The Journal of Northern Studies is a peer-reviewed academic publication issued twice a year. The journal has a specific focus on human activities in northern spaces, and articles concentrate on people as cultural beings, people in society and the interaction between people and the northern environment. In many cases, the contributions represent exciting interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. Apart from scholarly articles, the journal contains a review section, and a section with reports and information on issues relevant for Northern Studies.

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Contents
Editors & Editorial board ........................................................................................................................................... 6

Articles
Kristine Nystad, Benedicte Ingstad & Anna Rita Spein, How Academic Experiences and Educational Aspirations Relate to Well-Being and Health among Indigenous Sami Youth in Northern Norway. A Qualitative Approach .......................................................................................................................... 35
Ebba Olofsson & Joseph Folco, Narratives of Displacement and Trauma. The Tuberculosis Epidemic among the Inuit of Nunavik in the 1940s–1950s ........................................................................................................................................ 62

Reviews
Lars Hermansson, Friendship, Love, and Brotherhood in Medieval Northern Europe, c. 1000—1200, Leiden: Brill 2019 (Bertil Nilsson) ........................................................................................................................ 95
Dolly Jørgensen & Virginia Langum (eds.), Visions of the North in Premodern Europe, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers 2018 (Susan C. Brantly) ..................................................................................... 97
Lucie Korecká, Wizards and Words. The Old Norse Vocabulary of Magic in a Cultural Context, München: Utzverlag 2019 (Margaret Cormack) ........................................................................................................ 100
Jarich Oosten & Barbara Helen Miller (eds.), Traditions, Traps and Trends. Transfer of Knowledge in Arctic Regions, Edmonton: Polynya Press 2018 (George W. Wenzel) .............................................................................. 104
EDITORS

Editor-in-chief:

Professor Lars-Erik Edlund, Dept. of Language Studies, Umeå University, SE-901 87 Umeå, Sweden
Tel. +46-(0)90-786 7887
E-mail: lars-erik.edlund@umu.se

Assistant editors:

Professor emeritus Kjell Sjöberg, Dept. of Wildlife, Fish, and Environmental Studies, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), SE-901 83 Umeå, Sweden
E-mail: kjell.sjoberg@vfm.slu.se

Professor Peter Sköld, Arctic Research Centre at Umeå University (Arcum), SE-901 83 Umeå, Sweden
peter.skold@umu.se

Editorial secretary:

Associate professor Olle Sundström, Dept. of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies, Umeå University, SE-901 87 Umeå, Sweden
Tel. +46-(0)90-786 7627
E-mail: olle.sundstrom@umu.se

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This book is a welcome addition to studies on magic in medieval Icelandic literature. It deals primarily with the thirteenth century, and aims to determine the cultural meaning of magic at that time rather than reconstruct historical practices. The author does not lay claim to comprehensiveness, but collects evidence primarily from sagas of Icelanders and kings, lawbooks, and mythological texts, as they reflect “the variety of the vocabulary better than translations or texts with foreign subject matter” as well as thirteenth century Icelanders’ attitudes to their own past and cultural heritage (p. 3). However, *fornaldarsögur* make frequent appearances, and although foreign hagiography translated from Latin is mostly omitted, other religious works are not; passages are quoted from the Norwegian homily book, the penitential of Bishop Þorlákr, the statutes of archbishop Páll, and “sakeyrir biskups ok konungs,” a legal text dated by the editors c. 1280. With the possible exception of the last-named, all of these works must have been in Latin at some stage, although it could be argued that those who turned them into Icelandic would have chosen a different level of discourse than they used for learned translations of Latin hagiography. This is, however, an assumption which remains to be proved, and one wonders whether a more detailed discussion of translated saints’ lives on the one hand, legendary sagas on the other, would have provided useful evidence from genres where magic might (or might not) be configured somewhat differently than in sagas of Icelanders and kings. Korecká in fact notes interesting differences between *fornaldarsögur* and sagas of Icelanders on a number of occasions, for example in her discussion of *gandr*.

The value of the work lies in its presentation of the vocabulary of magic grouped according to its basic meaning, treating together terms connected to knowledge, action, crossing boundaries, the distant past, power, deceit, chanting or speaking, and the “ways of magical practice,” i.e. runes, *gandr*, various forms of *röð*, (of which the best known is probably *trollröð*), *þjónsandi*, *spá*, and *völva*. The discussion of vocabulary is framed by an introduction about the concept of “otherness” and concluded by a summary chapter entitled “Wizards and Words.”

Korecká’s discussions of each type of term include close readings of passages chosen to illustrate the range of significances the terms can have in different contexts, depending on the social status and gender of the participants, time, and place of the episode. She distinguishes between what might be called “clerical” and “lay” attitudes, the “clerical” ones being found not only in legal and ecclesiastical texts but also in the sagas of Christian kings such as Saint Olaf and Olaf Tryggvason.

It has often been noted that magic was considered acceptable before the conversion, and the examples confirm this view; Korecká emphasizes the point by underlining ambiguities of the texts themselves, as well as the use of magic by both sides of a conflict. She draws conclusions regarding the degree of positivity or negativity associated with each term in the different genres of literature in which it appears, and how this reflects the potential disturbance of the social system in each case. She makes valuable comments on how the literature manages narrative distancing from magical practices that might seem to be suspect. The book contains a good discussion of the ways shape-shifting is envisioned under *hamrammr* (pp. 107–134) which should be required reading for all students wanting to write term-papers on this subject.
The value of the volume should be clear from the above. The drawbacks are few but one, at least, is extremely unfortunate: the lack of an index, which prevents the reader from reviewing the evidence for a particular term. Since many passages contain more than one term relating to magic, the reader needs more help with cross-references than has been provided, and the reviewer has been unable to confirm her suspicion that the terms mæla um (p. 210) and mæla fyrir (p. 233), both in the section on chanting of speech, have not received their own treatment, nor has formáli, translated as ‘curse’ on p. 232 and clearly referring to some kind of magical formula on pp. 232–234. Anyone interested in the possible magical connotations of the word ljóð will also be frustrated. I would likewise have liked to see a more focussed discussion of sjónhverfing, ‘illusion,’ a term which Korecká sometimes contrasts with “real” magic (cf. pp. 172–173, 182, 211). In fact, it is an important type of visual magic and deserves its own treatment in a book like this.

Of particular value are the author’s comments on which terms are found—or not found—in which genres of texts. Útiseta, for example, occurs primarily in legal ones (including penitentials). However, her assertion that úti does not mean ‘outdoors,’ but rather ‘leaving the sphere of civilized human society and contacting forces from other worlds’ (p. 70) needs substantiation. While Korecká’s characterization is reasonable, the common understanding is that the individual performing útiseta is, in fact, sitting outside on a grave mound. On p. 82 she states more accurately that “The ON sources do not describe exactly what the practice of útiseta consisted of.” Since she rejects the received understanding, a critique of it would have been welcome.

A few translations need a bit of tweaking: on p. 73 fornir should be ‘offerings’ rather than ‘sacrifices,’ The foster-mother of Barði is not “goodwilled” in general, but specifically goodwilled towards the sons of Guðmundr (p. 148). In Laxdæla saga (Ch. 37), Hrútr orders that no one look, not go, outside, and I would have preferred something like ‘he walked into the spell’ [seið] rather than ‘he came to the enchanted place.’ With reference to Ynglinga saga Ch. 14, the sons of Visbúr are not themselves being enchanted (pp. 191–192), and in Stjórn, King Saul makes the woman herself sit on the prophet Samuel’s grave, rather than making her find someone to do so (p. 254). The key word in the passage quoted on pp. 217–18 is seiða rather than álág or the equivalent. In the discussion of Katla in Eyvþryggja saga on p. 211, it is disingenuous to state that although she uses sjónhverfingar to hide her son, she is not necessarily a sorcerer—aside from the sjónhverfingar, no reader of the saga can doubt that she was magically involved in Gunnlaugr’s death.

There are relatively few typos and fewer that make a difference: in for is after focus on p. 207 gives the reader momentary pause. More serious is the fact that the negative particle ó (v in the edition used) is missing before visa in a quotation from Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta in the last line on p. 252.

Korecká’s concluding ten-page chapter titled “Wizards and words” ties together themes that have been examined in detail for the individual concepts, such as “the power of the word,” otherness, positive or negative evaluation of terms, and “magic as a cultural concept.”

It is inevitable that readers will disagree on individual points of interpretation, but the texts on which Korecká’s interpretations are based, as well as the basis for those interpretations, are set out clearly. This useful and well-thought-out study will be of value to every reader of medieval Icelandic literature.

Margaret Cormack
College of Charleston, USA
University of Iceland
cormackM@cofc.edu