless, it seems possible then that this tunic was made of *vaðmál* which had been dyed or decorated, perhaps with embroidery or tablet weaving, which would have increased its worth beyond a *vaðmál*-material tunic alone, unless the interpretation favoured is that the *kyrtill* turned into a lower-value, worn *sloppr* or kirtle. Both Guðmundr and Hrafn are portrayed with saintly qualities and while cloth gift is intended to express the bishops' generosity and virtue to his followers, as he has returned from his consecration, it also visualizes the friendship between two saintly men, Hrafn and the bishop. The *kyrtill* that was recognized as an important gift even at Hrafn's death and noteworthy that the attackers did not recognize its importance.

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[398] "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka," 907; "Brot úr miðsögu Guðmundar," *Biskupa sögur* I, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, Guðbrandur Vigfússon, Þorvaldur Bjarnarson, Eiríkur Jónsson, 559-618 (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmentafélag, 1858), 565.

[399] "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar," *Biskupa sögur* I, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, Guðbrandur Vigfússon, Þorvaldur Bjarnarson, Eiríkur Jónsson, 639-676 (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmentafélag, 1858), 674; "Brot úr miðsögu Guðmundar," 565.

[400] Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde,* 154-55. He also states that the term *sloppr*, generally referring to the priest's gown, is out of place here, and likely then would infer a tunic rather than a gown. *Ibid*, 199.

[401] Ásdís Egilsdóttir also states that mistaken valuation is part of Þorvaldr's unworthiness, as the saga is seen to portray Hrafn in a saintly manner, as Hrafn's attackers were not worthy to have a cloth-gift imbued with Guðmundr's saintly personality, nor Hrafn's as gift-receiver. Ásdís Egilsdóttir, "Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, Pilgrim and Martyr," in *Sagas, Saints and Settlements,* ed. Gareth Williams and Paul Bibire, 29-39 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 37.

Vaðmál as currency could also be gifted to aid with making agreements between parties in conflict with each other. The 1181 personal assault compensation case for in *Hvamm-Sturlu saga* also involved an exchange of gifts to consolidate the truce. There was a feast at Reykjaholt where Páll Sölvason gave Jón Lóftsson gifts for his help in the lawsuit, including an ox with a gold ring in its horn and ten hundreds of *vaðmál* ("tíu hundruð vaðmála").[402] This gift expresses the relationship between Jón and Páll, that Jón acted on his behalf in both earlier in the Deildartunga inheritance issue and helping getting a reduced fine for the personal assault (when his wife Þorbjörg Bjarnadóttir cuts Hvamm-Sturla Þórðarson's cheek, as discussed above), where he also offered to foster Hvamm-Sturla's son Snorri. They publicly formalize a personal, social relationship of friendship through this gift-giving of the economically valuable woollen cloth and reinforced with fosterage, but the *vaðmál* is included among other valuable gifts—as with the Greenlandic *vaðmál* mantle—indicating fine cloth valued highly economically but also as fabric for elite men.

As with the first two types of social extra-economic transactions discussed in this chapter, marriage and inheritance, there are also examples which only use the term *hundrað* to imply the value of gifts (but also could have been actual *vaðmál*) between religious institutions, within families and across generations, and between friends. *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar* has a deathbed gift of Bishop Björn Gilsson in 1162 to friends and kin which included a hundred hundreds ("hundrað hundraða") from the see to the monastery at Þverá, where his brother was abbot, here a public gift showing family connection between important religious institutions.[403] *Íslendinga saga* tells of an intergenerational gift in 1231 from parents to a couple to solve marital problems (Ingibjörg Snorradóttir and Gizurr Þorvaldsson), of twenty hundreds ("tuttugu hundruð"), but ultimately the couple separated.[404] A 1243 example from *Þórðar saga kakala,* a friendship gift to support alliances with Þórðr kakala gifting Bárðr Þorkelson the island of Svefneyjar, which was worth forty-five hundreds (hálfan fimmta tug hundraða), in addition to other worthy gifts ("fleiri sæmdir") since Bárðr had supported Þórðr in his struggles against Kolbeinn Arnórsson.[405] In each of these cases, the amount of the gift is accounted in an expression of a *vaðmál* unit of account, but without a clear indication that cloth currency is passing hands, but

[402] "Sturlu saga," 99.
[403] "Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar," 106.
[404] "Íslendinga saga," 333.
[405] "Þórðar saga kakala," 484.

rather expresses the adoption of *vaðmál* as a measure of value across different sectors of society for openly expressing personal relationships.

The *biskupasögur* also tell of gifts of friendship, given as a call for aid from one's network of support. In *Árna saga* Loptr Helgason, who was a *ráðsmaður* in Skálaholt, was sent to Norway in 1283 (for the king to arbitrate after accusations of high treason for not accepting the new law code *Jónsbók* at the assembly, but had been prevented from plead his case with the king) with a gift of five hundreds of *vaðmál* ("fimm hundruð vaðmála") as a request for aid to Hallkell Ögmundarson, who had been King Magnús *lagabætir*'s vassal.[406] Loptr was using this *vaðmál* gift to draw on support from his and Bishop Árni's networks of support in the royal court in Norway, as Hallkell sought help from Bjarni Erlingsson of Gizka, who was the second most powerful man in King Eiríkr's council, demonstrating how such a gift could have value beyond the economic when used as a tool to navigate one's social network.

Lárentíus saga describes gifts given between the archbishop and bishop of Iceland. In 1330 Archbishop Eilífr's steward came to Iceland at Gáseyri on a ship from Trondheim, bringing to Hólar and Bishop Lárentíus (r.1324-1331) the previously mentioned splendid mitre and two boxes of balsam, and states that this gift showed the archbishop's affection for Lárentíus. In return, the bishop gave thirty packs of *vaðmál* ("þrjátigi pakka vaðmáls", thirty packs of sixty ells each (1800 ells); one manuscript uses the term *vaðmál* while the other *vara*) through his steward Bergr Jónsson in gratitude for this gift.[407] Lárentíus had lived in Norway for fifteen years studying with Archbishop Jörundr (1294-1309) and so would have had a close relationship with Eilífr's predecessor and was familiar with the archbishopric. Nonetheless, the bishop had received a great gift, confirming his friendship with Eilífr, and thus he sent back a significant gift as well, a large amount of *vara*. These great gifts signal friendship between important religious men: this was a gift of gratitude but also reciprocation for his own gift in his network of ecclesiastical authority, sending local cloth of high economic value for the gift of splendid foreign cloth (the material of the mitre). This is especially apt as, according to Joel D. Andersson, the saga illustrates the continued importance of individual friendships despite increasing institutionalization with the "shifting schemes and alliances of the elite clerics" at the turn of the fourteenth century.[408]

[406] "Árna saga biskups," 135-36.
[407] "Lárentíus saga biskups," 430-31. Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 387.
[408] Anderson, *Reimagining Christendom,* 157.

Lárentíus saga also includes a detailed account from 1331 of deathbed gifts of cloth and clothing from Bishop Lárentíus of Hólar to various members of his household upon his death, including abstract amounts of cloth gifts, some as expressed as specific fabrics and others not. He assigned ten hundreds ("tíu hundruð") each to the monasteries of Þingeyrar and Múnkaþverá, twenty *stika* of *klæði* to Þorsteinn, splendid kirtles for choir priests, fifteen *stika* of black *klæði* to Skúli the steward, a set of cloths of *skrúð* and two tunics with hoods (that were to be made of thirty ells of linen ("þrítigir alnir lérefts") taken from the wardrobe) and shoes to deacon Einarr, six ells of linen to each deacon, five hundreds ("fimm hundruð") to steward Sölvi, eight *stika* of red cloth to stewardess Guðrún, a hundred ("hundrað") to the guestman Þórr Ísleifsson, and nearly fifteen hundred ("nærri fimmtán hundruð") to his son Árni to pay to Munkaþverá as his entry donation.[409] In gifting these cloth and clothing, the bishop was giving his friends objects to remember him by, but also to acknowledge their devotion to him in their service in his household, affirming their relationship with these cloth gifts. It indicates cloth as currency in units of account (*hundrað*) and as lengths (*stika*) without stated function of clothing but also lists specific linen and *skrúð* fabrics and also garments with and without their fabric materials and colours, which leaves the possibility that the unspecified amounts might have been a gift of *vaðmál* or in kind. It is ambiguous to whether the bishop's wardrobe was comprised of purchased or gifted foreign cloth or cloth and garments of local *vaðmál* that have been elevated in value due to the connection they provide to the bishop.

There are also accounts of cloth gifts given as part of an intercessory vow, a promise of a gift to an institution when invoking a holy person for aid in a living threatening situation, particularly used in the account of miracles of the Icelandic saints. This includes promises of *vaðmál* to St Þorlákr, or to Skálaholt in his name, for healing—twelve ells ("tólf álnir vaðmáls") to St Þorlákr for healing from a kidney stone, six ells ("sex álnum vaðmáls") to Skálaholt in St Þorlákr's name for healing from a knife wound, and an ounce ("eyri vaðmáls") to St Þorlákr for healing from a blood disease—[410]but also to save goods—one hundred ("hundrað vaðmála") to Skálaholt in St Þorlákr's name for safe passage for a ferry with cargo in a storm and twelve ells

[409] "Lárentíus saga biskups," 438-39. Compare the account of the same event recorded in *Lögmannsannáll*, described below.

[410] "Þorláks saga byskups yngri," *Íslenzk fornrit 16. Biskupa sögur II,* ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 141-224 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2002), 218; "Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur," *Íslenzk fornrit 16. Biskupa sögur II,* ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 225-250 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2002), 230; "Þorláks saga byskups C," *Íslenzk fornrit 16. Biskupa sögur II,* ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 251-285 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2002), 274.

("tólf álnir vaðmáls") to recover two chests of cloth and iron which fell off horses when crossing a flooded Hvítá after travelling home from a *þingi*.[411] These vows are given by laymen, with the cloth gift enacting a connection between them by blessing the supplicant and supporting the saint's cult. These examples are found in the similar B- and C- versions and later miracle collection (*Jarnteinabók*), all of which are vernacular versions of *Þorláks saga helga*, derived from an earlier Latin *vita* (*c.*1200)*,* which survives only in four fragments which also include miracles, but only the miracles themselves and not anything stated given in thanks to the saint. This difference between the Latin and Old Icelandic version in their accounts is due to different sociopolitical and religious contexts and motivations for writing: of the miracles in the later, longer sagas which were written in the fourteenth-century context of promoting St. Þorlák's cult with vernacular readings at feast days and also of the expansion of papal rule by using miracles as Godly justification for canonization their own saints instead of looking to the papacy, whereas the shorter Latin version of 1199 was meant for reading miracles at the *alþingi,* using this proof of sanctity for establishing him as a saint.[412] These later miracles accounts are longer and provide more details about daily life and associate the miracles with specific places, people, and dates,[413] and thus used terms appropriate to a thirteenth- and fourteenth-century context, setting these gift amounts in terms of local, domestic trade in *vaðmál,* perhaps *vöruvaðmál* that could be shorter lengths (six ells) and intended for smaller, local transactions or for personal use, instead terms like *söluvaðmál* or *vara* more typical of the twenty-ell length to be used for larger transactions like export, before *vara* used as a unit of account after *c.*1400.[414] These six- and twelve-ell gifts would thus be appropriate for laymen to gift to Skálaholt, given in thanks to support the narrative of a saint who God esteemed.

These examples demonstrate how gift-giving of *vaðmál* was an important tool used for creating and maintaining alliances with family and friends, including for political purposes, and

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[411] "Þorláks saga byskups yngri," 219, 200. Conversely, *Jóns saga ins Helga* includes an account of an intercession to St Jón to find missing *vaðmál* at the *þingi* at Jöklamannabuð. "Jóns saga ins Helga*,*" *Íslenzk fornrit 15. Biskupa sögur I. Síðari hluti- sögutextar,* ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, Peter Foote, 173-316 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2003), 295.
[412] Anderson, *Reimagining Christendom*, 62, 76. Susanne Mariam Fahn and Gottskálk Jensson, "The Forgotten Poem: A Latin Panegyric for Saint Þorlákr in AM 382 4to," *Gripla* 21 (2010), 22, 52. Fahn and Jensson argue that the younger miracle collection originally belonged to the B-version, due to many parallels between the two, but the end is mutilated and might have been in the original epilogue. *Ibid,* 48.
[413] *The Saga of Bishop Thorlak/ Þorláks saga byskups*, transl. Ármann Jakobsson and David Clark (Exeter: Short Run Press/ Viking Society for Northern Research University College London, 2013), xviii.
[414] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 230-31.

represent mutual obligations between friends—sometimes balanced and sometimes imbalanced—but also in religious contexts and with saints and their holiness. Gifts remained an important part of the sociopolitical context of friendship and alliances in the violent twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but also to the religious context of the fourteenth with the increasingly important role of institutions and the expanding influence of the international church—Norway and Rome—in Iceland in the fourteenth century. These gifts functioned simultaneously in social and economic ways, creating social bonds and transferring of wealth across and between social matrices—between new and old friendship alliances and across the hierarchy of church officials. Interestingly, it demonstrates *vaðmál*'s economic value but also real use as clothing and cloth associated with some higher status people including bishops, archbishops, saints, and important secular leaders.

Íslendingasögur

Gifts are a physical manifestation of friendships in the family sagas, whether between blood or affinal relations or nonrelatives; they were with alliances a key component of early medieval Icelandic social hierarchy. The passage of gifts between parties is an expression to each other, if done in private, or to the community, if done in public, of their connection to each other, and must follow social rules and obligations of reciprocity. The economic exchange also reinforces social status as the gift is usually passed from a higher-status giver to a lower-status recipient and thereby creating a formal relationship of obligation and allows the giver to increase their position of prestige and power but also serves to boost the receiver's own status through the connection to the giver with the gift, visualized in the gift-giving act.[415]

Some examples refer to *vaðmál* signifying an item of fabric that is used as a gift. In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, the chieftain Hrútr Herjólfsson gifts a hundred ells of *hafnarvaðmál* cloth and twelve *vaðmál* cloaks ("hundrað álna hafnarváðar ok tólf vararfeldi") to Queen Gunnhildr *konungamóðir* (*c.*910-980) when he travelled to Konungahella during the reign of Gunnhildr's son Haraldr *gráfeldr*.[416] These are trade items, typical items brought to Norway by an Icelander travelling to fund a trip abroad before *c.*1200, but *hafnarváð* was a finer quality than *vara* and subject to

[415] Laurel Ann Wilson, "Status," in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Medieval Age,* ed. Sarah-Grace Heller, 107-124 (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 110. William Ian Miller, "Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid," 23.
[416] "Brennu-Njáls saga," 15.

assessment and not price in this period. Perhaps this term is being used to indicate a higher quality of *vaðmál* fabric that was suited as a gift to a queen, rather than the lower thread-count weave *vara* noted to be valued for its suitability for everyday clothing for walking, travelling, and rainy conditions. This example is using these terms, *hafnarað* and *vararfeldr,* to demonstrate an economic-social exchange, a transaction that gifts cloth trade goods in order to establish a relationship with an important person in a foreign country, but at the same time cloth that was considered a worthy gift for a queen, and she might use them to make her own clothing or regift them to her own supporters. The expectation is that the queen would be an ally in any potential conflicts, or even just to boost Hrútr's own social status through his connection to her. This is more notable as Hrútr and Gunnhildr later become lovers and publicly displays affection for him. This relationship has far-reaching effects on Hrútr's life, not only of the increased status that such a relationship brings (political and personal), but also later the gifts that she gives him in turn and the effect they have on his life in Iceland.

A further example of cloth gift is that given between friends, such as the example from early fourteenth-century *Finnboga saga ramma* of the gift from Finnbogi *rammi* Ásbjörnson to Bárðr of Grænmó, Hálogaland in Norway in the tenth century. Finnbogi's nephew Bergr the Bold and his wife Dalla had been staying with Finnbogi after landing at Borðeyri, Hrútafjörðr on a trade journey to Iceland. Bergr had been killed during an attack on Finnbogi when they were preparing Bergr's ship for its return to Norway. Dalla asked to foster Finnbogi's son Gunnbjörn and take him back to Norway with her. Finnbogi had agreed, and he gave her gifts to give to his friend Bárðr, with whom he had previously lived when abroad in his own youth, giving her fifteen hundreds of *mórent* cloth and fifteen *vararfeldir* ("fimmtán hundruð mórent ok fimmtán vararfeldi").[417] Finnbogi had gone abroad in his youth and the farmer Bárðr had held his wealth for him while travelling around Norway, which was returned and helped him to pay compensation for killing his first wife's father, Álfr *aftrkembr*, and they were friends when Finnbogi had returned to Iceland. This gift, in a combination of striped trade goods and trade cloaks, represents the continued bond between Finnbogi and Bárðr, a symbol of their friendship despite years apart.

Harðar saga has an example of hundreds used in a dowry payment but also to quantify a gift given in the tenth century. The saga tells of Signý Valbrandsdóttir transferring her property ("fé") to her brother Torfi in order to protect it during her marriage to Þorgeirr of Miðfell through

[417] "Finnboga saga," 315.

a *handsal*-contract and has him pay the previously-agreed-upon dowry amount from that property ("ek mun handsala þér fé mitt allt á þann hátt, at þú skalt gjalda heimanfylgju mína"), after which there would be twenty hundreds ("tuttugu hundraða") left over for him to keep as a token of friendship ("vil ek þat gefa þér til vingunar"), or gift.[418] Signý has both created a new relationship in her marriage via the dowry, but also maintained a previous relationship to her brother (and natal family) via the gift; both affinal and natal relationships were key social bonds in this society. This gift is given from her property (*fé*), expressed with *hundrað* using the *vaðmál* unit of account only for the amount left over from the total amount of property transferred, but can illustrate how family could work together to protect their property in the context of marriage.

Vaðmál could be exchanged between blood relations in a time of need. Thirteenth-century *Gísla saga* includes a late tenth-century account of cloth gifted between brothers as a means of support. Gísli Súrsson, after killing his brother-in-law Þorgrímr in vengeance for killing his other, sworn brother-in-law Vésteinn, was exiled for thirteen years before he was killed. This is a long time to stand outside of society and without the means for financial or alimentary support, and the saga tells of Gísli calling on his brother Þorkell at his farm Hvammr for support, and when he knew he wouldn't being receiving legal support, he asked for three hundreds of *vaðmál* ("þrjú hundruð vaðmál") and Þorkell gave him *vara* and some silver ("vǫru ok silfr nǫkkut"). Later, when Gísli again needs support, Þorkell gives him a boat plus food and a hundred of *vaðmál* ("hundruð vaðmála") so he can support himself.[419] There is the threat of legal punishment for supporting an outlaw, yet this is his brother, and the bonds of blood are stronger than fear of repercussion. This example is not a gift in the formal sense of public gift-giving, but rather in a more informal sense of helping another person, and this reflects brotherly bonds and a sense of obligation (and perhaps even love), despite how little help was actually given. After being exiled for killing out of obligation to a brother-in-law, the older brother has familial obligation to support his outlawed younger brother and grants him *vaðmál*, providing social, material, and financial support: cloth to provide physical protection and warmth or to be traded in Iceland for other goods. This holds financial and material usefulness for an outlaw, as seen with the earlier example of Grettir using *vaðmál* cloth to warm himself while in exile.

[418] "Harðar saga Grímkelssonar eða Hólmverja saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 13, *Harðar saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 99-172 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1991), 10.
[419] "Gísla saga Súrssonar," 74.

Returning to an example mentioned in the first section of this chapter, fourteenth-century *Flóamanna saga* account of gifts of obligation given when an Icelander settles his affairs before travelling to Greenland after Eiríkr *rauði* invited him there to take his choice of land, in the tenth century. Before moving there with his family and some dependents, from Traðarholt in South Iceland, Þorgils Þórðarson transfers his fixed property and gives sixty hundreds of *mórent* ("sex tigi hundraða mórent sex álna aura") to his brother Hæringr Þórðarson, also setting aside some cloth for his daughter Þórný's dowry, as she stayed behind because she had fallen ill before their trip.[420] Þorgils is moving abroad and leaving behind his family estate to his brother, and this gift of cloth and the fixed property can perhaps be seen as him reinforcing their familial bond with a gift of support, as the *mórent* has economic value in addition to its physical value as cloth, with the intention of financial support for the care of dependents and the estate plus cloth for his daughter's future dowry.

These examples of gift-giving in the family sagas demonstrate that such giving is not solely altruistic but serves in the consolidation of relationships, demonstrating more personal bonds. Half of these examples show that the giving of cloth or gifts measured in *vaðmál* currency are done between family members and are reinforcing inalienable familial relationships by thanking a brother for support or offering a small amount of financial support to a brother outside of the law. The other half serves to visualize and give physical expressions for the formation of relationship between socially unequal persons such as a queen and a chieftain or between friends. These gifts follow actions of support or friendship and serve to consolidate such relationships.

Documentary sources

The documentary sources also include references to *vaðmál* but hardly refer to it as a piece of cloth outside of an economic context, except in examples of gifts. These examples generally used different terms or are restricted to the use of the term *hundrað*, where it is unclear if there is a transfer of actual cloth or if it is a statement of value, but there are a few examples that indicate that actual cloth was intended to pass hands.

[420] "Flóamanna saga," 277. The alternate version of the text states that he sold the property to his brother and gifted him plain *vaðmál* in the three-ell ounce unit: "en Hæringi, bróður sínum, seldi hann í hendr sex tigi hundraða þriggja álna aura, en annat en staðfestu."

In an account that nearly mirrors the aforementioned death-bed gift in *Lögmannsannáll* the account for 1332 also tells of the gifts which Bishop Lárentíus Kálfsson had stipulated on his deathbed, but with slightly different amounts and materials.[421] Here, the annal adds that Larentíus promised twenty hundreds of *vara* ("tuttugu hundruð vöru") to be given to the poor from Michaelmas to Pentecost, so it was ten hundreds annually ("minnsta tíu hundruð árliga"), and gave away all the sheepskins, *vara*, and *hafnarváð* that had been given to the estate ("í klippingum, vöru, ok hafnarvoðum"). Þorsteinn is gifted twenty ells (not *stika*) of *klæði* and ten hundred *vara* ("tuttugu álnir klæðis," "tíu hundruð vöru"). Steward Skúli is granted fifteen ells (not *stika*) of *klæði* ("fimmtán álnir klæðis"). A deacon, presumably Einarr again, is granted thirty ells of double-lined linen ("klæði tvídregin þrjátigi álna lérefta"), leather hose, and shoes and an unnamed amount of linen cloth ("línklæðaléreft)". Sölvi only received three hundreds ("þrjú hundruð") here, not five. Guðrún received an unspecified amount of the red cloth. Árni's gift remained the same. It adds that all people received something, including *stakksvaðmál* and *línklæðaléreft*. The choir priests, other deacons, and monasteries are not mentioned here.[422] While *klæði* is a generic term for cloth and it is unclear if this refers to *vaðmál*, the possibility should not be excluded as the term is used for other gifts in the record, especially as it was one of the media in which the bishop's quarter of the tithe could be paid. *Stakksvaðmál* indicates the practical use in clothing, as it must refer to *vaðmál* to be used for *stakkr,* a type of thigh- to knee-length shirt that would be worn with hose, which thus references clothing provisions as poor support.[423] Together, these various gifts show that cloth, in both specific and unstated amounts, passed hands and that they could be given as pieces or lengths of fabric and as well as specific articles of clothing or textiles, and these could include terms specifying *vaðmál* and related terms. These are mainly references to untailored fabric, pieces of cloth which could be used for tailored clothing such as the shirts. The gifts demonstrate not only the desirability of these fabrics for their material properties, but also that they were valued for their biography; they are notable because of their association with a bishop who was so benevolent to his household and diocese, and also the prestige that such gifts bring for persons named as recipients. The wearer will remember him when wearing the item or other will

[421] Einarr Hafliðason, an important cleric for the Hólar diocese, is presumed to have written both accounts, the annal (up to 1361) and most likely also the bishop's saga, which seems reasonable as Larentíus was his friend and teacher.
[422] *Lögmannsannáll.* 1332, 269-70.
[423] The *stakkr* is typical fashion before the late fourteenth century, whereafter *hempa* shirts become fashionable, shorter and worn with trousers. Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 286-97.

recall the clothing also worn by the bishop and visualize their association. These fabric gifts may have been desired for their material properties, worth, and for possible saleability, but more so here for their connection to this bishop and the connections that these gifts established between him and their recipients, valued members of his household or community, or the poor, which shows his generosity and charity.

Lögmannsannáll also includes an account from 1376 of an invocation to Bishop Guðumndr *góði* Arason during a harsh winter (*Hvalvetur*). The account mentions intercessionary words of the men from the north, in agreement with Bishop Jón *skalli* Eiríksson of Hólar (r.1358-1390), who promised to give an ell of every hundred to Rome ("til aarnadar ordz vid enn goda Gvdmund byskup Arason at gefva alin af hverio hvndradi til þers at lata fara til pafva gardz").[424] This mirrors an account from *Pretssaga Guðmundar Arasonar* where the bishop and all on board made confession and had promised an ell from every sack aboard ("gefa alin af sekk hverjum") if saved from a storm, but that example had a clearer cloth connotation with the trade context of sacks with cloth to be exported, but a similar circumstance could be applied here.[425]

Vaðmál exchanged as gifts are objects that reveal direct connections between people, relationships of varying types, person-to-person bonds as the gift is passed from giver to receiver, and these documentary sources show more of the vertical type bonds with the church as an institution playing a stronger role in redistribution of resources, even including vows and charity. These can be gifts of money but is money in the form of cloth and therefore can be used in either way by the recipients and with a future functional use of the material cloth. It was still a commodity currency and standard of value, but it also was significant for the social sphere, reflecting social norms and economic value, functioning both as cloth-money and playing a role in the maintenance of social relationships, while the *Íslendingasögur* emphasized more those between family and between friends, especially those socially unequal among the *bændur* and *goðar* social classes, and the *samtíðarsögur* between bishop and parishioners or household members. The exchange of cloth gifts is the physical manifestation of a relationship between two parties, one which would come to mind whenever one subsequently uses or views that cloth object later, and these could include 'ordinary' cloth like *vaðmál* and not just 'fancy' cloth like scarlet, for gifts given to and from royalty, bishops, archbishops, the papacy, and chieftains. *Vaðmál,* as indicated in many of

[424] *Lögmannsannáll* 1376, 280-81.
[425] "Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar," 207-09.

the examples discussed above, could also be considered fine cloth appropriate for the clothing of high-status people, just as the *söluvaðmál* discussed in a prior chapter.

Conclusion

This section has shown how the exchange of cloth could be used to create and maintain social relationships, used as a tool in the game of power struggles and social and status. This could be done though the passage of objects associated with a person or place, exchanged in the name of an important person, or a relationship formed because of the exchange. These relationships could be between friends, family members, royals, bishops, saints, and with places. These examples of *vaðmál* demonstrate the variability of its function, here extra-economically as a material object used in economic exchange for social gain, and the depth and mutability of *vaðmál* as cloth currency with changing terms over term, using *vaðmál, vara, vararfeldr, hafnarvað,* and *stakksvaðmál* throughout. The sources reflect a dynamic situation where writers changed terms in relation to changing fashions and, in general, used time-period appropriate *vaðmál* terms, which reflects adapting to changing internal and external situations.

In terms of marriage exchanges, *vaðmál* acted to connect families in formalizing marriage arrangements, creating a desirable connection between families. These relationships are shown in the family and contemporary sagas as being formed with an agreement and 'purchase' via exchange of *vaðmál* or valuation of the amount in *vaðmál* in dowry, bride price, or bridal gift payments. These payments are expressed either as an amount of the *vaðmál* currency or as a payment in cloth goods. These various examples demonstrate how a bride and groom's families can be tied together through a marriage arrangement to create ties to a renowned person, to align to a socio-politically important family, to allow a lower-status family to be allied with a higher-status family, or to settle a feud between two families to reconcile after protracted and violent disagreements.

Inheritance payments were the second type of extra-economic payments made with or measured in *vaðmál*, acting to connect between or across generations by passing wealth and ensuring a link to the past. These payments allow the recipient to be connected to illustrious ancestors, especially in receiving their land or high-status material objects, or the value of them. These various examples have shown in the family and contemporary sagas as passing wealth according to legal order of inheritance, expressed as units of *vaðmál* currency or an amount of the

cloth. These socioeconomic payments were transferred between relatives, whether direct or extended, and some examples demonstrate how there might have been cases of dispute between heirs that led to conflict, especially in the case of large inheritances or multiple partners with children. In general, however, these payments were intended to pass along family wealth and land to the next generation and to help them establish new households, in sense replicating the family for the future and ensuring its continuation.

Gift-giving was the third extra-economic exchange, and such *vaðmál*-type of gifts connected people of variable backgrounds in a relationship of obligation and reward through friendship or reinforced family relationships. These various examples show a variety of types of relationships and these friendships and alliances show the creation and maintenance of relationships based on reputation, high social status or royal position, family responsibilities, fosterage, generosity, or aid in times of trouble, or expression appreciation for support. The gifts are expressed as an amount in the cloth currency or actual *vaðmál* cloth given for whatever purpose the receiver might have, whether use as financial funds or for clothing in a range of qualities. These examples of gifts also include the extolling (or maligning) a person in the written sources after their death, especially of religious persons, using these stories of gift-giving to enforce a sense of their generosity and boost their reputation. For whatever reason the gift was given, these extra-economic transactions communicate the types of relationships that might have been possible or normal in the past and highlight social values in terms of what personal qualities were desired in creating a useful alliance, whether reputation, generosity, political power, or wealth. It also visualized the connection between the giver-receiver whenever one was to wear the item in public, especially in the earlier period when gift-exchange done at public events. In the Commonwealth era, visual gifts were important for connections to kings and *goðar* but in the later Sturlunga and Norwegian-rule eras gift-giving was importance for religious networks and households as well. All throughout the period under study, *vaðmál* served to facilitate and show visual and material connections to specific, important people.

These cloth exchanges also highlight how *vaðmál* can be considered high-quality fabric or used for clothing of high-status people. The difference representations include using it as gift passed between friends, across hierarchies, and to establish marriages alongside luxury goods and thus can be considered fine cloth as well, not just valuable as was trade good in high quantities but because it could be made in high quality. *Vaðmál* can be used to express the ordinary and common,

such as walking clothes or a disguise, but also the extraordinary and high status with important men giving gifts; this reflects a possible range of fabric qualities based on a weaver's skill, materials, or how the cloth was used to construct a cloth object. *Vaðmál* cloth could be made of a fine weave that was appropriate for queens, archbishops, and chieftains but coarser weaves could also gain extra value through their association with important people, and context is important to determine the type and source of value represented in different types of *vaðmál* exchange.

In sum, this section highlighted some key examples that demonstrate the depth of the economic and social system in early medieval Iceland; *vaðmál* was the medium of exchange or unit of account and played a key role beyond the market in the management of social relationships. Here, a versatile cloth currency was used beyond the economic context and was influential across society, from the household level in forming marital relationships to inter- and intra-family relationships, to political alliances and religious networks. This cloth commodity currency was thoroughly entangled in medieval Icelandic society; *vaðmál* was woven by women in the home but used throughout society for clothing and in economic and extra-economic exchange, but also international exchange, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

Part 2. *Vaðmál* as Exclusive and Expensive Objects

Thus far the functions of *vaðmál* have been outlined as meeting a material clothing need, operating aesthetically to communicate visual messages of identity and status, cloth currency integrated into domestic systems of exchange, and a social object used to maintain relationships. This final section will address the final function, that *vaðmál* functioning as an exclusive and expensive textile produced as the result of learned skills and facilitated connections to the outside world as a trade good. It was an exclusive and expensive textile not necessarily because it was rare or a luxurious textile, but because of its impact via the large quantities produced and range of use in addition to the large labour investment, reflecting the desire for an object that could mark differences in social status by controlling access to it and its production and be used to navigate the local and international social system.[426]

In this regard, *vaðmál* has an extended role beyond economic fungibility as it facilitated the in/outflux of goods and people: it was integrated into the international exchange system as an expensive textile that made a significant contribution to the domestic economy in the large (unquantifiable) volume exported; it was also an expensive textile in extra-economic function that was used as travel funds for Icelanders to improve their social position via their activities and relationships formed abroad; and also that economic integration should include the exclusive function via women's role in regulating *vaðmál* according to cultural knowledge and controlled production.

These three points will serve as the outline of this chapter, exclusive knowledge, expensive trade goods, and expensive travel funds. First, it will discuss non-legal forms of regulation of this specific type of cloth object intended as cloth currency and trade commodity, as there was the potential for exclusive control via informal regulation through the management of production standards and accessibility to tools and resources that happens at the place of production, in the home. Second, it looks at the extra-economic function of cloth trade goods and how their export fits into the wider medieval era demand for textiles, with exclusivity identifiable in the legal standards regulating production and its esteemed use as the main export product, in large quantities. Finally, it examines the extra-economic function of trade goods funding overseas travels and the range of benefits such journeys could bring the travellers, as Icelanders would be involved in cultural exchange and be influenced by foreign ideas, religion, culture, and more, and

[426] Harris, 682, 683, 687-88.

thence return to Iceland with foreign goods but more significantly with increased social status, honour, and wealth from such journeys, and in doing so even influence Icelandic society itself. Each of these sections demonstrates how *vaðmál* was valued more than economically but also for cultural, social, political, and religious advantages that its production and exchange could bring, furthering the systems of power and social order in medieval Icelandic society.

Exclusive Textiles: Production Know-how

As the main standard of value, *vaðmál* production was subject to formal regulation with legal standards of quality for valid currency, as already discussed in the second chapter. An important part of this legal definition is that it is *þrískeft*, woven using three heddle rods—that is, making twill cloth—and with the dimension two ells width and six ells length, retaining an even breadth along the selvage edges. Standards were regulated at the point of sale where legal assessors were to use legal measuring tools (*stika*, *kvarði*), according to *Grágás*' prescription about lawful viewers measuring cloth along the middle or selvage or in between (see also the illustration in a *Jónsbók* manuscript*,* of two men measuring cloth with a stick in hand), with prudent men assessing the quality of the cloth and providing the *metfé* for *hafnarvaðmál* before the change to standard values by weight, lengths, and thread counts.[427] Here, regulation was under the purview of men, the assembly members, the lawspeaker or law man, sheriff, and any who acted as legal assessor, and they would have been concerned with issues of dimension and weight.

However, there was also informal regulation of the quality of this cloth, as in practice it would take place at multiple stages of the *chaîne opératoire* of production and required the cooperation of many members of society intersecting gender, class, and power structures. Regulation would have taken place at the point of production, particularly in weavers applying their textile knowledge to weave cloth that would meet such standards. Nanna Damsholt has noted that the housewife would have had an important role supervising and apportioning all work done inside the home, including ensuring that weaving was done in accordance with foreign markets demands of length, width, and durability. [428]

[427] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 206-207. The illumination appears in a fifteenth-century *Jónsbók* manuscript, GKS 3269b 4to.
[428] Nanna Damsholt, "The Role of Icelandic Women in the Sagas and the Production of Homespun Cloth," 84. Helgi Þorláksson, however, argues that domestic production was not done with foreign markets in mind but rather domestic need for wearable cloth and any similarities were a result of common inheritance of cultural textile

In this regard, the skills of the creators, the weavers and spinners, need to be emphasized more than they have before as bearers of the cultural knowledge of textile production 'know-how' to create cloth that can be called *vaðmál*. Helgi Þorláksson has highlighted their role as specialist workers in "Gráfeldir á gullöld og voðaverk kvenna," in that they had different wages and rights than other workers, but this can be emphasized more for their specialist knowledge of production. This is the production of exclusive cloth because of the knowledge management and skills required of the creators, as evidenced in the regulation of production. The limited accessibility of *other* fabrics makes *this* fabric type more valued/able than it might be in other sociohistorical contexts.

Vaðmál was therefore also regulated through knowledge management and the control of resources. The use of the term *þrískeft* to note that the cloth was twill indicates the cooperation between the two main parties of regulation, (presumably male) assessors and (presumably female) producers, and additionally the law makers who created the legal clause. The law speaker was the one who memorized the legal clause, but the inclusion of this term must have required some knowledge of textile work and looms to know about the parts of the loom and the weaving process, that it would require three shafts/heddles. Thus, regulating cloth means that there cannot have been a strict, segregation of male and female space and tasks, as this clause shows overlapping spheres of influence. Perhaps this was the result of conversation and collaboration between male and female heads of household at a certain point in time, or an adoption of ancient custom whose history cannot be recovered in texts.[429]

The necessity of cooperation shows the intertwining of 'hidden' women's work of weaving in the domestic context with 'public' men's work of lawmaking in the political and legal context. The concept of *innan* and *utan stokks* in *Grágás* tells us how the household heads, the husband and housewife, were responsible for household provisioning inside or outside of the threshold (*stokkr*) of the house, respectively. This *innan* work would include managing household resources and textile work, which extended to *utan* sheep rearing and herd management (in terms of breeding and culling for optimal wool production to meet cloth needs), with magnate, tenant, and

practices, rather the main influence of foreign trade was the shift to measurement by weight rather than length at the beginning of the fourteenth century. *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 265.

[429] Mary Harlow states that in ancient literature, it is clear that a basic understanding of textile production was somewhat common knowledge in the general population; textiles were visible in the past and became invisible with industrialization. Mary Harlow, "Textile Crafts and History," in *Traditional Textile Craft: An Intangible Cultural Heritage?* eds. Camila Ebert et al., 133-39 (Copenhagen: CTR, University of Copenhagen, 2016), 137.

ecclesiastical households all having been involved sheep rearing, wool work, and textile work.[430] Presumably, the female head of the household or stewardess would have been in charge of managing her resources and the workers (whether herself, her children, her servants, or other female household members which varied by household size and context) in the wool processing, spinning, and weaving stages of woollen cloth production as this wool.

Helgi Þorláksson and Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir have discussed the cooperation between the *bóndi* and *húsfreyja* in managing the *hjón*, a cooperative couple working together for good management, which in turn brings honour. The home in the Commonwealth period was an open one, with the only sense of 'privacy' being the couple's locked bed-closet or hangings, and rather a home was to be open, hosting foster children, guests, and travellers, and where everyone watched each other and practiced social restraint and actions and declarations were public-facing; this changed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with shift in power from *goðar* to the king and his representatives and religious institutions, whereafter homes became less open and changed in layout to have more areas of the home not open to the public. Throughout, however, the home meant more than the nuclear family as it hosted slaves, servants, and hired workers who boarded in their homes or rented their outlying tenant farms.[431]

Kirsten Hastrup discusses the farmstead as a conceptual space with access determined by membership in the family group (*ætt*). She argues for a concentric worldview model where the social farmstead (*innangarðs*) is at the centre and is surrounding by wild uncontrolled space (*útangarð*) with a border marked by the fence surrounding the farm. This *innangarðs* thus includes the inner house of living quarters and the outer house of storage buildings and animal pens as a farm consists of a "series of separate, yet connected buildings."[432] It thus involves the workspace of all activities performed on the farmstead.

Hence, the home was the site of the political and the private, although there were differences in status and in rights, but the married couple were of the similar social status and always equal, albeit in charge of separate areas: in charge of internal versus external workplaces

[430] Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, *Monastic Iceland* (New York: Routledge, 2023) tells of the large sheep numbers in ecclesiastical households.
[431] Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir and Helgi Þorláksson, *Heimili og samfélag. Ráðstefnurit hins íslenska söguþings,* (Reykjavik: Sagnfræðingafélag Íslands, 1998), 49-50, 52.
[432] Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 59-60, 136-37, 148.

and holding informal versus formal sources of power.[433] Women and men would have interacted in these spaces and also been in conversation with each other about meeting the household's needs, including that of cloth for their own needs and surplus that could be used for sale or export. Some of these decisions would have been made even months before, as it concerns sheep breeding, shearing, and culling for optimal wool production, which generally are presented as men's tasks in the *Íslendingasögur*: boys and freedmen shepherding with huts (*sel*) where they stayed while sheep were grazing in the mountains, sheep driven out and rounded up from the mountain by *bændur,* freedmen, and farmhands.[434] While there are a few examples of women helping with shepherding, it seems mainly boys were tasked with shepherding, and sheep farming seems to be the work of the farm owner and servants, slaves, or hired men that worked for him.

Textile work—wool cleaning and preparation, spinning, and weaving—seems to have been women's work, such as in the examples of women working on these tasks in the *Íslendingasögur*: women's daywork combing wool in the main hall, a young woman spinning yarn on the threshold of the farmhouse which was to be sent to another farm to be used as weft thread, contrasting a married couple's day's work of weaving and killing, an old woman weaving in a *vefjarstofa,* ("weaving room", likely referring to the loom being a permanent position when warped), two *húsfreyjur* sewing and cutting shirts in an exterior *dyngja* (a detached building, perhaps referring to a pithouse or outhouse used for work) while their *bændur* were haymaking, and a *húsfreyja* and her servants working in a sewing room.[435] It seems from these examples that there were dedicated areas for women's textile work. Spinning was considered appropriate for women of all social strata, but weaving seems not to have been appropriate work for the *húsfreyja,* rather they would

[433] Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn,* 173-75, 181.
[434] "Egils saga Skallagrímssonar," *Íslenzk fornrit* 2, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, 1-300 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1933), 288-89; "Víga-Glúms saga," 50-51; "Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa," *Íslenzk fornrit* 3, *Borgfirðinga saga*, eds. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, 109-211 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1938), 168; "Laxdœla saga," 165, 186.
[435] "Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar," 38; Fóstbræðra saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 6, *Vestfirðinga sögur*, eds. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, 119-276 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1943), 161-62; *Laxdœla saga* tells of the married couple comparing their work, that Guðrún had spun twelve ells worth of yarn (about 3800 metres) while her husband Bolli had merely killed a man. "Laxdœla saga," 154. Jonna Louise-Jensen argues that this would have been the collective work of the other female household members with Guðrún and male with Bolli, reducing the unbelievability of the amount of her work, but also insulting him by insinuating that the killing was not solely his work; Jonna Louis-Jensen, "A Good Day's Work: Laxdæla saga, ch. 49," in *The Cold Counsel: The Women in Old Norse Literature and Myth,* ed. Sarah M. Anderson, Karen Swenson, 189-199 (New York: Routledge, 2002), 194-95; "Brennu-Njáls saga," 344, later, the same saga includes the poem *Darraðarljóð* describing women weaving on a loom, an account of valkyries weaving with body parts and weapons as a metaphorical account of the Battle of Clontarf (1014), *Ibid,* 454-58; "Gísla saga Súrssonar." 78; "Víglundar saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 14, *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, 61-116 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1959), 77.

have chosen and managed competent and diligent women through careful supervision, but little is known about medieval spinners and weavers' actual work.[436] Later medieval sources indicate textile work as mainly women's work, as discussed above for *Búalög*'s fifteenth-century wage regulations for an average household's working woman's ("meðalhjóns vínnukona") daily work of working wool and weaving.[437] Those clauses portray these tasks as specialist work and as that of working women, paid wages presumably from the houseowner, and was not work done by the *húsfreyja,* as she would not be paying herself to work. It is more likely that she supervised and organized the work and supplies for these women working in or for her home.

In contrast, fulling seems to have been men's work, difficult work with the treading, stretching, and drying the cloth. There is little evidence for it in the sagas. A fifteenth-century *Búalög* clause stipulates an average day's work for a man to full cloth at a rate of twenty-ell *váð* per day.[438] A seventeenth-century *Búalög* clause indicates that the cloth would be expected to shrink two ells, with *gjaldavoð* shrinking from 26 down to 24 ells and *vöruvoð* from 20 or 22 ells to 18 and 20 ells, suited to standard units of account in both to local (18) and foreign trade (20), but *hafnarvoð* could also be unfulled if had a dense enough weave.[439] As men's work, one can assume it was supervised by the *bóndi* or farm steward, but possibly also the *húsfreyja*.

The house and farm estate of medieval Iceland was a space shared by both genders in their work tasks; it was simple and limited, as this was a society without a formal aristocracy and had no grand architecture, such as what was developing on the continent in the same period. In terms of the actual house (*bær*) on the farmstead (*bú*), it was neither a distinctly public nor private space for the household (*hjón*). While a medieval farm could range in size from small cottages to large extended estates, the basic architectural form in the earlier period was a long house with three aisles and largely open space and in the later period included annexes and separate rooms. These were often multipurpose, multifunctional domestic spaces for the various tasks of workers of different genders and ages; there was never a distinct separation of work and public life from the private life of the family but would eat, sleep, work, and entertain in the same spaces, until a much later period.

[436] Helgi Þorláksson, "Um sterkar konur og sterk segl," 49.
[437] *Búalög um verðlag og allskonar venjur í viðskiptum og búskap á Íslandi.* 7, 9, 21, 23-24, 27, 29, 32, 34.
[438] *Búalög um verðlag og allskonar venjur í viðskiptum og búskap á Íslandi,* 9, 19,
[439] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 315.

Innan stokks as private, gendered space with a strict division of labour in terms of space is perhaps overemphasized for textile production in medieval Iceland, as a textile is the result of the total process' (*chaîne opératoire*) labour; it was more than just the work of women or the housewife but rather was the output of the whole non-nuclear household model of extended family including different types of dependents and labourers. Perhaps this division was important conceptually but not in practice, and instead other non-gender factors are more important considerations, such as social status, family relationship, and wealth, to determine access to tools and ownership of the cloth produced, and thus the '*innan*' and '*utan*' would have interacted and influenced each other within the greater *innangarðs*. This also highlights the importance of looking at work (defined broadly) within the premodern home and at that work's importance to the household and community. Labour was done for the benefit of the household rather than personal profit because it ensured survival and acted as part of social welfare system in a society in geographical isolation. If we consider Hastrup's conception of *innangarðs* as a social space with controlled access and the home and farm as protected versus not protected space of the *ætt* instead of contrasting concepts which elevate women as equal but opposite to men in indoor versus outdoor work, rather that the *innan* is to keep women and their work safe inside legally protected social space instead of wild, unlawful space, this offers an alternate conceptual boundary that measure by effect and agency, rather than patriarchally.

The medieval Icelandic household thus can be seen as a community, headed by the couple who oversaw the hire and organization of labour and the distribution and consumption of food and goods, and with all the members working separately or together in a sort of symbiotic relationship where all members depended upon and benefited from the work of each other. They would have worked together for a successful household to both clothe themselves but also to be able to sell extra cloth product for the domestic unit's benefit, exchange for goods and services or wealth accumulation; however, not all household members had equal power or access to the fruits of their labours.[440] Nanna Damsholt emphasizes the empowerment that this supervisory role gave to the *húsfreyja*, as the married couple acted together to ensure the prosperity of their farm, that *húsfreyjur* were able to assert themselves and were respected for that position because of their social status and the household's *vaðmál* output in the inside domain, but the Norwegian takeover and shift to fish exports meant a possible loss for medieval women. However, caution should be

[440] Nanna Damsholt, "The Role of Icelandic Women in the Sagas and the Production of Homespun Cloth," 88, 46.

taken against viewing the medieval household economy as "an egalitarian refuge", as this "masks practical inequality beneath a rhetoric of mutuality" as women's tasks viz-á-viz men's were secondary and supportive, and access to any wealth they owned was controlled by their men.[441] In fact, inequality and limitations occurred regardless of sex, with the unequal power relations and conditions imposed by elite men on all women and lower social status men.[442]

Certainly weaving work would not have been hidden from the male householders, as there is not explicit evidence that weaving was hidden from men in private, restricted spaces in this sociohistorical context without specialization or industrialization.[443] The idea of women's work, particularly textile work, being done in protected, secluded, private female spaces rests on the concept of *gynaikon*, of space dedicated to women's activities as in Classical Greece (as opposed to the *polis* of the political (male) citizen). This has also been applied to medieval Icelandic women with the term *dyngja* as a private space dedicated for women, secluded and opposed to that of men's space in the public sphere.[444] This concept is dubitable, as what is known about medieval Icelandic architecture, particularly concerning the three-roomed longhouse, later annexed longhouses, and multi-use pit houses, hardly support this idea of seclusion as there is no real sense of private or separate space that could be dedicated to specifically women's only use, rather homes were open and rooms were communal—the *dyngja* may refer to buildings or pithouses as workspaces in general which included gendered tasks, rather than gendered spaces, and might be used by different groups at different times for different tasks by both genders.[445] There are no

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[441] Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 91-92.

[442] Ben Raffield, Neil Price, Mark Collard, "Polygyny, Concubinage, and the Social Lives of Women in Viking-Age Scandinavia," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 13 (2017), 199.

[443] Eva Andersson Strand has devised a model of six observable textile production organizational models in medieval Western Europe; Iceland fits the household industry level as there was production beyond the producers' needs, required general textile knowledge and skills, there needed to be a surplus of raw material, and was not full-time work, or advanced household production if consider full-time weavers and spinners of the later medieval period as specialized workers, as evidenced in the *Búalög* wage lists. Eva Andersson Strand and Sarah-Grace Heller, "Production and Distribution," in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Medieval Age,* ed. Sarah-Grace Heller, 29-52 (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 30, 39.

[444] The concept of *gynaeceum* is especially influenced by David Herlihy's work *Opera Muliebria*, which sees the evolution of female work from the *gynecea* to domestic production and sets women's work in distinct rooms, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 81; for Iceland, see the work of Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women*, 138 and Michèle Hayeur-Smith's ritual space in *Valkyrie's Loom*, 28-29, 141.

[445] Agnes Arnórsdóttir and Helgi Þorláksson, *Heimili og samfélag,* 51-52. On basic building types in the early period, see Neil S. Price, "House and Home in Viking Age Iceland: Cultural Expression in Scandinavian Colonial Architecture," in *The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings, and Environments*, ed. David N. Benjamin, 109-129 (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995), 116ff. For research on the possible use of pithouses for textile work, see Karen Milek,

rooms that can be fixed with a specific work function as the size of the houses at this time simply does not allow this; rooms must have been multifunctional and interactional and used by various persons of different sex and age.[446] Privacy does not necessarily mean seclusion and instead we should view the concept as controlled access to a space.[447] In the case of medieval Iceland and women's textile's work, this is more suitable if we look at private space as that was restricted to the family and the household, and public space as that open to visitors and the public, with the loom being in a protected space of the family with the *vefjarstofa*, not for women in particular but of the loom which by nature of its tasks were women, and in doing so protects these valuable economic assets (cloth from the loom) in a family space, especially in the later period with the development of more complex architecture and the increasing economic importance of *vaðmál*.

Based on this understanding of work and space, while male farmers, lawspeakers, and assessors would have known of and even watched textile production, these men would not necessarily have the know-how or tacit knowledge of *how* to meet the standards of 'legal cloth'. This is the difference between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge, knowledge and know-how—learned knowledge.[448] On paper (or in mind, as the earliest laws were oral), one could know that legal cloth had to be woven in a twill weave (*þrískeft*, using heddles), needed to have relatively even selvages, and should be two by six ells, that is, holding explicit knowledge of how to do the thing; however, that does not mean that one had the know-how of doing it, the tacit knowledge acquired through skill and practice to produce the thing or to produce it to a sufficient standard. Production of 'legal cloth' required the cooperation of both regulators, the assessors and the producers, who used both their legal knowledge of the requirements for legal cloth and the learned

"The Roles of Pit Houses and Gendered Spaces on Viking-Age Farmsteads in Iceland," *Medieval Archaeology* 56 (2012): 85- 130.

[446] Furthermore, recent scholarship on ancient Greek houses and women's spaces have argued against this specific function and gendering of space, that instead of assigning rooms to genders one should look at space as public or private, with access restricted to family or open to accommodate visitors, and using gender as the motivation for division. Lin Foxhall, "House Clearance: Unpacking the 'kitchen' in Classical Greece," *British School at Athens Studies*, 15 (2007), 233-242). In addition, houses can have complex patterns in their use of space, with rooms used for multiple purposes and that the focus should be on the interactions between male and female relations and that there are different possibilities in relationships at different levels of society. Lisa Nevett, "Gender Relations in the Classical Greek Household: the Archaeological Evidence," *The Annual of the British School at Athens,* 90 (1995), 363-381.

[447] Katherine Weikert, *Authority, Gender and Space in the Anglo-Norman World, 900-1200* (Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 57.

[448] Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 4, 10.

knowledge of how to make legal cloth, demonstrating the influence of weaving work on legal clauses.

All these tasks are learned tasks acquired through transferred skill and practice; likely cultural knowledge passed down generationally from mother to daughter, with mothering and socialization as the transfer of knowledge and skills of female practices and skills, and by adulthood would be a honed skill.[449] Medieval Icelandic housewives' skills in various textile work fits within the European model of womanhood, femininity, and marriage: textile skills in particular are positive attributes associated with women, especially of higher status. The supervision of *vaðmál* production has been argued to provide authority and an empowering role for women, albeit this is likely indirect power and the *húsfreyja* instead would use her skills in handicrafts (*hannyrðir*) instead of weaving to model status- and gender-affirming textile work.[450] Regardless, the ideological association of textile work remained a virtue and the housewife was important whether she wove or supervised weaving, as she had to be knowledgeable in every stage of production for the best management of the household.[451] In contrast, while the work of spinners and weavers was likely done by waged workers in the medieval period, based on the above-mentioned regulations stipulating weekly work expectations and wages, their low status does not negate the importance and economic impact on their household and society as a whole, weaving the country's wealth.[452]

The production of sails, however, further emphasizes the importance of the housewife's role as manager of production, as these were very expensive and prized textiles due to the sheer amount of work and specialized knowledge of proper weaving, construction, and decoration, such as stripes. Sails are noted a treasured gifts in the sagas, such as Þorvaldr *krákunef* gifting an Icelandic sail to an earl and king in Norway,[453] but, perhaps more significantly, sails allowed the

[449] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World,* 29, 31. Ben Cartwright, "Making the Cloth that Binds Us," 162. See the opposite in *Víglundar saga* with Ólöf Þórisdóttir and Ketilríðr Hólmkelsdóttir, when the mother refuses to teach her daughter handicraft skills and instead turning to a foster-mother for this education. "Víglundar saga," 64-65, 75.
[450] Nanna Damsholt, "The Role of Icelandic Women in the Sagas and in the Production of Homespun Cloth," 83-85; See Ólöf Þórisdóttir and Ketilríðr Hólmkelsdóttir in *Víglundar saga* as models of this virtue. "Víglundar saga," 64-65, 75.
[451] Ruth Mazo Karras, ""This Skill in a Woman is By No Means to Be Despised:" Weaving and the Gender Division of Labor in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Fabrications. Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. E.J. Burns, 89-104 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 98, 104.
[452] *Búalög: Verðlag á Íslandi á 12.-19. öld,* 17, 18*,*
[453] "Þorvarðar þáttr krákunefs," 237.

movement of Norse people all across the medieval world by boat, impossible without the huge labour investment of women spinners and weavers and the management of housewives who owned the materials, tools, and final product alongside their husbands.[454] According to Andersson Strand, a woven sail would need balance in terms of rigidity yet elasticity, windproof but limit on friction, light but sturdy, and waterproof, and estimates based on the sail of the 21.5m Ladby ship calculate a requirement of 124 ells or 61m^2 woollen twill of 8/6 thread count which would take *c.*4148 hours to spin and weave plus *c.*830 hours for the wool work of cleaning and preparing the wool and warping and setting up the loom.[455] Thus, sails were a huge monetary and labour investment, one that required the work and cooperation of the whole household in raising sheep, processing the wool, spinning, weaving, and perhaps fulling the cloth, and sewing the sail together, many of these tasks likely done under the supervision of the housewife as the head of *innan stokks*.

One aspect of regulation was specialized knowledge, such as would be required to produce the appropriate density of weave required for a sail. This would involve calculating backwards by using the final dimensions of the fabric to determine the required resources and labour input before starting the project, all stages which took time and labour. This required knowledge: about calculating the required raw wool and yardage required for the project; of which parts of fleece from of the sheep's body are best used for this project; of the different qualities of wool fibre to meet the desired quality, choices for whether one needs the shorter, finer staples of the inner fibre or longer, coarser staples of the outer fibre or a combination of both; for the required twist, hardness, and ply of the spun thread to make the appropriate diameter thread; how to set-up and warp the loom and create the starting band, the actual weaving technique to make the twill weave, appropriate thread density, and even selvedges; and finishing stages and fulling to produce the appropriate size and density cloth to meet the legal standards. The final cloth, for example of twill two ells by six ells, would be the result of planning and months of work before even starting to weave. This is especially relevant for cloth valued by assessment, before cloth quality was determined by weight, as per the *Búalög* regulations discussed by Helgi Þorláksson.[456] As much of the cloth that was to be exported abroad was sold on credit (to be discussed in the next section) at trading-sites with foreign merchants, this would also require planning how much wool a farm

[454] Helgi Þorláksson, "Um sterkar konur og sterk segl," 43-44, 49-50, "Gráfeldir," 460.
[455] Eva Andersson Strand, "Weaving Textiles: Textile Consumption for Travel and Warfare," 176, 178, 181.
[456] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 247ff.

or estate would need to gather and process in order to meet their agreement(s) with the merchants, in addition to their own cloth needs.

The work of weaving especially is the result of learned and applied knowledge, know-how, and would take practice and skill to be able to achieve the appropriate tension of woven cloth so that it would not buckle or shrink along the edges of the cloth as the weaving progressed. It took skill to be able to make cloth that was "not so much longer at the selvage than at the middle that it makes a difference of one ell in twenty", with lopsided cloth measured on the shorter edge and so extraneous cloth if wider in places than others.[457] This is addition to skills in other details of weaving with a warp-weighted loom and working through the hard stress that this places on the body from weaving motions including throwing the shuttle, beating the weft, and walking back and forth in front of the loom, plus eye strain, as in *Búalög* discussed above for special provisions of light for weavers and wool-workers, for the fine details of their work which perhaps might need to take place inside or in the longer dark nights of winter.

Further, with regulation there is also restriction in terms of access to knowledge, such as with the general handicraft skills that Ketilríðr's mother refuse to teach her in *Vígundar saga*, but also to have the material means to access the tools or ownership of the final product.[458] This knowledge-transfer is a type of education. In the later early modern era, it seems to be a skill that could be taught for wages, as seen in the eighteenth-century *Búalög* clause which stipulated twelve ells as payment for teaching an unexperienced woman to weave ("Að kenna óvanri konu vef.").[459]

In addition to knowledge concerning textile production, a household also needed access to the tools of production: wool combs for processing, drop-spindles for spinning, a loom and weaving tools for set-up, weaving, and finishing. This also includes the physical space to store and use them and the financial means to buy or make these tools (in the absence of markets where sold), which ranged in relative cost and access to raw resources, such as specific stone for the whorls, iron for the wool combs' teeth, or timber for the loom. There would be financial limitations due to the costs of building a loom—expensive even today to purchase—as one would need to acquire the appropriate size wood for the large beams of the header and crossbars of the loom, resources that one might not be able to source from their local environment (such as woodlands or

[457] *Laws of Iceland: Grágás* II, 301, 404; *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 212.
[458] "Víglundar saga," 75.
[459] *Búalög: Verðlag á Íslandi á 12.-19. öld,* 41.

driftwood, both of which were protected by the rights of the land owner if not common land) and would need to purchase from other forested places in Iceland or from abroad.

The household heads also owned the product of textile workers' labour; spinners and weavers did not necessarily own the product of their work, such as the above-mentioned examples of wool-workers and weavers producing for householders and not themselves, as seen in a quasi-'putting-out' system of weavers working in their own homes instead of the farmer's in *Búalög* or collecting spun yarn for weft thread in *Egils saga*.[460] Woven cloth would be used for the household's own fabric needs or was used to pay tithes, rents, or purchase other goods, among other things. Therefore, the financial means, the ownership or rental of a house or croft with space for the loom, and availability of labour to weave were necessities, and this would not necessarily be the case for all women, but likely for the *húsfreyjur* as the supervisory female heads of household and thus offered some social status in their regulatory authority here.

Thus, there were limits on who could produce cloth, especially legal cloth for sale or export and, in this regard, knowledge and know-how for textile techniques and tools can be considered cultural capital that would give one advantage vis-à-vis another. The skills of the creators in producing cloth were then part of a cooperative system of production and regulation intended to meet the needs of the household and society, and not necessarily benefitting everyone equally, but rather in general benefitting the heads of household or estates owners who controlled the resources, access to production, and the cloth output. However, the supervisory housewives and the household labourers' production of standardized, valuable *vaðmál* demonstrate how the productive activities from within the household could have great impact on the activities of the household's men outside the household in the public, economic and political spheres, and men's dependence on such people and their productive work.[461] Women were household managers and supervised textile production and consumption, affecting men's ability to travel via *vaðmál* funds and make payments for lawsuits and household purchases in *vaðmál* currency woven in the home and their work forms the conceptual basis of the cloth currency unit of account.[462] In this way,

[460] See Helgi Þorláksson's comments on women's wages for weaving work done for others found in the *Búalög* regulations. *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 309ff.
[461] Helgi Þorláksson, "Gráfeldir," 458-59; Kim Esmark, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Helle Vogt, "Kith and Kin: Ties of Blood and Marriage," in *Nordic Elites in Transformation*, vol. 2, eds. Kim Esmark, Lars Hermansson, Hans Jacob Orning, 11-32 (New York: Routledge, 2020), 19.
[462] Helgi Þorláksson, "Gráfeldir," 420.

standardization was the result of informally regulated production, generally of housewives, as well as the formal regulation of the assessors.

This section has aimed to show how regulation was an important part of determining the exclusive value of *vaðmál* textiles as domestic currency and trade goods, assessment that took place on formal and informal levels. Informal regulation especially involved the intersection of people and spaces at home and cooperation in terms of household and social dynamics, including sociocultural gender norms of appropriate work tasks. This was not necessarily primarily a gendered division, but more of hierarchy of class, but more so male and upper class with what was regulated on a formal level in law codes and at the moment of exchange (and liable in cases of fraud). The exclusive aspect of these goods is connected to their value as expensive textiles, playing a significant role as exported trade goods that provided access to international goods and society, which will be discussed next.

Expensive Textiles: Trade goods

Wool was a desired export product, and international trade was necessary due to Iceland's geographical isolation limiting accessibility to foreign markets, access to foreign goods that would have to be brought on ships and purchased or traded in Iceland for other goods. Trade was done at harbours and landing sites but also temporary markets as local and national assemblies and local churches, places where local communities would gather. Trade was mainly by barter, exchanging goods (luxury goods such as ivory and falcons and bulk goods such as wool, butter, and fish) using standard values based on the ounce, and at coastal trading sites local goods such as *vaðmál* could be exchanged for imported ones.[463] There was foreign influence on the types of cloth consumed

[463] Harbours and landing sites were initially controlled by Icelandic chieftains and landowners, using the trade system to bolster their own prestige by controlling the goods coming into the country and first access to high-status goods, but also regulating foreign ships' access to the landing sites and the temporary markets nearby and thus the goods exchanged there, including *vaðmál* for export. This allowed the accumulation of wealth by secular and religious landowners, landed and moveable property, and contributed to the development of large estates involved in the centralization of power and political struggles in the Sturlunga era, but also of large religious estates as power and cultural centres, especially Helgafell, Hólar, and Skálaholt with their role in ecclesiastical education and book culture. E. Paul Durrenberger, "Anthropological Perspectives on the Commonwealth Period," in *The Anthropology of Iceland,* ed. E. Paul Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson, 228-246 (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 238-9; E. Paul Durrenberger, "Production in Medieval Iceland," in *The Norse North Atlantic,* ed. Gerald Bigelow (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1991), 19; Gísli Sigurðsson, "The North Atlantic Expansion," in *The Viking World*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephan Brink and Neil Price (New York: Routledge, 2012), 565; Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, 50, 107; Sverrir Jakobsson, "From reciprocity to manorialism: on the peasant mode of production in Medieval Iceland," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 38, no.3 (2013), 283-85.

and goods exported but domestic cloth production continued with *vaðmál* for local and personal use into until the nineteenth century.[464]

Vaðmál exported from Iceland before the fourteenth century mostly refers to *vara*, as it dominated exports into the thirteenth century. *Vara* is an inclusive term which can also mean trade goods in general, referring to goods that are moved by ship, and context is needed to determine if general wares or cloth wares are meant, however dates, context of use, and accompanying terms often infer a *vaðmál* meaning.[465] As this project adopts a timeframe ending in the beginning of the fifteenth century, *vaðmál* as special Icelandic trade goods is represented by the terms *vara* (*söluvaðmál*, *vöruvaðmál*), *pakkavaðmál*, *vararfeldr* (before *c.*1200), and *alin* when discussing *vaðmál* traded abroad in this period, but also see *hafnarváð* terms start to appear in fourteenth century.

Helgi Þorláksson states that the terms *vara* and *vaðmál* are used interchangeably in the sources and that references with the term ell refer to *vara* before 1400, but after 1400 *vara* more commonly refers to a unit of measure, including measure of value in *vara*, *vöruvirt*. The *hafnarvaðmál*-type *vaðmál* emerges in the thirteenth century in exports, and in the fourteenth century *vaðmál* can refer to either type and *hafnarvaðmál* begins to dominate export trade, with Icelandic *vara* production for exports ending *c.*1400 and stopped being sent to Norway before the end of the fourteenth century, when *hafnarvaðmál* dominates exports under a new name, *gjaldavaðmál,* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[466] This could be due to various explanations, but Helgi Þorláksson argues that the most likely explanation in the Icelanders stopped offering *vara* as export products because it was unprofitable; the decrease in price was not worthwhile for them to produce for export compared to the more cost efficient *hafnarvaðmál* (in terms of wages, times, and assessment); this puts the agency for change in the hands of the medieval Icelanders rather than portraying them as passive objects subject foreign market changes.

Vaðmál could be exchanged for imports on the merchants' ships, carrying foreign and luxury cloth, foodstuffs, wheat or flour, and other material objects and commodities. The cloth could be exported in packs, (*pakkavaðmál* indicates *vara* or *söluvoð,* but likely not *hafnarvað*),[467] and *pakkar* seem to replace *sekkar* (sacks) *c.*1305-10, likely connected to the coinciding shift to

[464] Michèle Hayeur Smith, "Some in Rags and Some in Jags and Some in Silken Gowns," 521.
[465] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 562.
[466] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag, 224,* 432-33; Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 78-80.
[467] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 224-25, 250, 388. Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 74.

measurement by weight, at the instigation of the Norwegian crown for ease of trade in standard measures that matched Norwegian standards.[468] This possibility of exporting a cargo of high quantities of standardized cloth is what makes it desirable as a trade good, despite its relatively low value as compared to other textiles: it was a staple that is rendered expensive due to the quantities exported. This is in addition to its material suitability as cargo shipped across the North Atlantic, for wool material is recoverable if it becomes wet from rain or seawater if shipwrecked for the cargo could be dried and would not be a total loss, as subsequent examples in this section will demonstrate.

Vaðmál is not unique as a cloth commodity currency-export, as they appear in other nations and at other times in history.[469] Yet, but it fits into in the mid- to late-medieval era of rising mercantilism, urbanism, and bulk commodity trade, with textiles noted as "the primary currency of medieval trade."[470] This was a period of wider 'renaissance' in cloth trade with a European-wide merchant-consumer trade network fed by an economic boom from the mid-tenth to late thirteenth centuries, with trade of high-volume, low value commodities—textiles along with flour and salt—shipped via mercantile centres, but local, regional, and international wool trade were also significant for the development of urban centres and the emerging banking and credit systems in this period.[471] Urbanization led to greater availability of ready-woven cloth for urban residents who would have their clothing made by tailors, compared to rural complete self-production from sheep to woven cloth. Here, hinterlands producers supplied towns and cities (and further places on

[468] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 388, 381.

[469] Cloth currencies made of local materials have been noted in several near and distant places, including pre-Norman Ireland, third- to eighth-century China, eleventh-century North and West Africa, and sixteenth-century Central Africa. Mark Zumbuhl, "Clothing as Currency in Pre-Norman Ireland? in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol. 9, ed. R. Netherton and G. Owen-Crocker, 55-72 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 56-57; Valerie Hansen and Xinjiang Rong, "How the Residents of Turfan Used Textiles as Money, 273-796 CE," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, 2 (2013): 281–305; Marion Johnson, "Cloth as Money: the Cloth Strip Currencies of Africa," *Textile History* 11,1 (1980): 193-202; Phyllis M. Martin, "Power, Cloth and Currency on the Loango Coast," African Economic History, no. 15 (1986), 1-4.

[470] Michael Balard, "European and Mediterranean trade networks," in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 5, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, 257–86, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 282.

[471] Large, specialized textile production centres shifted from the Far and Near East in China, India, Baghdad, and Egypt to Europe in the Mediterranean in Italy and north in France, England, and the Low Countries for trade, and changing from producing for self to for others, as producers for own consumption, while at the same time increasing domestic and semi-specialized production in Central Europe. Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe: From the Breakup of the Western Roman Empire to the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017)*,* 121, 135; Wendy R. Childs, "Timber for Cloth: Changing Commodities in Anglo-Baltic Trade in the Fourteenth Century," in *Cogs, cargoes, and commerce: maritime bulk trade in northern Europe, 1150-1400*, ed. Lars Berggren, Nils Hybel, and Annette Landen, 181-211 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), 181; Peter Spufford, *Power and Profit: The Merchant in the Middle Ages* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 12.

the extensive trade routes, such as Iceland). The demand was for cloth of all ranges, including low-level, rough, utilitarian cloth, such as *vaðmál*—merchants moved these textiles across Europe by land and sea to close and distant markets.

In this regard, Iceland's cloth trade was part of the wider medieval cloth trade network burgeoning from regional centres of specialization and by the late middle ages there were a range of flourishing textile industries producing a diverse array of fabrics and types of wool from cheap and coarse to costly and fine, sourcing their wool from local or international suppliers, with increased output, higher quality and denser fabrics, longer lengths, specialization, and the introduction of guild and male dominance in industry with important technological advancements in the different sectors of textile industries such as the horizontal loom.[472] There were fluctuations in the main producers and traders over time, but Iceland and other periphery nations remained part to this wider network through the flourishing trade in the North Atlantic and North Sea via trade hubs connecting them to the continent and the road and river trade networks there.[473] Iceland *was* part of this textile boom, and the extent and volume of *vaðmál* trade reflects this. Iceland was not particularly special in its cloth export trade but was an active cog in the wider Western European machine of commercial trade and increased consumption (including of cloth), and the demand for cloth in Europe had an impact on Iceland as they exported cloth to Norway in particular.

In the early centuries, Icelanders are presumed to have their own ships and had controlled their own trading, albeit few ships and intermittent voyages, but also alongside foreigners, largely

[472] It joined that of English wool and broadcloth, cheap, light Spanish wool, German and Central European production of a range of linen and woollen cloth of high and lower quality cloth, and higher quality and luxury cloth from the Low Countries and Italy. English wool was the finest from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries, but also exported medium and coarse wool, and Spanish merino was also significant from the fourteenth century onward. John H. Munro, "Medieval Woollens: Textiles, Textile Technology and Industrial Organization, c. 800-1500," in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* vol. 2, ed David Jenkins, 181-227 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 182, 186, 189, 191, 194, 195.

[473] These connections and similarities are evidenced by cloth seals from the later medieval period when sealing cloth become more common, a useful development because it guarantees a standard (whether legal specifications or brand of producer) for the customer without need for measurement or quality control; this is practical for assuring and advertising the quality of cloth while also prevent counterfeiting, especially for those that need to travel a long distance between producer and final consumer and passing through many hands, which provides a more reliable trade product for merchants who take the risk of transporting this cloth. Cloth seals likely developed out of customs tags, as trade marks that ensure quality and developed the same time as the rise of guild system and the Hanseatic League, sometime around the late thirteenth century and were soon adopted for export textiles from Flanders and northern Italy and then to cloth industries beyond in Europe. Walter Endrei and Geoff Egan, "The Sealing of Cloth in Europe, with Special Reference to the English Evidence," *Textile History* 13, 1 (1982), 47, 51. Some seals were found in Iceland that can locate possible sources for such imported cloth, such as a seal for Kersey from England (from Devon, Hampshire, or Yorkshire) or a seal from Görlitz, Germany known for low to medium quality cloth, or records of *vaðmál* in foreign account books abroad. Svavar Níelsson, "Cut from the Cloth," 36, 54, 77.

Norwegians—as their ancestral relatives—who took over Iceland's trade from *c.*1100.[474] Iceland is also thought to have traded with the English in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with Ireland before the Norman invasions, and perhaps Sweden and Jutland in the eleventh century.[475] However, Norway was Iceland's main trade partner as it could not supply its own wool needs locally: Norway had scarcer pasturage and more natural predators meaning less sheep and wool available for domestic production, yet they needed wool cloth for the rising fishing industry and clothing suited to outdoor and fishing work, for the transport of fish, and for sails on boats and naval fleets; for clothing for the simple uniform of the members of the growing monastic movement; and as an affordable option for the increasing urban population of workers and poor people.

Norway's trade with Iceland was centred in Bergen,[476] including the export of *vaðmál* to fill Norwegian demand that they could not fill from their own domestic supply. *Vaðmál* cloth could also be transported within the country by merchants.[477] From *c.*1150 the Norwegians likely were sailing on larger ships than those of the earlier Icelandic settlers—shifting from keel to cog vessels, but likely using both for some time—and these larger ships had a higher cargo capacity of around 120 tons; thus a decline in ships does not mean a decline in volume exported and six annual ships carrying a cargo of 120 tons was still a considerable amount of surplus product.[478]

By the end of the twelfth century, trade was largely in the hands of foreigners, using increasingly larger ships, and done at a reduced number of landing sites; however, the control and influx of goods through these landing sites could be a great source of power and influence for the landowners who had the land rights to them. The three main harbours from 1262-1412 were

[474] In the eleventh century there were likely only few and small ships, the clinker-type ship with a single square sail and cargo capacity of up to thirty tons, and not sailing for regular trade, but rather most sailing was done by elite youths who exchanged luxury goods as gifts for accommodation and protection from continental secular and ecclesiastical leaders, ambitious voyages aimed at gaining education, prestige, wealth. Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 42. Christopher Westerdahl, "Sails and the Cognitive Roles of Viking Age Ships," 21-22; Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins*, 48.
[475] Elsa E. Guðjónsson, *Forn röggvarvefnður,* 24.
[476] Bergen became an important trade town from the early twelfth century, established by King Eysteinn Magnússon (r.1103-22) as a trade centre for whetstones, soapstone, bog iron, and *skreið*, and after the town was established as a protected trade centre then *vaðmál* was exported there, but also demand in Niðarós (seat of the archbishopric). Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 42.
[477] Lýður Björnsson, *Saga verslunar á Íslandi,* (Reykjavik: Samtök verslunar og þjónustu/ Viðskiptaráðuneyti, 2005), 6. Hildur Hákonardóttir, "Iceland's Settlement and Trade in Woven Goods–900 Years Working the Old Loom," in *The Warp-Weighted Loom–Kljásteinavefstaðurinn–Oppstadveven,* ed. Hildur Hákonardóttir, *et al*, 21-57 (Hordaland: Skald Forlag, 2016), 23; Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 75-76.
[478] Arne Emil Christensen "The "Big Ship" of Bryggen in Bergen: what can it tell us?" *Deutsches Schiffahrtsarchiv* 25 (2002), 92. Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins*, 43, 47.

Hvítá(árvellir) in the west, Gásir in the north, and Eyrar in the south, but also important were Vestmannaeyjar, Dögurðarnes, Dýrafjörðr, Borðeyri, Hvalfjörðr, Kolbeinsárós, Melrakkaslétta, and likely Gautavík in the East Fjords.[479] The increasing size of ships from the twelfth century meant a deeper draft, which in turn meant that not all prior harbours were suitable for larger ships as they had been for earlier ships with smaller drafts of only 1.5m.[480] This was not the end of Icelanders' participation in trade, but they no longer owned their own ships and had a more significant role as passengers or sponsors than as merchants and traders themselves, and landowners also likely controlled the terms and contexts of trade done at the trade sites on land they owned, especially considering that foreign merchants would have been subject to the prevailing prices set assemblies unless made a special agreement with chieftains at trading sites.[481] In addition, local elites would have a special relationship with these foreign merchants (largely Norwegian) as they would be under his protection when using his land or harbour and would stay at the homes of local elites, especially the landowner of the landing-site, if they were over-wintering in Iceland before their return journey. In return, the elite-host would have the first and best opportunity to the merchants' wares and to sell his own wares to them in turn, in addition to keeping prices under control.[482]

The thirteenth century had been a very turbulent time for Iceland as it had experienced a century of civil conflict that ended with them giving up their independence to become a tributary (*skattland*) of Norway, paying taxes to the crown in return for peace and ensuring trade ships came

[479] Lýður Björnsson, *Saga verslunar á Íslandi,* 6. Helgi Þorláksson makes a case for the *stórgoðar* acting in a similar manner to leaders who established trade towns, as these strong chieftains held increasing power in a period of turmoil in the twelfth century and offered protection for foreign merchants and perhaps led to some harbours being more important than others: the Oddaverjar and Haukdælir controlled trade at Eyrar, Snorri Sturluson oversaw increased activity at Hvítárvellir in Borgarfjörður, and Guðmundr *dýri*, Kolbeinn Tumason, and Sighvatr Sturluson led the growth and prosperity of Gásir in the north; however, while these were sites of controlled (including prices) and protected trade, there were no permanent settlements as trade was seasonal, no fortifications, nor large warehouse, only trading-booths (*búðir*). Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins*, 50.

[480] For example, the harbour Gásir in Eyjafjörður was a lively trading harbour from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, suited to the shallow draft of a *knarr*, but abandoned in the fourteenth century—likely after the catastrophic landslide of 1390 which silted the valley—at the same time as the uptake of the twice-as-deep drafted cog ship and when trade patterns were shifting to high volume, low value bulk trade goods such as *skreið*. John Preston, "The Geomorphology of Viking and Medieval Harbours in the North Atlantic," PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2017.

[481] Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 52.

[482] Carsten Jahnke, "Customs and Tolls in the Nordic Area c.800-1300," in *Nordic Elites in Transformation, c.1050-1250*, eds. Bjørn Poulsen, Helle Vogt, Jón Víðar Sigurðsson, 183-211 (New York: Routledge, 2019), 194; Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins*, 51, "Social Ideals and the Concept of Profit in Thirteenth-Century Iceland," *Leiðarminni: Greinar gefnar út í tilefni 70 ára afmælis Helga Þorlákssonar*, 339-357 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenska bókmentafélag/ Sögufélag (1987), 2015), 345, 352-3.

regularly to Iceland, including the five per cent tax on cargo (*sekkjagjald*). Bergen was an important trade connection for Iceland because of its position in the West Scandinavian trade network and trade was done through the Bergen Staple, a centre to and from which a vast array of goods from various places were transported, and could potentially be exported to Iceland for elite Icelandic consumers.[483] Trade at Bergen was done with Norwegian traders and then increasingly Hanse traders from *c.*1280, while later the Hanse outcompeted the Norwegians from the 1310s, as the Hanse had privileges established in 1343 and a monopoly in 1361.[484] There were occasional conflicts over who had the rights to trade with Iceland, often between different German cities, but this is largely beyond the timeframe of this project and will not be discussed here.[485]

Wool cloth was the main export from Iceland from *c.*1200-1340, a specific and regulated type of cloth in international export exchange, superseded by *skreið* with the high period of fish export set in the 1340s, and shifts from *vara* to *hafnarváð* over the fourteenth century.[486] Cloth remained a trade good for many centuries despite the dominance of fish, in a reduced role, in addition to other valued commodities and raw wool.[487] Prices of all the main commodities would be fixed in the later period, annually at the *alþingi* and were known as *kaupsetning*.[488]

Trade, along with the possibilities to move people and culture on the same merchant ships, gave Iceland access to items from the world of commodity markets and things one would buy in the towns and cities that did not exist in Iceland. Imports were valued in Iceland, through all its history, due to the climate limiting agricultural production and its geographical isolation from other markets. While medieval Icelandic society was self-sufficient, imports such as linen and other cloth, grain, timber, foodstuffs, wax, and wine were valued products especially for elites and the

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[483] Sverrir Jakobsson, *Medieval Iceland,* 130, 153.
[484] Bergen was a "gateway" for its western neighbours, and by *c.*1300 was "the dominant port of transshipment between Norse areas of production and receiving ports abroad." Knut Helle, "Bergen's role in the medieval North Atlantic trade," *AmS-Skrifter*, 27 (2019), 43-44.
[485] Rights and control of trade has been discussed by others, see Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*; Bart Holterman, *The Fish Lands: German trade with Iceland, Shetland and the Faroe Islands in the late 15th and 16th Century* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020).
[486] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 515.
[487] Other important export commodities include salted fish (from the sixteenth century), fish oil, sulphur, butter, gyrfalcons, meat, wool products, yarn, sheepskins, and eider down, and were traded in varying quantities in different periods of Icelandic history, largely depending on which merchants were taking these goods and where their markets were, fluctuating with according to changing foreign fashions and markets.
[488] A letter from 1480, from the Icelandic sheriffs and lawmen to King Christian I of Denmark, complains of foreign merchants overwintering and exchanging commodities for too high of a price, and that they needed to follow the set prices, including prices for *skreið*, *vaðmál*, butter, and other commodities. "Lundur (Lundareykjadalur)," 14800704LUN00, *Hansdoc Database*. https://hansdoc.dsm.museum/Docs/14800704LUN00.html

church, but also for use as products to differentiate people of different status through their wealth and ability to access foreign commodities and luxury goods in acts of consumption and display.

Commodities also moved alongside luxury goods, cultural products and ideas, and people themselves. This included necessities such as wheat, timber, and religious provisions, but also luxury goods such as silk and luxury clothing. The passage of cultural concepts and language from Europe to Iceland was also important, especially including Latin and the practice of writing; foreign books, art, and music; religious practices and institutions; and cultural innovations such as courtly behaviour, attitudes, fashions, and literature. At this point, Iceland had long been culturally Norse and continued to be connected to the Norwegian royal court and religious institutions, but also to secular and ecclesiastical institutions on the British Isles and the continent such as France, Germany, and Italy.

This section will examine the ways that *vaðmál* was traded abroad as goods, demonstrating its function in the domestic-international relationship to continental Europe with the outflow of local goods exchanged for the inflow of foreign goods and services. It was a tangible item used in an economic transaction with possible future non-economic use but also demonstrates extra-economic value in what was provided on return for these expensive textiles—cultural contact. The result of this exchange has a significant impact on medieval Iceland itself, on the economy, on society, and on Icelandic culture. While the export of cloth goods meant an economic return for those selling the cloth, the goods and services that were exchanged also had an impact and so did the control of this exchange.

Law codes

Vaðmál goods were exported abroad, trade goods as cargo transported to or on a ship and intended to go abroad. The term *vara* reflects the earlier period of *vaðmál* export, referring to trade goods more generally but often to cloth goods due to context and dominance of *vaðmál* as a trade good. As the main export product for Icelanders from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, regulations protecting the safe passage of travellers and their cargo is to be expected in the law codes and indicates its important role in society. *Grágás* includes allowances for some labour on Sundays in cases of emergency or if threatened financial loss if no action were to be taken, such as allowances to dry clothes or *vara* outside on Sundays if there is need or are in distress ("föt eða vöru") and for labour to move cargo and *vara* to a ship ("farma og vöru") during Easter

observance.[489] These trade goods included valuable articles of cloth and trade activity was important enough to be prioritized on holy days.

Grágás deals with ships which sailed overseas with *vaðmál* trade goods, regulating cargo space and overloading a ship. If the ship had taken on more people and their *vara* ("beri vöru þeirra") than there was space for, the last to board with their baggage ("með föt sín"), and thus the one who had helped the least with loading, were to leave the ship first with reimbursement of their passage-payment, and more people were to disembark until the ship was fit for sailing.[490] Another clause that stipulates that the responsibility to bring hides (*húðir*) to cover and protect their trade goods (*vara*) stored in sacks (*sekkir*) is shared to protect this cargo during transport.[491] *Jónsbók* includes a similar regulations *vara* transport in a clause concerning the loading of a sea-going ship, noting the order in which the *vara*-cargo was to be unloaded from an overloaded ship to make it seaworthy: first ship master's, then those who last boarded, until the ship was properly loaded.[492] It later details that cargo space is to be shared, allotting each man the weight and space for *vara* for which he paid and reserved. This later law codes contains the same regulations from *Grágás* concerning equal responsibility to provide material to cover the sacks of *vara* and concerning *vara* wave drift, found in the tenancy chapter.[493]

Indubitably, as these cloth exports were sent abroad on ships, there might be problems of accidents and shipwrecks due to storms and other misfortunes that cause the goods to wash overboard or sink with the ship. *Grágás'* Land Claims section includes protections for these goods in legal regulations concerning so-called wave-drift, that is things that are washed ashore, and there are stipulations over who has the rights to and responsibility for recovering this flotsam. If items including *vara* came ashore, it was the responsibility of the man householding that land to recover all of it to the highwater line and tell the landowner about it, as the landowner is to take responsibility for it, whether to return, sell, or keep it if not claimed.[494] It seems even when damaged, trade cloth was still valued enough to be covered by legal regulations, as was recoverable property and could be washed and dried and still used, either again for export or locally to meet cloth needs. This aligns with the undermentioned examples of Bishop Lárentíus's and Grettir's

[489] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 21, 27.
[490] *Ibid*, 149.
[491] *Ibid,* 151.
[492] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 225.
[493] *Ibid*, 228. 207.
[494] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 367.

cargo which were recovered and laid out to dry as wool's high lanolin content repels water and prevents rot, but recovery of course depends on how long the cargo was in the sea or wet from leaks in the ship's hold before it came to land.

Grágás' Assembly Procedures and in the Miscellaneous Articles sections include clauses that prioritize trade activity over legal responsibility when called as witness. The first states that if a man came to a ship with his goods and was called to act as witness, he is recused if his goods are already on board and afloat or on if on board with his *vara* and the ship is mostly loaded with everyone's trade goods; it seems more important to prevent the delay of a ship's departure than to act as witness, if the goods are loaded and summoning not serious enough a cause for removal.[495] However, the second clause indicates that such protections were not unlimited, as local commune compensations covered the loss of some, but not all, property. When discussing commune obligations for compensation due to fire damage, *Grágás'* stipulates that the householder can seek compensation for damage to the living room, kitchen, or pantry buildings and the clothing and things belonging to the householder ("klæðnað eða gripi"), but not for costly things or *vara* ("eigi gersimar, né vöru enga").[496]

The thirteenth- and fourteenth-century law amendments reflect a continued important role for exports, now also an important source of revenue for the crown. An 1280 amendment from King Eiríkr Magnússon (included in the 1578 and 1580 manuscripts of amendments), labelled purchases of *vara*, stipulates that the king and his agent had the first right to goods and necessities ("varningi eður þarfindum"), including the purchase of domestic or imported goods, and they were to be sold at a fair price as others would pay ("selja fyrir slíkt verð sem aðrir vildu kaupa") and his agent can sell to others as he wills.[497] This reflects the king's policy to keep Iceland's revenue for himself, as Iceland was his tributary lands.[498]

A 1329 amendment from King Magnús Eiríksson shows his concern about regulation of *vaðmál* production for trade to Norway, a concern about the quality that is exported compared to exports past ("að vaðmál þau sem héðan færast eru eigi svo góð sem þau eigu að vera að fornu"), requesting that Icelanders produce proper cloth conforming to the legal standard, so even-long at the middle as at the selvages ("jafnlöng að hrygginum sem með jöðrum"), or else forfeit the

[495] *Ibid*, 387, 233.
[496] *Ibid*, 188.
[497] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 302.
[498] Helgi Þorláksson, "King and Commerce," 149.

product to the crown.[499] This regulation specifically names the types (or qualities) of *vaðmál* cloth which should be produced properly (although it is not clear whether or not they had been the *vaðmál* exported in poor quality): *vöruvoð*, *munaðarvoð*, *hafnarvoð*, and other *vaðmál*.[500] Here we can see concurrent presence of both *vaðmál* types in trade, but *hafnarvoð* types shortly dominating.

The trade good examples which are found in the law codes demonstrate that *vaðmál* as trade goods were important to society and appear in both household and trade contexts. This *vaðmál* product was fabric, susceptible to damage by fire and somewhat by water. It was valued as an economic product and was subject to certain legal and physical protections that expanded privileges concerning allowances on holy days and exemptions from legal procedures. Yet despite its importance as an export product, legal regulations seem concerned with protecting individual rights in trade, but not when it crossed over into community responsibility and the commune was not responsible for insurance on trade goods and only individual possessions.

Samtíðarsögur

Among examples of cloth goods traded in Iceland are those using the term *klæði*, the generic term for cloth, where context of use implies an economic context where it could be cargo or trade goods to be exported from Iceland. While it is not irrefutable, this could be *vaðmál* because that was the main export and trade good being exported in the time period (and it would not make economic sense to re-export foreign cloth either, if "*klæði*" is considered only foreign cloth, as per Falk). First is an example from 1150 in *Sturlu saga* where the farmer from Hváll had his housecarls gather cloth supplies from surrounding islands—perhaps from smaller farms which produced the cloth there—and stored these goods on the shore, but these "vistir" and "klæði" were stolen by Geirr Þóroddsson and his followers.[501] This can be compared to a second example from 1188 in *Prestssaga Guðmundar Arason*, which tells of cloth cargo which came to Norway from England on ship with Ingimundr Þorgeirsson but the cargo—including sixteen ells of red-brown cloth ("sextán álnar klæðis rauðbrúnt"), which was said to be of the best quality ("allgott klæði")—was seized in Bergen by Jón *kuflungr* and later recognized as the tunics of Norwegian courtiers.[502]

[499] *Jónsbók: Lögbók Íslendinga*, 269.
[500] *Ibid*.
[501] "Sturlu saga," 56.
[502] "Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar," 120-21.

These examples show cloth gathered for export and how such trade goods could be used as clothing in Norway, albeit without specifying *vaðmál*.

There are also examples evident of *vaðmál* export from Iceland, earlier in *sekkar* for *vara* and later in *pakkar* for *vara* and then *spýtingar* for *hafnarvaðmál. Vara* was the main export good and thus examples of merchants transporting this cloth is expected, such as *Íslendinga saga'*s 1241 account of the shipwreck of Óláfr of Steinn at Hlöðuvík near Hornstrandir when returning to Norway. The sailors were able to recover their wares the saga describes them drying their vara ("þurrukuðu Austmenn vöru sína"). This demonstrates the suitability of this bulk trade good for the dangerous, long-distance trade voyages across the North Atlantic, as woollen cloth is a type of cargo that would not have been spoiled in the ocean water but rather could be saved if exposed to the water, if withdrawn in a reasonable time before it begins to rot. This cargo was recoverable if wet, as the sailors here dried the cloth, for it was too valuable to not try to save, although waterlogging could bring danger of drowning and all cargo and lives would be lost regardless if the ship sinks too far from shore, unless it drifts ashore like *Grágás* accounts. In contrast to other commodities, water would damage other goods and make them unusable (*i.e.,* oil, *skreið*), dangerous (*i.e.,* sulphur), or dead (*i.e.,* falcons), depending on the conditions in which they are stored.[503]

Þorgils saga og Hafliða describes an 1118 account of the preparations of a merchant ship to return to Norway from Eyrar with a cargo of *vara*. It describes the preparations for the journey out of Iceland and merchants were carrying their *vara* on board the ship, including the Icelander Óláfr Hildisson, who had recently been outlawed, who tried to board with his own *vara* goods but was recognized and thrown off the ship by the captain Hermund and kicked off the ship.[504] This *vara* cargo was likely payment for the foreign goods the merchants had sold on their arrival in Iceland but also demonstrates that Icelanders also could take *vara* abroad as well as payment for his passage abroad and to support himself there.

A final example of *vaðmál* as trade goods exported abroad comes from the above-mentioned account from 1200 in *Preststssaga Guðmundar Arasonar* of Guðmundr using *vara* to fund his journey sailing abroad to be consecrated by the archbishop. Guðmundr packed all the *vara*

[503] One could dry (as seen in examples below) or wash the fabric to remove the salty sea water or could try to sell at a reduced price rather than accept a total loss.
[504] "Þorgils saga og Hafliða," 16.

that he had been given as tithes ("tíundavöru") and were packed in sacks ("sekk"), some of which were to be given away due to the intercessionary vow for safety.[505] This example shows how cloth tithe funds could be used by the bishop as travel funds and such exported *vara* was shipped in sacks at this time.

These examples from the contemporary sagas have displayed *vaðmál*'s simultaneous material and economic functions as cloth export collected by foreign traders or taken abroad by Icelanders themselves, further illustrating its role as an expensive textile due to the volume of its trade. In these examples, ranging from trade goods stored at home, those stolen, those sold at ships, to those used to fund travels abroad, both the function of cloth and commodity are present—physical cloth acting in an economic exchange—but often also bringing a social or cultural return. In this way, *vaðmál* epitomizes the flow of goods and people in and out of Iceland in the late commonwealth, highlighting the motivations for travel and what goods were desired from Iceland and from abroad.

Íslendingasögur

The family sagas include the previously-mentioned type of trade goods that likely represents an older period of Icelandic cloth-trade, or at least the memory of it written in the stories—*vararfeldir*, trade cloaks, or *röggvarfeldir,* pile-woven trade cloaks. This is perhaps the earlier form of *vaðmál* as an economic trade good in the Icelandic context (ending *c.*1200), as it was a natural extension or a common type of medieval clothing that would be desired abroad, in an age when fur clothing was in demand, as evidenced by the range of Norse trade in fur; the term was also thought to refer to sheepskins,[506] but has been disputed by Jón Jóhannesson when he argues that *Grágás'* legal regulation on the addition of thirteen wool piles across the breadth indicates that was made from *vaðmál* and not skins, but in imitation of sheepskin cloaks (*skinnfeldir*).[507] This was confirmed by Elsa E. Guðjónsson with the Heynes finds, stating this is questionable since *Grágás* gives different prices for *gæruskinn* and *vararfeldr*.[508] Helgi Þorláksson

[505] "Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar," 207-209.
[506] Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde*, 74, 175.
[507] Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga* I, 369
[508] *Vararfeldr* may have originally been aimed to imitate fur or to supplement the demands of the fur market, as animal skin (ON. *skinn* can refer to both leather and fur) products were in great demand throughout most of the medieval period, of varying animals, sizes, and colours. Furs were also an Icelandic trade good (cat, fox, etc.) but declined in importance from around the thirteenth century, perhaps since Norway had sufficient supply of better fur from northern tributary lands and from the Rus'. Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins*, 44. There are other terms for

believes that *feldr* in the story of Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði ruminating about the decision to convert to Christianity in *Íslendingabók* was a *vararfeldr* cloak, used like a blanket to cover oneself when napping or when contemplating.[509] These trade cloaks were cloaks made of *vaðmál* cloth and were common trade goods, brought to Norway by Icelanders and Norwegian merchants, allegedly popular there during the reign of Haraldr *gráfeldr* but more likely only standardized for export in the eleventh century, and were well suited to outdoor work such as fishing and sailing, but also for travel in wet and windy weather.[510] *Vararfeldir* were popular and valued in Iceland outside of its role in export trade, but its standardization might have been developed in connection with rules for land taxes in Norway in the eleventh century, in addition being a comparable competitive pile-woven trade product.[511] These examples demonstrate an economic exchange of a ready-to-wear clothing article, a physical cloth item that was valued as an economic good, as discussed in the earlier chapter on the material value of *vaðmál* cloth.

Trade cloaks could be exchanged directly for other products that were needed, and not readily available, in Iceland. This is seen in *Brandkrossa þáttr*, a late thirteenth-century tale which can be regarded as a preface to *Droplaugarsona saga,* which tells a quasi-fantastical story of the Icelandic brothers Grímr and Þorsteinn's trade journey from Unaós to Trondheim in the late ninth century, stating that they lacked money but had *vararfeldir* for their cargo, stated to be customary cargo for that earlier time, and sold twenty-four cloaks ("tuttugu ok fjóra varafeldi") on credit for flour. When the debt was not paid, they tracked down the buyer in Geitishamrar for the payment, with Grímr marrying Geitir's daughter Droplaug with a generous dowry, returning to Iceland with a ship, the flour, a wife with her dowry and possessions of clothes, precious items, gold, silver, treasures.[512] Here, *vararfeldr* is shown as an acceptable trade goods for a period centuries earlier

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sheepskin and fur cloaks, such as *gæra*, *loðkápur*, and *loðólpur*; see earlier discussion on p.22, n.66. Elsa E. Guðjónsson, *Forn röggvarvefnaður,* 25. Pile-woven cloth such as *vararfeldr* was used in many places in northwest Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and have been found in Denmark, the Hebrides, England, and Ireland.

[509] Helgi Þorláksson, "Skyggnst undir feldi," 73, 76.

[510] Or at least that is how it is remembered in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, which includes an anecdote about King Haraldr purchasing a trade cloak from an Icelander and starting a new fashion trend, eponymous of his nickname *gráfeldr.* Snorri Sturluson, "Haralds saga gráfeldar," *Íslenzk fornrit* 26, *Heimskringla* I*,* ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 198-224, (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2002), 212. Helgi Þorláksson finds this story unreliable and suspects *gráfeldr* to refer to the grey winter fur of the arctic squirrel. Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 34, 48.

[511] Helgi Þorláksson, *Líftaug landsins,* 43.

[512] "Brandkrossa þáttr," *Íslenzk fornrit* 11, *Austfirðinga sögur,* ed. Jón Jóhanneson, 181-191 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1950), 187-88. A version of this tale appears in *Fljótsdæla saga*, discussed on p.173, where the travelling-Icelander is Þorvaldr Þiðrandason who also left from Unaós but was shipwrecked in Shetland, and had to recover lost cargo of Icelandic *vara* when shipwrecked. Whether *vararfeldir* or *vara*, the point is the same: both

than the time of writing, stated as common cargo for the time—and thus portrayed as an outdated practice for writers at the end of the thirteenth century, as it disappeared *c.*1200 and was an unfamiliar trade product to them as were likely more familiar with *vara* as cloth exports, as seen below—to be used to buy other commodities abroad, such as flour, but also indicates that a journey to Norway could be advantageous for an entrepreneurial Icelander, bringing back wealth and a wife.

Harðar saga og Hólmverja, a saga written in the early fourteenth century and events set in the late tenth century, also depicts an earlier period when *vararfeldir* were transported to Norway. Geirr Grímsson had travelled abroad from Eyrar with the Norwegian ship-owner Brynjólfr Þorbjarnarson with *vaðmál* as his cargo, wearing a trade cloak ("vararfeld") while walking in Bergen. He was accosted by a group of men, who belonged to Gunnhildr *konungamóðir*, demanding that Geirr sell it to them. When he refused, they seized it from him, and he fought them for it and took it back.[513] While this specific cloak had not necessarily been exported to Norway, the fact that the queen's men asked him to sell it means that such the sale of Icelandic *vararfeldr* was common enough as a desired, saleable product at that time that it was desired by high-status Norwegians, valued enough abroad that they were worthy of being stolen.

A final example of trade cloaks intended for sale abroad comes from two variant accounts of the tenth-century sale of woollen goods at a ship in harbour at Eyjafjörðr in the late thirteenth-century *Ljósvetninga saga*. The A-version of the text tells of wool and sheepskins ("ull ok klippingar") being sold by Þorgils to the Norwegian Ingjaldr in return for linen ("lérept") and other things. Ingjaldr was too busy to examine the payment at the time, and only realized later that they were rotten. In the C-version Þórir Akraskeggr came to the Norwegian Helgi's ship asking to buy his (unspecified) wares ("vara") on credit, with Þórir's payment specified as trade-cloaks ("vararfeldir") with a specified number of piles ("þykkröggvaðir"). He paid Helgi right before the ship departed and so Helgi could not examine the cloaks' quality, but when examined later, they were bad and full of holes. In both versions, the merchant went to a local chieftain, with whom he had a relationship, to demand action for fraudulent sale (punishable with lesser outlawry, according to the law codes).[514] Here, the acceptance of the woollen products without examining their quality

tell of an Icelander bringing woollen cloth trade goods to sell abroad (and both return with wealth and a wife). "Fljótsdæla saga," 228-237.

[513] "Harðar saga Grímkelssonar eða Hólmverja saga," 35-6.

[514] "Ljósvetninga saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 10, *Ljósvetninga saga,* ed. Björn Sigfússon (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka

infers that such an exchange was a typical practice when buying foreign goods from merchant ships, here stated as linen, and that the merchants expected them to be of a certain standard, trusting that the product was of standard quality. Likewise, this supports the "new and unused" aspect of standardized *vaðmál*, that trade goods would be purchased on credit and paid in the spring with cloth made to pay the credit, but also that cloth does degrade and rot, and the expectation is for Icelandic trade cloth to be of new, good quality that foreign merchants could rely on.

These *vararfeldr* examples demonstrate that this outerwear was a common, accepted trade good and usual cargo for the time, and that it was desired abroad. These examples come from different contexts, ranging from a ship's cargo to sale at a ship to a royal court, and together they demonstrate that the export and sale abroad of *vaðmál* outerwear are portrayed as normal trading activity for the tenth century by later thirteenth- and fourteenth-century authors. These internal economic exchanges demonstrate how *vaðmál* cloth was a valuable economically as a trade good, displaying their function as both cloth and economic product. A secondary result of this trading is the activities which these Icelanders took part in while abroad, including forming relationships with important people, creating marriage alliances, and gathering wealth, which had the result improving one's personal status in terms of wealth and standing. This concept will be explored further shortly in the next section on *vaðmál* as travel funds.

The specific trade of *vara* is also seen in the family sagas, trade of cloth in the general sense and not cloth of a particular cut or construction, and perhaps better reflects the age of writing and a use of *vaðmál* for export more familiar to the saga authors. New cloth would be collected from farms and sold to merchants at ships docked at Icelandic harbours, presumably in exchange for foreign goods, or used to fund Icelanders' travels abroad, but in either case the cloth would be sent outside of Iceland to Norway, the main market for Icelandic *vaðmál* until *c.*1430 thence English and German markets grew in importance. Helgi Þorláksson has looked in foreign account books but has not found evidence of Icelandic *vaðmál* in the east or England, those likely came from other areas, such as Sweden and Denmark.[515] Norway needed clothing for everyday wear and outer clothing needs just as in Iceland: Norway had more limited sheep grazing and wool production capabilities, largely limited to Northern Guðbrandalur, but they also needed woollen cloth to clothe the urban working class, for workers and work at fishing stations, and

fornritafélag, 1940), 21-23.
[515] *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 421-22; *Líftaug landsins,* 76-78.

monasteries.[516] These examples demonstrate cloth sent abroad and generally exchanged for products that could not be produced, or produced in high enough quantities, in Iceland and range from cargo taken abroad by Icelanders to wares used as the medium of payment for foreign goods purchased from the ships of foreign traders in Iceland.

An example from the thirteenth-century *Brennu-Njáls saga* illustrates how *vara* could be collected in Iceland and used in purchases with Norwegians or exported abroad. After Flosi Þórðarson was exiled from Iceland as a result of the burning at Bergþórshvoll in approximately 1011 CE, he left Iceland via Hornafjörðr on a ship he had bought from the Norwegian Eyjolf *nef*, having exchanged land for this ship and twenty hundreds of *vara* ("tuttugu hundruð vöru"). It also says that Flosi and his companions prepared for the journey by gathering sacks of *vara* ("sekka vǫru") from their farms and bringing them to the ship, all the *vara* and supplies before sailing abroad.[517]

Similarly, *Fljótsdæla saga* includes a semi-fantastical tale of a late tenth-century trade journey, where Þorvaldr Þiðrandason decided to go abroad after he and his brother divided their estate and gathered *vara* and took passage abroad on a ship at Unaós. The ship wrecked in the Shetland Islands, however, but he was able to recover his and others' goods from a troll's treasure trove, including his Icelandic *vara* ("íslenzka vöru"), and was rewarded with a wife and wealth, since he also saved Earl Björgólfr's daughter Droplaug who had been kidnapped by the troll there, and return to Iceland having gained an aristocratic wife, wealth, and improved social standing due to the honour gained from this courageous act and from his new relationship with the earl.[518]

The late thirteenth-century saga *Reykdæla saga og Víga-Skútu* tells of a late tenth-century exchange of *vara* in a ship-market context when the Icelander Eysteinn Mánason came to a ship moored in Húsavík to buy three hundreds of linen and of cloth from one of the ship owners Þorsteinn *bǫlkamaður*/*bolstǫng* in exchange for ten hundreds of *vaðmál* ("þrjú hundruð lérepta ok klæði fyrir tíu hundruð [vaðmála]"), on credit ("skuldarstaði selt"), which was eventually paid in *vara*.[519] While the term *vara* is not explicitly used at the moment when the deal is made, "vǫru" is

[516] *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 511; *Líftaug landsins,* 75-76.
[517] "Brennu-Njáls saga," 427, 438.
[518] "Fljótsdæla saga," 223, 227, 228, 230-31. It is interesting that this plain, coarse cloth is included in an episode describing valuable items, which demonstrates that this cloth was valued abroad, as well as in Iceland; even if that that value lies in bulk trade, it was among treasures worth recovering from the cave.
[519] "Reykdœla saga og Víga-Skútu," 154-55. There are two versions of the text, with "tíu hundruð", the other "tíu hundruð vaðmála." Which version is "correct" is not important, as the use of *hundrað* and later *vara* implies that it was ten hundreds of *vaðmál* in this context.

named as payment, showing that foreign cloth could be purchased at a ship and be paid for with Icelandic *vara* at a later time, which would most likely exported to Norway.

Trade goods could be decorated or coloured cloth, not just plain, traded in Iceland for foreign goods or exported abroad—as with the russet-striped cloth *mórent* of a slightly higher value than *vara* (five ells instead of six ells per ounce).[520] *Reykdœla saga og Víga-Skútu* tells of two ships arriving at Eyjafjörðr at the same time, one landing at Knarrareyri and the other at Gásir, where some Icelanders purchased lumber in exchange for cloth: Steingrímr Örnólfsson of Kroppi had made a deal to buy the ordinary lumber for three hundreds of plain cloth and had already paid six ounces for the choice lumber ("fyrir þrjú hundruð einlit… sex aura"), but Vémundr *kǫgurr* Þórisson outbid him by offering to pay the Norwegian merchant in *mórent*, half the amount for the ordinary wood and the whole price for the choice lumber ("hálft verðit mórent fyrir viðinn, en allt mórent fyrir kørviðinn").[521] Presumably the plain (*einlit*—one-coloured) cloth would have been standard *vara*, being the main cloth export, but also indicates the desire for exports of the higher valued *mórent*, striped *vaðmál*.

These examples illustrate how *vara* was used to pay foreign merchants at Icelandic harbours at Icelandic harbours, used to purchase ships, lumber, or foreign cloth, was used as trade goods to fund Icelanders' journeys abroad, but also provides details about where such cloth used as travel goods would be sourced from and how cloth could be stored, in addition to reaffirming the benefit of using cloth as a trade good since it could be recovered and remain valuable after a shipwreck. These are small but important details for the logistics of woollen cloth export. In this regard, *vaðmál* cloth played a significant role in ensuring that the necessary foreign goods were brought to Iceland, whether it be linen cloth or timber, but also was important for enabling Icelanders themselves to travel abroad, where they could gain wealth, prestige, and important personal connections, such as in the case of Þorvaldr Þiðrandason. Nonetheless, as the main medium of exchange, *vaðmál* facilitated the movement of goods and people.

Documentary sources

Vaðmál continued to be exported into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with *vara* and *hafnarváð* in the fourteenth century but from *c.*1400 mostly *hafnarváð* (*gjaldavaðmál*) types while

[520] *Grágás: Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, 477-8; *Jónsbók: Lögbók*, 212, 213-214.
[521] "Reykdœla saga og Víga-Skútu," 172-73.

vara was used for payments or trade within Iceland or used as a unit of account (*vöruvirt*); *vaðmál* was also consumed locally by people of all status, but foreign cloth as well, both ordinary cloth and luxury cloth. However, this has always been the case that foreign cloth was consumed, especially for the elite who could afford expensive imports or had brought cloth back with them on their travels. The actual types and quantities of cloth are nearly impossible to recover, but recent research on leaden cloth seals discovered in archaeological excavations has shed light on the possibilities of uncovering the types and sources of cloth, such as England, Germany, and modern Hungary.[522] Other research has uncovered remains of cloth fragments, such as that of Penelope Walton Rogers and Michèle Hayeur Smith at the Reykjaholt church farm site, uncovering 526 cloth fragments of which 7.2 per cent are foreign imports.[523] *Vaðmál* remained an important part of the domestic cloth supply, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,[524] but coexisted with other cloth types and foreign imports and both would have been used in clothing and part of building wealth and prestige via display in a society with limited possibilities for material display of wealth.

The documentary sources include contracts or payments of *vaðmál* made in Norway as they pertain to Iceland, and they also indicate the growing role of *hafnarvaðmál* in Icelandic exports. An account from 1312 in Bergen tells of Ormr *svartr* Þórisson buying the property of Bellagarð innra from Guðrún Køjukona, stating that he paid her some Icelandic *vaðmál* and *hafnarvaðmál* ("fimm hundrat uaðmala … fiora tighi alna j hamnaruaðmalum"), among other goods including Icelandic ram- and goatskins, butter, burned silver, and that he would pay the remaining thirty marks and fifteen hundreds ("fimtan hundrat") when he returned from Iceland, and paid two winters later thirteen hundreds of *vaðmál* ("þrettan hundrat vaðmala").[525] An account from 1329 tells that Sveinn Jónsson sold Munkalifi in Norway and the payment included *vaðmál*, each a hundred valued at two marks ("hundred vadmala").[526] Another from 1340 in Bergen tells of the obligation to pay a tithe for merchant trips to Iceland but that Þórir, Sigurðr, Nikúlas, and

[522] See the seals from Görlitz, England, and Nuremburg in Svavar Níelsson, "Cut from the Cloth."
[523] The sixteenth- to seventeenth-century and seventeenth- to nineteenth-century farm layers have twills from northern Germany, silks from Flanders or England, and some fine woven tabbies. The fourteenth- to sixteenth-century church layers have less foreign textiles but see worsted twills, silks, and in the Hanse layer some fine tabbies Michèle Hayeur Smith, "Rumpelstiltsken's feat: cloth and German trade with Iceland," in *German Trade in the North Atlantic c. 1400-1700: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Natascha Mehler, Mark Q. Gardiner, and Endre Elvestad, 107-120 (Stavanger: Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger, 2019), 112-13.
[524] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 515.
[525] *Diplomatarium Islandicum,* 2, 375-76.
[526] *Ibid,* 644.

Bjarni did not have the usual *skreið*, *lýsi*, or sulphur to pay it but only "vadmalom."[527] These examples show Icelandic *vaðmál* as a desired medium of payment among many choices also in Norway, both with the inclusive term *vaðmál,* which has been used to refer to both *vara* and *hafnarvaðmál,* and the more specific term "hamnaruaðmalum."

Another account demonstrates how *vaðmál* refers to a range of quality in cloth, from the simpler *pakkavaðmál* to finer *hafnarvaðmál,* both important for exports and payments to foreign authorities such as the Church. In 1337 Bishop Hákon of Bergen acquitted Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálaholt of paying a papal tithe since the Icelandic *vaðmál* intended for it was rotted in the sea ("in mari putruerunt"—indicating, perhaps, that not all *vaðmál* could be saved by drying if wet too long or after stored in poor conditions), stating that the vernacular terms for different types of Icelandic *burello* were "islencha" or "pakka vedmaal," "hamfnarvaad," and "bragdarvaad," all three with different values.[528] This account indicates a conceptual comparison in the minds of the writer recording the documents, that Icelandic *vaðmál* was considered a comparable type and quality to foreign simple woollen cloth. Medieval coarse weave wool cloth called *burel* are known from Flanders, France, and England and were considered comparable to *hafnarvaðmál*, while *pakkavaðmál* to canvas, but *burel* could be narrower or wider than standard *vaðmál*, and there is uncertainty on their technical comparisons, but Icelandic manuscripts use *burel* interchangeably for *vaðmál* in Latin texts, as is the case with this letter written in Latin.[529]

These examples show that *vaðmál* exports, whether shipped by Icelanders or Norwegians, could be purchased and sold in Norway, and was suitable for important purchases such as buying land, and even that *pakkavaðmál* was considered an "Icelandic" product in overseas accounts. The term *vaðmál* dominates in these fourteenth-century accounts, but *hafnarvaðmál* also appears in addition to *burrellum*, indicating the shift in type of *vaðmál* being exported to Norway, one based on measurements of weight rather than length in this period, but also the integration of *vaðmál* into the greater Western European *lingua franca* of cloth where it is considered comparative to foreign examples by using foreign names, in Icelandic accounts at least.[530]

[527] *Ibid,* 729.
[528] *Ibid,* 718.
[529] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 414, 421.
[530] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 259, 414-15.

Expensive Textiles: Travel Funds

Vara was also used by Icelanders to fund their travels abroad, not just sent out with traders. This is especially significant for the fact that Icelanders could travel abroad without their own ships by using woollen cloth travel funds, *fararefni* in *vaðmál*. Travelling abroad was always important, from rites of passage to build prestige in foreign kings' courts in the tenth and eleventh century, to the end of the Commonwealth and the submission to Norwegian rule, when the centre of secular power was the king and his royal court and not solely the *alþingi*, and the king's officials and *hirðmenn* would have to commute frequently between Norway and Iceland, but also with the growth of the institutional church when bishops would need to travel to the archbishop for consecration or when needed to travel to Rome for absolution.[531] *Vaðmál* is commonly seen here as a ticket, funds used to purchase travel abroad. However, while woollen cloth exports facilitated the outflux of people and goods, they also had significant impact in what this experience abroad allowed Icelanders to bring back with them to Iceland, as there was also an influx of people, goods, and ideas that impacted medieval Iceland's economy, society, and culture.

Helgi Guðmundsson argues that luxury products were more important in this regard, that simple *vaðmál* could never have brought a return of "high culture" via education and networking abroad in the way that the export of Greenlandic products like walrus and narwhal ivory could, as *vaðmál* was too bulky, was a danger to the ship if waterlogged, inefficient to transport on a long and dangerous journey, intense competition elsewhere in Europe limited demand for Icelandic cloth, and was of too low economic value to be appropriate gifts to gain access to royals and aristocrats abroad.[532] However, both low value and luxury products could be important simultaneously. While ivory were precious goods, wool cloth was the fabric *du jour* of the medieval period—royals wore silk, embroidery, and fur, but would also wear wool for underclothing layers, non-ceremonial wear, and outerwear to protect higher-value clothes beneath such as in the case of rain (*i.e.,* rain ruins silk), in addition to lower status people wearing a higher proportion of wool cloth, the need for wool for clothing for martial and crusade activity, for sails, and fishing—and different regions produced different types of cloth, for different demands of quality. Lower class people also did not necessarily buy their clothing new, but could receive hand-

[531] Sverrir Jakobsson, "Upphefð að utan," *Sæmdarmenn: Um heiður á þjóðveldisöld,* ed. Helgi Þorláksson (Reykjavík: Hugvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2001), 39; Sverrir Jakobsson, "State Formation and Pre-Modern Identities in the North," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 125 (2010), 80.
[532] Helgi Guðmundsson, *Land úr landi,* 49, 58.

me-downs from family members, friends, or followers, as in the case of Bishop Lárentíus' deathbed gifts, or purchase second-hand at shops in urban areas or exchange in local rural communities. Wool was also an important source of revenue for royals, as the above-mentioned examples of King Magnús Eiríksson's concern about quality and the treasured sail-gift demonstrate. Both systems, luxury and bulk goods, were in action and important at the same time and luxury trade could be just as risky (with a higher value of loss, if the ship sank with ivory or polar bear skins on board) as bulk trade, and wool cloth could be dried and recovered, as seen above. The dismissal of the importance of wool goods to "high culture" also ignores the social aspect of previous contact and favouritism, that kings could have known Icelanders through their ancestors or relatives who were related or had already made alliances and thus did not need prestigious gifts but rather cloth gifts (which were valuable products in themselves) could suffice. In this way, wool cloth could be just as important as luxury goods and thus similarly could have brought a return of "high culture" via education and networking abroad through high quantity and quality export and the impact of the movement of these wool goods enacted on the lives and economic activities of Icelandic travellers. Commodity currencies such as *vaðmál* were money and were in demand and could be converted into other forms of money or prestige goods abroad but just have been conceptualized differently.

By using *vaðmál* as travel funds, Icelanders could gain prestige and established connections to important people, experience different cultures and religions, and return having amassed wealth in commodities and luxuries, more specifically returning to Iceland with material goods and artistic styles, language, books, and culture, and more practical materials such as iron, timber, glass, and even shoes. *Vaðmál* therefore functions as an expensive textile which was exported in large enough quantities as travel funds to allow the mobility of people, products, and ideas in and out of Iceland. This section will examine examples from the contemporary and family sagas, but not the legal codes or documentary sources, as this section will examine how *vaðmál*'s use in this regard has been used a narrative tool to demonstrate this in/outflux of people and ideas, rather than focussing on the movement of goods as in the previous section.

Samtíðarsögur

Icelanders in the thirteenth century likely traded a variety of *vaðmál*, including *vara, hafnarvaðmál*, and *mórent* types, and *vaðmál* alone could refer to any of the types. *Vara* is named

as travel funds in the contemporary sagas, specified as the means for an Icelander to make a journey abroad (often on a foreigner's ship), emphasizing payment for the movement of people rather than solely focusing on the movement of goods. *Guðmundar saga dýra* tells of ten hundreds of *mórent vara* ("tíu hundruð mórendrar vöru") stolen from Hákon Þórðarson in 1197 when his farm Arnarnes was attacked, stating that it had been intended for his journey overseas ("til utanferðar sér").[533] An account from *c.*1198 in *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka* tells of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson outfitting his close friend Þorvaldr Snorrason for an overseas journey, giving him supplies including some *vara*, supplies, water-kettle, hat, bedclothes, a set of clothes, and passage on a ship in Dögurðarnes, demonstrating that *vara* was among the necessary supplies for a journey abroad, not just to be exchanged in trade in Iceland but also fungible beyond its borders.[534]

Íslendinga saga describes several Sturlungar's travels abroad, where they met important aristocrats, royals, and ecclesiastical leaders. Sturla Sighvatson prepared for his trip to Norway in 1233, after being summoned by the archbishop's letter to go to Rome for absolution for a violence against the bishop, and it states that he prepared for his journey abroad ("bjóst til utanferðar") by gathering *vara* ("dró að sér vöru") and sailed from Gásir. This was a successful trip for Sturla, as he travelled widely and made contact with many important people including Earl Skúli Bárðarson in Staðr and King Hákon Hákonarson in Túnsberg in Norway, King Valdimarr *gamli* of Denmark and received splendid gifts from him, Bishop Páll of Hamar in Norway, and the pope who absolved him in Rome; on return to Iceland at Gásir, Sturla acted on King Hákon's behalf and tried to bring Iceland under his influence, but was killed in the Battle of Örlygsstaðir in 1238.[535] Nevertheless, this shows how *vara* could fund travels where Icelanders became vassals of important people and gain gifts, prestige, and social positions, which could have significant consequences for Icelandic society itself. Órækja Snorrason, was sent abroad ("utan") by Bishop Magnús Gissurarson in 1235 with ten hundreds of *vaðmál* ("tíu hundruð vaðmála") to fund his journey, sailing from Eyrar to Norway and then he went south and met King Valdimarr *gamli* in Denmark, for whom he wrote a poem and received a gift horse in return; he also met Earl Skúli Bárðarson in Oslo and his exiled father Snorri Sturluson in Niðarós, and they returned to Iceland together in 1239 at

[533] "Guðmundur saga dýri," 157.
[534] "Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar hin sérstaka," 900.
[535] "Íslendinga saga," 263, 292.

Vestmannaeyjar, after the Battle of Bæjarbardagi.[536] *Íslendinga saga* also tells of the previously-mentioned inheritance gift from Þórðr Sturluson to nephew Jón *murtr* Snorrason in 1228, when he called on friends for supplies of *vara* to travel ("til utanferðar") to Norway, and of the hundred hundreds ("hundrað hundraða") likely no more than ten hundreds was used as funds for the journey when he took passage at Hvítá, as was the norm for other journeys.[537] While Jón was successful abroad, becoming a retainer and personal follower of Jarl Skúli and meeting King Hákon in Norway, he died abroad during a fight at a Christmas party at the king's court and there is no return on this familial investment in terms of a young Icelander returning to Iceland wealthy and successful, however Jón did make a name for himself while abroad through his personal connections with high-status people such as the earl and the king.

Þórðar saga kakala includes examples that show the intent to travel abroad in an attempt to solve the civil conflict which had gotten out of hand, especially with the large, deadly battles such as Flóabardagi and Haugsnesbardagi.[538] In 1245 Kolbeinn *ungi* Arnórsson sought reconciliation with Þórðr *kakali* Sighvatsson and they were to go abroad ("fara utan") to Norway to have King Hákon Hákonarson arbitrate the conflict, promising Þórðr sixty hundreds of *vaðmál* for travel funds ("sex tigi hundraða vaðmála til fararefna"), a higher amount than normal, and the travel goods were sent to Hvítá.[539] However, since Kolbeinn *ungi* died that summer, instead Svarthöfði Dufgusson went abroad ("fór Svarthöfði utan") from Hvítá, with those *vara* which Kolbeinn had given to Þórðr.[540] This seems to indicate that the trade goods were intended to go abroad, despite the original travellers not making the journey, as Svarthöfði made the journey instead for his cousin Þórðr and took these trade goods with him. The saga does not say much about his stay in Norway, but it does state that he had left a large supply of wine behind in the

[536] *Ibid,* 349-50, 382. Exiled along with Órækja's cousins Þórðr *kakali* Sighvatsson and Óláfr *hvítaskald* Þórðarson, and his father's cousin Þórleifr Þórðarson. They stayed at Bergen and Niðaróss with Duke Skúli and King Hákon, and returned along with Hrani Koðránsson, Ófeigr Bjarnarson, Egill Solmundarsson, Hákon Bótólfsson, and Þórleifr Þórðarson (they had a share in the ship).
[537] *Ibid,* 321-22.
[538] *Þórðar saga kakala* was created *c.*1275 as a response to the version of history in Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* and is from the point-of-view of Þórðr's followers and supportive of Hrafn Oddsson's political ambitions, relationship to the king, and law reform; it was integrated into the *Sturlunga saga* compilation with Sturla Þórðarson's later *Íslendinga saga* and harmonized discrepancies in the different perspectives of the struggle for governance of Iceland as king's *sýslumaðr.* Sverrir Jakobsson and Daniel M. White, "1277: Contemporary Politics and the Prehistory of *Sturlunga Saga,*" *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 18 (2022), 173.
[539] "Þórðar saga kakala," 530.
[540] *Ibid,* 532. Svarthöfði was Þórðr's cousin: he was the son of Hvamm-Sturla's illegitimate daughter Þuríðr and Dufgus Þórleifsson. Svarthöfði and his brothers Kolbeinn *grönn*, Björn *drumbr*, and Björn *kægill* were Sturlungar.

Vestmannaeyjar for Þórðr, which suggests that wine is one of the imported goods that could be purchased abroad with Icelandic export goods, such as this *vaðmál*.

The *biskupasögur* also tell of *vara* being used to fund travels abroad, in this case a bishop's consecration trip funded. *Lárentíus saga* notes that in 1323 Bishop-elect Lárentíus travelled abroad on the ship Kafsinn but hit a reef in Hálogaland; they lost a lot of cargo but were able to save the *vaðmál* as it states that they dragged back on board the bundles of *vaðmál* ("at þeir krökuðu upp spýtingana ok pakkana") and oil that they were transporting—likely *hafnarvaðmál* in *spýtingar* and *vara* in *pakkar* units of sixty-ells each, which would then have to be unrolled or unfolded to dry, and it is not clear here whether this was done on land or on the ship. These were the funds drawn from bishops' tithes, rent, and other land dues, as the saga later states that *síra* Stefán joined them later in Trondheim with those *vaðmál* goods ("góðz") of Lárentíus from Hólar, perhaps indicating that *síra* Stefán had stayed behind with the drying cloth until it was fully recovered and repacked. The saga also relates that Lárentíus through Hólar always held ownerships in two or three trade ships coming to Iceland, in the interest of procuring drinkables but likely also interested in other items and would trade *vaðmál* tithe goods as exports, indicating the bishopric's significant role in trade.[541]

The motivations for making for these journeys may be different from those found in the *Íslendingasögur*, as these are largely travels highlighting personal connections and alliances that Icelanders made with important people, in a time when both the Norwegian crown and the Church had increasing influence in Icelandic affairs, rather than raiding and building wealth to use on return to Iceland to build up an estate and following, as found in the family sagas in the next section. These *Sturlunga* travellers travelled widely across Europe, impressing and making personal connections with high status people, especially royalty and high-status episcopal figures. Regardless, the function is the same as in the *Íslendingasögur*, that is, it was used to fund these travels, and the most common return seems to be status via personal connections by becoming followers and the giving and receiving of gifts. While there are other ways to pay for travel, as there were other exported goods, these examples have been highlighted because of their

[541] "Lárentíus saga biskups," 362, 366-67, 379. Falk states *spýtingar* refers to *hafnarváð* or *vaðmál* not in packs but wound in rolls (*spýtingar*) and held in place with a peg (*spýta*). Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde,* 50. Helgi Þorláksson states this is unlikely as they had to be standardized at time when *vaðmál* valued by weight, and *spýta* refers to stretching after fulling according to order, with *vara* and *hafnarvaðmál* likely finished differently. The difference in terms might be the two different types of *vaðmál.* Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag,* 389-90.

importance to medieval Iceland as the main export goods of the time and the impact appears to be facilitating the movement of goods and people, and culture and religion via religious and royal authorities with increasing deference to royal power and papal authority.

Íslendingasögur

That facilitation is seen clearly where *vara* is clearly named as travel funds in the family sagas, gathered from their own household or estate, from their community of family and friends, or as owed to them from supporters, and states that Icelanders either gave the cloth to the captain to pay for passage or used that cloth to pay for their stay abroad; *fararefni* is specified as the means by which the person paid for their journey off the island and not solely cargo.[542] As these sagas are cultural products of circa tenth-century oral and circa thirteenth- to fourteenth-century written stories, it could also be possible that authors had *hafnarvaðmál* in mind when describing these *vaðmál*-travel funds, as both *vara* and *hafnarvaðmál* are circulating in export trade at the time of writing and interchangeable.

Vöðu-Brands þáttr, a tale appended to the thirteenth-century *Ljósvetninga saga,* tells of a father sponsoring his son's voyage to Norway, with Þorkell giving his son Vöðu-Brandr fifteen hundreds ("fimmtán hundruð") to travel on a Norwegian ship. This proves a fateful trip, however, as Brandr had stayed at the Norwegian's home in Trondheim but left there soon after killing a man, with the Norwegians return his travelling funds ("fararefni") in fifteen hundreds in Norwegian goods ("fimmtán hundruð í norrænan eyri") and he returns to Iceland in Reyðarfjörðr.[543] This can be seen as a cautionary tale, rather than a tale of great exploits, as Brandr was a troublemaker, and received no wealth nor honour from his journey abroad, but rather appears to return like a dog with his tail between his legs. As "Icelandic" goods are the other side of the comparison to Norwegian goods, it is likely that Brandr took some kind of *vaðmál* for his travelling funds, as the main export of this period, perhaps *pakkavaðmál*.

Laxdæla saga also includes an account of a mid-tenth century father providing *vara* funds to send his son abroad, when Óláfr *pái* was sent to meet his mother's family, who were Irish royalty, on a ship that was at Borðeyri in Hrútafjörðr. When he was unable to get funds from his foster-father Þórðr *goddi*, who was wealthy in land and movables but not Icelandic *vara* ("at þat

[542] Cleasby, 185 "outfittings."
[543] "Vöðu-Brands þáttr," 126-28.

er meir í lǫndum ok kvikfé en hann eigi íslenzka vǫru liggjandi fyrir"), his mother provided him with funds by marrying her farm manager and he received thirty hundreds of *vara* from him ("Óláfr tók þrjá tigu hundraða vǫru") and arranged his passage with the ship's skipper Örn, who was a follower of King Haraldr *gráfeldr* Gunnhildarsson.[544] Óláfr's trip abroad brought him renown, honour, wealth, and personal relationships with people of the highest status: in Norway he met King Haraldr and became his follower and later exchanged gifts, with Óláfr giving the king precious objects from Ireland and the king giving Óláfr a suit of scarlet clothes and a ship loaded with timber and provisions; also in Norway he met Queen Gunnhildr, who liked him because he was nephew to her former lover Hrútr, and gifted him a ship to sail to Ireland; in Ireland he met King Mýrkjartan and gained honour and renown through raiding support and good advice and also gifts of a ship, weapons, and wealth. He returned to Iceland at Borðeyri and gained renown with news of this journey because of his status as grandson of King Mýrkjartan, the honour he had received from powerful men, and the great wealth he had brough home. Such a trip was used a coming-of-age narrative trope, and, factual or not, it shows how a young Icelander can go abroad via *vaðmál* funds, compete with his Norse and Celtic brethren, and return to Iceland with increased wealth, honour, personal contacts, and reputation, all possible through the financial support that Óláfr had received from his stepfather. Thus, these funds, cloth in the form of export goods, were an investment by the family and thereby raising the social status of not only the young Icelander, but also the whole family by familial association. Here, the "Icelandic" *vara* is likely *vöruvaðmál,* considering the temporal context, as a toponym of sorts, using the placename as to signal quality or exclusivity based on the origin of production—implying Icelandic-specific *vaðmál* was valued over or unique from that produced in other places.

The term *vaðmál* itself is also used in the *Íslendingasögur* in reference to the funding of such overseas trips as travel goods and could refer to either *vara* or *hafnarvaðmál* depending on context. One such example is found in the fifteenth-century *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* where a father gives the bare minimum to his son, some provisions and a little *vaðmál* ("fararefni fá honum, útan hafnest ok lítit af vaðmálum"), to travel abroad after being outlawed.[545] Grettir Ásmundarson was described as unruly, obstinate, and troublesome, and had been sentenced to lesser outlawry for a killing. He went abroad from Hvítá on a ship owned by merchant Hafliði of Reyðarfell, sailed

[544] "Laxdœla saga," 50-51.
[545] "Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar," 49.

to Norway and stayed in Haramsoy in South More, staying with chieftain named Þorfinnr when his cargo needed to be dried after a wreck—recoverable wares—, but also at More, Túnsberg, Vagan, and Halogaland. Grettir proved himself by defeating a mound-*draugr* and gained renown by defeating two outlawed berserkers but was forced to leave Norway after some killings and returned to Iceland on a merchant ship, where he was welcomed warmly by his father, but still had troubles due to his overbearing nature. This semi-fantastical tale tells of the young Icelander's exploits abroad, albeit a troublesome outlaw, who gained a great reputation and made personal connections with high status people like the chieftain Þorfinnr and his half-brother Þorsteinn Dromund and was able to return in a better position with a more positive reputation with new friendships, demonstrating that even such difficult characters such as the aggressive Grettir could improve their social status abroad. This is a later saga, and the fifteenth-century writing might imply the author thought of *hafnarvaðmál* for the travel funds, as *vara* was only a unit of account for foreign trade after *c.*1400.

The thirteenth-century *Bandamanna saga* tells of Oddr Ófeigsson's voyage in the mid-eleventh century when he wanted to improve his position, and the steps he took to be able to afford to make the journey. After his father refused him the funds, as he cared little for him and owned little wealth that was not land, Oddr he took fishing line and tackle and twelve ells of *vaðmál* ("tólf álnar vaðmáls") and was a fishermen for three years, then invested in cargo trips between Miðfjörðr and Strandir and shares in a ferry until he was the sole owner, and when rich enough he bought a share in an ocean-going ship and made profit and built his reputation with working with merchants over several trade journeys, eventually owning a whole ship and most of the cargo, then two ships, and eventually becoming the wealthiest trader sailing at that time, becoming highly regarded. He continued building wealth until buying land at Mel, Miðfjörðr where he farmed on a large scale and lived in grand style, until he was the most prominent man in the north, even the richest in Iceland. The saga states he was well-off in every way including gold, silver, lands, and livestock and had great prestige.[546] Here, the *vaðmál* and fishing tackle are noted as the starting funds to help him make his own way, albeit not a direct export of goods in this case, but was part of the process of gaining the necessary financial means to go abroad where he was able to build wealth and reputation, culminating in his return and settlement in Iceland where he became a wealthy,

[546] "Bandamanna saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 7, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, 291-363 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1936), 295.

well-regarded, important man, even eventually buying his own *goðorð*; this demonstrates even small amounts of woollen cloth act as the starting funds as part of the toolbox for building up one's status, a motivational tale or trope for how one can use travel funds like *vaðmál* to go abroad and act honourably with merchants and kings, gain education and manners, and build wealth that will benefit one economically and socially upon return. Helgi Þorláksson argues that this portrayal represents a new era in Iceland with an increasingly positive view towards a profit motive in trade and with decreasing chieftain control of trade at the expense of increasing Norwegian royal influence and set prices.[547]

The mid-thirteenth century *Eyrbyggja saga* tells of a tenth- to eleventh-century journey abroad, with Arnbjörn Ásbrandsson seeking passage abroad on a ship owned by Norwegian traders preparing to leave from Straumsfjörðr, only was accepted because he had little more travel funds than baggage which was able to be tied on top of the already-loaded cargo, just three hundred *vaðmál*, twelve *vararfeldir*, and some provisions ("Hann lézk eigi hafa fararefni meiri en liggja megi á búlka… Í bagga hans váru þrjú hundruð vaðmála ok tólf vararfeldir ok farnest hans"); he went to Denmark, found his lost brother Björn, and they returned to Iceland at Hraunhöfn, stating that Arnbjörn had made a lot of money abroad and therefore was able to buy land and establish a farm at Bakki.[548] This journey had perhaps a more altruistic purpose in finding lost relative, but was still a profitable journey using *vaðmál* and *vararfeldir* as funds.

Late fourteenth-century *Harðar saga og Hólmverja* saga tells of the preparations and gathering of woollen travel funds used for a young man's journey abroad from Eyrr in the mid-tenth century. Norwegian Brynjólfr Þorbjarnarson had invited Hörðr abroad with him because of his reputation, offering him half the stake in a ship, and Hörðr asked his father Grímkell Bjarnarson for the funds ("fararefni"), specifically asking for sixty hundreds, twenty to be *mórent* ("sex tiga hundraða, ok væri í tuttugu hundruð mórend"), and his stepmother Sigríðr agreed, giving him *vara*.[549] As other important men used less funds to go abroad, sixty is six-times the usual amount and thus an arrogant request, but nonetheless had a large return. Hörðr sailed to Bergen with Brynjólfr and his companions, Geirr Grímsson[550] and Helgi Sigmundarson, also travelling to Vik,

[547] Helgi Þorláksson, "Social Ideals and the Concept of Profit in Thirteenth-Century Iceland," 243-44.
[548] Eyrbyggja saga," *Íslenzk fornrit* 4, *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, 1-186 (Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1935), 105.
[549] "Harðar saga Grímkelssonar eða Hólmverja saga," 33.
[550] This is also the same journey that had been previously mentioned, in which Geirr Grímsson was accosted by some Norwegian courtiers over *vararfeldir*.

staying with Brynjólfr's father, to Gotland, staying with Jarl Harald and defeated a mound-troll (and was visited by Odin) to great honour and married the earl's daughter Helga, and also raiding with his sworn brother, the earl's son Hróarr, including on the coast of Finland. After fifteen years Hörðr returned to Iceland rich and highly esteemed and settled on his own farm.[551] These hundreds of *vaðmál*, specified as *vara* and *mórent*, were travel funds invested in a young man by his parents, here he returned with improved status in wealth, honour, and important personal relationships, a promising young man who met expectations and was able to enhance his worth and honour, all of which was possible through *vaðmál* travel funds.

While this can perhaps be considered a type of narrative trope wherein the character travels abroad and returns a success or failure, some medieval Icelanders did travel abroad where they increased their prestige and received honour from their association with foreign elites.[552] Icelanders, especially in the thirteenth century, were active in foreign courts and gained education and manners or participated in battles, and other such matters, in doing so built up their own social credit and honour, and even built-up wealth and received gifts from important persons such as royalty, but also likely brought back a variety of material goods ranging from minor to lavish. So, we can trust that these examples reflect the idea that going abroad was more than just part of the story but reflects some reality of wealth and prestige accumulation in the early medieval past.

Therefore, *vaðmál* travel funds, as shown here specifying a range of *vaðmál* types including *vararfeldr, mórent, vara,* and perhaps *hafnarvaðmál*, acted as an extension of trade as it had the added purpose of the Icelander himself travelling and exploring the outside world as a coming-of-age and period of personal growth. His return generally marked an improvement—in status, wealth, personal alliances—accessed via *vaðmál* in the form of tradeable goods as capital appropriate for the both the age of events and/or writing. These travel funds were significant because of the impact they had on the lives of the individuals who travelled, and, as a result, their families and supporters because they had bettered themselves on their return to Iceland, and so the *vaðmál* acts as an investment in the future of the traveller, most often here a young man, by establishing a person's worth and prestige, and therefore boosting the position of their family. This demonstrates expensive function, accumulation of cloth-wealth to fund these important journeys,

[551] "Harðar saga Grímkelssonar eða Hólmverja saga," 33, 35, 53.
[552] Sverrir Jakobsson, "Politics and Courtly Culture in Iceland, 1200-1700," In *La matière arthurienne tardive en Europe,* ed. Christine Ferlampin-Acher, 733-41 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2020), 734.

but also exclusive as not all social classes could afford such trips, and these were mostly sons of *goðar* and *bændur* but nevertheless demonstrates the significant impact that *vaðmál* had on medieval Iceland's economy and society.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how *vaðmál* functioned as expensive and exclusive textiles, produced according to legal standards as a result of regulation by learned skills and law stipulations, and functioned to facilitate connections. It was expensive and exclusive because of the impact of the large quantity of cloth exported, demonstrating a desire for a durable material good to trade abroad, but also was used as a 'tool' to mark social differences through control of production and consumption but also to navigate domestic and international social systems. The production, consumption, and export of *vaðmál* shows the overlap of 'gendered' roles, that it was important for it to be produced according to legal standards to meet the demands of foreign merchants and kings, something done through regulation at home on the loom and in public in the law. *Vaðmál* facilitated the movement of goods, people, and ideas in and out of Iceland and this allowed Iceland to stay part of the continental cultural milieu, which is seen in developments such as religious changes, book culture, monasticism, designs and techniques in material art like embroidery, and consumer goods, to name a few important ones.

In contrast to Helgi Guðmundsson's emphasis mainly on Greenlandic luxury goods, Icelandic bulk wool trade had a significant impact on Icelandic traders and travellers via their role as expensive quantity and quality wool goods exported as trade goods and travel funds. These goods enabled Icelanders to travel and participate in political, cultural, and martial activities abroad, and this in turn benefited their and their families' lives on return because of the gains (money, contacts, experience, honour) that were made abroad as a result of their trip. While this does not exclude the benefit that luxury goods brought, it is more fruitful to include wool goods in the conversation and to see medieval Icelanders taking advantage of every tool in their toolbox to build their lives and reputation at home and abroad, made possible via *vaðmál* trade goods.

Vaðmál—vara and *hafnarvaðmál—*was a specialty Icelandic product valued domestically and abroad, showing that even 'cheap' textiles played an important role in the mid- to late-medieval trade mechanism. We could even say that *vaðmál* was desired *because* of its wool material, as the examples have proven that wool cloth was a fitting export product for crossing the

North Atlantic. All of the source types provide specific examples where trade ships were wrecked or cargo was lost or damaged in rivers and at sea, which seems not to have been a problem for the recovered *vaðmál* which could be dried out and thus not a financial loss in spite of water damage; of course, a shipwreck at sea would have a different outcome if people and goods were beyond the reach of land and all would be lost, but that would be the difference between a ship wreck and sinking.[553] This perhaps is another answer to the question of why *vaðmál* as commodity currency—its durability and resiliency of its material properties with a high lanolin content made it a reliable domestic and especially international trade good.

This chapter has also shown how Icelanders and Norwegians participated in *vaðmál* trade, exporting goods and travelling with funds, which could have a significant impact on a person, community, and society with the return on that investment. In addition to wool and sheep being an apt resource for medieval Icelanders producing a valued export product to support the in/outflux of people and goods, a key addition to why *vaðmál* was exported is that it gave people, especially the elite, access to foreign luxuries and goods in the elite networks of trust that developed in the burgeoning mercantile networks and increasing institutionalization of society in the medieval period which connected Iceland to the continent, especially the crown with taxes and penalty fees and the church with crusade tithes and other fees.[554] There was increasingly dependent relationship between Iceland and Norway, which was based on a social foundation of trust between traders and Icelanders, that the traders will bring quality products for barter with the promise of return next year from the staple trading places and that Icelanders will provide quality products and have more produced for the next trade voyage.

A significant question, when discussing *vaðmál* as trade goods exchanged abroad, is where, to which markets the cloth would go. Helgi Þorláksson has argued that Norway was the prime market for *vaðmál* until *c.*1430, where it was needed due to limited capability of local production and was used for everyday and outer wear and bedding for urban workers, fishermen, and on

[553] See examples on pp. 164, 165, 167, 173, 175, 180, 183.

[554] Trust and confidence were needed in both directions in the trade of textiles. Continental Europe had more institutions (such as monarchies and towns) that were aimed to reduce risk and instability in trade networks to ensure products to support urban populations, but for Iceland there was some structural support in the form of laws for standardized production, *goðar* and leaders' control of harbours, and perennial journeys of the crown's ships or messengers to collect taxes. This is set in opposition to distrust and corruption that would slow down or disrupt trade and commerce. Kerstin Droß-Krüpe and Marie-Louise Nosch, "Textiles, Trade and Theories: How Scholars Past and Present View and Understand Textile Trade in the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean in Antiquity," in *Textiles, Trade and Theories. From the Ancient Near East to the Mediterranean* eds. Marie-Louise Nosch and Kerstin Droß-Krüpe, 293-329 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 296, 307.

monasteries, plus needed for sails for the kings's navy.[555] Later, German and English merchants played a greater role, beyond that is beyond the timeframe under study here, but it is likely that Icelandic travellers could exchange *vaðmál* for other goods or cash when travelling or trading beyond Norway—as seen in the previous chapter with the crusade tithe that needed to be converted from cloth into more appropriate mediums of gold or silver to be sent Rome—to other peripheries in trade networks.[556] While *vaðmál* is only one type of woollen cloth in an era of multiple known places of production, the primary consumer of this cloth was Norway.

Iceland existed as part of the 'periphery' of the growing trade centres of the medieval period, such as the excavated towns at Birka, Hedeby, or Kaupang in Norway in the earlier Viking Age period, trading cloth for other goods and luxuries, as there is evidence of specialized cloth production in Birka but also evidence of Chinese silk and Byzantine embroideries.[557] Trade also involved the movement of people, especially as seen in the discussion on the *vaðmál*'s role in funding the travels of Icelanders, which in turn means that in addition to the movement of trade goods, there was movement of ideas, technologies, culture, art, fashion, religion, stories, and other intangible concepts that are shared between people when different societies meet at places such as trade centres and nodal points. Both sides of this exchange had an impact on Iceland's history. This sharing of concepts when people meet had a significant impact on Iceland, especially at the time of *vaðmál*'s trading heyday. *Vaðmál* trade coincides with increased papal power and pressure for crusade tithes and also royal power and pressure for owed taxes and fines and exported *vaðmál* for use in Norway. While it was by no means the only good that was exchanged, it was the main export good and therefore can be considered the main funder of this movement of people, products, and ideas, and especially connections to important people, as mentioned in this chapter, such as kings and their royal courts and their cultural norms, religions, and material goods.

We must emphasize the important role that *vaðmál* played here, that *vaðmál* funded these activities—provided the financial means to participate in these activities—and therefore we can see the hugely important impact that this cloth had on society. The impact also came from external

[555] Helgi Þorláksson, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 511.
[556] There is written evidence of ships sailing from Iceland to England, such as the letter from 1224 asking for allowance for ships with merchandise from Iceland (and Scotland, Norway, West Jutland, and Cologne) to be able to land in Yarmouth, England, signed in London. *Diplomatarium Islandicum* 1, 481-82. See especially Helgi Þorláksson, who discusses the possible foreign markets for *vaðmál*, and he states that Sweden and Denmark filled the market for *vaðmál* for England, while Norway was satisfied with Iceland's *vaðmál* to fill their own domestic needs, *Vaðmál og verðlag*, 421-22.
[557] See Eva Andersson Strand, "Tools and textiles—production and organisation in Birka and Hedeby."

influence with changes in the main type of *vaðmál* in response to royal standards which in a way that was beneficial for local production conditions and costs. Therefore, as trade goods *vara* and *hafnarvaðmál* were valued for their expense, the expense due to high quantities traded in Iceland provides a scale of exclusivity, and the impact is that they support the system of power dynamics and social order, especially in its regulation, and also expand what they could access through the accumulation and sale of these textiles, access to the outside world. This shows, therefore, how important it is to look at the whole system working together, not to split into 'male' or 'female' spheres of influence, to show the effect of the work of women, weavers of cloth money and export goods, on medieval Icelandic society: in religion, in politics, in culture. *Vaðmál* and its trade and exchange abroad had a significant impact on the whole of medieval Icelandic society.

Conclusion

This thesis has striven to show how *vaðmál* was a measure of value and commodity currency but functioned in more specific ways than money which shows different kinds of value beyond economic, how these values show the different desires and effects that this cloth had on medieval Icelandic society. This thesis has outlined how *vaðmál* displays these different values, whether material, aesthetic, social connection, economic suitability, or exclusivity, all of which serve to uphold the power and social dynamic of medieval Icelandic society. *Vaðmál* emerged as the cloth commodity currency as a response to society's needs, taking advantage of local natural resources and applying a known cultural textile technology when it needed a locally available medium for currency. Wool was an available resource, as sheep were part of their farming culture and suited to the environment whereas other types of farming were not, and its multifunctional functions developed out of the traditional knowledge and tools of textile production, but also meeting need for pragmatic fabric source for textile to clothe and visual status.

Humans determine what is valuable and valued or not, and that can change over time. For medieval Iceland, it seems to have shifted from Norse silver to medieval cloth to later medieval and early modern fish as the main commodity currencies and measures of value, but with overlapping and changing standards; *vaðmál* was always valued but in different forms and with different terms in different periods. Society chose *vaðmál* and it "powered" the country for centuries, with the indirect power of women via the weaving of money by female producers and supervised by the *húsfreyja*.[558] While cloth might be a female-coded product, *vaðmál* was more than a female product, it represented the totality or cooperation of a range of people in a past society, a textile entangled in and across different sectors of society. The range of uses in various functions seem to indicate that it was adopted because of its ease of use, ease of use in different contexts and ease in ability to produce with the resources and technology that society had available in that environment. The money meaning acted in complement to the cloth meaning, its value nature added extra layers on top of economic value, value for social and aesthetic purposes, which highlights how cloth had various uses and reuses as material object and economic standard over its lifecycle before and after it was "consumed" for making clothing, decorative cloth, or practical cloth.

[558] Mary Beard, *Women and Power,* 87*;* Michèle Hayeur Smith, "Weaving wealth," 28.

The chapters have been divided according to Harris' five principles by which material objects can be desired, showing that the different functions of *vaðmál* can reveal different ways to value textiles, beyond economic or practical value alone. At the same time, multiple values can be held by the same object, whether at once or at different stages in its life cycle as textiles are dynamic and consumable objects, but also these values could be varied or stay the same from person to person. These functions and values can reveal what society desires, values and standards by which its members are judged, in addition to the effects of these desires; in the case of *vaðmál*, the variable functions generally reveal the perceptions of the written sources' authors about what characteristics and standards reflect societal ideals concerning status, identity, and social roles.

Vaðmál was conceptualized as cloth and money in these sources, functioning as material object valued for its woollen properties, used as the primary type of fabric to meet their clothing needs. The contexts of cloth use demonstrate that the material composition fit within the lifestyle and activities of daily life, a pragmatic fabric suited to the variable, wet, windy, and cold weather of the North Atlantic and outdoors or at-sea work of travelling, fishing, and sailing. The literature with these examples of wool clothing shows early settlers responding to their new environment, adapting their farming traditions to heavily rely on sheep farming and process that wool using the technology of traditional textile spinning and weaving techniques to clothe themselves or use that cloth for other purposes such as bedding, tents, or sails. The functions of this cloth in these examples tell how society fulfilled its own needs, but also what those specific needs were, the need for clothing that would keep them warm and dry and that was also readily accessible for a range of people, young and old, poor and wealthy, who were using fine and coarse cloth(ing).

Vaðmál also functioned as representing aesthetic value in these sources, serving to visually communicate messages of status concerning age, gender, and group association. Textiles act as narrative devices to tell subtext about the characters whose actions are being described, an additional layer that would have been understood by the audience of the stories or biographical accounts. They serve to communicate messages of sensory appeal that assert or subvert messages of what is considered luxurious, symbols of wealth and power, or belonging to the top social class. In the case of *vaðmál*, it could be used as a visual code to assert a message of the everyday, the ordinary life of an Icelandic farmer, in opposition to other materials or colourful fabric that would have been imported and reflect fancy cloth such as *skrúðklæði* or clothing suited belonging to members of the Norwegian royal court, yet it was also worn by *goðar* and thus represents clothing

suited to all Icelanders, and could be considered to represent "Icelandic-ness" or the provincial abroad as well.

Vaðmál, in perhaps its most obvious function, textiles acting as the medium of exchange or unit of account, emphasizing its fungibility value in that it was part of the system of exchange for other goods and services as a standardized, legal unit of currency, but one that adapted to changing internal and external variables with the shift from *vara-* to *hafnarvaðmál*-type. The examples discussed in that chapter demonstrate the ease of use of this cloth commodity currency and the wide range of contexts in which it could be used, ranging from the purchase of farm supplies to payment of various dues or fees, to the valuation of property to indicate one's qualification for rights or responsibilities. In this case, the examples show how *vaðmál*'s role as the medium of payment for tithes, taxes, fines, tolls, and compensation was connected to power dynamics in the use of product that was due to householder's mobilization of labour for the production of this economic resource, but also the control of standards in the regulations concerning legal cloth, a product that also measured their access to power and politics.[559] *Vaðmál*'s value lay in its flexible and accessible role accessible across all sectors of society from poor and dependents to bishops and *goðar*. It also used as a tool of elite households, authority figures, and institutions to obtain, maintain, and enhance their position in society.

Vaðmál's fourth function was acting as a social textile, a material object that created or maintained connections between people and places. This cloth functioned in a socioeconomic sense in exchanges, creating both connections between cloth objects and socially significant people, especially in the case of gifts from high-status men like bishops and kings to their followers, and could be regifted or inherited and so creating secondary connections across generations to the illustrious ancestors who made those original connections. It also functioned to create a relationship, often one of obligation, between two parties with the exchange of textiles. This was seen in the case of payments of inheritance and various payments for marriage arrangement, either creating, maintaining, or emphasizing relationships between families, across generations, or between a social superior and inferior. In these cases, the exchange was beneficial to both parties, either to gain an ally, improve their social position vis-à-vis another, or use the transaction as a public declaration of wealth or status or association with a holy person. In this function, *vaðmál* was often used as a tool by elite families to obtain and maintain a superior

[559] Jane Schneider, "The Anthropology of Cloth," 409, 412.

position in society, or at least this is how it is presented in the literature, in addition to maintaining ecclesiastical networks within and outside of Iceland.

Last is *vaðmál*'s function as an expensive and exclusive cloth, despite its ordinary nature. Textile skills are learned skills and tools and technology varied by culture and the amount that can be produced (quantity) is limited by production means, but also by access to tools and raw resources. This knowledge and know-how were part of the informal female education system and was training most often passed along mother to daughter, and these were among the essential knowledge and skills needed for household provisioning to meet their own and surplus cloth and clothing needs, but also served as a marker of the higher status of the *húsfreyja* in her role in supervising her household's production of cloth for sale and trade. The legal standardization of *vaðmál* shows the transplanting of culturally Norse (and Celtic) production techniques in a new environment to meet clothing needs based on the available labour pool, using their textile skills and embodied knowledge to transform and everyday cloth into a valuable trade product and exchange value. There had to be some sort of surplus to be able to use it to purchase goods domestically and exchange for imports, and the material properties of this cloth seemed suitable for transport across a wet, volatile ocean. The export of *vaðmál* was another way that this cloth was used as a tool to build and maintain power relations, used to demonstrate wealth and position in the ability to purchase foreign imports but also to travel abroad, which in itself was a means for individuals to build prestige, honour, connections to important people and places abroad, and bring back wealth on their return to Iceland, all via an expensive quality and quantity wool trade good.

These various functions of this complex textile reveal information about what medieval Icelandic society desired. It needed cloth that enhanced their people's ability to act in typical activities and the local environment, it needed material for clothing that could act in aesthetic ways to project an visual codes of identity and status that would influence the perception of themselves and the behaviour of others, it needed a material to act as a medium of exchange for economic and extra-economic transactions, and it needed a trade good that could be exchanged for items abroad and facilitate the movement of people, goods, and ideas. *Vaðmál* was able to meet all those needs.

These multiple functions reflect economic, cultural, social, and religious value systems of medieval Icelandic culture. It tells the contexts where people spent money and on what, demonstrating financial pathways. It shows cultural traditions in terms of textile production itself and also what tools and weave types were chosen to be used. Various exchanges show connections

between people, whether between social equals or not, showing common familial or community responsibilities and obligations, including those in burgeoning ecclesiastical institutions, or demonstrating what personal qualities or characteristics of people were held in esteem in society. Intra-societal trade and exchange demonstrates the importance of retained connections to Norway and Europe and its markets for Iceland, that it was never as isolated socially and economically as it was geographically, seen in changing fashions and *vaðmál* standards and terms. These various functions and values also reflect the use of space in terms of gender and labour relations, in terms of male or female oriented spaces and cultural norms, rather, they show cooperation and shared spaces divided according to being inside and outside of the family and household.

The impact of these functions and desires was especially seen in its use as a tool by people to meet goals and to help them live their lives. It was an object used to differentiate oneself in power relations, it was used to help people do their work and protect their bodies while in cold, wet, or bad weather, it was a tool used to form relationships, it was a tool used to communicate various identities and statuses within society (and beyond, on the continent), and finally it was a tool used to connect Iceland to Norway and thence to markets and cultures further abroad. In many of these ways it served to build wealth and, or as a result, prestige and political authority within Iceland.

Multiple values could be held for *vaðmál*, separately or at the same time and by the same or different people, whether seen explicitly through the writing of the author or in subtext, as functional cloth suited to the local environment and society's needs for clothing and currency. Ultimately, these values show cooperation for survival and success, but also to establish social position and prestige in society. Separating the two meanings, cloth and money, only limits our understanding of this cloth product in its social and economic context.

It is also interesting to note that these two meanings have connotations that align with the theory of separate spheres, that men worked in the public sphere and were concerned with things economic, and women worked separately in the private sphere and were concerned with labour such as cloth production. This separation aligns with what has previously been elevated to importance in the study of *vaðmál*, that it was significant <u>because</u> of its economic role, and <u>despite</u> its ordinariness as its stems from household production and is not anything special or valuable in itself. This view is very much informed by modern values of cloth, something considered easily accessible, disposable, and replaceable—especially as Western consumers (such as the author) are

geographically distant from our clothing's manufacturing centres in the global south and largely undisturbed by its climate impact or the dangerous, toxic consequences of modern textile production. These two contrasts, cloth and money and home and economy, have been represented in the history of the medieval period (including Iceland's) as separate and distinguishable. Yet this object, *vaðmál* is connected to both and this study aims to show the inseparability of both of these two binaries in the past, that life in the past was more cooperative and intertwined that has thus far been represented. There are limitations to historical representation when we retain the separation between the meaning of *vaðmál* as cloth and money, whereas the aim here was to demonstrate that it is inseparable.

While this thesis attempted to be comprehensive in its search for *vaðmál* references, it is not useful to compare numbers or frequency of use because the nature of the source material is not representative and such analysis would be futile. It is not known how many manuscripts were lost and the nature and intentions of these different sources are different (narrative, legal, political, religious), but we can compare how it was used in sources, what the authors were trying to say in their use of the term *vaðmál* in how this cloth and its monetary conception were used in the past and can compare it to the evidence from archeological evidence for when this type of cloth actually existed and when it reflected the peak standardization period. Thus, the medieval authors might have been retroactively applying the term for economic contexts in the family sagas, but that does not negate the possibility of cloth and such standard values occurring organically before it was formally legislated, as cloth is a universal item and was used in barter and trade in other nonmarket societies; what was unusual here that it was so standardized and regulated. This is a farming society using farming resources to produce local pragmatic fabric source, but in a way that also allowed the accumulation of wealth (via property or material display) to build prestige, status, and capital for secular and ecclesiastical leader and landowners. Here we can see the mutual influence and impact of material objects in virtually all aspects of medieval life. Cloth is the fabric of civilization, the material object that was the thread entangled in the various sectors of society through its function as a cloth commodity currency.

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