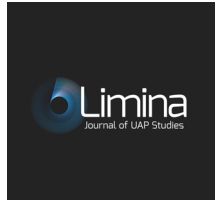




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## Trauma, UAP, and the Phenomenon in the sagas of Vínland: Tales from the Uncanny Vallée<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

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In this essay, I discuss the phenomenon of UAP and other paranormal encounters as they manifest themselves in a selection of scenes from the Icelandic sagas. More specifically, I want to address scenes that happen during the short Norse sojourn to modern day Canada. The point of this is twofold – first, to provide new case studies, from a body of text seldom discussed in this context. Second, I wish to expand upon the ties between paranormal and trauma, which have been suggested by Marion Poilvez. Poilvez has rightly noted that many of the occurrences of the paranormal in the Icelandic sagas coincide with events that could be characterized as traumatic, usually connected with violence or disease. These circumstances naturally lend themselves to a symbolic interpretation of the paranormal as reflecting the tortured psyche of the saga characters or that of the authorial voice itself. I seek to enhance this argument, questioning these phenomena as events isolated within the mind of simply one traumatized individual. Rather, these paranormal occurrences will be shown to go far beyond a specific event experienced by a specific person.

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## 1. Introduction

“There is a strange urge in my mind: I would like to stop behaving as if I am a rat pressing levers - even if I have to give up the cheese and go hungry for a while. I would like to step outside the conditioning

maze and see what makes it tick. I wonder what I would find. Perhaps a terrible superhuman monstrosity the very contemplation of which would make a person insane? Perhaps a solemn gathering of sages? Or the maddening simplicity of unattended clockwork?” (Vallée 1988)

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In this essay, I discuss the phenomenon of UAP and other paranormal encounters as they manifest themselves in a selection of scenes from the sagas of Vinland. More specifically, I want to address scenes that happen during the short Norse sojourn to what is commonly believed to be modern day Canada. The point of this is twofold – first, to provide new case studies, from a body of text seldom discussed in this context. Second, I wish to expand upon the ties between paranormal and trauma, which have been suggested by Marion Poilvez (2020). Poilvez has rightly noted that many of the occurrences of the paranormal in the Icelandic sagas coincide with events that could be characterized as traumatic, usually connected with violence or disease. These circumstances naturally lend themselves to a symbolic interpretation of the paranormal as reflecting the tortured psyche of the saga characters or that of the authorial voice itself. I seek to enhance this argument, questioning these phenomena as events isolated within the mind of simply one traumatized individual. Rather, these paranormal occurrences will be shown to have implications for representation that go far beyond the literary description of a specific event experienced by a specific person.

The Icelandic sagas are medieval texts written between the 13th and 15th centuries. It is typical that people think about Þórr (Thor) or Óðinn (Odin) when hearing mention of “the sagas”, but gods (the Norse *Æsir*) do not, in fact, feature prominently in these texts. Rather, the Sagas of Early Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) chronicle the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century lives and struggles of farmers, chieftains, and the occasional monster. The sagas in focus here, *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, are often called the Vinland sagas, referring to the name given to those parts in Canada visited by the medieval Icelanders and Greenlanders. This voyage to North America predates that of Christopher Columbus by more than four centuries and a half, but as it did not constitute an ontological shift of the scope of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century European ventures to the “New World”, it is usually considered a minor affair, of anecdotal interest mainly to those preoccupied with the Middle Ages and the history of European encounters with indigenous Americans (see discussions in e.g. Crocker 2020; 2023; Melton 2024). It is also noteworthy that there is a lack of scholarly consensus regarding whether Vinland was even truly located in the 13th century Icelandic mind in North America and not in Africa, rather (Sverrir Jakobsson 2001; Arngrímur Vídalín 2020a). The Icelandic sagas’ focus on the minute politics and legalities of a farming elite rather than continental kings means that the sagas will often

concern themselves with issues like daily farm management, which helps create a sense of realism that is usually not associated with pre-modern literature. To our modern ears, realism sounds at once like an opposite to “fantasy” and the paranormal associated with that generic mode, but it also implies a kind of stylistic straightforwardness that tells things in a sober (often somber) mode, familiar to readers of the Old Testament (Grønlie 2024, 23-25). But the modern opposition between natural vs. preternatural does not hold water in medieval times, where descriptions of events that we consider clearly fictional would often be seen as factual (Ármann Jakobsson 2020; Steblin-Kamenskii 1973). In many of the sagas, descriptions of the paranormal are related in an almost matter-of-fact manner, toning down the sensational characteristics of a character’s meeting with an undead shepherd or ghastly mound dweller. This gives the stories and events within them a sense of realness: so long as you are willing to suspend your disbelief and accept a world where ghosts, trolls and other monstrous beings operate alongside humans. In medieval studies, the monster is often considered as a manifestation of social anxieties and concerns (Cohen 1996; Ármann Jakobsson 2017; Merkelbach 2019). Monstrosity is culturally constructed: one person’s vampire is another person’s brave duke. This subjectivity and the elusiveness of the monster expose the absurdity of any attempt at taxonomizing the ghoulish underworld (Ármann Jakobsson 2013). While the paranormal encounter is described with a somber lucidity, it is often impossible to tell—as is the case with many Icelandic saga elements—if the source for a particular event lies within the oral tradition informing the sagas, authorial invention, literary and liturgical influence, or some combination of these. For this, and many other reasons, the jury is out on the question of the veracity of any scene described in the Icelandic sagas, let alone paranormal encounters. Going down the rabbit hole of Old Norse studies, one will discover that questions of the sagas’ reflection of real historical events remain largely unanswered. Do the sagas reflect an oral tradition passed down through the ages, or were they authored by 13th century monks? And if they were first composed orally and written down on vellum verbatim, did these stories actually “happen”? My opinion on the matter, if it matters, is that the sagas were composed by 13th-15th century authors, based to various degrees on pre-existing oral tales and folktale typologies. Rather than banging your head against these questions, a more fruitful path has been charted by those exploring the sagas as the products of collective memory (Hermann and Mitchell 2013):

The understanding that society and individual societal groups are constructed through shared narratives that strengthen societal norms and identities. From this I conclude that when treating scenes of paranormal activity in the Icelandic sagas, one is wiser to think of them as reflecting ideas and attitudes that were contemporaneous with the writing period in the High and Late Middle Ages rather than the faraway Viking Age; though some elements must surely have seeped through. In other words, *this essay will not argue that the events described in the sagas actually happened*. Rather, it will argue that *the authors* (a shorthand meant to represent distributed authorial agency (see Ranković 2007)) *and their audiences believed that the events described in the sagas could have happened*. The events described in the sagas fitted well with their understanding of the world, either through personal experience, or through hearing many such stories about these occurrences to make them seem more plausible than not. To make things even more explicit: A description of the appearance of a ghost or alien in the farm of Hauksstaðir on October 29th in the year 1019 does not mean that a ghost or alien appeared in the farm of Hauksstaðir on October 29th in the year 1019, but it does mean that the 13th century author and the audience believed that a ghost or alien could have appeared in the farm of Króksfjarðarnes just the other day. It is crucial to state that there is no attempt to argue here that the paranormal manifestations reflect any kind of direct historical evidence that could be traced back to a precise historical event. These are stories that have developed over centuries based on a blend of fact, fiction, and exaggeration, which were written down by scribes of various artistic skills. However—and this is significant—this does not negate the fact that the scribes, and their preceding oral storytellers, very much understood these events’ description as a depiction of how things *could happen*, or how things *actually happened* (see also Ármann Jakobsson 1998).

Discussing the UAP phenomenon from a trauma studies perspective is usually done with relation to experienter narratives; the scenes discussed in this chapter will be looked at through this perspective. The disruption of temporal time has been associated with technological shock and awe on the side of the witness (Luckhurst 1998, 38) and is a consistent feature of these accounts (Vallée 1988). Disrupted time and delayed reaction are themselves a major feature of trauma narratives, which in modern novels is reflected through unique narratological devices that reflect lost time (Vonnegut 1969—tellingly, in the context of a UFO abduction), repressed events (Heller 1961), or embodied

mental differences (Dick 1964; see also Bérubé 2018, esp. 84-111). The saga’s prose will often be disrupted, in the middle of battle or in its immediate aftermath, with a poem uttered by one of the characters present. Such multiplicity of voices could offer a variance of perspectives within the same text, but can also cause disorientation and contradictions (Tirosh 2025, 40-43; Wilson 2020). Considering the violent content of these verses and its often gut-wrenching battle descriptions, it is therefore not beyond reason to call the sagas’ prosimetrum a literature of trauma. It has been argued that such traumatically-instigated time disruptions found their way into medieval literature as well (Tirosh 2020), with Icelandic literature being full of traumatic events and manifestations (e.g. Torfi Tulinius 2018a). Interestingly, the high strangeness of encounters with the UAP phenomenon is also characteristic of moments that would be described as traumatic in modern situations. A good example is the case of *Eyrbyggja saga*’s Þórarinn svarti (the Black) (Torfi Tulinius 2018b), who reluctantly finds himself in a battlefield, displays an abundance of military prowess, possibly cuts off the hand of his wife, and thereafter speaks mainly in skaldic verse. Skaldic verse is a literature known for its disruption of syntax, forcing its authors and audience to contain several ongoing narrative threads at once. It is also—as has been communicated to me by an anonymous peer reviewer—highly artificial in its nature, with a specialized vocabulary and referencing system. Medieval Icelanders have opted to communicate their awareness of these aspects of trauma, and while this stands as a clear use of a creative narrative technique, it also invites us to think how and why they described certain events the way that they did.

Although this essay places itself within the discourse of UAP studies, the keen reader might notice that it does not offer up any case that can actually be described as “UFOs”, “flying saucers”, or the appearance of any tictacs or soundless hovering triangles. I nevertheless presume to ask for a few minutes of your time because the cases described below were noticed by me when I decided to read the sagas while thinking about Jacques Vallée’s idea of the UFO phenomenon as a control system in mind: particularly as it was articulated in his 1988 *Dimensions*. After downplaying the extraterrestrial hypothesis as insufficient, Vallée suggested that it is better to think of the phenomenon as a mechanism by which aspects of humanity are controlled, like a thermostat controls a room’s temperature. But to what end is humanity being controlled? Vallée suggests that religion and religious thinking are being changed to shape the way that humanity

interacts with its own abilities, technology, and the world around them. It is the absurdity of these events that makes them so difficult to latch meaning onto. The multiplicity of meanings that one can attach to these events might be exactly the point: nobody knows what it means, but it's provocative. In encounters with the paranormal and in all saga literature, there is a multiplicity of ways to interpret each scene and event; religiously, narratologically, socially, or sexually. What is consistent in the scenes discussed in this article—in my view at any rate—is the idea that the paranormal is described as associated with these fringe events of frontier and discovery. At the moment of writing these words, I concede the reality of UAPs/UFOs, but, following Vallée's work, am skeptic (although not entirely dismissive) towards the extra-terrestrial hypothesis as a complete explanation to what these events represent. Vallée's idea of the paranormal functioning as a control mechanism that is meant to guide humanity in certain paths meshes well with Jacques Attali's (1985) discussion of noise in music: he observed that moments of societal change can be anticipated and instigated by creative generic dissonance. The UAP phenomenon is exactly such a moment of technological and ontological dissonance that begs the question: *how is this possible?* Despite my general tendency to sidestep symbolism, here it is apparent that the appearance of the impossible makes the characters and ourselves ask: *what is this event saying to us?* The events in Vinland, it will be argued, are telling the saga characters to leave Turtle Island. This essay will now turn to a description of several key case studies where trauma and paranormal seem to create an opening for a UAP-centered interpretation.

## 2. The Other Guðriðr

According to *Grænlandinga saga*, Guðriðr was among the group of Icelanders who had temporarily settled North America in the pre-Columbian age. While they subsisted on the land's vast resources, they also engaged in trade with the local inhabitants, who they called *Skraelingar*. It is worth pausing on this name: while some have argued that it relates to skin color or clothing (e.g. Arngrímur Vídalín 2020a, 97), the etymology also points at *Skraelingr* as a cognate of modern English "Screech" (Kolodny 2012, 3; see also Orel 2003, 344). The latter interpretation is significant for the following argument, since it emphasizes the intelligibility aspect of settler-local interactions, and points at issues of (mis-)communication right off the bat.

In one wonderful scene, a baffling encounter is described,

while the Icelanders and native Americans are negotiating outside:

Guðrid sat inside in the doorway, with the cradle of her son, Snorri. A shadow fell across the doorway and a woman entered, wearing a close-fitting tunic, rather short in stature, with a shawl over her head and light red-brown hair. She was pale and had eyes so large that eyes of such size had never been seen in a single human head. She came to where Guðrid was sitting and spoke: "What is your name?" she said. "My name is Guðrid, and what is yours?" "My name is Guðrid," the other woman said. Guðrid, Karlsefni's wife, then motioned to her with her head to sit down beside her, but just as she did so a great crash was heard and the woman had disappeared. At that moment one of the natives had been killed by one of Karlsefni's servants for trying to take weapons from them, and they quickly ran off, leaving their clothes and trade goods lying behind. No one but Guðrid had seen the woman. (*The Saga of the Greenlanders*, 29)

This scene has been approached from various perspective, either as a paranormal apparition that taps into the Old Norse tradition of fetches (*fylgjur*; see Almqvist's discussion and dismissal of this possibility, 18-19), or as various manifestations of indigenous behaviors, or beliefs about monstrous humans in the outer edges of the known world (Jesch 2004, 123). These explanations, however, seem insufficient; if this other Guðriðr is a *fylgja*, who is she protecting, or attacking? And, as Zuzana Stankovitsová (2020) has shown, evidence for female *fylgjur* is quite scarce; most of these beings' manifestations are in fact in the form of different animals. If this "Guðriðr", then, is a local indigenous person, why does her description stand out so significantly from all others in the saga? Pernille Hermann (2021, 18-20) recognizes this, and suggests the woman to be the expression of Guðriðr's vulnerable and weakened psyche, holding her own in face of a treacherous situation in a foreign land. In Hermann's reading, the other Guðriðr should be understood as a *doppelgänger*, a mental manifestation, sparking a sense of the uncanny, an unease that stems from the troubling situation she got herself into with her vulnerable child (some readers might be reminded of that harrowing scene in the film *Annihilation* (Garland 2018) when Natalie Portman's character encounters her own terrifying *doppelgänger*). This fits well

with looking at the paranormal as a form by which trauma is expressed. The appearance of the unexplained in such a moment of physical threat and mental strain is complemented rather than constrained by an acknowledgement that such events can happen. Is the other Guðríðr created by Guðríðr's strained mind, or by an agency that wishes to discourage the venture? If Hermann's interpretation highlights the psychological meanings of this scene, William Sayers frames this and other manifestations of the paranormal in the Icelandic excursions to Vinland as a form of active psychological warfare employed by indigenous Americans, in an attempt to counteract these invaders and their weaponry. The appearance of a *Doppelgänger* can certainly qualify as a "mindfuck", to use Discordian nomenclature (discussed in Davis 2019, *e.g.* 199–202): the destabilization of reality goes along with and is exacerbated by the traumatic circumstances.

Hermann and Sayers' interpretations needn't contradict one another. The text's preoccupation with the other Guðríðr's features, providing us with a detailed physical description that stands out in the sagas' otherwise terse narrative style (Sävborg 2017), seems to create a dissonance even in face of the magical capabilities available to Vinland's indigenous people. Sayers has pointed that the meeting between the Icelanders and indigenous Americans in Vinland disrupts reality to the extent that "effects known from Norse culture are attributed to native magic." (Sayers 1997, 244) This defamiliarization process and loss of reasoning rhymes well with the absurdity of the UFO phenomenon highlighted by Jacques Vallée and Eric Davis (2003, 224; 227; and 235-237). The encounter's content and form portend catastrophic events (Sayers 1997, 250): the forthcoming fall of the Icelandic settlement of Vinland, and the deaths that anticipate it. That the other Guðríðr's appearance and other paranormal events carry within them a meaning symbolic of that specific moment in history does not mean that they are there to purely symbolize. Could the appearance of the paranormal alongside these significant events not be seen as parallel rather than symbolic? Or, rather, could it not be that the Icelanders who recorded these events orally and literally had decided to describe these paranormal events happening alongside these historical moments because, in their own lived experience, historical moments, trauma and the paranormal frequently appear together (for a contrasting perspective on this scene as based on actual events to some degree, see discussions in Almquist 2001; Falk 2004, 582; Falk 2015, 3-4, ft. 2; Kolodny 2012, 65-67; for an interpretation suggesting the scene foreshadows Guðríðr's future as a nun,

see Johansson 2019, 293-294; and for an interpretation suggesting that the other Guðríðr being evidence for an earlier Norse habitation, see Horsford 1892, 124; and Kolodny 2012, 235-236)?

### 3. The One-Legged Man

In *Eiríks saga rauða*, the text describes the travelers arriving at Einfoetíngaland, the Land of the Uniped. Unlike the other Guðríðr, the uniped seems somewhat more familiar to the reader of medieval literature. As Judith Jesch rightly notes, it corresponds more with medieval marvel tales than with any "real experiences in North America" (Jesch 2004, 123; see also Johansson 2019, 293). While this interpretation is more likely than not, what interests in the scene in the context of the phenomenon is rather the manner in which this 'uncanny fellow' appears, and disappears:

One morning Karlsefni's men saw something shiny above a clearing in the trees, and they called out. It moved and proved to be a one-legged creature which darted down to where the ship lay tied. Thorvald, Eirik the Red's son, was at the helm and the one-legged man shot an arrow into his intestine. Thorvald drew the arrow out and spoke: "Fat paunch that was. We've found a land of fine resources, though we'll hardly enjoy much of them." Thorvald died from the wound shortly after. The one-legged man then ran off back north. They pursued him and caught glimpses of him now and again. He then fled into a cove and they turned back. One of the men then spoke this verse:

True it was  
that our men tracked  
a one-legged creature  
down to the shore.  
The uncanny fellow  
fled in a flash,  
though rough was his way,  
hear us, Karlsefni! (*Eirik the Red's Saga*, 17)

Hermann rightly notices the "illusory aura" around the uniped, a blurring of sorts that makes it hard to perceive, while noting that this could also be attributed to its arriving from the sun's direction (Hermann, 12-13). Considered in the context of the UFO phenomenon, this fuzziness matches

an “anti-physical” layer, as outlined by Jacques Vallée and Eric Davis (2003; 228-229). This would conceivably make it possible to catalog it as a manifestation of the phenomenon. Despite the clear invitation to interpret this scene from a religious and miraculous perspective, it also echoes what Oren Falk emphasized as the sense of wonder accompanying First Contact. Falk’s emphasis is on the shattering eeriness created by the narrative, the “impossibility of representation.” I would argue that the combination of the darting, glittering creature, as well as the unexpected death that accompanies is a case where the intangibility of the phenomenon is felt. While the uniped is likely a literary borrowing from other medieval sources, the way that it is described utilizes the language of paranormal encounters, some of which would be formed through descriptions of interactions with the UFO phenomenon. It is therefore placed here since it adds to the paranormal aura of the failed settlement attempt through accumulation. The vivid description of the uniped’s maneuvering and the confusion from its approach once again invite an interpretation that unites the paranormal with trauma: the sensory overload and confusion involved in these encounters require explaining, and what cannot be explained is represented through the unexplainable.

#### 4. Boats to Men - Illusions

As a part of what Sayers dubs the “psychological warfare” conducted by the newly-found-land’s indigenous people, the medieval European travelers experience the illusion that they are fighting more men than they actually were:

Despite facing a superior force, only two of Karlsefni’s men were killed while a great number of the natives were slain. They returned to the booths wondering how numerous the attackers had been who had approached them on land. But it now looked to them as if the company in the boats had been the sole attackers, and any other attackers had only been an illusion. (16)

Elsewhere also, the indigenous people fighting the aspiring settlers are wont to use technologies that were not recognizable to them. Particularly noteworthy is an instance where a dark ball is sent their way, creating a terrifying racket and causing their retreat. This display could be explained by some manner of manipulating chemical reactions that the indigenous people could have had access to (as the Westerners

would soon have access to the chemical reaction of gun powder), and its memory is here preserved in writing. It is also somewhat reminiscent of a literary motif of metal ball (or decapitated fat-dripping seal head) throwing elsewhere in Old Norse and medieval literature, such as *Þorsteins saga bæjarmagns* (Rösli 2009). But if we look at the simultaneous multitude of abnormal events during this fight, it becomes more challenging to rationally explain away through such historical logic. One cannot discount the fact that the people being attacked believed that some magic was at play. This tells us both that—regardless of the veracity of these tales—magical objects and illusions were definitely seen as valid explanations for the paranormal that manifests itself during high stakes martial situations.

In *Grœnlendinga saga*, the text also relates an illusory encounter where the Greenlanders misidentify *skrælingar* boats:

As they headed back to the ship they saw three hillocks on the beach inland from the cape. Upon coming closer they saw they were three hide-covered boats, with three men under each of them. They divided their forces and managed to capture all of them except one, who escaped with his boat. They killed the other eight and went back to the cape. On surveying the area they saw a number of hillocks further up the fjord, and assumed them to be settlements. (*The Saga of the Greenlanders*, 25)

This is obviously not what we would intuitively refer to as a UAP/UFO, nor even paranormal event. Visual trickery appears in many other places in the Icelandic sagas, and I would not venture to refer to every appearance of an illusions manifestation as connected to the UFO phenomenon. Rather, it is another instance where the Old Norse text has the Vinland inhabitants as utilizing powers that are outside of the would-be settlers’ control. We cannot know if the hilly appearance was intended or not, but this time—at any rate—the illusion fails and the indigenous people pay a heavy toll.

It seems that the Western settlers could fight back through their own manner of transgressive behavior. In a much-discussed scene of *Eiríks saga rauða*, Eiríkr inn rauði’s daughter Freydis finds herself alone in face of an attacking force of *skrælingar*. She grabs the sword of a nearby ally whose head was bashed in, releases one of her breasts, and slaps her sword at the exposed body part threateningly. As Oren Falk shows, there is something that is boundary-crossing about this behavior, placing Freydis within a space that is neither male

nor entirely female (Falk 2015; see also Wolf 1996). Equally, the texts do hint at an awareness that the technologies that the settlers had brought with them could be perceived as bewildering—and possibly paranormal—to the indigenous people as the local technologies were for the settlers:

In *Eiríks saga rauða*:

The natives also found one of the dead men, whose axe lay beside him. One of them picked up the axe and chopped at a tree, and then each took his turn at it. They thought this thing which cut so well a real treasure. One of them struck a stone, and the axe broke. He thought a thing which could not withstand stone to be of little worth, and tossed it away. (*Eirík the Red's Saga*, 16)

And in *Grœnlendinga saga*:

One of the natives then picked up an axe, peered at it awhile, and then aimed at one of his companions and struck him. The other fellow was killed outright. The tall man then picked up the axe, examined it awhile, and then threw it as far out into the sea as he could. After that the natives fled into the woods at top speed, and they had no more dealings with them. (*The Saga of the Greenlanders*, 29)

These scenes indicate a fear and lack of control of a technology that the European settlers take for granted. In one of them it is interpreted as useless by at least one member of the *Skraelingar*, and in another a source of technological horror. It is important to remember that these descriptions, even if based on distant historical realities, reflect the notions of the 13-14th century Icelanders who scribed these stories down. Therefore, when we encounter these scenes, we should avoid considering them as any indication of the (currently) unknowable indigenous attitudes towards European technologies, but rather as a *European* self-reflection on approaching the unknown. The *Grœnlendinga saga's* *skraelingar* see the axe as an object that is completely foreign to them, and in its wake lies death and destruction. If testing the axe on a rock might seem plausible, the accidental killing of a peer using what is clearly a dangerous tool stretches one's suspension of disbelief. Still, it works as an absurd mirror of the settlers' own confusion about local technologies that they did not understand. When not yielded by a person who is proficient in using the axe, it is either rendered useless as is portrayed in *Eiríks saga rauða*, or fatal as is portrayed in

*Grœnlendinga saga*.

## 5. Conclusion: The Control Mechanism

"Show me the aliens!"

- Neil Degrasse Tyson

My choice of text is far from unproblematic; if, as I argue, the paranormal encounters in *Vínland* involve manifestations of the UAP phenomenon in addition to the machinations of people indigenous to North America, it could be fairly argued that I am taking the *alien*—foreigners (on the complex idea of racial thinking in the Viking Age and the later Middle Ages, see Cole 2015; 2025; and Arngrímur Víðalín 2020b)—and representing it as *extra-terrestrial*. This shift could be argued to echo colonial narratives denying the colonized of their voices and their humanity. It also ignores the intersection between queerness and Indigeneity that clearly deserves further examination in the context of this text (on how these concepts intersect see the discussion in Price 2024). That being said, the encounters in *Vínland* described in the sagas undeniably confronted the Icelandic and Greenlandic settlers with a society they perceive as entirely foreign, without a shared language or cultural frames of reference. It seems only natural that they would therefore interpret these encounters through the prism of the preternatural. Thus, the extreme conditions and situation of *Vínland* would invite the historical settlers themselves—as well as the later medieval Icelanders chronicling their own version of their ancestors' story—to interpret what they see through their existing framework: namely, that of the phenomenon. Therefore, rather than arguing that what the settlers encountered in America were in any shape or form extraterrestrials, I argue that alien situation they came across would readily be interpreted by them through the language of the paranormal that they knew, the language of encountering the phenomenon. Let me reiterate: These sagas likely do not reflect a historical reality of the pre-Columbian Western excursions to the American continent. While such a venture has been shown to have happened, the veracity of the sagas' specific descriptions remains unknowable (but see Gísli Sigurðsson 2004; Jesch 2009). Still, we must consider that the Icelanders who were putting these texts to vellum were struggling to explain how they were driven away from this potential new settlement so thoroughly. The eerie events charted in this text could therefore constitute an attempt at explaining their misadventure, using the language of the phenomenon that was familiar to them. It

is almost as if these pre-Columbian Western developed their own proto “ancient alien” theory in order to justify their defeat. But I do not care (or rather, believe it is impossible to ascertain) whether or not any of these paranormal events actually occurred at that time. I care that the paranormal and an encounter with the Other are used to justify the trauma of battlefield retreat.

As Poilvez states, “both trauma and paranormal beings have a mnemonic function and make the past an everlasting present,” (Poilvez 2020, 77; influenced by Ármann Jakobsson's thoughts in 2017, 91-94). The appearance of the paranormal here is tied to the trauma of the failed Vinland expedition. This, in terms, meshes well with Jacques Vallée's concept of UFOs as a control mechanism. In his work, Vallée has shifted from proposing an E.T. solution or the UFO phenomenon to the more metaphysical concept of these events as a control mechanism meant to sometimes advance, sometimes delay, and sometimes alert humans culturally, socially, and technologically (1988). But what was the phenomenon perceived as controlling for in the encounters between the Icelandic and Greenlandic settlers and the indigenous people of North America? In this particular case, the Icelanders chronicling this story are using manifestations of the phenomenon to justify their aborted venture to North America. The paranormal manifestations here function to deter the settlers from advancing further into this (in European eyes) uncharted land. A pair of continents that would later prove to be crucial for the European expansion, and devastating for the indigenous population, the Europeans incorporating the Americas into their mental maps would be a paradigm shifting event, both for them as well as for the continents' indigenous peoples. While the 13th-14th century Icelanders first writing down these texts could not have known this, it seems clear from their employment of the paranormal in these sagas that they intuited that these were the kinds of events that invited the intervention of a control mechanism that they did not understand. Without taking away the agency from the American indigenous population in fighting off these dangerous invaders, the phenomenon was clearly telling the Western settlers in these stories to back off. And they complied.

This article is not meant as a case for the belief in UFOs. To quote *Sekret Machines: Gods*: “If you need convincing—after all of the data that has been presented by sober, sane [sic] members of world governments, including that of the United States, as well as by military observers around the world who have gone on record concerning alien contact—

then there is nothing here for you.” Rather, this article has asked readers to view the failed settlement of Vinland, and the tales surrounding it as they have transformed through the ages and brought to writing, not as tales of first contact, but as tales of the moment in which trauma, literary descriptions of the paranormal, and *something else* collide. As noted by an anonymous peer reviewer, the possibility that it was the local population's “screeches” that awarded them the name *Skrælingar* hints at a moment of dissonance that merits attention. Such a moment connects both Jacques Vallée's control system with Jacques Attali's moments of noise as moments of destabilization. It is only fitting that this article should end with this uncanny Jacques pairing. Both pointed at the importance of disruptive moments to the human psyche: Nobody knows what it means: it gets the people going.

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