

## 2. Old Icelandic and Sami Ancestor Mountains: A Comparison

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### Introduction

From thirteenth-century Iceland, we have texts that tell us about a belief in local mountains where people could go after death. In mainland Scandinavia, the eighteenth-century sources for Sami religion tell us about a similar tradition. In this chapter, I will compare these traditions and argue that they overlapped both in content and geographically, and that they constituted a partly shared tradition. I will compare the textual information about the two traditions, and I will compare the relevant places in the context of the surrounding landscapes. In Sami tradition, the places are in a few cases lakes and rivers rather than mountains.

### The sources

Neither of the two source types that I will use is unproblematic. As written accounts dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Icelandic texts post-date the conversion by two or more centuries. Therefore, we cannot necessarily rely on the information they give about pre-Christian beliefs. For the present study, however, this does not matter so much, because it is relevant to compare the two traditions even if we cannot be sure that all the information is truly pre-Christian. Another problem is that the information that the Old Norse sources give about ancestor mountains is very scant. This is one reason why it is interesting to compare it with the neighbouring Sami tradition. We cannot transfer information from one tradition to another, but

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it is worth checking if they could throw light on each other. As opposed to the Old Norse sources, the eighteenth-century sources for Sami religion concern contemporary beliefs. But they are untrustworthy nevertheless, because they are written by outsiders – Norwegian and Swedish missionaries who interviewed Sami people about their religion only to find the most effective way to strangle it and convert the Sami.<sup>1</sup> As will become clear in the discussion, this problem is inescapable, but we still seem to know enough to allow for an interesting comparison.

There are three Old Icelandic texts that tell of mountains that people would ‘die into’ during the age of settlement: *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Landnámabók* and *Njáls saga*.<sup>2</sup> According to *Eyrbyggja saga*, the chieftain and farmer Þórolfr Mostrarskegg in the ninth century moved from the Norwegian island of Moster south of present-day Bergen<sup>3</sup> to the Þórsnes headland on the south shore of Breiðafjörður in western Iceland.

On that headland, there is a mountain in which Þórolfr placed so much faith that nobody was allowed to look at it unwashed and nothing could be killed on the mountain, neither livestock nor people, unless it perished by itself. That mountain he called Helgafell [‘sacred mountain’] and believed that he would go there when he died, as would all his relatives on the headland.<sup>4</sup>

One autumn day many years after Þórolfr had died, a shepherd:

saw the cliff in the north face of the mountain open, and inside the mountain he saw big fires and heard the merry noises from a banquet and loud drinking talk. When he listened [...], he could hear [Þórolfr’s son] Þorsteinn Þorskabítr being greeted together with his companions and told to sit in the high seat opposite his father.<sup>5</sup>

The following day, Þorsteinn drowned at sea while fishing. *Landnámabók*, which is an overview of the settlement of Iceland, says this about the same mountain:

Þórolfr ‘had so much faith in this mountain [...] that he called it Helgafell, and nobody was allowed to look at it unwashed, and this place was so inviolable (*svá mikil friðhelgi*) that nothing could be killed on the mountain, neither livestock nor people, unless it perished by itself. Þórolfr and his relatives believed that they would die into the mountain.’<sup>6</sup>

*Njáls saga* tells of how the sorcerer Svanr, who lives at Strandir in north-western Iceland, drowns at sea while fishing, and fishermen in the area ‘thought they saw Svanr walk into the mountain of Kaldbakshorn, where he was well greeted’.<sup>7</sup>

*Landnámabók* gives three accounts that are very brief but seem to reflect the same notions. A certain Kráku-Hreiðarr settled at Steinsstaðir in Skagafjörður, northern Iceland, and ‘chose to die into mount Mælifell’.<sup>8</sup> On the Snæfellsnes peninsula, western Iceland, ‘Sel-Þórir and his pagan relatives died into mount Þórisbjörg’.<sup>9</sup> In Hvammsfjörður, western Iceland, the settler Auðr Djúpúðga, who was a Christian, ‘held her prayers at Krosshólar heights.’ When she died, ‘her relatives had great faith in the heights. A sacrificial construction was erected there, and sacrifices performed. They believed that they would die into these heights’.<sup>10</sup>

Three more examples are sometimes mentioned, but these are not unequivocal. In *Njáls saga*, Flosi Þórðarson in a dream sees Mount Lómagnúpur in south-eastern Iceland open and a man with an iron staff and a goat-skin jacket comes out. The man calls on many of Flosi’s men and thus predicts that and in what order they are to die in the upcoming conflict. He speaks to Flosi and says his name is *Jarngrímr*, ‘iron mask’. Later in *Njáls saga*, when Earl Sigurðr has died in a terrible battle in Ireland, one of his men sees him coming home to his farm in Orkney, and rides towards him. They meet and ‘ride under a high hill’ (*undir leiti nokkurt*) and ‘are never seen again’. In *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Gísli in a dream enters a house where he recognises ‘many’ of his ‘friends and relatives’ sitting around fires drinking. (It is not clear whether they are still alive or not.) The fires are seven in number, and this number indicates how many more years he is to live, a woman tells him. This good woman (and an evil one) returns repeatedly in his ominous dreams, and on one occasion she takes him to her hall and says this is where he goes when he dies.<sup>11</sup>

The Old Icelandic notions of ancestor mountains in all probability came from Norway; in the case of Helgafell, this is clear. In Norwegian tradition, these notions have been lost more or less completely. Nordland, however, has pointed out one exception, which is connected to the Ryssaberget precipice at Voss in western Norway. It ‘was thought to be an unearthly place. In the local

tradition, it is believed to be a place where lights are seen foreboding deaths in the districts: “It is a nasty, haunted place. Fires have been seen burning inside the mountain [...]. Now somebody is dying again, last night a light was showing in Ryssaberje.”<sup>12</sup>

We now move on to Sami tradition. It is only from the South Sami area that we have information about a similar kind of death realm. This, and the beings inhabiting it, is called *saajve* in South Sami, plural *saajvh*.<sup>13</sup> This chapter is not the place to present all the material we have about this and I will therefore limit the scope to the passages that seem most relevant to a comparison with the Old Norse tradition.<sup>14</sup> The best introduction to *saajve* is offered by Johan Randulf, who was a clergyman in the Namdalen district of north Trøndelag from 1718. He is considered one of the most valuable sources, because he presents much independent information. In 1723, he wrote:

In every parish and bailiwick here in Norway, in the interior as well as along the coast, there are some mountains that are bigger, and for some reason more noted than the other, small mountains that surround them, such as *Lyder Horn*, *Hornelen*, *Romsdals-Horn* in Bergen Diocese, *Naupen*, *Schiolden*, *Lechemøen*, *Harchilden* [manuscript variants: *Harchilden*, *Harichilden*, *Hanchilden*], *Heilshornet*, *Torghatten*, *Alstahaugs Tinder*, *Biarchon*, *Leiron* etc. here in Trondheim Diocese. A Sami will hold all such mountains holy and call them *Saivo* / *saajve*, for example *Leiron Saivo*, *Biarchon Saivo*, *Harchild Saivo*, etc. The reason for this supposed holiness of the mountains is this: that Satan has deluded them into believing that in every such mountain lives a holy angel or sub-god who has the power to preserve them and help them in whatever they undertake. From such mountain angels a Sami then chooses, according to how much of a *nåejtie* (Sami ritual specialist) he is, one or two, sometimes maybe even three or four, as his angel or guardian angels, which he will summon by customary yoiking when he is to undertake something, especially when he wants to beat his drum or in other ways make an enquiry to Satan about what he wants to know. This angel will immediately appear visibly at his place and talk to him in human guise, wearing red, blue, yellow, white or green clothes. Because every such mountain's angel or *saajve*, which is what they also call the one who lives inside the mountain, has his specific colour of clothes, by which he

distinguishes himself from any other *saajve* from another mountain, whose clothes are in turn of a different colour.<sup>15</sup>

The *saajve* will help the Sami ‘to a wealthy marriage, to a successful hunt, to be powerful in the Sami witchcrafts, etc.’ The *saajve* can also appear in the shape of a beautiful forest goddess (‘Skov-Gudinde’) and help gather and milk the reindeer, or she may sleep with Sami men.<sup>16</sup>

According to Randulf, the Sami believe that:

as soon as they are dead, their souls move into the *saajve* or holy mountain, whose master or possessor (whom they also call *saajve*) was their guardian angel when they were alive, and they are there made into gods who have the power to, for a while, keep death away from their friends and relatives, who sacrifice to them reindeer, or horses with which they can drive around and amuse themselves, from one *saajve* to another, but mostly in their own *saajve* and the joy that is found there; all of this together is called the realm of the dead (‘de Dødis Riige’).<sup>17</sup>

Skanke lists between 30 and 40 *saajve* locations, mostly mountains, in the northern parts of Trøndelag in Norway and Jämtland in Sweden.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the information that we have about Sami religion in general comes from Thomas von Westen, who was leader of the Danish-Norwegian mission among the Sami from 1716 until his death in 1727. He may have been the non-Sami who obtained the deepest knowledge of the Sami religion at the time, but during his lifetime he was able to publish only fragments of the large material that he collected. Hans Skanke inherited von Westen’s material, and most of what we know about it comes from his presentations.<sup>19</sup> He writes:

It has been an old superstition among the Sami that they believe that in sacred mountains in the highlands, which they call *saajve*, and in haunts belonging to specters underground, which they call *jaemiehaajmoe*, there are people like themselves, with the same professions, the same practices, the same skills, the same kinds of animals as they, just with the difference that the people in(side) the mountains and underground are said to have all such things far more perfect and in a far richer and happier degree and condition

than the Sami. [...] This means that the Sami therefore consider *saajveálmah*, the people who live in(side) the mountains, as rich and wonderful people, and in all magical arts excellent and perfect [...].

In any of these *saajvh* they say there are [...] *álmah*, i.e. men, as well as *saajveniejth*, i.e. women and children. In quite a few there are married *álmah* with their *niejth*, others are unmarried [...]. In addition to these *saajve* people, the Sami explain that there are said to be livestock and animals far more beautiful than those the Sami have. In particular, any Sami is said to have, in those *saajvh* that belong to him, three kinds of creatures for his *náejtie* service, which always, when he summons them, lend him a hand, namely a bird, which they call *saajvevuerniesledtie* ('*saajve* oath bird'), a fish or a snake, which they call *saajveguelie* ('*saajve* fish'), and a reindeer bull, which they call *saajvesarva* ('*saajve* [rutting] reindeer bull'). These in combination, the Sami call *náejtiesvoejkene* ('*náejtie* spirits'). [...] <sup>20</sup>

In *saajve* [...] they also believe that there is a church and the most blissful life that anyone can lead. Therefore, it is their hope [...] that when they have spent this life in the misery that is the Sami's lot, they will be moved to *saajve*, whose inhabitants they consider Sami, who in their lifetime sedulously have sacrificed, drummed and yoiked on *saajve*, and therefore in their second life enjoy such great prosperity and blissfulness. [...] This is why *saajvetjaetsie*, the water that flows from a *saajve*, is thought to be so holy [...]. <sup>21</sup>

Skanke later repeats that *saajve* is a place to where the Sami 'hope to come after death', but this time he says that a condition for this is having led a moral life. <sup>22</sup>

Further north, there are also Sami traditions about sacred mountains, often called *Bassevárre* 'sacred mountain' (SamL., or *-várri*, SamN.), which are inhabited by helping spirits or god-like beings who receive sacrifices and resemble the *saajve* beings, or the beliefs were directed at stones, boulders or cliffs near such mountains or rivers or lakes inhabited by such beings. <sup>23</sup> Such formations could belong to a clan, <sup>24</sup> and children could be sent to the supernatural beings inhabiting them to go to school. <sup>25</sup> However, we have far less information about any traditions about such beings than about the *saajve*, and there is no indication of a belief that people could go to such places after death.

The word *saajve* / *sájuva* / *sáiva* etc. is north of the South and Ume Sami areas known mostly in connection with water. One widespread meaning is ‘freshwater’,<sup>26</sup> another ‘small spring-fed lake with large, hard-to-catch fish owned by the hidden people, and a shaft down to a similar lake below, and taboos connected to it’. Especially noise, vulgar speech and uncleanness should be avoided near *sájuva* / *sáiva* lakes, or else, you would get no fish.<sup>27</sup>

It is believed that the word *saajve* is borrowed from Proto-Scandinavian \**saiwaz* or \**saiwiz*, which is the same word as *sea*, and that the meaning ‘sacred mountain’ in some way developed from the meaning ‘sacred lake’, although it is unclear how this happened.<sup>28</sup>

## Research History

Here, I will give an overview of the research that has discussed the *saajve* complex and especially the *saajve* and Helgafell complexes together.<sup>29</sup>

Already Fritzner in 1877 suggested that the Sami idea that people could go to local sacred mountains after death was borrowed from the Scandinavians, and most scholars have shared this opinion.<sup>30</sup> Wiklund and Bäckman agree that most or parts of the complex surrounding the *saajve* mountain of the dead was borrowed, but believe that some parts of it are indigenous.<sup>31</sup> Arbman points out that, although *saajve* and other loanwords in Sami come from Scandinavian, they may have been given new content and fitted into a Sami, north Eurasian cultural background.<sup>32</sup> In early research, most scholars also believed that the *saajve* was a(n ordinary) realm of the dead.<sup>33</sup> Especially in recent research, however, many scholars reject this view,<sup>34</sup> because the sources primarily point out Jamiehaajmoe (SamS.) as the Sami realm of the dead.<sup>35</sup> Instead, some say that the *saajve* world essentially was the same as the world of *hálldit* (SamN.), *gufihtarat* (SamN.), *uldat* (SamN.), *gadniha* (SamL.), fairies / elves / hidden people<sup>36</sup> / *vittra* (Swedish) / *huldrefolk* (Norwegian), etc.<sup>37</sup> Some say that it is both, or something in-between. Bäckman argues that it was neither, and calls the *saajve* beings ‘helping and protecting spirits’.<sup>38</sup> Rydving seems to follow Bäckman, refers to the *saajve*

beings as ‘collective invisible beings’ and distinguishes them from the ancestors.<sup>39</sup> Christiansen, on the other hand, sees traits from both ancestors and ‘fairies’ in the *saajve* complex and uses this in the evolutionistic debate about the origin of the ‘fairy faith’: ‘conceptions of life after death played an important part in its formation’, he argues.<sup>40</sup> Wiklund and Bergsland have identified most of the *saajve* mountains / locations mentioned in the early sources.<sup>41</sup> Dunfjeld-Aagård points out, however, that they have only paid attention to the *saajve* locations mentioned by von Westen / Skanke, who covered the interior along the Norwegian-Swedish border in Trøndelag, Nordland and Jämtland, not the coastal areas in Norwegian Trøndelag mentioned by Randulf.<sup>42</sup> Qvigstad, however, does include the coastal examples.<sup>43</sup>

## Discussion

I believe that we need a broader and more detailed comparison of the Old Norse Helgafell complex and the Sami *saajve* complex than what we have seen so far. Von Unwerth’s discussion from 1911 was good for its time, but is now outdated, among other things because he combines material from all over the Sami area into one standard Sami Religion.<sup>44</sup> After von Unwerth, there has been no systematic comparison. I believe a renewed, in-depth comparison will reveal that some of the disagreements that we have seen in the research history are not real. Others seem to derive from demanding from the mythic world view a consistency that we should not expect (see below). I also believe that we should put more emphasis on what Randulf says about *saajve* – both regarding its nature and his examples of *saajve* mountains on the coast. The partial neglect of this information seems to derive to some degree from the modern conception of the Sami as a people of inland mountain areas. In the eighteenth century, however, the Sami on the coast of Trøndelag were not yet assimilated. And, as Dunfjeld-Aagård points out, three of Randulf’s *saajve* mountains were located in his own parish, Nærøy, on the coast,<sup>45</sup> about which he – obviously – had good information. He specifically says that there are *saajve* mountains ‘In every parish and bailiwick [...], in the interior as well as along the coast’.<sup>46</sup>

### List of Traits

I will now list characteristics of the *saajve* complex (because this is the aspect we are best informed about),<sup>47</sup> and then compare it with Norse tradition. Because the idea of going to sacred mountains after death is mentioned only in connection with South Sami *saajve*, I will restrict myself to mainly South Sami sources that mention the word *saajve*, and not include information about the *Bassevárres* further north (as, for example Bäckman does<sup>48</sup>), although many aspects of that tradition are very similar.

1. The *saajve* locations listed in the sources are landscape formations that attract attention, mostly mountains, sometimes lakes, rivers or rapids.<sup>49</sup> As Randulf points out, the mountains in question are prominent and many are typical landmarks.<sup>50</sup> The sources do not highlight specific parts of these mountains, but judging from later popular traditions, the points of contact with *saajve* beings were in some cases precipices, because a precipice in which the hidden people live can be called *saajvebaakte*, ‘*saajve* precipice’.<sup>51</sup> Many of the *saajve* mountains listed in the sources have a characteristic precipice.<sup>52</sup>

2. The *saajvh* had a special connection with water. The water that flowed from *saajve* mountains was regarded as very valuable and was drunk at certain rituals.<sup>53</sup> In the South Sami area, a *saajve* was in most cases a mountain, but also there, *saajve* lakes were part of the tradition. We just saw that some of the *saajve* localities mentioned in the sources are lakes, rivers or rapids. A lake with fish that are hard to catch because they are owned by supernatural beings was in Frostviken, Jämtland, called a *saajvejaevrie*, ‘*saajve* lake’, as late as in the early twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> In Härjedalen, even further south, a small sacrifice would be given to a *saajvejaevrie* before fishing.<sup>55</sup> The South Sami woman Kerstin Jakobsdotter, in the early eighteenth century, provides information that seems to come even closer to the northern traditions. She was asked to explain the Sami words in a letter from von Westen, and she explained *saajve* in this way: ‘Big mountains or fells where the smoke stands or the worst ghosts live. It is also said that there are small lakes there that go, if I may say so, or uncleanness, which, if one touches, close up and nothing is seen. The hens or

roosters crow there, and far north, it is said. Such *saajvh* they consider their supporters.<sup>56</sup> The small lakes closing in connection with uncleanliness fits neatly in with the traditions about *sájuva / sáiva* lakes and their hard-to-catch fish further north.<sup>57</sup> It should be stressed, however, that ‘small lakes’ (*tjärnar*) in this text emerges only through emendation. But from Jämtland we also have early twentieth-century South Sami information that *saajve* lakes have a double bottom. This *could* derive from literature, but the account contains quite a bit of independent information and even names such a lake.<sup>58</sup> In an early twentieth-century South Sami legend from Hattfjellidal, Norway, the *saajve* world is reached by jumping into a spring (*gaaltije*).<sup>59</sup> In light of these examples, what ‘closes’ in Kerstin Jakobsdotter’s account could be the shaft between the upper and lower lake. See also the connection between *saajve* and fish in point 7 of this list.

3. Only people with a personal relationship to a certain *saajve* could go to it after death.<sup>60</sup>

4. A *saajve* and its inhabitants could be inherited and sold, like trade goods, even moved if the owner moved, and status in society depended upon how many *saajvh* one owned and on their respective values, which differed; inherited *saajvh* were the most valuable ones.<sup>61</sup>

5. The *nåejties* had a special connection with *saajvh*.<sup>62</sup> Bäckman, whose work on *saajve* is the most comprehensive hitherto, understands the sources in the way that ordinary people could not go to a *saajve* after death, only *nåejties*.<sup>63</sup>

6. The paradise-like *saajvh*<sup>64</sup> are mentioned as one place you could go to after death, but not the main realm of the dead – which was Jaemiehaajmoe, literally ‘the world of death’. The sources also mention other names for it, such as Mubpienaajmoe, ‘the otherworld’, or perhaps for other realms of the dead.<sup>65</sup>

7. The Sami had a devoted and intimate relationship with the *saajve* beings. The *saajve* beings, who were better off than humans, offered important help with reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, divination and other aspects of life, even accepting human children into their schools – if they were given the sacrifices they wanted and treated the way they wanted – and they would do serious damage if this was not done.<sup>66</sup> The *saajve* beings could

appear in dreams and sometimes show themselves in this world; they would especially visit the Sami on Christmas night. The Sami could visit the *saajvh* and go to parties there, and they could have sexual relations with *saajve* beings. The *nåejties* had special animal helpers in *saajve*.<sup>67</sup> If a human child got sick, s/he would be given a new name, which was called a *saajvenimme* ‘*saajve* name’, because the sickness was believed to be caused by a deceased person in a *saajve* wanting to be called up (to the world of the living), and the *saajvenimme* would be the name of that person, who was then in a way reborn.<sup>68</sup> This ritual was called a *saajvelaavkoe* ‘*saajve* baptism’, and after it, the deceased person’s *nimmeguelie* ‘name fish’ would follow the person who was given the name.<sup>69</sup> All this implies that most of the information we have about the *saajvh* and their world (in the earliest sources as well as in later traditions) is hard to separate from the traditions of the hidden people and their world in South Sami culture (where the word *gitne*, *giknjesje*, *gitnesje*, cognate with *ganij* above, is one term for it<sup>70</sup>) and the cultures surrounding it. It is not without reason that many scholars understand the *saajve* and the hidden people as the same.<sup>71</sup>

8. It seems that certain taboos were to be observed near a *saajve*. We have no absolutely clear evidence of this in the South Sami area, but we have many indications. As we have seen, Kerstin Jakobsdotter probably mentions an uncleanliness taboo in connection with *saajve* lakes. From the Lule and North Sami areas, we have much information about such taboos: Noise, vulgar speech and uncleanliness must be avoided near *såjvva* / *såiva* lakes, or else, you would get no fish. In some areas, the taboos are more developed: women should stay away from the *såjvva* / *såiva* lakes, the name of God should not be mentioned near them, the fish from such a lake should be gutted on its shores or taken into the hut through the sacred back door, etc.<sup>72</sup> In the northern Sami areas, such taboos were common also in connection with *Bassevárre* mountains. Among them was a requirement that women must not look at such mountains.<sup>73</sup> From Lycksele, just north of the South Sami area, we have information from the 1670s about a taboo regarding noise connected to a mountain where a *såjvvuo* being could be encountered.<sup>74</sup> Lindahl & Öhrling’s information about

such taboos in connection with ‘Saiwa’ mountains might also refer to a southern area, although it is impossible to determine how far south that area would be.<sup>75</sup>

9. The *saajvh* had a very prominent position in South Sami religion. Von Westen says the *saajve* beings are the Sami’s ‘most important god(s) and their greatest hope and on them they have expended all their sweat and means’. Skanke says that *saajve* ‘seems to be the most important element in the old religion of the Lapps, the element to which everything else refers’.<sup>76</sup>

## Comparison

1. The five known formations that people could ‘die into’ in the Old Icelandic landscape are all mountains or heights, like most of the Sami ones. Also as in Sami tradition, most of these Icelandic mountains or heights are prominent.<sup>77</sup> Kaldbakshorn and Mælifell (and Lómagnúpur) are typical landmarks.<sup>78</sup> Keeping in mind *saajve* precipices, it is when the precipice in the north face of Helgafell opens that the shepherd is able to look into the mountain. Kaldbakshorn has a 400 m high, kilometre-long precipice facing the ocean, and in the middle of it, there is a vertical cleft called *Svangsjá* ‘Svanr’s cleft’ through which, according to local tradition, Svanr entered the mountain.<sup>79</sup> (Lómagnúpur is also characterised by an immense, vertical rock face.) Regarding a connection to water, see the next point.

2. None of the known Icelandic formations that people ‘die into’ are lakes, rivers or rapids. In Iceland as well as in mainland Scandinavia, where the Helgafell complex must have come from, there are rich traditions about small lakes that are double-bottomed and/or have a passage through the bottom. The essence of these traditions is probably ancient because they are so widespread and can hardly be derived from Christianity, and because one such lake is mentioned in an Old English text.<sup>80</sup> But, as far as I know, we have no information that such lakes were thought to be (passages to) a realm of the dead (although such ideas may have existed in the past and failed to be recorded). Yet, the Old Icelandic belief in ‘dying into’ mountains could still have a connection with water. Both Svanr and Þorsteinn Þorskabítr drown before they are seen entering their local mountains, so,

in a way, they enter the mountains through water. In Icelandic folklore, *álfar* / *huldufólk* are said to live mostly in cliffs and boulders, but in many stories, jumping into ponds, rivers or the sea is the way to get to their homes, although this leads to a normal landscape on the other side, not a water-world.<sup>81</sup> The same is the case in the South Sami legend about a journey to the *saajve* people (see above); the spring is just a passage. This is ambiguous in a way reminiscent of the *saajve* complex with its combination of mountains and lakes. To a modern reader, it looks illogical and inconsistent. But when the cosmology of Northern traditional mythologies and folktales is examined more closely, it turns out that the unusual landscape formations that are associated with supernatural beings – special lakes, springs, boulders, cliffs, prominent mountains, waterfalls, crevices, caves, etc. – should only in some cases be seen as *dwelling*s for otherworld beings in this world's landscape and more commonly as interchangeable *passageways* to an otherworldly landscape.<sup>82</sup> For example, in a Skolt Sami legend, a reindeer bull from the otherworld goes back to the otherworld through a waterfall.<sup>83</sup> It would be odd if the bull lived in the waterfall itself. In a North Sami legend, the land of the hidden people (*mearrahálddit*) appears to be underneath the sea, but is a dry land that was reached by sailing horizontally through fog.<sup>84</sup> Apparently, the hidden people neither live in the sea nor beyond fog horizontally speaking; they just live 'beyond the passageways'. In Old Norse mythology, Óðinn has to bore through a mountain to get into the giantess Gunnlōð's abode, but when he wants to go home, he can fly out, unhindered by the mountain, as if she lives above the ground in daylight.<sup>85</sup> If we look closer at the South Sami sources, the *saajve* beings are not confined to a dwelling inside one mountain or precipice. We see in the eighteenth-century texts that they go to church and visit *saajve* beings in other places. In legends and terminology recorded later, we see that they have reindeer herds and clearly live in a whole landscape in the *saajve* world.<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, we should probably understand the *saajve* mountains, precipices, lakes and springs primarily as points of contact between this world and the *saajve* world, as interfaces. With this in mind, the difference between prominent mountain and spring or lake (or the like) is not so large.

3. The Old Icelandic ancestor mountains seem to have had the same private character as the *saajvh*. In three of the five clear Old Icelandic cases, it is said that it was a certain settler and his relatives who would die into the mountain.<sup>87</sup>

4. We have no indication that the Old Icelandic ancestor mountains could be owned like the *saajvh*, which could be traded and amassed in a rather capitalistic way. Still, it seems that the Icelandic mountains that people ‘died into’ belonged to the clan, especially the head of the clan, which implies that they were inheritable. If the owner of a *saajve* moved, its inhabitants could be persuaded to move with him to settle in the mountain(s) that the owner pointed out.<sup>88</sup> Þórolfr Mostrarskegg and his Helgafell could be an analogue to this. He moved, pointed out a new ancestor mountain, and it may be that his ancestors were thought to have moved with him from Norway and into the new mountain. At least, the noisy banquet in Helgafell may appear to have more participants than just the settler generation of Þórolfr’s ‘relatives on the [Þórsnes] headland’,<sup>89</sup> which is quite small.

5. Þórolfr Mostrarskegg was a religious leader and had a close relation to Helgafell in the sense that he chose it and decided who was to go there after death. I assume that the same was the case in the other Old Icelandic cases. However, we have no indication that Þórolfr as a religious leader had such a close relationship to the mountain that he had zoomorphic helping spirits inside it (although ritual specialists in Old Icelandic tradition did have zoomorphic helping spirits<sup>90</sup>). In the Old Icelandic texts, it is clear that also ordinary people, not only ritual specialists, could go to an ancestor mountain after death. This seems to be the case also in Sami tradition, contrary to what has been claimed.<sup>91</sup> As far as I can tell, the sources do not mention such a restriction. Our two best sources say that the South Sami, in general, hoped to come to a *saajve* after death.<sup>92</sup> And, as noted by Rydving,<sup>93</sup> not all *saajvh* had a *saajve* fish, bird or reindeer bull; these *nåejtie* helpers were only found in special *nåejtie saajvh*.<sup>94</sup> This implies that many *saajvh* did not have a special connection with *nåejties*.

6. Both the *saajvh* and the Helgafell type were merry, desirable places. But were the *saajvh* really realms of the dead? The sources for South Sami tradition primarily point out Jaemiehaajmoe as

the realm of the dead, at the same time as the relationship between Jaemiehaajmoe and the *saajvh* is unclear.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, leading scholars (see above) argue that the *saajvh* were not realms of the dead. However, when anybody could come to a *saajve* after death, this implies that the *saajvh* were realms of the dead. The information we have of *saajvenimmes* points in the same direction: it is a dead person (*jaemieh*) in a *saajve* who wants to be called up to the world of the living.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, there may well be several, alternative places to go after death even within the same belief system. This is the case in Old Norse tradition, where the grey, dull Hel is the main realm of the dead, and there also is a paradise for deceased warriors, Valhøll, possibly also Folkvangr (see below) – in addition to the even more exclusive ancestor mountains, at the same time as the deceased in some sense was believed to lead a continued existence in the grave.<sup>97</sup> In South Sami tradition, the sources mention even more realms of the dead, although it is not clear that they are not simply different names for the same place.<sup>98</sup> The realms of the dead in South Sami and Old Norse tradition correspond quite closely to one another, not only in their diversity, but also in many of the details. In both traditions, the main realms of the dead are joyless places with a female ruler – Jaemiehaahka or Hel<sup>99</sup> – and there are happier alternatives (*saajvh*, Valhøll, Helgafell etc.) as well as more local and exclusive alternatives (*saajvh*, Helgafell etc.). We even get a glimpse (but no information), in both traditions, of a (presumably happy) realm of the dead ruled by one of the main female deities – Freyja’s Folkvangr in Old Norse tradition, and Saaraahka’s Saaraahkaaajmoe in Sami.<sup>100</sup> Kerstin Jakobsdotter’s information about crowing roosters associated with *saajvh* may recall the roosters crowing in Valhøll and Hel according to *Völuspá* 42.<sup>101</sup>

Rosén’s argument for rejecting the *saajvh* as realms of the dead is the fact that the *saajve* beings overlap so extensively with the *huldrefolket* / hidden people.<sup>102</sup> However, this seems to demand more tidiness from the mythology than we should expect. I am also unsure of whether the sources allow us to distinguish between *saajve* beings and ancestors, as Rydving does.<sup>103</sup> For sure, only a minority of ancestors were believed to live in a *saajve*, but there is strong evidence that the *saajvh* were understood as places

to go to after death, places where deceased persons lived. At the same time, the sources make no distinction between deceased persons and other inhabitants of the *saavjh*. In this situation, it seems difficult not to understand the *saajve* beings as (one group of) ancestors.

7. The relationship between the Norse and the inhabitants of their ancestor mountains seems not to have been equally devoted and intimate as that between the Sami and the *saajve*. Þórolfr Mostrarskegg's great-grandson and successor as chieftain and *goði* or 'cultic leader' at Þórsnes was Snorri Þorgrímsson, and later in *Eyrbyggja saga*, it is said that Snorri 'climbs up on Helgafell to devise successful plans' (as Torfi Tulinius puts it).<sup>104</sup> This is conspicuous, and it could be an example that the ancestors inside an ancestor mountain in Iceland were believed to help the living. But no other Old Norse sources tell of anything like that – although there are many accounts of ancestors or newly deceased persons who approach the living in order to help them, similar to what the *saajve* beings do. In many cases, this is done through dreams, and often the beings who do this are female *fylgjur*, guardian spirits of the clan. These beings sometimes overlap with deceased persons and the concept seems to derive from ancestors. One example of this is Gísli's already mentioned 'dream woman' in *Gísla saga*.<sup>105</sup> We have no example where a deceased from inside an ancestor mountain turns up in a living person's dreams, however (unless the 'dream woman' in *Gísla saga* should be understood in this way). The fact that the anthropomorphic *fulgjur* are women, whereas the sources only mention men who go to ancestor mountains, could count against a possible link between *fylgjur* and ancestor mountains. Yet, in some cases, the *fylgja* woman's role is filled by a man,<sup>106</sup> and Krosshólar Heights were chosen by a female founder of the clan.

Even so, there is little reason to believe that the few words handed down to us about Old Icelandic ancestor mountains present the whole picture. Apparently, regarding pre-Christian religious phenomena, the medieval scribes took more interest in non-local traditions; most of what information we have concerns deities that were common to large areas. (More about this below.) Indications that ancestors in Old Icelandic mountains were

believed to help the living in ways similar to what the *saajve* beings did, can be found in popular traditions from post-medieval times. Throughout mainland Scandinavia, from where the culture of Iceland during the Age of Settlement was mainly brought, there are widespread traditions that the founder of the farm (which Þórolfr Mostrarskegg was), sometimes called *rudkallen*, ‘the land clearer’, or *tomten*, ‘the house foundation man’, and sometimes bearing a proper name, lives on the farm or in a nearby (grave) mound, boulder, grove or other, occasionally in a local mountain. He is believed to protect the farm and help the people who live there with their work, as long as they bring him sacrifices at certain times and observe taboos about noise, uncleanliness etc. near his dwelling.<sup>107</sup> If we include the whole of the tradition about *huldrefolk* (‘hidden people’), *haugefolk* (‘mound people’, Norway), *vättarna* (‘the sprites’, Sweden), *álfar*, *huldufólk* (‘elves’, ‘hidden people’, Iceland), etc., from which the *rudkall* and the *tomte* can only partially be distinguished – we find virtually all of the characteristics of the *saajve* complex even in its earliest known form, including the participation in parties held by hidden people, visits from them at Christmas and sexual relations with them.<sup>108</sup>

This is relevant because most of the complex surrounding the *huldrefolk* etc. is probably ancient – because it is hard to derive from Christianity or other post-Christian developments (the Church would have opposed the introduction of such beliefs rather than facilitated it), and because essential glimpses of it are recorded in medieval literature. In *Porvalds þátr víðförla* from around 1200 and *Kristni saga* from the middle of the thirteenth century, the Icelandic farmer Koðrán sacrifices to an *ármaðr*, ‘steward’, or *spámaðr*, ‘soothsayer’, who lives in a boulder near the farm, taking care of Koðrán’s livestock and protecting him and giving him advice about the future. In the early thirteenth-century *Kormáks saga*, *álfar* who live in a mound cure people when people give them sacrifices.<sup>109</sup> In Sweden, the (condemnation of the) worship of the *tomte* is attested from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards.<sup>110</sup> Generally in Old Norse literature, the *álfar* are connected to fertility and good harvests.<sup>111</sup> Óláfs þátr Geirstaðaálfs tells of the ninth-century Norwegian king Óláfr Guðrøðsson who was associated with bringing such abundance and prosperity that

he was posthumously called *Geirstaðaalfr*, ‘the *alfr* of Geirstad’ (the farm where he lived), and was given sacrifices during crop failures.<sup>112</sup> It seems a reasonable assumption that the inhabitants of the Old Icelandic ancestor mountains (and, by implication, the Old Norwegian ones) largely overlapped with the hidden people. The fact that the *saajve* beings, even in the earliest sources, are difficult to distinguish from the Sami hidden people lends additional support to this assumption. In my judgement, this assumption is probable, albeit obviously uncertain.

Some important elements from the *saajve* complex are not found in the hidden people complex. Going to the hidden people after death is (to my knowledge) not an option, human children are not sent to their schools and there is no equivalent of the helping spirits that the *nâejtie* has in his *saajve*(s). Also, it is only in the *saajve* complex that there is a link between a reincarnated child, the child’s name and an ancestor mountain (or other realm of the dead). It could be a coincidence that such a notion is not recorded in the Old Norse material, however. Reincarnation in connection with naming is well known from Old Norse culture,<sup>113</sup> and in some places, this has survived until modern times.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, many scholars believe that the word *soul*, Gothic *saiwala*, is derived in Proto-Germanic times from the word *\*saiwaz* or *\*saiwiz*, which is the source for Sami *saajve* / *sájvva* / *sáiva*.<sup>115</sup> The ultimate background for this may be, firstly, the idea that water separates the otherworld from this world,<sup>116</sup> and secondly, beliefs in reincarnation, where the souls are recycled from the otherworld beyond the water.

8. It is clearer that taboos were connected to Helgafell than to the South Sami *saajvh*. But Kerstin Jakobsdotter seems to mention an uncleanness taboo, as we have seen. The taboo about not looking at the mountain is known in connection with *bassevárre* mountains further north – although in that case it only applies to women. The taboo against killing on Helgafell, ‘neither livestock nor people, unless it perished by itself’, is probably better understood if we compare it with Sami and Scandinavian practices. According to *Landnámabók*, the ban against killing on the mountain reflects a demand for peace in the sacred place. This seems also to be the case when the Sami forbade hunting within

a fence enclosing a large area around a sacrificial site in the Lule Sami area.<sup>117</sup> However, in Iceland there was no wild game except birds and the small arctic foxes, which would be very few indeed on a mountain that measures 200 x 150 m (and was not a nesting cliff). And why add: ‘unless it perished by itself’? Why is this information important to include? The words about not killing constitute nearly 10 % of the description of the mountain in *Eyrbyggja saga*! Lid explains this by linking it to a custom known from Early Modern Norway: Horses were often put to death by pushing them off a cliff, in some places backwards. They died from the impact and were then buried. This was done partly because of the Christian ban on eating horse meat, partly probably as a remnant of pre-Christian sacrificial practices. The original point, Lid says, is to send the sacrificial animal to the otherworld without using tools of any kind to kill it; this was said to be part of the tradition at Voss. As Lid points out, such ideas seem to be anchored in late thirteenth-century Iceland through a description of how the sacred stallion Freyfaxi (‘Freyr’s stallion’) is killed in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, allegedly in the tenth century: With a sack over his head and rocks tied to his neck, he is forced off a certain cliff and drops into a pond where he drowns. What Lid says about the ritual killing of horses makes good sense in Helgafell’s case,<sup>118</sup> because the mountain has a broad, high precipice on the north side – the one that opened when Þorsteinn Þorskabítr entered. The same way of sacrificing animals is well accounted for among the Sami, both in the north and in the south. Also, it was not unusual among the Sami to bury sacrificial animals alive or tether them, leaving them to die on the sacrificial site.<sup>119</sup> These animals would also come to the otherworld without being actively killed by humans.

I previously mentioned the precipice Ryssaberget at Voss, where lights used to be seen foreboding deaths. Interestingly, *Ryssaberget* means ‘the horse cliff’, and along with other cliffs with similar names, it is believed to reflect the habit of putting horses to death by pushing them off cliffs, which is well documented at Voss.<sup>120</sup>

If this is a correct understanding of ‘unless it perished by itself’, it could imply that humans (‘neither livestock nor people’) were also sacrificed in this way on the Helgafell precipice. In *Kristni*

*saga*, the Christian Icelanders Gizurr hvíti and Hjalti Skeggjason say (at an assembly just before the conversion) that the pagans in the country sacrifice humans by pushing them off cliffs. In addition, there are three mentions in Old Norse literature of old people or criminals being killed in this way, although one of them (*Gautreks saga*) clearly is legendary.<sup>121</sup> There are also several accounts of other forms of human sacrifice in Old Norse culture. It has been disputed to what degree these stories are true. But in a recent review including both the textual and archaeological material (much of it new), af Edholm concludes that human sacrifice probably was a reality in Old Norse pre-Christian culture.<sup>122</sup> We also have several accounts that the Sami, in the south as well as in the north, sacrificed humans in this way.<sup>123</sup> Some see this as anti-pagan or anti-Sami propaganda, which it may very well be.<sup>124</sup> But I can see no particular reason why it would be more unlikely among the Sami than among the Norse.

9. From the earliest written sources for both cultures, we get the impression that ancestor mountains were far less central in Old Norse religion than in South Sami religion. This may be correct. But it is also possible that we get a biased image because those who wrote the Old Norse sources had a different focus from those who wrote the sources for Sami religion. As we have seen, the *saajve* complex is hard to distinguish from the hidden people and their realm in other cultures, including later Sami cultures. The hidden people belong to the parts of the metaphysical world views that, after the introduction of Christianity and especially after the Enlightenment, have come to be regarded as popular traditions and superstition rather than religion.<sup>125</sup> Dictionaries of religion usually do not have entries about ‘hidden people’, ‘fairies’, ‘brownies’, ‘dwarves’ or ‘trolls’.<sup>126</sup> When, some years ago, I wanted to find examples – from around the world – of giants and monsters living in or belonging to mountains and caves,<sup>127</sup> I did not find anything in the religious studies section of my university library. I had to turn to the folkloristics section. However, such beings are fully covered by any accepted definition of religion, e.g. Melford Spiro’s classical one: ‘an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings’.<sup>128</sup> Still, the mentioned types of beings are not included

in the common understanding of ‘religion’ (although in religious studies during recent decades there has been a reaction against the understanding that only institutionalized religion is religion<sup>129</sup>).

This is probably why modern presentations of Sami religion do not give the *saajve* complex the position that we should expect, given von Westen and Skanke’s statements that it was the most important part of the religion.<sup>130</sup> For example, Mebius touches only briefly upon *saajve* in his book about Sami religion (which in many ways is brilliant).<sup>131</sup> Rydving is an exception, as he writes that the *saajve* beings, and ancestors, were invoked ‘far more frequently’ than the divinities.<sup>132</sup>

Bäckman addresses this problem in her 1975 thesis on sacred mountains and *saajve*: ‘It seems to me a great injustice against a people to degrade essential elements of their religion to “folklore”, or worse, to “witchcraft”.’ As a way of redressing this, she sees seventeenth and eighteenth-century recordings about *saajve* as religion, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century recordings as folklore, because the latter are ‘strikingly similar’ to the traditions about the hidden people (*vittersägner*) recorded among the Swedes in the same areas.<sup>133</sup> However, as we have seen, it is difficult to separate the hidden people traditions from the *saajve* complex even in the sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when Sami religion was still fully alive. The fact is that the probably most important part of South Sami religion is something that is usually not considered as religion but as folklore. This is not because there was something wrong with South Sami religion, but because the standard understanding of religion has a weakness. Luckily for modern scholarship, the missionaries who studied Sami religion in Early Modern times ignored the distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘superstition’ / ‘folklore,’ maybe because their purpose was to destroy the religion and they therefore had to learn to understand it as it actually was.

Our sources for Old Norse religion, however, were recorded for different purposes. The Eddic and skaldic poetry, which contains some mythological information, seems to have been recorded mostly because the poems were considered to be of historical or literary value in themselves. When Snorri Sturluson wrote his Edda two centuries after the conversion, his motivation was

to preserve the indigenous poetical tradition, which was packed with allusions to the mythology and thus required mythological knowledge in order to be understood. As the skalds did not allude much to the ‘folkloric’, local, everyday parts of the religion, Snorri did not include those aspects.<sup>134</sup> Regarding this part of the religion (including the ancestor mountains), all the information we have in medieval sources is the bits and pieces that happened to be recorded (mentioned above) because they had a function in narratives that were recorded for other reasons.

Due to this bias in the sources, it could well be that beliefs in ancestor mountains, probably overlapping with beliefs in *rudkallen* and the like as well as the hidden people, held a prominent position in Old Norse religion. Still, there cannot be much doubt that it was less important than the *saajve* beliefs were in South Sami religion. This is evident from the fact that deities in a Greco-Roman sense were not so important in Sami religion,<sup>135</sup> whereas they clearly had a prominent position in Old Norse religion – not only judging from the surviving written evidence, but also from place names.<sup>136</sup> In addition, the *nåejties* clearly had a more important position in Sami religion and society than corresponding ritual specialists had in Old Norse religion (*seiðmenn*, *skrattar*, etc., partly *goðar*).<sup>137</sup> Thus, the ancestor mountains’ ‘share’ must have been smaller than the *saajve*’s, probably much smaller.

## Conclusion

It seems that the happy *saajvh* really was a realm of the dead, one of several in South Sami religion. There is strong evidence that the *saajvh* were understood as places to go after death and places where deceased persons stayed. At the same time, the sources make no distinction between deceased persons and other inhabitants of the *saajvh*. Thus, it seems difficult not to understand the *saajve* beings as (one group of) ancestors, and to maintain a distinction between *saajve* beings and ancestors.

The diversity of places to go after death is not an argument against *saajvh* being realms of the dead, but indeed constitutes a similarity with Old Norse religion. Other similarities are the fact that most of the *saajvh* are mountains, usually prominent ones, the fact that the Icelandic mountains and the *saajvh* have a

private character, and the fact that taboos against uncleanness attached to both groups. It is probable that both also had a taboo against using tools to kill sacrificial animals (possibly also humans), which instead were to die by themselves when they were pushed off cliffs, buried alive or bound tethered and left at the sacrificial site.

There are also a number of significant differences. Some of the *saajvh* listed in the sources are lakes, rivers or rapids, but in the Old Norse sources, no lakes, rivers or rapids are portrayed as places where people could go after death. This difference diminishes if we conceive of the lakes and the mountains as interfaces between this world and the otherworld. The *saajvh* were inherited, but were also traded and amassed in an almost capitalistic way. We have no indication that Old Norse ancestor mountains were understood in this way. But it is possible that the ancestors inside of Helgafell were thought to have moved there with the head of the clan, like the *saajve* beings could follow their owner. The taboo against women looking in the direction of or approaching sacred places, probably also *saajvh*, that we find in Sami tradition seems to have no parallel in Norse tradition. We have no indication that Norse ritual specialists had a similar kind of personal relationship with ancestor mountains as the Sami *nåejties* had, with important helping spirits inside the mountains. It seems that *saajvh* also played an important role in the lives of ordinary people among the Sami. Whether or not this was also the case among the Norse is hard to determine. If we take the sources at face value, this was definitely not the case. But there is reason to believe that this part of the religion is significantly underrepresented in the sources. In South Sami religion, the *saajvh* overlap greatly with the hidden people in other Nordic cultures, including later Sami cultures. At the same time, the complex surrounding the hidden people can only partly be distinguished from the Norwegian and Swedish beliefs associated with the founder of the farm, the *rudkall*, etc. If we assume that the Old Norse beliefs in ancestor mountains overlapped with these complexes, similar to the situation surrounding the *saajvh*, ancestor mountains would have had a prominent position in Old Norse religion – although clearly not as prominent as in South Sami religion.

It seems that the similarities between the *saajve* complex and the Old Norse ancestor mountains have been exaggerated. So has the degree to which the *saajve* complex has been borrowed from the Scandinavians. Today, it may seem obvious that the existence of similarities between a Sami and a Scandinavian tradition does not in and of itself demonstrate that the Sami tradition is borrowed. The influence could have gone in both directions, the traditions could have developed in interaction and some of the similarities could be independent. It seems clear that the Sami borrowed the word *saajve* (*sájuvva*, *sáiva*). But, as Wiklund, Bäckman and Arbman have pointed out, this does not imply that they borrowed the whole complex. The Sami would not need to borrow the idea that there are beings in some other world close to us, who can help us if we treat them well and can do us damage if we do not. The same applies to the notion that deceased humans can join beings inhabiting mountains or water, or can pass through precipices, gorges or bodies of water in order to enter the world of the departed. Such ideas are found in countless cultures around the world, so why should the Sami need to borrow them?<sup>138</sup>

The Sami can hardly have borrowed from the Scandinavians those traits that are only found in the Sami part of the complex. The *nåejtie*'s reliance on anthropomorphic helping spirits in *saajuh* is one example of this, another is the capitalist-like ownership of *saajuh*. One of Petterson's points is also important to keep in mind: Even if a word is borrowed, this does not necessarily mean 'that the *original* content, the original ideas which the loan word in question expresses, have also been adopted.'<sup>139</sup> In addition, a word for a phenomenon can be borrowed even if both the phenomenon and another word for it already existed in the receiving language. For example, people in Scandinavia used to have a meal at lunchtime (in my childhood called *formiddagsmat* in Norway) even before the word *lunch* was borrowed from English in the second half of the twentieth century. Obviously, the Sami had, even before the adoption of the word *saajve*, notions of a hidden people and of an afterlife, as well as of otherworld beings living in prominent landscape features, like mountains or small spring-lakes, or of using such landscape features as points of contact with the otherworld.

The questions of which features within the complex surrounding the Norse ancestor mountains and the Sami *saajve* have come from where can never be answered. What we can establish is that, to a large degree, the two traditions overlap. Therefore, it seems fruitful to regard them as a largely shared tradition, developed in interaction. Some of the traits that we know only from Sami tradition may have developed after the Norse migration to Iceland – or disappeared at a later point in Norse tradition. And some of them may have existed in Norse tradition, but failed to be recorded. As we have seen, the Old Norse sources only give us glimpses of something that clearly constituted a much greater complex.

The Old Icelandic ideas of ancestor mountains must have come from Norway, so there is good reason to assume that, in the Viking Age, many Norwegian mountains were understood as ancestor mountains. But no name of such a mountain in Norway has made it into a manuscript that has come down to us. We may guess that Mount Siggjo, which resembles Helgafell and is the most prominent mountain in Þórolfr Mostrarskegg's native district, was his model for Helgafell and thus itself an ancestor mountain.<sup>140</sup> And, if it is correct that the *saajve* complex and the Norse ancestor mountain complex are largely a shared tradition, then probably (some of) the *saajve* mountains mentioned by Randulf in areas of Scandinavian settlement were venerated as ancestor mountains by the Norse, too, in the Middle Ages. This, however, can never be more than an educated guess. One could object to Randulf's list that some of the mountains, such as Lyderhorn near Bergen and Hornelen on the coast of Northwestern Norway, are outside of even areas where Sami could have lived in the early eighteenth century, when they were more widespread than later on.<sup>141</sup> But the Sami built boats and sailed the coast just like the Norwegians did,<sup>142</sup> so it should be no surprise that these landmarks were well known also to them.

## Notes

1. See Rydving 1995.
2. The cases were, to my knowledge, first listed by Maurer 1894: 267 f.

3. It is universally believed that he came from this place. But he could also have come from present-day Mosterøy north of Stavanger, which likewise bore the name *Mostr* in Old Norse.
4. *Eyrbyggja saga* ([eds.] Matthías Þórdarson & Einar Ól. Sveinsson): 9 f. Translations of source texts are my own.
5. *Eyrbyggja saga* ([eds.] Matthías Þórdarson & Einar Ól. Sveinsson): 19.
6. *Landnámabók* ([ed.] Jakob Benediktsson): 124–125. *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók*.
7. *Brennu-Njáls saga* ([ed.] Einar Ól. Sveinsson): 46.
8. *Landnámabók* ([ed.] Jakob Benediktsson): 233.
9. *Landnámabók* ([ed.] Jakob Benediktsson): 98.
10. *Landnámabók* ([ed.] Jakob Benediktsson): 139 f.
11. *Brennu-Njáls saga* ([ed.] Einar Ól. Sveinsson): 346–348, 459; *Gísla saga Súrssonar* ([ed.] Björn K. Þórólfsson): 70, 94.
12. Nordland 1969: 72.
13. *Saajve* is the modern South Sami spelling; in the sources, we usually find the form *saiivo*. I generally use modern Sami spellings in accordance with Rydving 1995: 65–73; Bergsland and Magga 1993; Korhonen 2007; and Kåven *et al.* 1995.
14. For an overview of the *saajve* sources, see Wiklund 1916; Bäckman 1975: 56 ff.; Rydving 1993: 44 f.; Rydving 1995: 67.
15. Randulf [1723] 1903: 43 f.
16. Randulf [1723] 1903: 44, 46.
17. Randulf [1723] 1903: 49.
18. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 222–224; Wiklund 1918; Bergsland 1985.
19. Von Westen's material is better known from Jessen-S[chardebøll] 1767, but Skanke's version of it is earlier and better, although it was not published in its entirety until 1945.
20. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 190 f.
21. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193 f.

22. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 196.
23. Rheen [1671] 1897: 37–43, 40 f.; Anonymus [1750s?] 1945; Kildal [1730 and later] 1945: 108, 116, 123, 138 f.; Turi 1910: 175 f., 211–213; Ränk 1955: 43–45, 77; Wiklund 1916; Bäckman 1975: 56 ff.
24. Rheen [1671] 1897: 40.
25. Olsen [after 1715] 1910: 26.
26. Nielsen 1932–38, 3: 369.
27. Tornæus [1672] 1900: 56; Johansson 1941: 47; Bäckman 1975: 13–15, 20, 56 f.; Wiklund 1916: 60 f., 63–65; Itkonen 1946: 67 f.; Manker 1957: 111; Wiklund 1916: 63–66.
28. Weisweiler 1940; Wiklund 1916: 68; Thors 1957: 452–457; Bäckman 1975: 13–17; Wallenstein 2017; etc.
29. For possible Western European, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern analogues to the Old Icelandic ancestor mountains, see Cöllen 2014.
30. Fritzner 1877: 214 ff.; Krohn 1907; Olrik 1905; von Unwerth 1911: 5 ff., 10 ff., 30; Holmberg 1915: 22; Wiklund 1916; Rosén 1919: 16; Olrik 1926: 133 f.; Lid 1942: 144; Ström 1958: 437; Arbman 1960: 127; Hultkrantz 1962: 924; Nordland 1969: 73; Pettersson 1987: 73.
31. Wiklund 1916: 45 f., 71–73; Bäckman 1975: 7 f.
32. Arbman 1960: 69 f.; similar Pettersson 1987: 71–73.
33. Fellman [1830s] 1906, 2: 65; Friis 1871: 113, 125; Holmberg (1915) 1987: 25 f.; Wiklund 1916: 45 ff.; Olrik 1926: 134; and others.
34. Rosén 1919: 25; Arbman 1960: 127; Bäckman 1975: 7, 84, 91, 103, 106–109, 126, 137; Pettersson 1987: 73; Mebius 2003: 81–86; Tolley 2009: 407–409; probably Rydving 2013.
35. Arbman 1960: 124 ff.; Bäckman 1975: 7, 84, 91, 103, 106–109, 126, 137; Pettersson 1987: 73 f.
36. Henceforth, I use ‘the hidden people’ as my analytic term.
37. Læstadius [1840–45] 1997: 55 f.; Fritzner 1877: 214 ff.; Rosén 1919: 25; Arbman 1960: 122 f.; and others.
38. Helland 1906: 216; Kolsrud 1958: 59; Bäckman 1975: 100 ff., for example p. 114.
39. Rydving 2013: 405 f.

40. Christiansen 1946: 93.
41. Wiklund 1918; Bergsland 1985; see also Fjellheim 1995: 73–76.
42. Dunfjeld-Aagård 2005: 30; Randulf [1723] 1903: 43 f.; Qvigstad (1920a: 354) also pays attention only to the interior.
43. Qvigstad 1920a: 355.
44. See especially von Unwerth 1911: 16 f., 31 f.; and Rydving 2004.
45. Dunfjeld-Aagård 2005: 30.
46. Randulf [1723] 1903: 43 f.
47. Compare the list in Rydving 2010b: 120–121.
48. Bäckman 1975: 18, 62.
49. Lakes, rivers, possibly a rapid: ‘Jörman-Saiwo’, ‘Brantzen-Jokken-Saiwo’, ‘Germanjana-Saiwo’, ‘Krosejaure-Saiwo’, ‘Bergzhjaze-Saiwo’ (Wiklund 1918: 158, 161; Wiklund 1916: 69).
50. Randulf [1723] 1903: 43 f. E.g. ‘Aimetal-Saiwo’ = Aajmehtaelie / Heimdalhaugen in Grong, Trøndelag; ‘Hermans-Oilk-Saiwo’ = Hermanssnasa in Verdalen, Trøndelag; and ‘Mutzviell-Saiwo’ = Modtviellie / Munsfjället in Krokomb, Jämtland (Wiklund 1918: 158; Bergsland 1985: 63–66).
51. Frostviken, Jämtland (Wiklund 1916: 56).
52. E.g. ‘Dærkan-Saiwo’ = Jillie-Dearka / Dergaklumpen, ‘Mælkan-Saiwo’ = Mealhkoie, ‘Buarkan-Saiwo’ = Buarkantjahke / Borgahällan, ‘Ourewarden-Saiwo’ = Ovrevartoe / Orklumpen, ‘Norisviell-Saiwo’ = Noeresfiellie / Nursfjellet, etc. (Wiklund 1918; Bergsland 1985).
53. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193 f.; Skanke [1728–31] 1945a: 254; Sidenius [1726] 1910: 58.
54. Wiklund 1916: 55–57.
55. Demant Hatt 1928: 52.
56. ‘Store Fiäll eller Berg, der röken står ellr de wärsta spöken som der boo, derest ock skola wara kiärnor som går, Salva venia, ellr orenlighet, hwilka om man widrörer, så gå dhe igien och synas intet. Hönsen eller Tuppar gahla ther ock, skall wara långt Norr, sådane Saivo skall dhe holla för sina underhollare.’ (Burman [late 1720s?] 1910: 9). In this translation, *kiärnor* is (following Håkan Rydving’s emendation) read

as modern standard Swedish *tjärnar*, because *kiärnor* ‘churns’ does not seem to make sense. The initial *ki-* and *tj-* have the same pronunciation, and in the eighteenth century, the distribution of the unstressed endings *-ar*, *-er* and *-or* was not yet fixed in standard Swedish.

57. From the Ume Sami area, just north of the South Sami area, we encounter the notion that ‘saiva’ resides in many small lakes (Rijsjaevrie, Faarrohke / Farroken and Baeltehkjaevrie / Baltiken are the examples given) and rule over the fish, some times ‘she’ chases them away, making them impossible to catch, at other times ‘she’ makes them reappear (Wiklund 1916: 53–56, 65, 71).

58. ‘Ved Tossåsen er en saivosö, den er meget lunefuld. Det kan være smugt vejr, naar de gaar ud for at fiske, men det bliver altid storm og uvejr, naar de begyner at fiske. Saivosøer har dobbel bund. Saivo er noget ondt’ (Demant Hatt 1928: 49).

59. Qvigstad 1924: 286–289.

60. Randulf [1723] 1903: 49; Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193 f.

61. Randulf [1723] 1903: 43 f.; Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 190 f., 222–224; Hammond 1787: 455–469; Wiklund 1918; Bergsland 1985; Rydving 2010b.

62. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 190–194; Randulf [1723] 1903: 43–44.

63. Bäckman 1975: 103, 109, 126.

64. Randulf [1723] 1903: 49; Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193; Wiklund 1916: 70; Arbman 1960: 124 f.; Bäckman 1978: 44.

65. von Westen [1723] 1910; Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 190 f., 194–196; Bäckman 1975: 84; Pettersson 1957; Pettersson 1987: 75, 78.

66. von Westen [1723] 1910; Randulf [1723] 1903: 43–46; Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 190–196; Rydving 2010b.

67. von Westen [1723] 1910; Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 190–192, 222; Sidenius [1726] 1910: 56–58; Qvigstad 1924: 286–289; cf. Olsen [etter 1715] 1910: 26 ff.

68. Ränk 1955: 16; Rydving 2013: 393.

69. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 197–199; Anonymus [1720s] 1767: 417; Sidenius [1726] 1910: 58. Forbus [before 1730] 1910: 35; Kildal [1730s?] 1807: 458; Rydving 2013. About the same habit further

north, see Kildal [1730 and later] 1945: 134, 140 f.; Anonymus [1750s?] 1945: 174.

70. Wiklund 1916: 56; Randulf [1723] 1903: 64.

71. See endnote 34 and the data provided by Wiklund 1916: 50 f.

72. Wiklund 1916: 55, 63–65; Bäckman 1975: 56 f.

73. Rheen [1671] 1897: 37–43; Olsen [after 1715] 1910: 26 ff.; Leem 1767: 443 f.

74. Wiklund 1916: 55.

75. Lindahl & Öhrling 1780: 390. Wiklund points out that, although most of Lindahl & Öhrling's information is either of a northern provenience or presents southern information from the von Westen circle, their article about 'Saiwa' is independent and not northern (Wiklund 1916: 67). Part of the article reads: 'In the past, they venerated quite a few mountains as sacred. These, women were not allowed to approach, except very young, under the age of twelve.' (Lindahl & Öhrling 1780: 390, translated from Latin.)

76. von Westen [1723] 1910: 2; Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193 f.

77. Krosshólar is not, and Þórisbjörg has not been identified.

78. Helgafell is not that prominent, but it could be, as Endresen (1937: 36) points out, that Þórolfr chose Helgafell because his model was the landmark mountain Siggjo near his probable homestead in Norway. Helgafell's shape and location in the landscape resembles, on a more modest scale, that of Siggjo, whose Old Norse form was *Sigg*, probably derived from 'to see' (Stemshaug and Sandnes 1997: 391), meaning 'the one you see (from far away)'.

79. Þorvaldur Thoroddsen 1914: 54, <https://ornefnasja.lmi.is/>.

80. Jón Árnason [1862–64] 1958–61, 1: 461, 660; 3: 208; 4: 42 f.; Asbjørnsen 1870: 91 f.; Sahlgren 1913; Finnur Jónsson 1913; Indrebø 1924: 98; Langenfelt 1920.

81. Jón Árnason [1862–64] 1958–61, 1: 3 f., 101 ff.; 3: 162 ff., 176.

82. Heide 2014a.

83. Saba 2019: 188, 191.

84. Christiansen 1920: 19.

85. Skáldskaparmál 6, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* ([ed.] Finnur Jónsson): 84 f.; Hávamál 106, *Eddukvæði I. Goðakvæði* ([eds.] Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólasson): 343.
86. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193 f.; *saajvebovtsh* in Bergsland and Magga 1993: 247/Hasselbrink 1981: 1101; Jernsletten 2009: 103–112.
87. *Eyrbyggja saga* ([eds.] Matthías Þórdarson & Einar Ól. Sveinsson): 19; *Landnámabók* ([ed.] Jakob Benediktsson): 98, 139 f.
88. Hammond 1787: 455–469; Bergsland 1985: 71–73.
89. *Eyrbyggja saga* ([eds.] Matthías Þórdarson & Einar Ól. Sveinsson): 9.
90. Strömbäck 1935: 160–190; Heide 2006: 137–141, 143–154.
91. Bäckman 1975: 103, 109, 126.
92. Randulf [1723] 1903: 49; Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193 f., 196.
93. Rydving 2010b: 121; Bergsland 1985: 73.
94. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193
95. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193 f., 196 f., 214; Skanke [1728–31] 1945c: 235.
96. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 166, 197–199.
97. Simek 2006: 178 f., 481–483; Steinsland 1991: 431; Cöllen 2014: 76 f.
98. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 194; Skanke [1728–31] 1945c: 235.
99. Anonymus [1720s] 1767: 418; Sidenius [1726] 1910: 59; Simek 2006: 178 f.
100. Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 194; Simek 2006: 113; Ränk 1955: 35, 44, 77; Pettersson 1987: 75. In Kola Sami tradition, there was even a place that resembled the warrior paradise of Valhøll (Bäckman 1975: 84).
101. *Eddukvæði I. Goðakvæði* ([eds.] Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólasson): 302.
102. Rosén 1919: 25.
103. Rydving 2013.
104. Torfi H. Tulinius 2006: 6; *Eyrbyggja saga* ([eds.] Matthías Þórdarson & Einar Ól. Sveinsson): 72.

105. Mundal 1974: 101–106.

106. Mundal 1974: 105 f.

107. Birkeli 1938: 187, 189–192, also 100, 103, 117–124, 171, 181, 186–191, 203, 205.

108. Birkeli 1938: 109–203; Jón Árnason [1862–64] 1958–61, 1: 3–124, 138, 466; 3: 162–186, etc.

109. Þorvalds þátrr víðförla 1 ([eds.] Jónas Kristjánsson & Sigurgeir Steingrímsson & Ólafur Halldórsson & Peter Foote): 61–68; Kristni saga ([eds.] Jónas Kristjánsson & Sigurgeir Steingrímsson & Ólafur Halldórsson & Peter Foote): 7 f.; Kormáks saga ([ed.] Einar Ól. Sveinsson): 288.

110. Nordberg 2013: 244.

111. Nordberg 2013: 248.

112. *Flateyjarbók* ([ed.] Sigurður Nordal): 74 ff; Sundqvist 2017.

113. de Vries 1956, 1: 180–184; the prose after Helgakviða Hundingsbana 2, *Eddukvæði II. Hetjukvæði* ([eds.] Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólasson): 283.

114. Mundal 1992.

115. Weisweiler 1940; Thors 1957: 452–457. Some reject this, e.g. Bjorvand & Lindeman 2007: 954.

116. Heide 2011.

117. Högström [1747] 1980: 192 f.

118. Lid 1924: 181–184, 186–192, esp. 190. Cf. the killing of the horse Freyfaxi in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* ([ed.] Jón Jóhannessen): 123–124.

119. Qvigstad 1920a: 354 f.; Arbman 1960: 132; Manker 1957: 92, 259, 263, 275; Demant Hatt 1928: 48; Leem 1767: 444; Qvigstad 1920b: 28. In light of this, it may be a foreshadowing in *Hrafnkels saga* that the chain of events, which lead to the killing of Freyfaxi, namely the illicit riding of him, happened because while the many other available horses were suddenly wary, Freyfaxi was ‘as calm as if he had been buried’ (*grafinn niðr*) (*Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* ([ed.] Jón Jóhannessen): 103).

120. Nordland 1969: 72; Lid 1924: 186–192.

121. *Kristni saga* ([eds.] Jónas Kristjánsson & Sigurgeir Steingrímsson & Ólafur Halldórsson & Peter Foote): 34; Lid 1924: 192; Nordberg 2003: 22–30.

122. af Edholm 2016; af Edholm 2020.

123. Lid 1924: 193 f.

124. Arbman 1947; Hermanstrand 2009: 182 f.; Kroik 2020.

125. See e.g. Anttonen 1992; Saler (1993) 2000: 33–50; Rydving 2004; Nordberg 2018.

126. There are no entries on these words in neither *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion* (1996), *A New Handbook of Living Religions* (1997), *The Brill Dictionary of Religion* (2006), or *Encyclopedia of Global Religion* (2012). The 15-volume *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd ed., 2005) has entries on ‘dvergar’ and ‘álfar’ in Old Norse mythology, but not on ‘dwarves’ or ‘elves’ in later traditions. The dictionary does have an article on ‘Fairies’, which also mentions ‘trolls’ and ‘brownies’. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (2005) does have an article on ‘Faerie Faith in Scotland’ and an article about ‘Elves and land spirits in Pagan Norse Religion’, as might be expected from its focus on nature.

127. Heide 2014b: 175.

128. Spiro 1966: 96.

129. Cf. the references in endnote 125.

130. For example Reuterskiöld 1912; Karsten 1955; Hultkrantz 1962; Pentikäinen 1997; DuBois 1999; Mebius 2003; Tolley 2009; Eidlitz Kuoljok 2009; von Westen [1723] 1910: 2; Skanke [1728–31] 1945b: 193 f.

131. Mebius 2003: 81–84, 86 f., 91 f.

132. Rydving 2013: 406.

133. Bäckman 1975: 9.

134. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* ([ed.] Finnur Jónsson); *Eddukvæði I. Goðakvæði* ([eds.] Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólasson); *Eddukvæði II. Hetjukvæði* ([eds.] Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólasson).

135. Rydving 2013; Mebius 2003: 44–62.

136. Olsen 1915.

137. Dillmann 2006.

138. Petterson points out that ‘the idea of mountains of the dead is found not only in Scandinavia but also in the eastern parts of the North European area’, but he still concludes that the ‘ideas about the saijvo mountains are of Nordic origin’ (Pettersson 1987: 73, 70–71, 74).

139. Pettersson 1987: 69 f.

140. Cf. endnote 78.

141. Olsen 2010.

142. Larsen 1934; *Samiske båter og båtbygging* 2010; Rydving 2010a.

## Abbreviations

SamL. Lule Sami

SamN. North Sami

SamS. South Sami

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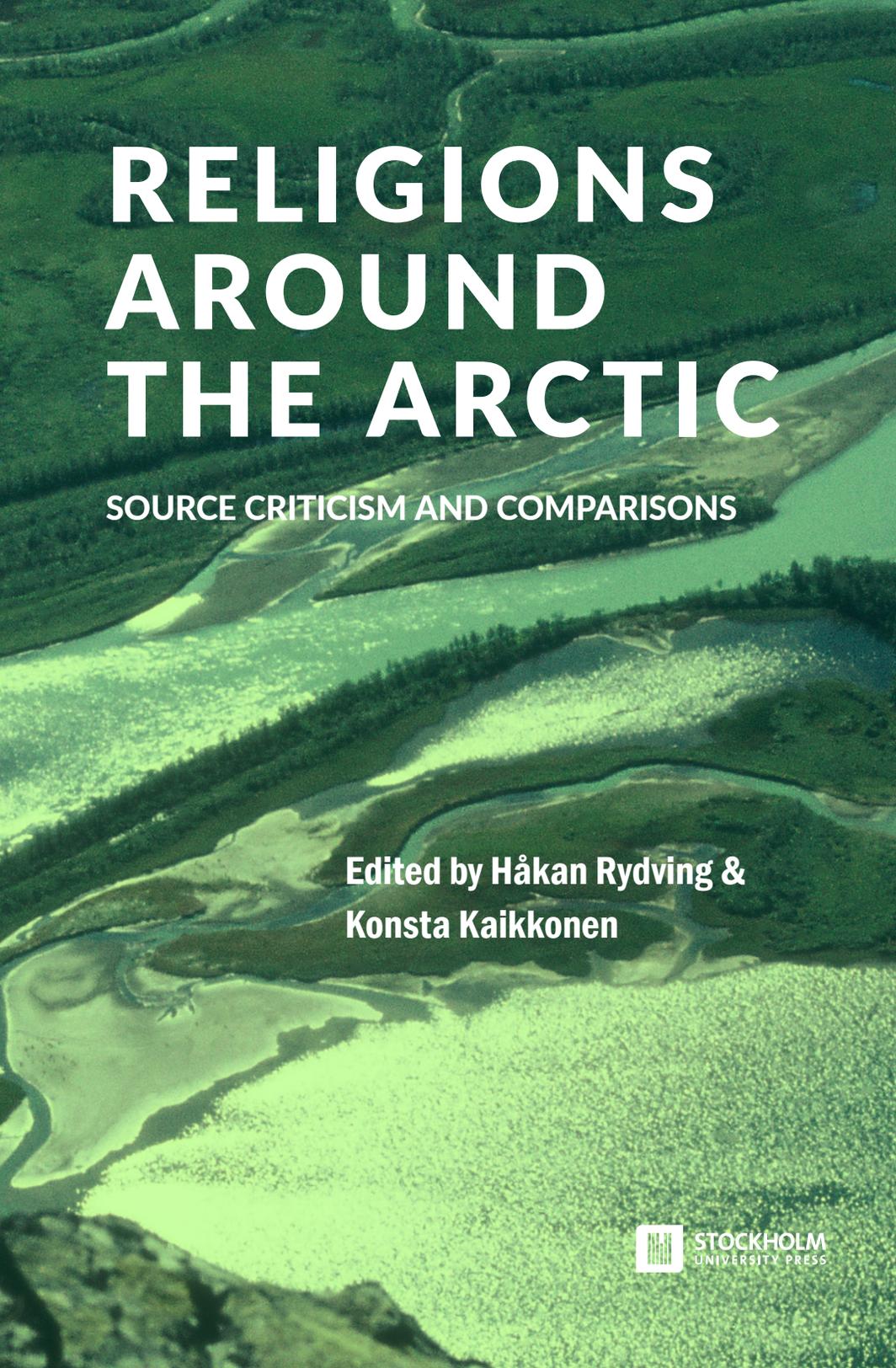
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An aerial photograph of a river delta, showing a network of channels and sandbars. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green color. The text is printed in white on this background.

# RELIGIONS AROUND THE ARCTIC

SOURCE CRITICISM AND COMPARISONS

Edited by Håkan Rydving &  
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