

Weather as Magic and Metaphor in the Sagas of Icelanders

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The *Sagas of Icelanders* are undoubtedly the most well-known type of written source from Iceland. They are concerned with prominent Icelandic families during the early settlement period of Iceland (from c. AD 871-930) and the so-called "Saga Age" (c. AD 930-1050). They comprise about one hundred sagas and shorter stories (*sögur* and *þættir*). They are not contemporary accounts but were compiled in Iceland mainly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. To what extent they are works by individual authors, and how much they draw on oral tales, has long been debated by saga scholars. Although the sagas feature known historical characters, current scholarship places them in the realm of literature rather than history or ethnography. The sagas include many interesting references to weather events and climatic conditions. Many of these descriptions must be seen in the context of literary fiction. Some, however, may reflect a real event. Others may be a mixture of the two and it is not always possible to unravel one from the other. What is clear is that weather, in all its myriad forms, frequently seems to be used to create a mood, or as a metaphor. A fascinating subject in itself is the use of weather magic in the sagas. This can either take the form of a witch or a wizard, someone who is *ffjolkunnugur* and "knows a thing or two" casting a spell, usually malevolent (but not always) or a person who appears to have prescient knowledge of a weather event that is about to occur without apparent warning. This presentation will consider a number of such instances of weather magic and also how weather is used as a literary device. Examples will be drawn from several sagas including: *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*; *Njáls saga*; *Laxdæla saga*; *Fóstbræðra saga*; *Eiríks saga Rauða*; *Grænlendinga saga*; *Gísla saga Surrssonar*; *Vatnsdæla saga*; *Eyrbyggja saga*; *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa*; *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*.