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Nordic Witchcraft in Transition:

Impotence, Heresy, and Diabolism in 14th-century Bergen

Introduction

Within the orbit of witchcraft, what is the relationship between sexuality, heresy, and diabolism? Since the early history of Christianity in Europe, these topics have increasingly come to be viewed “like three sides to a triangle,” to use Evans-Pritchard’s famous formulation concerning Zande witchcraft, oracles, and magic.¹ This symbiosis, already in evidence in the early Middle Ages, intensified as the later medieval world experienced an ever increasing eroticization and diabolization of witchcraft. Whereas accusations in the earliest reliable sources suggest relatively simple *maleficia*, such as drying up cows, raising storms, and murder, the charges of the early modern period maintain that these same crimes, and much worse, are now committed by the sabbat-attending, baby-murdering, licentious harlots into which the medieval *strigæ* have been transformed. Age-old slanders, especially slanders involving sexual license, which had traditionally been used against groups at odds with the dominant society – at first, against Christians themselves, and later, against the Cathars, Waldensians and other heretics – were recycled to fit the emerging image of devil-worshipping, congregational witches.² In Scandinavia, this transformation is most notable in the “Journey to Blåkulla” complex that develops already by the early 15th century,³ but there is a much earlier Nordic case from 1324–25 that brings together some, at least, of these items, and raises interesting questions concerning the association of witchcraft with heresy, diabolism, and issues of sexuality in the Scandinavian context.

Our understanding of the European witchcraft phenomenon in all its manifold details – its accusations, crazes, and so on – has undergone remarkable reevaluation in recent decades, and certainly the study of Nordic witchcraft has been profoundly influenced and energized by it.⁴ Overwhelmingly, however, the numerous recent studies of the witchcraft phenomenon in Scandinavia have focussed on the post-Reformation situation, where the extent of the persecutions is great, the imprint of elite witchcraft ideology imported from the Continent readily apparent, and the documentation and data substantial.⁵ Witchcraft in the Viking Period and the Middle Ages, on the other hand, has proved a largely

elusiveness, generally being seen as a shadowy survival of Norse heathendom.⁶

What has been substantially ignored is the “missing link,” that is, an account of events in the later medieval period, particularly in the non-insular Scandinavian areas: specifically, an examination of how elite and non-elite, native and imported understandings of witchcraft evolve during the three centuries before the Reformation, an era during which attitudes toward witchcraft change markedly in the North. *The Older Law of Gulaping*, for example, in a manuscript from ca. 1250, but believed to go back to originals approximately a century older, calls for those who practice witchcraft to be exiled; yet the corresponding section in a manuscript from the first half of the 14th century, now demands capital punishment for those guilty of witchcraft or of “riding a man” (*riði mann*).⁷ Attitudes of all sorts begin to harden in this period: whereas many of the native terms used for witches and witchcraft (e.g., *trollkona*, *galdrakona*, *vísindamaðr*, *skratti*; *fjólkyngi*, *margfræði*, *görningar*) carry no easily or clearly assailable moral implications, 14th-century belief is explicit in its association of witchcraft with heresy (e.g., *trolskaps synd är at stridha mot gudz budhi* ‘the sin of witchcraft is [its] struggle against God’s commandments’).⁸ In exploring the evolution of the witchcraft triptych – sexuality, heresy, and diabolism – in the Nordic area, there is much to be learned from a Norwegian case involving an accused witch by the name of Ragnhildr Tregagás.

Events in Bergen 1324–25

In the winter of 1325, Bishop Auðfinnr of the Norwegian city of Bergen faced a dilemma: how was he to respond to growing rumors about the behavior of a certain Ragnhildr, who, it was reliably and widely reported, had renounced God, fallen into heretical beliefs, and used magic in an attempt to preserve her adulterous and incestuous relationship with her cousin Bárðr?⁹ The documentation of this case consists of Bishop Auðfinnr’s original “proclamation” (*De quadam lapsa in heresim Ragnilda Tregagaas*) and his subsequent “sentence” (*Alia in eodem crimine*), preserved in transcriptions of the bishopric’s “protocol-book.”¹⁰

In his complaint of February 1325, Auðfinnr notes the following: 1) That gossip about Ragnhildr’s lapses and character had been heard week after week; 2) That he could not with a good conscience allow such public discussion to continue without investigation; 3) That although she denied the allegations in a meeting on the 28th of January, 1325, when confronted with witnesses on the 5th of February who swore that Ragnhildr had on the 3rd of November, 1324 freely confessed to her crimes, she admitted that she had concealed in Bárðr’s and Bergljót’s bridal bed on the first night of the wedding, 5 loaves and 5 peas, as well as a sword, and uttered an incantation. When examined again on the 8th of February, Auðfinnr continues, Ragnhildr admitted to the following: 1) That the testimony of the witnesses was correct; 2) That she had, while her husband

was still alive, four times had carnal relations with Bárðr, to whom she was related in the third and third degree; 3) That she had denied God and given herself over to the Devil in order to sow discord and rancor between Bárðr and Bergljót; 4) That she, at the incitement of the Devil, had recited this curse – “I cast from me Gandul’s spirits. May one bite you in the back; may another bite you in the breast; may the third stir up in you hatred and ill-will” (*Ritt ek i fra mer gondols ondu. æin þer i bak biti annar i briost þer biti þridi snui uppa þik hæimt oc ofund*) – after which one was to spit on the individual concerned; 5) That due to Ragnhildr’s actions, Bárðr rejected Bergljót and went to Hálogaland, whence Ragnhildr prepared to go as quickly as she possibly could; 6) That her claims to have power over Bárðr’s life and death if he failed to follow her will in everything was due to the fact that her husband would kill him for his adulterous and incestuous relationship with her; 7) That she, on the second day of the wedding, in mockery of the bridegroom had an outburst, expressing her happiness that because of witchcraft, Bárðr would be impotent; 8) That she, on the first night of the wedding and without the knowledge of the bride and bridegroom, concealed herself in the bedroom next to the bed; and 9) That she had learned the heretical incantations in her youth from Sörli Sukk.

The sentence meted out to Ragnhildr is restrained, especially when set against the practice of fierce justice in the post-Reformation period. Bishop Auðfinnr concludes that Ragnhildr’s crimes center on her use of a charm and the heresy thereby involved, as well as on her attempts to destroy Bárðr’s marriage to Bergljót. He notes that Ragnhildr has long been kept imprisoned in fetters, where, after much fasting and prayers, she looks for an appropriate punishment. Auðfinnr then says that it must be taken into account that he is told by reliable individuals that at the time of the crimes, Ragnhildr was not in full command of her faculties. He will, therefore, soften his judgement, in accord with the advice and entreaties of his fellow clerics and other prelates, citing the admonition, “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die... and not rather that he should return from his ways and live?” (*Ezekiel 18:23*). After all, the bishop notes, the law itself would not look for grace to be denied where someone had but once fallen into such wrongful ways. Assured by her oath to repudiate such activities, the Bishop proscribes a set of fasts (several a week) for the rest of her life and a seven-year pilgrimage to visit holy sites outside of Norway. If Ragnhildr fails in any respect, she is to be regarded as having relapsed in heresy and turned over to the secular courts.

Curses and Male Members

In Nordic sources, witchcraft is generally intertwined with other taboo topics, especially sex: it cannot, for example, be mere coincidence that the sections of the Norwegian law codes dealing with witchcraft, bestiality, and heathen sacrifice follow one after the other in most manuscripts. So close was, or became, the

association between witchcraft and sexual license, that by the close of the medieval period, *trolle hus* (lit., ‘troll or witch house’) could be used in Swedish to mean ‘whorehouse.’¹¹ And it is telling that one of the last events related about the Norse colony on Greenland concerns the seduction of a woman through the use of magic, the burning of the seducer-witch, and the woman’s apparent madness as a result.¹²

In the context of the sexual use of magic, the curious episode of Ragnhildr Tregagás has principally attracted attention from researchers interested in the nature of her curse.¹³ By far the most important of these contributions has been that of Ohrt, who identifies several parallels, including a strikingly similar German curse from a trial in 1407.¹⁴ Although there remain sharply opposed opinions about details,¹⁵ it is clear that the curse falls neatly into the tradition of Nordic *maledicti*. Moreover, the substance of the accusations against Ragnhildr – her attempt to keep her lover from consummating a union with another woman through enchantment – foreshadows what will become a common charge against witches in Europe. Both the *Malleus maleficarum* and the *Compendium maleficarum*, for example, explore in some detail the ability of witches to prevent coitus through ligature (i.e., the ability to effect impotence through magic), including at least some anecdotes where a witch prevents her lover from leaving her for another woman.¹⁶ Page after page, wondrous anatomical theories fill and inform these works, but no discussion is more striking than the following from the *Malleus maleficarum*:

And what, then, is to be thought of those witches who in this way sometimes collect male organs in great numbers, as many as twenty or thirty members together, and put them in a bird’s nest, or shut them up in a box, where they move themselves like living members, and eat oats and corn, as has been seen by many and is a matter of common report? It is to be said that it is all done by devil’s work and illusion, for the senses of those who see them are deluded in the way we have said. For a certain man tells that, when he had lost his member, he approached a known witch to ask her to restore it to him. She told the afflicted man to climb a certain tree, and that he might take which he liked out of a nest in which there were several members. And when he tried to take a big one, the witch said: You must not take that one; adding, because it belonged to a parish priest.¹⁷

What, indeed, is to be thought of those witches? Although this picture may with some justice be dismissed as yet another extreme view of witchcraft from the *Malleus maleficarum* – Kieckhefer, for example, characterizes this tale of the captive penises as “atypical”¹⁸ – the fear of women capable of rendering male genitalia ineffectual is routinely brought up by Ivo of Chartres, Thomas Aquinas and other theologians.

In 1189, the Norwegian archbishop, Eiríkr, maintains in a letter to the Icelandic bishops that if a couple cannot cohabit, then such a condition has to do either with witchcraft (*med giorningvm*) or with an inherited disease.¹⁹ The question of such conjugal problems, usually referred to as *hǫrundfall*, is often taken up in medieval Norwegian laws.²⁰ Its specific manifestation as male

impotence as a result of female manipulation is known elsewhere in medieval Scandinavian sources. One of Stockholm's fifteenth-century 'loose women' (*lösa quinnor*), for example, Margit halffstop, admits that she has, through the use of magic, removed a fellow's manhood 'where he had stood and urinated' (*ther hand hade standit och giort watn fran sigh*).²¹

Native literary monuments also indicate a preoccupation with fecundity, phalluses, and sexual dysfunction. *Volsa þáttr*, for example, describes a Norwegian fertility cult and its worship of a horse phallus. Scholars have been at some pains to determine the place, if any, of *Volsa þáttr* in Old Norse religion, but there can be little doubt but that, whether the story is traditional or a conversion tale of more recent coinage, this late fourteenth-century text speaks reams about our topic here.²² The eddic *Hávamál* (v. 113–14) contains a specific admonition against copulation with witches, although whether it evinces this same fear of emasculation or impotence is unclear:

folkkunnigri kono	scalattu í faðmi sofa,	[in a witch's arms	beware of sleeping,
svá at hon lyki þic liðom;		linking thy limbs with hers.	

hon svá gorir,	at þú gáir eigi	She will cast her spell	that thou carest not to go
þings né þioðans máls;		to meetings where men are gathered;	
mat þú villat	né mannczis gaman,	unmindful of meat,	and mirthless, thou goest,
ferr þú sorgafullr at sofa.		and seekest thy bed in sorrow.] ²³	

A most striking instance of “art imitating life” is found in *Njáls saga*, when the Norwegian queen Gunnhildr curses her soon-to-be-former Icelandic paramour Hrútr. Gunnhildr's reputation, a potent blend of sexuality and power which has led at least one scholar to label her the prototypical “Destructive Prima Donna,”²⁴ is fully developed in Nordic sources as that of the “compleat witch” – she has studied magic with the Finns, does not hesitate to poison her political enemies, and is described as “a very beautiful woman, shrewd and skilled in magic, friendly of speech, but full of deceit and cruelty” (*kvinnna fegrst, vitr ok margkunnig, glaðmælt ok undirhyggjumaðr mikill ok in grimmast*).²⁵ When Hrútr discloses to her that he wishes to return to Iceland, but denies that any woman awaits him there, Gunnhildr assists him in gaining the king's leave to depart, but then places an enchantment on him:

Hon tók hendinni um háls honum ok kyssti hann ok mælti: “Ef ek á svá mikit vald á þér sem ek ætla, þá legg ek þat á við þik, at þú megir engri munúð fram koma við konu þá, er þú ætlar þér á Íslandi, en fremja skalt þú mega vilja þinn við aðrar konur. Ok hefir nú hvárki okkat vel: þú trúðir mér eigi til málsins.”

[She put her arms around his neck and kissed him, and said, “If I have as much power over you as I think, the spell I now lay on you will prevent your ever enjoying the woman in Iceland on whom you have set your heart. With other women you may have your will, but never with her. And now you must suffer as well as I, since you did not trust me with the truth.”]²⁶

When Hrútr subsequently returns to Iceland and marries Unnr, things do not turn out well for the newlyweds and when after several aborted attempts to divorce herself from Hrútr fail, Unnr finally divulges to her father, Mǫrdr, the reasons for her marital dissatisfaction:

Þá mælti Mǫrdr til dóttur sinnar: “Seg þú mér nú allt þat, er á meðal ykkar er, ok lát þér þat ekki í augu vaxa.” “Svá mun vera verða,” segir hon. “Ek vilda segja skilit við Hrút, ok má ek segja þér, hverja sök ek má helzt gefa honum. Hann má ekki hjúskaparfar eiga við mik, svá at ek mega njóta hans, en hann er at allri náttúru sinni annarri sem inir vöskustu menn.” “Hversu má svá vera?” segir Mǫrdr, “ok seg enn gǫrr.” Hon svarar: “Þegar hann kemr við mik, þá er hǫrund hans svá mikit, at hann má ekki eptirlæti hafa við mik, en þó hofum vit bæði breytnt til þess á alla vega, at vit mættim njótast, en þat verðr ekki. En þó áðr vit skilim, sýnir hann þat af sér, at hann er í æði sínu rétt sem aðrir menn.”

[Then Mord said to his daughter, “Now tell me everything about your relationship, and let nothing deter you.” “Very well,” said Unn. “I want to divorce Hrut, and I can tell you the exact grounds I have against him. He is unable to consummate our marriage and give me satisfaction, although in every other way he is as virile as the best of men.” “What do you mean?” asked Mord. “Be more explicit.” Unn replied, “Whenever he touches me, he is so enlarged that he cannot have enjoyment of me, although we both passionately desire to reach consummation. But we have never succeeded. And yet, before we draw apart, he proves that he is by nature as normal as other men.”]²⁷

Thus, we find a very close parallel to our historical event from the 1320s in a saga written some 40 years earlier,²⁸ namely, jealous women who in both instances curse *the men's* genitals in such a way that the weddings between their paramours and rivals cannot be consummated, although the specific results of the spells could apparently not be more dissimilar. And, there are substantial “technical” differences as well: Gunnhildr appears capable of placing a pox on Hrútr through her embrace, kiss, and words, whereas Ragnhildr employs a rather elaborate set of verbal (i.e., the curse) and physical (i.e., the sword, peas, loaves, and spittle) anaphrodisiacs. If, indeed, *Njáls saga* presents an abbreviated version of this same curse complex, the reason may be purely pragmatic and pedagogical, or perhaps because the writer’s knowledge is imperfect.²⁹ In either case, it represents an exquisitely poignant reminder of the wide-spread belief in, and fear of, magically empowered women, as well as a useful point of departure for considering the historical events in Bergen half a century later. The Gunnhildr and Hrútr episode in *Njáls saga* unquestionably indicates that Ragnhildr’s behavior fit an already-, and perhaps well-, established pattern of what female witches were believed to engage in.³⁰ What does not seem to fit the expected pattern is Bishop Auðfinnr’s reaction to events.

Events in Bergen Considered and Reconsidered

We know a number of important details about the man in whose hands Ragnhildr's case rested: Auðfinnr succeeded to the bishop's seat in Bergen after his brother, Áрни, and in so doing became a player in one of the major conflicts facing the Norwegian church at this time, *viz.* – the status of the royal chapels (*de kongelige kappeller*) *vis-à-vis* the bishopric.³¹ With his background as a student in France, probably at Orléans, Auðfinnr was well-prepared for the major legal conflict in which he became embroiled as bishop, and was, one can assume, acquainted with prevailing views on witchcraft.³² In addition to the question of the royal chapels, Auðfinnr was inevitably caught up in the rising popular passions surrounding the execution of the so-called “false Margrét,” and issued a proclamation in 1320 against what were fast becoming popular pilgrimages to the site of her burning near Bergen.³³ Morality and social order were also topics of immediate and great moment: a picture of the situation facing the bishop as he dealt with Ragnhildr's case can be had from several documents from Bishop Auðfinnr's very busy calendar of early 1325. In the same month in which he addresses the witchcraft case, Auðfinnr adjudicates another accusation of incest, evidently in the context of a disputed inheritance.³⁴ In March, he judges that a certain Eiríkr must accept Þomhilda as his wife after a long period of cohabitation.³⁵ Later (1325 or 1326), he addresses a case of deception, abduction, and adultery on a grand scale (*Repeticio uxori de adulterio*).³⁶ The nearly-contemporary runic inscriptions from Bergen bear out this image of a bawdy, even licentious, society.³⁷

Anachronistically, it may be noted that toward the end of the fourteenth century, Bergen's Danish-born bishop, Jakob Jensen, decries “...the impure and sinful life which is in Bergen, and above all, the amount of promiscuity here which is greater in this little city than in any comparably sized place in all Christendom...” (...*þat oreinligt ok sundalight liferne þar i Bergvin er ok allre meir einn nú sem er frilla lifverne þar meri ofvitz her j þessum litla stadenum. en nokrum jafn storum j ollum kristindominum...*).³⁸ He notes further in this jeremiad that “the daughters of good men are being spoiled and dishonored” (...*jungfrur godra manna dettr skemmazt ok vanheidrazt...*) by this behavior.³⁹ Although this Sodomese view of Bergen comes several generations after the Ragnhildr case, already in the early decades of the century, a similar clerical concern for private mores and public behavior can be discerned in the relevant portions of *Hauksbók*, a manuscript with well-established ties to Bergen in the early fourteenth century. One of *Hauksbók*'s sermons is entirely dedicated to questions of whoredom and illegitimate births (*þeir drygia hordom saman fyst oc gera born saman*), and warnings against diabolism and witchcraft (*af galdra monnom eða af gerninga monnum. þeim er með taufr fara eða með lyfeða með spar þúi at þat er fianda villa oc diofuls þionasta*), including a reference to women who use sexual magic on their men “that they should then love them well” (*En þer ero sumar konor er gera drycki oc gefa gilmonnum sinum. til þess at þeir skili*

þa unna þeim væl).⁴⁰ Although we cannot be certain that this sermon had specific application to Bergen at this moment, it is deeply concerned about the dangers of magic, paganism, diabolical activity, witchcraft and licentiousness, and the clergy was evidently taking steps to address the problem.

The destruction of the Knights Templar a few years before the case of Ragnhildr Tregagás is often cited in witchcraft literature as a development critical to the formulation of elite views of witchcraft, such as initiation through the renunciation of Christianity, rampant and raucous sexual practices (especially homosexuality), and Devil worship, in particular the so-called Devil's Pact.⁴¹ That Bishop Auðfinnr, the former student at Orléans, could have allowed Ragnhildr's crimes to be dismissed so lightly – especially in view of Auðfinnr's explicit association of Ragnhildr's behavior with heresy and a Devil's Pact – has often been viewed by modern critics as a sign of his tempered and enlightened rationalism, a sort of last medieval outpost of the critical spirit with which the *Canon episcopi* of Regino of Prüm and the penitential of Burchard of Worms are supposedly imbued, and which we are not to see again until Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* in 1584 (e.g., Berulfsen's view that “[Auðfinnr's] prohibition against worship of the false Margrét and his intervention in the case of Ragnhildr Tregagás can certainly be seen as an enlightened and rational cultural figure's opposition to the superstitions of the period, an outlook which does him honor”).⁴² In fact, we will only understand Auðfinnr's decision, and Ragnhildr's case as a whole, if we explore it against the tangled backdrop of Bergen politics and popular attitudes in the 1320s.

The dispute between the bishopric and the royal chapels, a critical chapter in Norwegian church history, developed after 1308, when Pope Clement V, following the urging of King Hákon V, granted certain privileges to the Norwegian royal chapels, fourteen in all, five of them within the Bergen bishopric. Among these privileges, the priest in charge of the Church of the Apostles was named “Dean of the Royal Chapels” (*magister capellarum*), and allowed the trappings of a bishop.⁴³ Troubles quickly arose between the Royal Chapels and the bishopric, and in 1311, the Pope and Guido de Bayio responded to some of these issues, including a refutation of the idea that the Dean of the Royal Chapels would be allowed to judge the members of the Royal Chapels where anything other than major sins and crimes were involved.⁴⁴ As difficult as the situation was under Bishop Árni, tensions reached a new level in the relationship between Finnur Halldórsson, Dean of the Royal Chapels, and Bishop Auðfinnr,⁴⁵ especially with regard to the question of parish borders and the freedom of the Royal Chapel clergy to operate outside the chapels themselves.⁴⁶ Many images of this conflict could be adduced, but none better captures this ecclesiastical “turf war” than does the case of Bótólfr Hákonsson, a canon from Niðarós and formerly *fehírde* ‘royal treasurer’ in Bergen, who attacked a parish priest during High Mass at the Church of the Apostles during Lent in 1320. The latter was preparing to read aloud Bishop Auðfinnr's proclamation concerning worship of the “false Margrét,” when Bótólfr apparently knocked him off the stool on which

he was standing and held him fast, thereby preventing him from reading the proclamation, which course of action Bótólfr evidently undertook, to judge from his remarks, in order to keep the regular clergy from participating in any degree at the Royal Chapels.⁴⁷ Little wonder then, given the fact that King Hákon had just died (1319) and was succeeded by the three-year-old Magnús Eiríksson, that the authority of the clerics at the Royal Chapels was quickly curtailed and limited to the care of the souls of the royal family itself and its close circles.⁴⁸

Bishop Auðfinnr thus emerges from his numerous entries in the bishopric's "protocol-book" as an outstanding figure, an active leader and a vigorous defender of the prerogatives of his bishopric, but what do we know of Ragnhildr? No satisfactory answer to this question has thus far emerged, although the interesting suggestion has been made that her cognomen *tregagás* should be understood as the genitive (singular or plural) of *tregi* 'difficulty' or 'reluctance' (also 'grief, woe, sorrow') with *gás* 'goose' in the nominative.⁴⁹ The similarity between Ragnhildr and the story of the witch, Þórdís, in *Kormáks saga*, is striking: it is Þórdís who attempts to undo the spell on Kormákr, a glamour which continually frustrates the romance between the saga's eponymous hero and Steingerðr, with a counter-spell that includes the sacrifice of three geese. This explanation appears compelling, but can be refined slightly: ON *gás* was also used for that part of female anatomy most relevant to this discussion, Latin *cunnus*.⁵⁰ Thus, the byname *tregagás* might appropriately mean either 'goose of difficulty' or 'pudendum of difficulty,' interpretations with obvious applications to both our historical event of 1325 and such situations as those in *Kormáks saga*. Either the name was a well-earned sobriquet conferred on Ragnhildr because of her professional calling or it was something of more recent coinage resulting from the peccadillo of the previous year. It should be borne in mind that Auðfinnr says Ragnhildr has fallen into wrongful ways but once – thus it is unlikely that Ragnhildr has acquired her nickname as an occupational title. More probably, it is a derisive cognomen conferred on her by the same populace whose rumblings call Auðfinnr to action in the first place.

In his important proclamations, Auðfinnr often relies on, or claims additional authority through, the opinions of those whom he variously describes as wise men, learned men, or men of standing:⁵¹ in the case of his proclamation concerning the "false Margrét," for example, Auðfinnr refers to such counselors as 'the wisest men in the country' (*the wissiste mend i landitt*). In his consideration of Ragnhildr, Auðfinnr makes several similar references to just such notable consultation, on whose judgement he relies. Moreover, he mentions a number of what he calls 'distinguished men' (*discretos viros*) who witness the questioning of Ragnhildr at the refectory in Fusa and testify to her earlier admissions, although we know so good as nothing about them otherwise. He does not typically use such language, or such procedures, in dealing with domestic issues, suggesting the conclusion that there was something unusual in this case, either because of the severity of the situation or because of the participants.⁵²

Ragnhildr was to meet Bárðr in Hálogaland in northern Norway as quickly

as she could, but the initial hearing was held in Fusa, a location to the southeast of Bergen in Hordaland, across Svinningen on the opposite shore of Fusafjord. There is little reason to believe that Ragnhildr made it this far on the way out of Bergen to meet Bárðr in Hálógaland, as her movements in that case would naturally have taken her in the opposite direction. We may then reasonably understand her questioning in Fusa as indicating that she was apprehended there either because she was on a circuitous route to meet her erst-while lover, or because she was attempting to escape prosecution by the authorities or the families of the couple.⁵³ To do so may be taking the data too far – after all, Ragnhildr may as easily have been connected with the area in other ways, including the possibility that she lived or had property in the vicinity – but if she was pursued and caught, it suggests that her social standing, and Bárðr’s, was important enough to warrant such a dramatic move. Such a supposition would help explain Bishop Auðfinnr’s care in using “distinguished men” in the questioning process, as well as the fact that he feels compelled to address the wide-spread rumors that are sweeping Bergen. Indeed, it would help explain why there would have been rumors in the first place, especially gossip that would have reached the influential circles to which Auðfinnr refers – surely the behavior of a peasant or other unimportant person would fail to merit such attention. Moreover, such a reading would explain why the bishop takes such exaggerated care to note that it is because of the high degree of evidence that Ragnhildr is being held in custody, but only in an area for those suspected of crimes, and not in the area for those convicted of wrong-doing. Finally, such a supposition would also explain why we know so many details about this one case, when we know nothing at all about any other specific instance of witchcraft in Norway before the Reformation.⁵⁴ It is inconceivable that this case was the only occasion on which a charge of witchcraft was brought before the Norwegian ecclesiastical courts throughout the Middle Ages – surely some other reason explains why it is the one instance treated in medieval Norwegian records.

How would our understanding of events be altered, then, if we were to assume that collectively, these details suggest that Ragnhildr was someone of status, indeed, someone of sufficient station to be of proper concern to the Royal Chapels? In this case, Auðfinnr simply could not let the case go unaddressed because of its high visibility, and yet he would want to show leniency at every turn (especially as he was at this time engaged in some serious maneuvering with Princess Ingibjorg, the Queen Mother),⁵⁵ a willingness to confer with fellow ecclesiastics, and a desire to keep the case within his purview. Should Ragnhildr break the conditions of her release, Auðfinnr specifies that the case should be transferred to the *secular* courts, which suggests that he is ensuring that should the issue come up again, the case would stay out of the hands of the Royal Chapels. Likewise, his insistence on labeling Ragnhildr’s crimes a heresy may well derive from his interest in keeping the case within his own jurisdiction. We are perhaps justified in asking again, who is this Ragnhildr?

There is, in fact, a candidate who would fit the profile just sketched very

nicely, known to us elsewhere as Ragnhildr, “the housewife of Skjolgen” (*Ragnhildar huspræyiu j Skiolghenne*),⁵⁶ who, in March of 1327, enters into an agreement with the canons of Niðarós Cathedral according to which her son, Bárðr [!], will attend school daily for 6 years and eat at the brothers’ table, in consideration for which, Ragnhildr deeds to the canons twenty-two estates and other properties, principally in Trøndelag. Such arrangements were not unusual, although the 6-year specification appears to be without precedent.⁵⁷ Moreover, she signs the deed on behalf of her son, and nowhere is her husband mentioned, suggesting the twin possibilities that her son is young and that her husband is dead or otherwise out of the picture. One is reminded of Auðfinnr’s remark that Ragnhildr had slept with Bárðr while her husband was still alive. This comment should no doubt be understood to mean that he has since died. Extensive holdings in Trøndelag would also help explain Ragnhildr Tregagás’s urge to flee with her lover northward in Norway, and properties of the sort mentioned in the agreement would accord well with the social standing other circumstances suggest. If Ragnhildr was pregnant at the time of Bishop Auðfinnr’s judgement, this possibility would explain why she has not yet left on her seven-year sojourn, and perhaps we get a hint of this condition in Auðfinnr’s remark about Ragnhildr’s mental (and physical?) condition at the time of her crimes (*non mentis sue compositem ut lunaticam exstitisse*). Finally, Auðfinnr’s accusation is from February 1325; our only information about the date of his judgement is Auðfinnr’s statement that Ragnhildr has been incarcerated ‘for a long time’ (*diu*). Thus, the timing of this agreement between the canons of Niðarós Cathedral and “Ragnhildr, the housewife of Skjolgen,” approximately two years after the case of Ragnhildr Tregagás is first brought to light, would dovetail neatly with the sort of time-table we might imagine for her departure for foreign pilgrimage sites, as well as for the birth of a son resulting from her dealings with Bárðr. The connection between these two Ragnhildrs – if correct – would certainly explain a great deal.

Conclusion

In the foregoing, the case of Ragnhildr Tregagás and its historical setting have helped us understand the relationship between elite and non-elite witchcraft ideologies in Norway and in Europe.⁵⁸ Whether or not the proposition identifying Ragnhildr Tregagás with “Ragnhildr, the housewife of Skjolgen” is correct, there is much to be learned from this little episode from Norwegian cultural history. The events of 1324–25 and the sermon in *Hauksbók* draw together witchcraft, obscenity, and social order in an important way: Auðfinnr could not be clearer that he acts out of a sense that public order demands a response to the rumors of indecent behavior. Ragnhildr’s confession suggests that she believed in the possibility of a power to control men’s sexuality and men’s actions, a belief system in evidence elsewhere in Nordic sources, and a serious and credible

threat to Church doctrine. For his part, Bárðr, for whatever reasons, *does* leave his wife and travel to northern Norway, a fact the bishop himself attributes to Ragnhildr's actions. Auðfinnr's ready association of Ragnhildr's acts with diabolism gives remarkably early testimony to the identification of witchcraft with heresy and the Devil's Pact, especially in such a hyperborean setting as early 14th-century Norway. And the absence of any charge of a *sabbat* or other indication of congregating witches in the case of Ragnhildr Tregagás *may* suggest that the lewd conduct of *assembled* witches that later became so fully engrained in accusations of witchcraft was an as-yet undeveloped, or at least unnecessary, notion in the Nordic context.

There is much yet to be learned concerning the transformations that took place in Nordic witchcraft beliefs, as the witchcraft of Nordic heathendom evolved into that of the early modern era. Without a doubt, the evidence left by that most alacritous of writers, Bishop Auðfinnr, concerning the case of Ragnhildr Tregagás, with its love magic, adultery, incest, diabolism, and heresy, will continue to play a decisive role for our understanding of medieval Nordic witchcraft.

Noter

1. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford, 1937), 387.
2. This view has been widely accepted since Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Inquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (London, 1975), and is treated in many of the other works referred to in this article. It has, however, been challenged by Carlo Ginzburg, especially in his *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, transl. Raymond Rosenthal (New York, 1991) [the Italian original *Storia notturna: Una decifrazione del sabba* appeared in 1989].
3. The earliest indication of this phenomenon is from 1410, "De naucula a periculo tempestatis liberata," *Scriptores Rerum Svecicarum medii aevi*, ed. Erik Fant et al. (Uppsala, 1871–76), III:2, 277. On the development of the "Journey to Blåkulla" complex, see Jöran Sahlgren, "Blåkulla och blåkullafärderna. En språklig och mythistorisk undersökning," *Namn och Bygd* 3 (1915), 100–61, and my "Blåkulla and its Antecedents: Transvection, Conventicles, and Nordic Witchcraft" in *Alvíssmál: Forschungen zur mittelalterlichen Kultur Skandinaviens* [in press].
4. E.g., Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, 2nd ed., Rättshistoriskt bibliotek I:17 (Stockholm, 1984) [First published in 1971]; Bente Alver, *Heksetro og trolddom. Et studie i norsk heksevæsen* (Oslo, 1971); Siglaugur Brynleifsson, *Galdrar og brennudómar* (Reykjavík, 1976); Jan Wall, *Tjuvmjólkande väsen*, *Studia ethnologica Upsaliensis*, 3, 5 (Stockholm, 1977–78); Hans Næss, *Trolldomsprocessene i Norge på 1500-1600-tallet: en retts- og sosialhistorisk undersøkelse* (Oslo, 1982); and Karsten Sejr Jensen, *Trolldom i Danmark 1500–1588* (Copenhagen, 1988). See also the essays collected in *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (1990; Rpt. Oxford and New York, 1993), especially Bengt Ankarloo, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668–76)" (pp. 285–317), Jens Christian V. Johansen, "Denmark: The Sociology of Accusations" (pp. 339–65), Hans Eyvind Næss, "Norway: The Criminological Context" (pp. 367–82), and Kirsten Hastrup, "Iceland: Sorcerers and Paganism" (pp. 383–401).
5. Particular attention has been paid in recent years to local outbreaks, rather than national epidemics, especially in Sweden and Denmark: e.g., Bengt Ankarloo, *Att stilla herrevrede: trolldomsåden på Vegeholm, 1653–54* (Stockholm, 1988), and Gustav Henningsen, *Heksejægeren på Rugård: de sidste trolldomsprocesser i Jylland 1685–87* (Copenhagen, 1991).
6. Although they often reflect outmoded, and suspect, views on witchcraft, an earlier generation of scholars did yeoman's work in assembling materials, especially with respect to the period of Nordic heathendom. See, for example, Frederik Bætzmann, *Hexevæsen og troldskab i Norge. Meddelt til læsning for menigmand* (Christiania, 1865); Alf Lehmann, *Overtro og trolddom fra de ældste tider til vore dage* (Copenhagen, 1893); Vilhelm Bang, *Hexevæsen og hexefølgelser især i Danmark* (Copenhagen, 1896); Hugo Gering, *Über Weissagung und Zauber im nordischen Altertum* (Kiel, 1902); Bror Edvard Gadelius, *Tro och öfvertro i gångna tider* (Stockholm, 1912–13); Emanuel Linderholm, "Nordisk magi. Studier i nordisk religions- och kyrkohistoria," *Svenska landsmål och svenskt folkliv*, B.20 (1918), 1–160; and Ólafur Davíðsson, *Galdur og galdramál á Íslandi*, Sögufélag Sögurit, 20 (Reykjavík, 1940–43).

Among more recent assessments, Peter Buchholz, "The Devil's Deceptions: Pagan Scandinavian Witchcraft and Wizardry in Medieval Christian Perspective," *Mankind Quarterly* 27 (1987), 317–26, provides "a somewhat impressionistic account of magicians, male and female, as they occur and act in our sources, moving, so to speak, back and forth from pagan orality into Christian literacy" (319), and Katherine Morris, *Sorceress or Witch? The Image of Gender in Medieval Iceland and Northern Europe* (New York, 1991), employs "literary, linguistic, and legal iconography to interpret the image of the sorceress/witch in the early Middle Ages" (176). Cf. Richard Kieckhefer,

- Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 47–53.
7. *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*, ed. R. Keyser and P. A. Munch (Oslo, 1846), I:17; IV: 18. The Gulaping laws were revised at the behest of King Magnús in 1267, although this change appears to be a later emanation.
 8. *Svenska medeltids-postillor*, ed. G. E. Klemming, Samlingar utgifna af Svenska Fornskrift-Sällskapet 23 (Stockholm, 1880), 160.
 9. I have normalized the names and geographical locations (except well-known sites like Bergen) from this period to Old Norse standards.
 10. The texts are printed in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum. Oldbreve til Kundskab om Norges indre og ydre Forhold, Sprag, Slægter; Sæder; Lovgivning og Rettergang i Middelalderen*, ed. C. R. Unger & H. J. Huitfeldt (Oslo, 1876) [hereafter: *DN*], IX, nos. 93, 94. The “protocol-book” (*Liber ecclesiae Cathedralis Bergensis, or Bergens kapitel-bok*) was evidently lost in the great Copenhagen fire of 1728, but two direct copies of it are preserved. They differ only on minor points of orthography.
 11. For 1467-68 in *Stockholms stads skottebok*. See *Ordbok öfver svenska medeltids-språket*, ed. K. F. Söderwall, Samlingar utgifna af Svenska Fornskrift-Sällskapet 27 (Lund, 1884).
 12. *Annáler og nafnaskrá*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1948), 143.
 13. Important collections and studies of Norwegian curses include A. Chr. Bang, *Norske Hexeformularer og Magiske Opskrifter*, Videnskabsselskabets Skrifter. II. Historisk-filos. Klasse. 1901. No. 1 (Oslo, 1901) and Ronald Grambo, *Norske trollformler og magiske ritualer* (Oslo, 1979). See also F. Ohrt, *Trylleord fremmede og danske*, Danmarks Folkeminder 25 (Copenhagen, 1922).
 14. F. Ohrt, “Gondols ondu,” *Acta philologica Scandinavica* 10 (1935), 199–207. This connection may have great significance for the shape of the curse itself, given the growing German Hansa community in Bergen at this time.
 15. Additional contributions to the debate— especially where the meaning of *gondols ondu* is concerned – include Knut Liestøl, “Trollkvinne og ulv. Ikring folkevisa um Liten Lavrans,” *Folkminnen och Folktankar* 24 (1937), 88–99; Magnus Olsen, “Hild Rolvsdatters vise om Gange-Rolv og Harald Hårfagre,” *Maal og minne* (1942), 1–70; Nils Lid, *Folketru*, Nordisk Kultur 19 (Stockholm, 1935), 39; and Aslak Liestøl, *Runer fra Bergen* (Bergen, 1964), 46–47 [Rpt. from *Viking* 1963]. Ragnhildr’s curse is taken up in the context of women’s medicinal magic in Else Mundal and Gro Steinsland, “Kvinner og medicinsk magi,” in *Kvinnors rosenegård. Medeltidens liv och hälsa, lust och barnafödande*, ed. Hedda Gunneng et al. (Stockholm, 1989), 118.
 16. Cf. W. H. Trethowan, “The Demonopathology of Impotence,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 109 (1963), 341–47, and the examples cited there, as well as R. E. L. Masters, *Eros and Evil: The Sexual Psychopathology of Witchcraft* (New York, 1962), 126–37. An excellent overview of theological perspectives on this phenomenon is provided in Henry Charles Lea, *Materials toward a History of Witchcraft* (Philadelphia, 1939), I:162–70.
 17. *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger*, transl. Montague Summer (New York, 1971), 121. Although the *Malleus* is not usually conceived of as a source of medieval levity, it is difficult not to imagine that this story of the man disallowed a large penis because it belongs to a priest was in other contexts the “punch line” of a joke, albeit one whose humor was apparently lost on the authors of the *Malleus*.
 18. Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (Berkeley, 1976), 61.
 19. *DI* I, no. 71.
 20. *hgrundfall* is usually glossed as ‘impotence,’ but as Mundal and Steinsland, “Kvinner og medisinsk magi,” 116–17, have pointed out, it is a term that probably referred to a wide range of sexual dysfunctions, including frigidity and impotence.
 21. Quoted in Lena Witt, “Om kvinnors villkor i det senmedeltida Stockholm: Några

- iakttagelser i samband med filologiska studier i Stockholms stads tänkeböcker 1474–1500,” in *Förändringar i kvinnors villkor under medeltiden*, ed. Silja Aðalsteindóttir & Helgi Þorláksson, Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar (Reykjavík, 1983), 118. There exist a substantial number of related materials in Old Norse, such as impotence, mutilation tales, and the motif of a “curse given on the wedding night” (M412.2). Cf. the latter phenomenon in *Drei Lygisögur: Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana, Ála flekks saga, Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, ed. Åke Lagerholm, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 17 (Halle, 1927), 98–99, and the mythological parallel of Loki’s self-mutilation as part of the settlement with the giantess Skaði, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1931), 81.
22. E.g., Andreas Heusler, “Die Geschichte vom *Völsi*, eine altnordische Bekehrungsanekdote,” *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 13 (1903), 29–35; and Gro Steinsland and Kari Vogt, “‘Aukinn ertu Uolsc ok vpp vm tekinn’: En religionshistorisk analyse av *Völsa þátr* i *Flateyjarbók*,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 97 (1981), 87–106.
 23. *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern. I. Text*, ed. Gustav Neckel, rev. ed. Hans Kuhn, 5th rev. ed. (Heidelberg, 1983), 35. The translation is from *The Poetic Edda*, transl. Lee M. Hollander, 2nd rev. ed. (1962; Rpt. Austin, 1987), 31. On this passage, and especially the question of aggressive female behavior in Icelandic ecclesiastical literature, see Margaret Cormack, “‘Fjolkunnigri kono scalltu í faðmi sofa’: Sex and the supernatural in Icelandic saints’ lives,” *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 221–28.
 24. Lars Lönnroth, *Njáls saga: A Critical Introduction* (Berkeley, 1976), 76.
 25. *Heimskringla. History of the Kings of Norway by Snorri Sturluson*, transl. Lee M. Hollander (1964; Rpt. Austin, 1991), 95. The original is from *Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla I*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk forni rit 26 (1941; Rpt. Reykjavík, 1962), 149. Cf. chap. 32, concerning her attempts to “nema kunnostu at Finnum tveim” (135; “to learn sorcery from two Finns” [Hollander, 86]) and chap. 41, with respect to the fact that when Hálfðan the Black dies, “var þat mál manna, at Gunnhildr konungamóðir hefði keypt at fjolkunnigri konu at gera honum banadrykk” (147; “people said that Gunnhild Kingsmother had suborned a witch to prepare a poisoned drink for him” [Hollander, 94]). For a thorough review of Gunnhildr’s career, and especially of the various sources relevant to its development in Nordic tradition, see Sigurður Nordal, “Gunnhildur konungamóðir,” *Samtíð og saga* 1 (1941), 135–55.
 26. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk forni rit 12 (1954; Rpt. Reykjavík, 1971), 20–21. The translation is from *Njal’s Saga*, transl. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (1960; Rpt. Baltimore, 1966), 49. Other examples of cursed lovers, such as *Kormáks saga*, could certainly be enumerated; see below.
 27. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 24; *Njal’s Saga*, 52. Unnr’s comment here appear to reflect the concerns of the decretists, as does does Archbishop Eiríkr’s earlier comment. See James A. Brundage, “Impotence, frigidity and marital nullity in the decretists and the early decretalists,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Medieval Canon Law, Cambridge, 23–27 July 1984*, ed. P. Linehan (Vatican City, 1988), 407–23, for a review of the competing theories about marriage consummation and impotence.
 28. On the dating of *Brennu-Njáls saga*, see Einar Ólafur’s remarks in his introduction to the edition cited above, LXXV–LXXXIV. He concludes that the saga was begun shortly after 1280.
 29. See the comparable argument with respect to sexuality in the Icelandic family sagas as a whole in Jenny M. Jochens, “The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland,” *Journal of Medieval History* 6 (1980), 377–92.
 30. Cf. Morris, *Sorceress or Witch?*, 129–53, and Jenny Jochens, “Old Norse Magic and Gender: *Þátr Þorvalds ens víðforla*,” *Scandinavian Studies* 63 (1991), 305–17.
 31. See Sverre Bagge, “Striden mellom kapellmagisteren og biskopen i Bergen 1308–1320,” in *Bjørgvín bispestol. Byen og bispedømmet*, ed. Per Juvkam (Bergen, 1970), 41–54.

32. On Auðfinnr's studies abroad, see A. O. Johnsen, "Hvor studerte biskopbrødrene Arne og Audfinn?" *Historisk Tidsskrift* 36 (1952), 89–98, as well as Lars Hamre, "Kring biskop Audfinns brev frå 27. mars 1320 om sokneband og soknegrenser i Bergen," in *Bjørgvín bispestol*, 55–72. A glimpse into a west Norwegian bishop's intellectual life can be had by virtue of the fact that an inventory of, as well as many of the original manuscripts of, Árni's library exists. See Gustav Storm, "Den Bergenske Biskop Arnes Bibliothek," *Historisk Tidsskrift* II:2 (1878), 185–92, and Vilhelm Gödel, *Fornnorsk-isländsk litteratur i Sverige* (Stockholm, 1897), 19–55.
33. *DN* VI, no. 100. Specifically, Auðfinnr prohibits anyone to worship with offerings, pilgrimages, or prayers the "woman from Lübeck" who was burned at Nordnes.
34. *DN* V, no. 166.
35. *DN* V, no. 72. Cf. the similar case in February 1328, *DN* IV, no. 175.
36. *DN* VII, no. 107.
37. See Liestøl, *Runer fra Bergen*, 23–24 *et passim*.
38. *DN* III, no. 487.
39. *DN* III, no. 487.
40. *Hauksbók udgiven efter De arnamagnæanske Håndskrifter N. 371, 544 og 675, 4to samt forskellige Papirhåndskrifter*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1892–94), 168. This sermon occurs only in AM 544, 4to, and was written by the so-called "first Norwegian hand;" it attributes the text to St. Augustine, but has never been identified with any of his known works. See Jón Helgason, "Introduction," *Hauksbók. The Arnamagnæan Manuscripts 371, 4to, 544, 4to, and 675, 4to*, Manuscripta Islandica 5 (Copenhagen, 1960), X–XI.
41. E.g., Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1972), 194–98, 219; Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 75–98; and Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington, 1985), 25–26. Cf. Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars* (Cambridge, 1978), especially 178–92. Also relevant is the nearly contemporaneous "leper's conspiracy" of the early 1320s, on which see Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 33–53.
42. Bjarne Berulfsen, *Kulturtradisjon fra en storhetstid: En kulturhistorisk studie på grunnlag av den private brevlitteratur i første halvdel av det 14. hundreår* (Oslo, 1948), 52: "Hans [Auðfinnr's] forbud mot dyrkningen av den falske Margrete og hans inngrep overfor Ragnhild Tregagås kan virkelig ses som en opplyst og rasjonalistisk kulturpersonlighets motarbeiding av tidens overtro, en innstilling som gjør ham ære."
43. *DN* I, nos. 113, 129.
44. *DN* IV, nos. 91, 92.
45. See, for example, Finnur's letter of February 16, 1320, (*DN* IV, no. 142), and Auðfinnr's letters of February 14, 1320 (*DN* IV, no. 141) and of February–March 1320 (*DN* VII, nos. 85–89).
46. On this topic, see especially Knut Helle, *Bergen bys historie. I. Kongssete og kjøpstad. Fra opphavet til 1536* (Bergen, 1982), 585–92; Bagge, "Striden mellom kapellmagisteren og biskopen"; and Hamre, "Kring biskop Audfinns brev frå 27. mars 1320."
47. There exists a series of letters and testimonials about this event in *DN* VIII, nos. 51–68. See also Bagge's discussion, "Striden mellom kapellmagisteren og biskopen," 50–51.
48. See, for example, Auðfinnr's letter of February 14, 1320 (*DN* IV, no. 141), in which he complains of the intrusion of the chapel clergy into the rightful service arenas of the parish clergy.
49. E. H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden* (Uppsala, 1920–21), col. 386. This interpretation is endorsed by Mundal and Steinsland, "Kvinner og medicinsk magi," 118: "Denne kvinne har tilnavnet [*sic*] *tregagås*; *trega* må være gen. av *tregi* som bl.a. betyr 'hindring', 'vanske', dvs. 'en gås som skaper hindring/vanske'. Ragnhild kan ha fått tilnavnet [*sic*] fordi hun var blitt kjent for sin trolldom."
50. See, for example, Johan Fritzner, *Ordbok over Det gamle norske Sprog*, 4th rev. ed.

(Oslo, 1973), which includes for *gás*, ‘Kvindens Avlelem eller Kjønsdele, lat. *cunnus*,’ as well as a number of medieval examples of such usage. Indeed, the term continues to mean ‘female sex organs’ in modern Icelandic. See Sigfús Blöndal *et al.*, *Íslandsk-dansk Ordbog* (1920–24; Rpt. Reykjavík, 1980), I:241 – ‘de kvindelige Könnsdele.’ Cf. the sense ‘adventurous, or promiscuous, woman’ in Faroese and English: “Ordet ‘Gæsa’ bruges egentlig om en ung uerfaren, flytig Pige, der ikke er tilbageholden hverken i Ord, Klædedragt eller fri Opførsel.” J.H. Schrøter, “Færøiske Folkesagn,” *Antiquarisk tidskrift* (1849–51), 149. Anglo-American usage varies but includes such phrases as ‘Winchester geese,’ used from the early modern period to the 18th century in the sense ‘whores,’ as well as the corresponding verb (‘to goose’) meaning ‘to copulate,’ especially ‘to bugger,’ and ‘to poke between the buttocks.’

51. Cf. the discussion in Knut Helle, *Konge og gode menn i norsk riksstyring ca. 1150–1319* (Bergen, 1972), especially 54 and 184.
52. E.g., *DN V*, no. 72, the case of Eiríkr and Domhildr.
53. Cf. Sigurd Liland, “Biskop Audfinn og Ragnhild Tregagås. Eit tidsbilete frå tidi fyre svartedauden,” *Frå Fjon til Fusa. Årbok for Hordamuseet og for Nord- og Midhordland Sogelag* (1949), 22–50.
54. Cf. Næss, *Trolldomsprosessene i Norge*, 14–15, 18–19, and 374–76.
55. See, for example, the exchange of letters between Ingibjörg and Auðfinnr during 1324 and 1325 (*DN VII*, no. 101; *DN X*, nos. 17, 18).
56. *DN II*, no. 161.
57. Cf. the similar arrangements for *bordhald ok æfuenlæghan kost* made for a woman and her servant, *DN IV*, no. 165, and her subsequent dissatisfaction with the results, *DN IV*, no. 234.
58. The possibility that the Bergen case was part of a larger surge in trials with political overtones cannot be ignored. By odd coincidence, a case with many parallels to events in Bergen was playing out in Ireland at about the same time (1324), *viz.* – the accusations against Dame Alice Kyteler of Kilkenny and her associates, who were accused of having invoked demons for various purposes, including killing Dame Alice’s three former husbands. Like Ragnhildr, Dame Alice got off quite lightly, although at least one of her associates was executed.