

# The Revenge of the Rejected – The Rise, Fall and Background Context of Icelandic Beliefs in Supernatural Family Followers<sup>1</sup>

—Terry Gunnell—

Buildings in Iceland in the past tended to have a limited lifespan resulting in the fact that beliefs in ghosts or spirits associated with buildings also used to be limited. Instead of such beliefs, Iceland has numerous legends about spirits that attach themselves to particular families, causing a wide range of problems over a number of generations. Interestingly enough, such beliefs do not seem to be encountered in neighbouring countries. This article contains an overview of the legends concerning these spirits, commonly referred to as *mórar* (peat-reds: male) and *skottur* (tasselled hats: female), which sometimes have a background in the mistreatment of the poor by those who are wealthier, or the rejection of an unwanted lover. Attention is paid to the nature and distribution of these legends, the potential reasons for their apparent uniqueness, and why these beliefs seem to be dwindling (but not totally disappearing) in modern Icelandic society.

KEYWORDS: Icelandic legends, memorates, family ghosts, clothing, legend distribution, *mórar*, *skottur*, folk beliefs

Stavbe na Islandiji so imele v preteklosti običajno kratko življenjsko dobo, zaradi česar so bila tudi verovanja v duhove ali prikazni, povezane s stavbami, precej omejena. Namesto takšnih verovanj pa Islandija pozna številne legende o duhovih, ki se navežejo na določene družine in skozi več generacij povzročajo različne težave. Zanimivo je, da podobnih verovanj ne zasledimo v sosednjih državah. Članek podaja pregled legend o teh duhovih, ki jih običajno imenujejo *mórar* (»šotno-rdeči«, moški) in *skottur* (»resasti klobuki«, ženske). Njihov izvor je včasih povezan s slabim ravnanjem bogatejših do revnih ali z zavrnitvijo nezaželenega ljubimca. Posebna pozornost je namenjena značilnostim in razširjenosti teh legend, možnim razlogom za njihovo navidezno edinstvenost ter vprašanju, zakaj ta verovanja v sodobni islandski družbi postopoma izginjajo (čeprav niso povsem izginila).

KLJUČNE BESEDE: islandske povedke, memorati, družinski duhovi, oblačila, razširjenost pripovedi, *mórar*, *skottur*, ljudska verovanja

The following article deals with a particular kind of Icelandic ghost or supernatural being that is a strange blend of a poltergeist, a revenant, a shapeshifter, a following protective spirit, a raised corpse and a curse. Unlike ancient Nordic beliefs in other kinds of personal

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following spirits in the shape of animals or people (*fylgjur*), which were supposedly born with everyone – spirits which cannot be regarded as ghosts (see Hrefna Sigríður Bjartmarsdóttir,<sup>2</sup> 2015) – the beings under discussion here are attached only to specific people and their families. They commonly take the shape of young people or children, and are essentially malevolent, viewed as exacting some kind of punishment or revenge on those they follow. To the best of my knowledge, the beliefs in question are limited for the main part to Iceland, although, as will be noted below, indirect parallels to certain aspects of these beings can be found in certain other countries, especially in descriptions of poltergeists and concepts relating to the raising of corpses or spirits which are used to attack others. The uniqueness of this kind of being in Iceland is partially explained by the fact that beliefs in haunted *buildings* seem to have been comparatively rare in Iceland up until the last few decades, largely because the turf-built houses in Iceland in the past had a limited lifespan and needed to be regularly reconstructed, something that gave the supernatural figures associated with their inhabitants the potential to break loose and run comparatively freely in the landscape, attached to human beings rather than bricks and mortar.

Before proceeding any further, however, it is necessary to outline the ways in which Icelanders in the past seem to have understood the “ghost”. As I have noted in a recent article (Gunnell, 2024), records of Icelandic legends about encounters with the dead taking place on our plane of existence go back as far as the early thirteenth century if not long before. However, from the start, and right up until the nineteenth century, for some reason, those beings commonly classed as “ghosts” tended to be seen as taking the shape of the “undead” rather than spirits. In short, they were corporeal, and were quite capable of wrestling with you, something which seems to have been a common behavioural trait for Icelandic ghosts (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, 1998: 143–174). Hence the more common use of the word *afturganga* (lit. “revenant”) in earlier texts in Icelandic, rather than *svipur*, *draugur* or *andi*, which are closer equivalents for the English “ghost” or spirit and have become more common over the course of the last two centuries.

The supernatural “ghosts” that will be discussed here are a type most commonly placed by Icelanders under the general heading of *ættarfylgjur* (lit. “family followers”), and a large majority of them have been bestowed with the names *móri* (male; plural: *mórar*) and *skotta* (female; plural: *skottur*) for female. Jón Árnason, the collector of the first and main folk legend collection in Iceland from the mid-nineteenth century, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* [Icelandic folk tales and wonder tales], describes the *skotta* as follows:

[They] had a peat-brown [mórauður] veil/ scarf on their heads [in the shape of] the old female headdress /.../. The key difference was that the female ghosts had the “hook” in the headwear bending in the wrong direction or had the scarf trailing down between their shoulders whenever the headdress is facing forwards. They often wore red socks and sucked their fingers. /.../

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<sup>2</sup> In line with Icelandic tradition (in which descriptive patronyms are used rather than surnames), the full names of Icelandic authors are provided in references rather than just surnames.

Most of the female ghosts have been named after their clothing /.../. The women are named after their headwear and are called *Skottur* or Tassels [or Tails], because their scarf falls behind them like a tassel or tail. (Jón Árnason, 1954–1961: I, 346)<sup>3</sup>

Later legends nonetheless regularly refer to these beings wearing so-called *skotthúfur*, which are literally hats or caps with tassels.

With regard to the male spirits, Jón Árnason writes:

[They] are most often in peat-brown pullovers or tunics, with a wide-brimmed hat pulled low over their faces or a balaclava which they had pulled back over their heads, and some walked with a pointed stick. /.../ The male ghosts are called *Mórar* because of the peat-red pullovers or woollen smocks that they are supposed to wear, even though they also have other names such as “Lalli” and “Goggur” which are differentiated by place names. (Jón Árnason, 1954–1961: I, 346–347)

One notes in both cases the emphasis on *clothing* rather than physical appearance or behaviour in these descriptions, something that will be returned to further below.

As noted above, not all of these beings are called *mórar* or *skottur*, but for the purpose of my present research I have limited myself here to those beings whose names include these words (as is commonly the case: see below) in order to remove any unnecessary complication. A *móri* is a *móri* by nature, and the same applies to the *skottur*. The distribution maps below provide some idea of the widespread distribution of the beliefs in these beings in Iceland both past and present (although they only depict those legends directly connected to a particular place).

As can be seen in Figure 1, the Icelandic *Sagnagrunnur* database<sup>4</sup> containing information about over 10,000 Icelandic legends that have appeared in print from the mid-nineteenth century onwards lists over 200 legends dealing with *mórar*, a slight majority coming from the west of the country, most being told by male storytellers, as opposed to females (something that is not surprising given the fact that most of the collectors over the course of time were also male: see Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir, 2023: 50–54).

As Figure 2 shows, *Sagnagrunnur* lists a slightly lower number of *skottur* legends with a similar distribution, and as with the *mórar*, most of these were collected from men. Figure 3 meanwhile shows a comparison between the *mórar* and *skottur* legends in print. One notes how the *skottur* stories seem to be particularly prevalent in the north of the country, and how *mórar* stories cluster in the eastern fjords, something that may have some connection with a particularly popular being from this area that will be returned to further below.

<sup>3</sup> There is unfortunately no space to give the original Icelandic of the quotations in this article. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Icelandic are by the present author. For further information on Icelandic clothing in the past (male and female), see <https://www.heimilisidnadir.is/en/icelandic-costume/national-costumes>.

<sup>4</sup> For a list of all the printed sources contained in the database, see: <https://sagnagrunnur.arnastofnun.is/thjodsagnasofn/>.



Figure 1: Móri legends in Icelandic printed sources connected to particular sites (Author's visualisation based on *Sagnagrunnur* database)

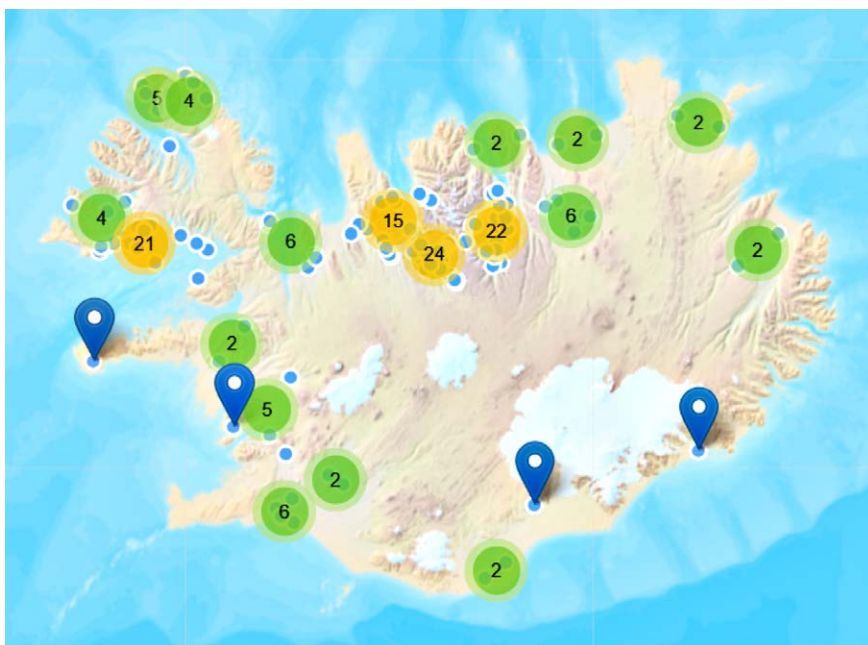


Figure 2: The number of *skotta* legends in Icelandic printed sources connected to particular sites (Author's visualisation based on *Sagnagrunnur* database)

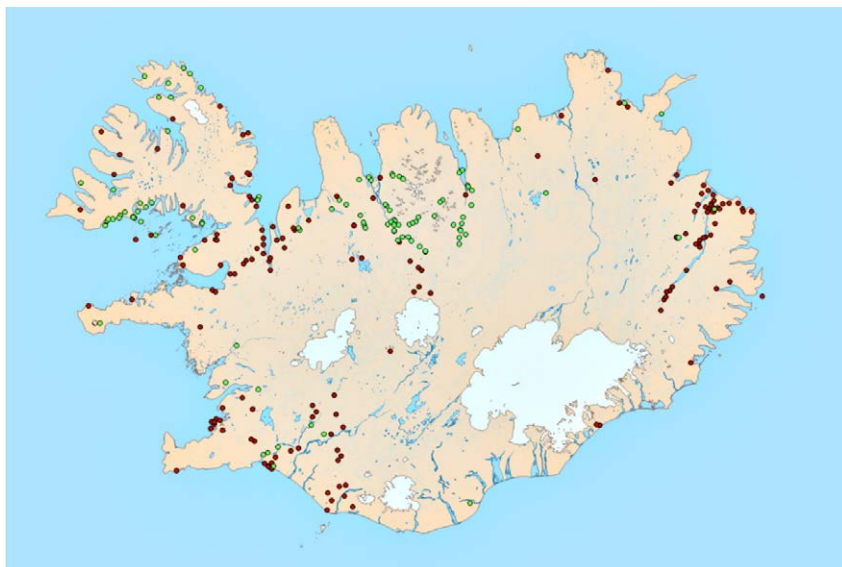


Figure 3: A comparison between the number of *móri* (brown/dark spots) and *skotta* (green/light) legends connected to places in printed sources (Map: Trausti Dagsson's visualisation based on *Sagnagrunnur* database)

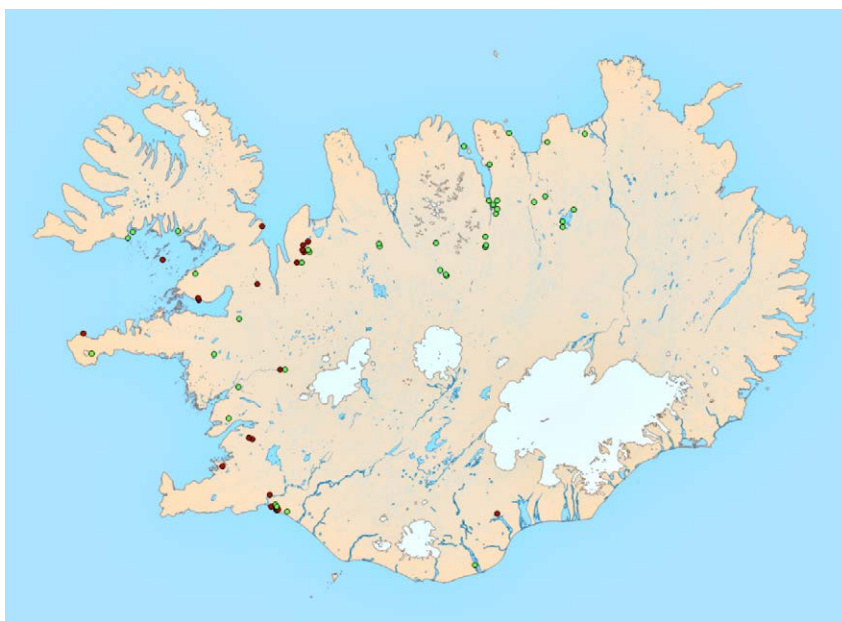


Figure 4: *Móri* (brown/dark spots) and *skotta* (green/light) legends connected to particular places in Jón Árnason's *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* (1862–1864) (Map: Trausti Dagsson's visualisation based on *Sagnagrunnur* database)



Figure 5: The number of *móri* legends in the Arnarnaganean sound archives connected to particular sites (Author's visualisation based on the *Ísmús* database)

Particular attention needs to be paid to Figure 4, which shows the comparative distribution of the *mórar* and *skottur* legends contained in Jón Árnason's earlier-noted key collection of folk legends from 1862–1864, a work which would come to be well-known by Icelanders all around the country, partly because the first two volumes were distributed to many of them for free.<sup>5</sup> There is logically good reason to consider the potential influence of this work on later beliefs or interpretations of supernatural occurrences. As the map shows, however, even though this seems to have been one of the first times that the words *móri* and *skotta* appeared in print (apart from brief mention of a *skotta* in the eighteenth century),<sup>6</sup> there was already a wide distribution of these concepts and the narratives related to them around the country.

Bearing the above in mind, we can now turn to the *móri* and *skotta* narratives collected on tape by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson and others in the 1960s and recently made available in the *Ísmús* database assembled by Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir.<sup>7</sup> As the number of narratives indicate (once again reflected in part in the distribution maps in Figures 5 and 6), legends about these beings were still very much alive at that time (and if anything even more prevalent than they were in the past).

As with the printed legends, the maps only show links to those recordings of legends directly connected with places. The database itself lists 480 accounts dealing with *mórar* out of a total of roughly 10,000 recorded legends, making roughly 2% of the total, nearly two-thirds of which were collected from men (see Fig. 5).

<sup>5</sup> One notes here an interesting difference in the distribution of the *skottur* legends (which seem to be largely in the north and north-east, and especially around Eyjafjörður) and the *mórar* legends (which are more in the west).

<sup>6</sup> See <https://ritmalssafn.arnastofnun.is/daemi/5669>; <https://ritmalssafn.arnastofnun.is/daemi/7175>; see also Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 2003: 187–188.

<sup>7</sup> Connection to the database website is available at: <https://www.ismus.is/tjodfraedi/hljodrit/>.

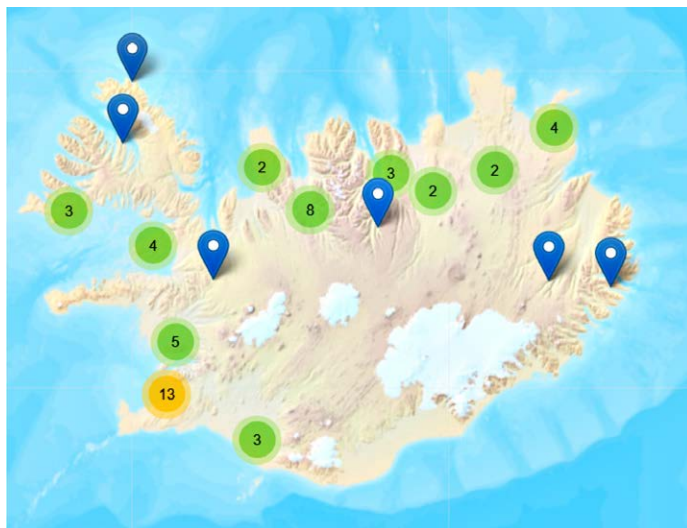


Figure 6: The number of *skotta* legends in the Arnamaganean sound archives connected to particular sites (Author's visualisation based on the *Ísmús* database)

Alongside the *mórar* narratives, a total of 240 accounts in the *Ísmús* database tell of *skottur* (see Fig. 6). As the maps demonstrate, like the printed legends, stories about these beings were recorded all around the country except in the south-east, an area which is not only comparatively sparsely populated because of the rivers running from the central glacier, but also home to people who seem to have been relatively reticent in terms of providing folk narratives (Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir, 2008).

The wide distribution of the narratives is reflected in the equally wide range of compound names for *mórar* and *skottur* that are found in both the printed and sound sources. In each case the first part of the name relates to a particular farm or area, and the two databases show a total of c. 55 *mórar* names<sup>8</sup> and 38 *skottur* (listed below).<sup>9</sup> As noted above, several of these beings are certainly bestowed with Christian names, but the general lack of such

<sup>8</sup> *Mórar* names in Iceland (italic: only in print; bold: in both print and sound): Arnardals-Móri, Arnarnes-Móri, Bakka-Móri, Dals-Móri, Einholta-Móri, *Egilssels-Móri*, **Ennis-Móri/ Sólheima-Móri**, Eyjasels-Móri, Eyraholts-Móri, Fells-Móri, *Fosslægjar-Móri*, Fúlúvíkur-Móri(?), Gerða-Móri, **Gerðis-Móri**, Grænavatns-Móri, **Hafnar-Skotta**, Hamars-Móri, Heggstaða-Móri, *Hamarsholts-Móri*, *Hofstaða-Móri*, Hóls-Móri, Hrauns-Móri, Hörghóls-Móri, Hörgslands-Móri, Írafells-Móri, Íra-Móri, Jörvíkur-Móri, Keflavíkur-Móri, Kiðafells-Móri, Kots-Móri, Laugaland-Móri, Langhúsa-Móri, Lóns-Móri, Miðvíkur-Móri, Nýgræðis-Móri, Mýrdals-Móri, **Ófeigsfjarðar-Móri**, Rauðafells-Móri, Rauðamýrar-Móri, Reykjaþing-Móri, *Rettarhóls-Móri*, Seljanes-Móri, Seltjarnarnes-Móri, Skarðs-Móri, Skáleyjar-Móri, **Skerflóðs-Móri/Sels-Móri/Kampholts-Móri**, Staðar-Móri, Stakkadals-Móri, Stekkjar-Móri, *Stekkhólts-Móri*, Svalbarðs-Móri, Svalvoga-Móri, Sviðholts-Móri, Tungu-Móri, Víkingavatns-Móri, **Voga-Móri**, and **Þeistareykja-Móri**.

<sup>9</sup> *Skottur* names in Iceland (italic: only in print; bold: in both print and sound): *Arnarþælis-Skotta*, Arnarvatns-Skotta, **Ábæjar-Skotta**, Böðvarsels-Skotta, **Böðvarshóla-Skotta**, *Eyjaþing-Skotta*, Eyraþakka-Skotta, Fjalla-Skotta, For-Skotta, Foss-Skotta, Gauksmýrar-Skotta, Gláms-Skotta, Gunnavíkur-Skotta, **Gunnólfsvíkur-Skotta**, Hafnar-Skotta, Héraðsdals-Skotta, **Hítardals-Skotta**, **Hleiðargarðs-Skotta**, Hlíðar-Skotta, *Holtastaða-Skotta*, **Húsavíkur-Skotta**, Hvítárvalla-Skotta, **Illuga-Skotta**, Kálfa-Skotta, Ketils-Skotta, Kúskerpis-Skotta, **Leirár-Skotta**, Leirulækjar-Skotta, Litluvalla-Skotta, **Móhúsa-Skotta**, Mórastaða-Skotta, **Mývatns-Skotta**, *Rauðamels-Skotta*, Saltvíkur-Skotta, **Skarðs-Skotta**, *Stekkjars-Skotta*, Viðvíkur-Skotta, and Vogatungu-Skotta.

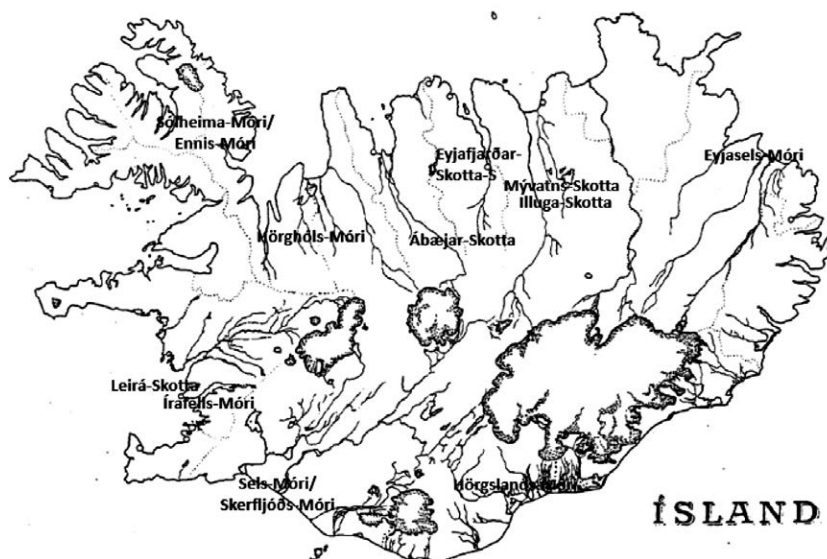


Figure 7: The home grounds of some of the most famous *mörar* and *skottur* (Author's visualisation)

names in most cases points to the fact that this approach of referring to places rather than persons, like the use of descriptive *noa* names, was used as a means of avoiding calling on any of these figures by accident, even though in many cases there seems to be some uncertainty as to their actual background. (Figure 7 contains a map displaying the home settings of those legends about the most commonly mentioned *mörar* and *skottur*, many of which will come up in the considerations that follow.)

As has been noted above, the extant written sources (those accounts listed in the *Sagnagrunnur* database), and the lack of references before this time, imply that the beliefs in question started coming into existence in the eighteenth century at a time when Iceland was reaching perhaps the lowest point in its existence as a result of low temperatures, a high degree of sea ice, and not least the Laki volcanic eruptions, which led to harvest failures and high levels of death amongst both the general population and livestock (see further Gunnar Karlsson, 2000: 171–181). This was also a time at which beliefs in magic and witchcraft seem to have been still prevalent (see further Hastrup, 1990: 198–228).<sup>10</sup>

It is now logical to proceed to the nature of the beliefs and legends themselves. Interestingly enough, the majority of the legends in question are relatively short first- and especially second-hand memorates (see Honko, 1964), in other words, personal memories dealing with personal encounters with *mörar* or *skottur* and/or the physical and mental damage and harm they have caused. First of all, however, it is important to explain exactly who and what these beings are and how they come to behave as they do, something that brings us directly to the feature of revenge noted in the title of this article.

<sup>10</sup> As in other countries, the high point in witchcraft trials in Iceland (which focused here on men rather than women) was in the seventeenth century: see further Ólína Þorvarðardóttir, 2000.

By far the majority of the *mórar* and *skottur* appear to begin by being what the Icelanders refer to as *sendingar*, in other words, they take the shape of raised and reanimated corpses that have been sent to harm other people and their families, something which seems to be another particularly Icelandic phenomenon, which I have dealt with in more detail in another article (Gunnell, 2012), showing how such ideas go back to the time of the settlement in the ninth century. Jón Árnason provides detailed, if somewhat gruesome instructions as to how one goes about raising a dead person from a graveyard with the help of a backward-written Lord's Prayer and a rune stick, underlining among other things that the raised figure should ideally be both recently deceased and young (not least because the person engaged in the raising will have to physically wrestle with the deceased figure in order to impose their will on the reinvigorated corpse) (see Jón Árnason, 1954–1961: I, 304–306; translated in Simpson, 2004: 164–166). As noted in the aforementioned article (Gunnell, 2012), to my mind the closest parallels for such beliefs and practices are those relating to the Sámi *noaider* magicians from Northern Norway, Sweden and Finland who were believed to make similar uses of dead bodies, bringing them back to life to attack others (see further Price, 2019: 191–229).

Particularly worth noting in Jón Árnason's account in connection with *mórar* and *skottur* is his aforementioned stress on the fact that raised figures should not only be young (ideally 12 or 13) but also freshly deceased (the latter feature being stressed, for example, in accounts of the background of Hörghóls-Móri, Írafells-Móri, Ábæjar-Skotta and Mývatns-Skotta). Also worth noting is his statement that *sendingar* have the potential to cause trouble (potentially also for the magician) for up to nine generations, a motif commonly encountered in statements about how long *mórar* and *skottur* can cause trouble for a family (cf. those narratives relating to Sels-Móri, Írafells-Móri, and Hörgslands-Móri).<sup>11</sup>

In the case of the *mórar* and *skottur* stories, the resurrection of these sad youthful revenants is commonly inspired by a desire for revenge on the part of an embittered rejected male lover (as in the accounts of Írafells-Móri, Eyjasels-Móri, Gerðis-Móri, Hörgslands-Móri and Hvítárvalla-Skotta). Somewhat typical is the following account of the origin of Sólheima-Móri (also known as Ennis-Móri) from the north-west of Iceland:

In the late nineteenth century, there was a farmer called Finnur who lived at Skriðnesenni in Bitra. His wife was called Guðrún, and [they had] a daughter called Elísabet /.../. They had a worker living with them called Hallur. He fancied Elísabet, but this was very much against the will of her parents. Hallur was supposed to go south to work with the fishing on Snæfellsnes that winter, and before he left, he asked for Elísabet's hand in marriage, but was refused, and he thus left home with a heavy heart. Soon after Christmas, Elísabet went to the church at Eyri, as she often did, and when she came home, she sat on her bed, and took out her bowl, and was

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<sup>11</sup> See Jón Árnason, 1954–1961: I, 306. It might be noted that the number nine, like the number three, commonly occurs in Old Norse mythology and folk belief (in a similar way to ten or twelve elsewhere: see further Sołtysiak, 2003).

about to eat, when she suddenly turned away from her bowl and said that a peat-red fly was bothering her. She then collapsed and died. And that was the start of the hauntings at Enni. People started being troubled in their sleep, getting scared of the dark, and causing problems when they visit other farms.

Guðmundur was the brother of the wife and lived at Enni, and he was the one most troubled by the visitations; he said that it was a boy with a large trunk but short legs, in a peat-red hooded coat with a balaclava on his head with a tassel hanging behind it. Now more people started to see the ghost in the same form and called it *Móri*. Guðmundur had no peace that winter at Enni. He set off from home and visited a man who had knowledge of magic, and there he heard that several men on a fishing boat at Rif had drowned, and that one of them was called Friðrik, and Hallur had got someone to raise this Friðrik to attack Elísabet and her people. (Jón Árnason, 1954–1961: I, 376–377)

The legend goes on to relate how Elísabet's parents moved away but were continually being troubled by the *móri*: livestock were killed or injured, and one of their workers became suddenly ill. Another worker was found black and bloody in a hay loft, and Guðmundur's fishing boat went down with all hands. All of this was blamed on the *móri* who was regularly seen in the vicinity when these things occurred (Jón Árnason, 1954–1961: I, 376–377).

Other types of anger resulting in someone personally raising a *sending* or having one *raised* for them have a background in problematic business dealings or disagreements in general, as occurs, for example in the cases of the Hleiðargarðs-Skotta, Hítardals-Skotta, Illuga-Skotta, and Ábæjar-Skotta.

This brings us to another type of revenge, which has a background in inhuman and immoral mistreatment. While fewer in number, these stories stand out because of their strong message relating to guilt, making them slightly reminiscent of the numerous Nordic legends also known in Iceland, telling of the vengeful ghosts of babies who have been left out to die of exposure (*útburðir* in Icelandic; *utburdar* in Norwegian) (see further Pentikäinen, 1968; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir, 2022: 332–339); and those legends about the bodies of drowned foreign seamen found on Icelandic beaches, bodies which should be taken to a churchyard, but have items of clothing that are too attractive not to steal (see further Gunnell, 2005). The most striking of the *móri* and *skotta* legends in this particular regard are those of Móhúsa-Skotta, Gunnólfsvíkur-Skotta, Fosslækjar-Móri, Mývatns-Skotta, Hofstaða-Skotta, Stekkholts-Móri, and especially Sels-Móri. Most of these narratives deal with the corporeal ghosts of young homeless people who have died of exposure while travelling across Iceland in the winter. In at least five of these cases (those accounts telling of the background of Móhúsa-Skotta, Gunnólfsvíkur-Skotta, Hofstaðar-Skotta, Litluvalla-Skotta and Sels-Móri), these unhappy figures are the corporeal ghosts of poor people who have been refused hospitality in a time of need, one of the worst moral crimes one could imagine in the Iceland of the past. The following

account of the background of Sels-Móri, like several other narratives of this kind, comes from the south of Iceland:

There was a man called Einar who lived at Borg in Hraunshverfi in the late eighteenth century. He threw out a boy who was a local migrant like so many others who were from Skaftafell in the east of Iceland as a result of the Skaftáreldar volcanic eruptions there [in 1783]. It was in the winter, and the boy was both hungry and had little clothing and died of exposure the next night not far from Borg in a gully known as Skersflóð. Even though the boy was buried, it gradually became evident that he was following Einar and his relatives, and especially Einar's nieces, Þuríður and Salgerður who lived at Efraseli. He is not said to have killed anyone. (Jón Árnason, 1854–1861: I, 364)

Another particularly chilling example of this kind of story is that of Mývatns-Skotta (Jón Árnason, 1854–1861: I, 353–354), which tells of a starving homeless girl who comes to a farm where she is given food to eat. She is then taken outside by the farmer and drowned in a river before being raised to come back and attack another farmer and his relatives. These included a poet who later apparently went mad, and his wife who died mysteriously. The *skotta* was blamed for both.

So much for the origin stories. The majority of the numerous extant legends of this kind available to us in print and recorded form, nonetheless, seem to have comparatively little interest in the background of the various *mórar* and *skottur*, but instead concentrate on the sickness, deaths and other kinds of harm that regularly occur over the course of centuries in the families associated with these beings. Even more common are the experiences of others who are visited by members of the family, the *móri* or *skotta* apparently regularly arriving at destinations before these family members, causing memorable disturbances of various kinds that have served to convince people of their existence. As noted above, in many cases, we are dealing essentially with relatively first-person or second-hand memorates rather than migratory legends; in other words, what Jan Assman called “communicative memories” (Assman, 2006: 3).<sup>12</sup>

As the folk-tale collector, Sigfús Sigfússon, writes about Eyjasels-Móri from the eastern fjords (a figure that has had enough stories told about him to warrant a 160-page book: see Halldór Pétursson, 1962; Halldór Pjetursson, 1977, which contains additional narratives):

As is well known, various people in this family have suffered from mental illness, and that is believed to have been caused by Móri. He went around there in the likeness of a man and harmed people's livestock. Sheep were

<sup>12</sup> Assman compares “communicative memories” to “cultural memories”, the former being memories that those who experienced the events in question pass on directly to others, while the latter are memories that can no longer be verified by those who experienced them, and are in the hands of society.

commonly thrown up into the air and broke their necks or other bones, or were [found] hung, and this often occurred just before Sigurbjörg [the housewife] arrived. Many said that they could hear his laughter from buildings when he killed animals.

When the subject of Móri came up in conversation, some sensible people said that he was like no other ghost, or that he could hardly be called a ghost because he had been walking around the farm on his legs like any other person both on bright sunny days and in the dark night, visible to both those who were clairvoyant and those who were not. He was closer to a human demon. /.../ He was said to have been given life for 300 years. (Sigfús Sigfússon, 1982–1993: II, 261)

The element of supernatural beings physically *walking* around or between farms endlessly is a common feature of the *sendingar* legends (see Gunnell, 2012), and seems to apply also to a number of the *mórar* and *skottur*. For example, Stekkjar-Skotta, as described by Sigfús Sigfússon (1982–1993: II, 343), has apparently walked so much between farms over the centuries that according to witnesses her legs have now worn down to the knees, if not farther (see also below on Ennis-Móri).

The harm to people, livestock and premises caused by the *mórar* and *skottur* clearly varied in degree, and could sometimes be quite minor, as in the following recording telling how:

people in a local shop noticed that some accident or other regularly occurred right before the farmer [from Kampholt] arrived, so often that they thought it unique. It was usually something small: a paper bag holding flour might rip, emptying and ruining its contents; a bottle might break and the contents get ruined and such like. They had started blaming the móri when this happened, and the rule was rarely broken whenever Eiríkur [the farmer] was nearby. (Ragnar Ásgeirsson, 1957–1959: III, 242)

Otherwise, people talk about experiencing strange sleeplessness, increased fear of the dark, and not least actual encounters with the *mórar* or *skottur* in question, which sometimes lie on top of them, limiting breathing.<sup>13</sup> There are strange knocks on doors or the roof, screams or laughter, and other mysterious sounds such as that of the knocking of a stick. Sometimes someone seems to be “riding” the roof of the farmhouse, or a strange figure is seen riding horses behind family members, causing the animals to behave badly. As noted above in the account of Eyjasels-Móri, livestock are commonly killed or hurt (sometimes having their tails tied together); household implements are broken;

<sup>13</sup> A dreamer’s sense of someone lying on top of them (commonly referred to as “sleep paralysis”) is a common feature of so-called “mara” (lit. nightmare) legends in the Nordic countries: see further Raudvere, 1993. Interestingly, the same phenomenon seems to lie behind so-called “mora” legends in the Balkan countries. (My thanks to Mirjam Mencej for telling me about this.) Nonetheless there is no linguistic connection between the Balkan word *mora* and the Icelandic *móri*, and the *mara* legends of the Nordic countries. While they involve the same feature of sleep paralysis, they have no connection to the Icelandic *attardraugar*.

and bones or lumps of turf are thrown about. Sometimes these beings are also said to cause people to lose their way when travelling, and they commonly cause dogs to bark and horses to refuse to move for no obvious reason. Móhúsa-Skotta, meanwhile, is said to have had the rather strange habit of eating people's socks and the inner soles of their shoes (Jón Árnason, 1954–1961: I, 347), while Ábæjar-Skotta seems to have certain vampiric tendencies, stealing the bedclothes of women who have newly given birth and the clothes of midwives in order to suck the blood off them (Sigurður Nordal, Þórbergur Þórðarson, 1962: II, 49–50; Ólafur Davíðsson, 1978–1980: I, 377–382), in at least one case causing the death of a man for the sole purpose of drinking his blood and eating his brains (Þorsteinn M. Jónsson et al., 1964–1965: IV, 358). One notes how in this last case, the *skotta* is said to have appeared to a woman in a dream before she had heard about the accident in question.

Another interesting feature about these beings is the fact that in at least two cases in the south of Iceland (Hörgslands-Móri/Írafells-Móri: see Guðni Jónsson, 1940–1957: I, 89; Jón Árnason, 1954–1961: I, 365), food offerings seem to have been regularly left out for the being in a similar way to that which used to occur in Norway and Sweden with farm protecting spirits like the *nisse* and *tomte* (Stokker, 2000: 72–74; Gunnell, 2014). Here, however, it seems to have been first and foremost a means of buying protection. Otherwise, the only means of keeping these beings off seems to have been the use of magic incantations, full chamber pots, the careful placement of knives around oneself<sup>14</sup> and/or other forms of physical violence, all of which could only serve as a temporary solution. Indeed, matters were not helped by the fact that one was dealing with a being that also seems to have had the capability of changing shape, many *mórar* and *skottur* (including Hörgsland-Móri, Nýgræðis-Móri, Hörghóls-Móri, Írafells-Móri, Egilsels-Móri, Eyjasels-Móri, and Hleiðargarðs-Skotta) also appearing in the shape of a strange peat-red dog.

The following account of an encounter with one of the *skottur* (here Ábæjar-Skotta) is somewhat typical of the form of *mórar* and *skottur* memorates, and their regular attention to detail:

This story takes place when I was in my eighth year with my parents in Miðhús in Blönduhlíð. I was sleeping with Þrúður my grandmother and was in front of her in the bed because I thought that more manly. One night I woke up, which I didn't usually do. There was moonlight and it was light inside. I looked into the room [the *baðstofa* shared by everyone] and looked towards the partition which was directly opposite the bed. There was a clock there and it struck four. By the partition was a bench and guests often sat on that. And I see a girl standing up by the bench and it was light enough for me to see her clearly. She was in a peat-red short skirt and a blouse of a similar colour and had a tasselled cap on her head. I watched her for a while

<sup>14</sup> The use of sharp instruments of steel or silver as a means of protection from the supernatural is also encountered in Nordic legends in the context of the threat of supernatural abduction (especially of un-christened babies): see further af Klintberg, 2010: 82, 187–188, 197, 281, 299.

and couldn't understand what that girl could be doing there in the middle of the night. I was going to say something to her but then a cloud slid in front of the moon and the room became dark again. I found this all so creepy in the dark that I didn't dare address her. I felt an uncontrollable fear take over my body and dived into the bed, pulling the sheets over my head. I did all my best to wake my grandmother up but that proved impossible.

After a short while, my curiosity overcame my fear, and I dared peep out from the sheets again. The bright moonlight had now returned, and I could see the girl much more clearly than before. And she now seemed to be closer to the bed than before. I watched her for a while. Then, all of a sudden, she started to grimace at me and it was so horrific that I will never ever forget it. At last, I managed to wake my grandmother and told her that I couldn't sleep because there was a girl standing over there by the bench opposite the bed. Grandmother said that I must have been dreaming: I should look over there now, and there was nothing. /.../ She said we should say our prayers and then I would be able to sleep. /.../ In the morning when I awoke it was getting late, but the first thing that I saw when I opened my eyes was a strange man sitting on the bench opposite me. Later I heard my mother say that this had been the Skotta that accompanied this man. (Sigurður Nordal, Þórbergur Þórðarson, 1962: II, 48–49)

Especially noteworthy here and in numerous other accounts of this kind is the emphasis placed on descriptions of clothing, something that is also evident in the following three extracts of accounts telling of encounters with these beings. One nineteenth-century account describes Hleiðargarðs-Skotta as follows:

She was the size of a 13-year-old girl but was somewhat shrivelled and wrinkled. On her head, she had a grey tasselled cap which reached down to her eyebrows and the back of her neck. She was in a black ragged jerkin with arms that reached down to her elbows, and below that she was in a black, short, ragged skirt which reached down to her knees, and this was followed by grey socks with folds and tied deep shoes. Her hands were large and her yellow curved nails reached beyond her fingertips. Her forefinger was bent into her mouth, pulling her cheek out towards her ear. (Þorsteinn M. Jónsson, 1964–1965: IV, 369–370)

A description of Ennis-Móri in a sound recording from 1964, meanwhile, states that he was:

a young boy, around 16 years old, or the size of a 16- or 17-year-old boy, and he was dressed in a woollen coat, turned inside out, and the stitches were all on the outside just like [they were] in the old days, and can still be seen on some clothes, and this woollen smock was rather worn, and reached

down to his knees and was all in rags at the bottom, and [he had] a small hat on the head tied under the chin like a top hat but what I thought was strangest was that down below the coat were trousers, which once upon a time had been trouser legs, but you could call them nothing but tatters which reached down to where the top of the socks would be, but below them were just bones, nothing but bones, and I could clearly see the space between the legs and when he stepped down into the grass I could see where the toes spread out. (Geir Jónsson, 1964)

Finally, one notes the following very personal description of Skerflóðs-Móri, who, when encountered in a tent one night, is described as having been:

the size of a 12-year old boy. He had a small face. He had a small peat-red hat on his head, very ancient in style, and it was too big for him. He was wearing a knitted pullover, with patches and holes all over the place. It was light-brown in colour, but rather discoloured. This pullover was also too big for him and came down to his knees. His trousers had a similar colour, ripped and patched. The socks were grey and with holes in them. He had shoes, which were all worn out. Everything about him was as tattered as can be. What I most remember though was his look of grief and sadness. (Jón Thorarensen, 1971: II, 131)

As the informant underlines at the end: “Many others have seen this *móri*, and everyone agrees about his appearance. /.../ Others that were with me can confirm that this story is true” (Jón Thorarensen, 1971: II, 132).

As is well known, such descriptions of clothing along with other small details about times, dates, and the names of people and places all form part of what Elliott Oring has described as “the rhetoric of truth” (Oring, 2012: 104–152), in other words, they are all features that are designed to help convince any dubious listener that the supernatural event in question has actually taken place. They are meant to be believed and to help change the listener’s sense of reality.

So much for the past and the background and nature of these legends which, as was stressed at the start, were evidently still very much alive in the lives of those many Icelandic individuals that Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson took interviews with in Iceland in the 1960s. Bearing in mind the dated nature of the costumes noted above, there is good reason to consider the degree to which such beliefs are likely to continue to exist in our own time when the idea of visiting a graveyard in order to reanimate a corpse has become ever more questionable (not least in legal terms), and when more understanding exists about the nature of hereditary illnesses in families.

Three detailed surveys of folk belief have been carried out in Iceland over the past 50 years: one in 1974, and another in 2006–2007, the third taking place in 2023, involving answers from over 2,500 people of different ages and genders, and from different parts of Iceland (Erlendur Haraldsson, 1978; Ásdís A. Arnalds et al., 2008; Gunnell, 2023).

As comparisons of figures in the three surveys indicate, even though traditional folk beliefs in Iceland seem to be reducing over the course of time, and particularly over the last 20 years, it is evident that over 60% of Icelanders continue to believe that life after death is possible, probable or certain (15% are certain about this, while 16% believe it is impossible). Over 50% feel the same about the possibility of encountering the dead (10% are certain), and a similar number believe in the existence of haunted houses (13% are certain), something that seems to apply more to young people than the old. Interestingly enough, while the figures are a little lower, beliefs in family spirits like *mórar* and *skottur*, which respondents were asked specifically about in the most recent survey, seem to have changed little over the course of the last 50 years (see Fig. 8): while only 7% of the nation say they are convinced that they exist in the 2023 survey, around 46% remain open to the possibility that they can be encountered in some way (61% in 2006) (Gunnell, 2023).

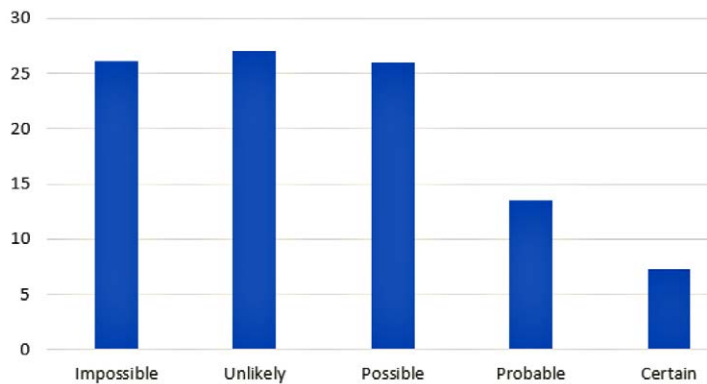


Figure 8: Icelandic beliefs in family spirits (*mórar* and *skottur*) according to the 2023 survey (Gunnell, 2023)

As in other cases relating to beliefs in the supernatural, and in all of the surveys from 1974–2023, women seem to be more open to beliefs of this kind (see Fig. 9).

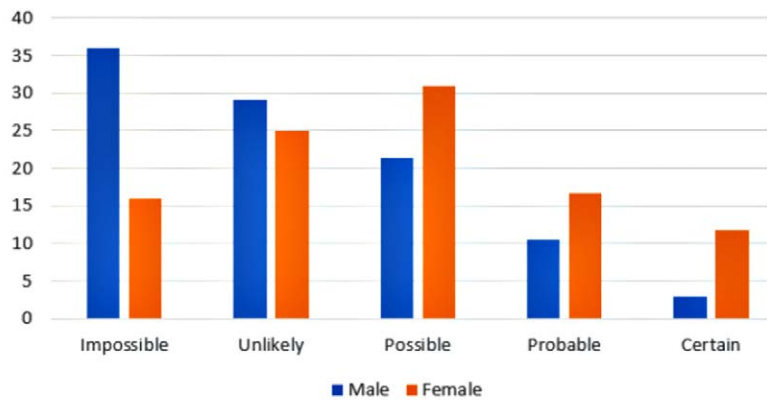


Figure 9: Icelandic beliefs in family spirits (*mórar* and *skottur*) according to the 2023 survey: Gender differences (Gunnell, 2023)

Particularly striking are the facts that evidently fewer young people are open to beliefs in family ghosts (Fig. 10), and that there are clear differences between the figures relating to urban informants and those coming from the countryside where the beliefs are evidently stronger (Fig. 11).

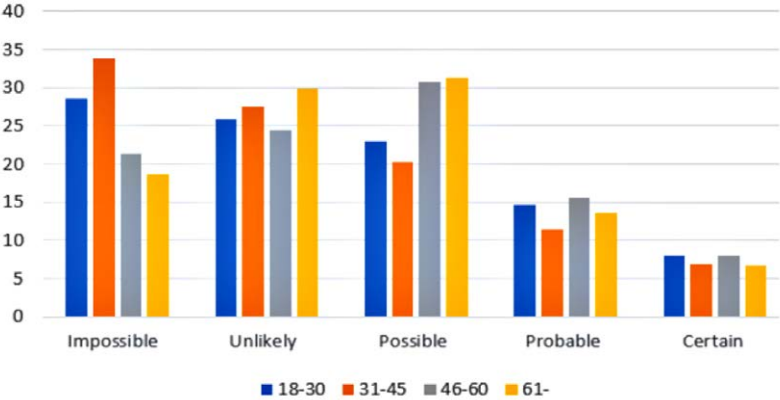


Figure 10: Icelandic beliefs in family spirits (*mórar* and *skottur*) according to the 2023 survey: Age differences (Gunnell, 2023)

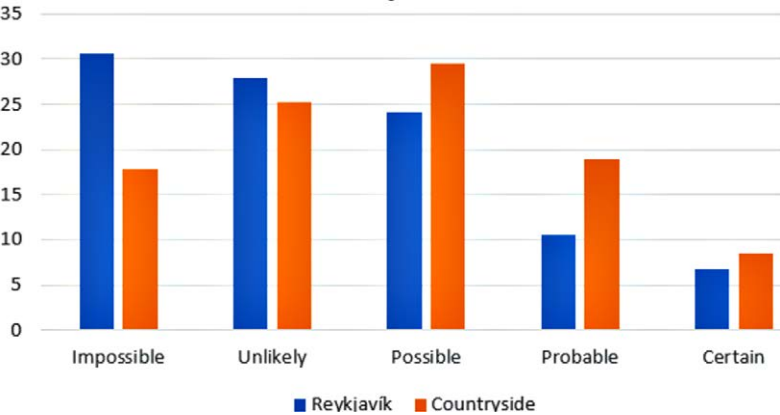


Figure 11: Icelandic beliefs in family spirits (*mórar* and *skottur*) according to the 2023 survey: Differences on the basis of places of residence (Gunnell, 2023)

Firm beliefs are regularly connected to personal experiences, and it is also striking that the figures relating to experiences of encounters with family “ghosts” of the kind discussed above (2006–2007: 16–18%; 2023: 17%) have changed little since 1974 (17%). In the most recent survey, 16% of those people who have had such experiences talk of having seen the being in question, while 34% mention auditory experiences, 31% state they were aware of strange movements taking place, and 40% say they were aware of the being in some other way. The short narratives that respondents provided about their experiences in this most recent survey are strikingly similar to the earlier records in print and sound: They recount how various events commonly occur before someone from a

particular family arrives at a site unexpectedly. Several respondents talk about strange sounds heard in or outside the house. One talks about suddenly seeing someone standing by their bed, and another talks of feeling suddenly exhausted before someone particular arrives. In one case, someone suggests that a being of this kind seemed to have moved into their boarding school (probably with a new student). In this case, students apparently had nightmares, doors opened of their own accord, and bolts were seen moving about. Also striking is that 62% of those who have had such experiences connect them to a phenomenon that they have previously heard about, implying that they were previously aware of some kind of tradition that might explain these experiences, something reflected directly in one person's account telling of how when a jug of milk was mysteriously knocked out of their hands, local people said this must have been caused by *Sólheima-Móri* (see Gunnell, 2023).

All the same, there are also implications in both the recent survey and some earlier records that these beings are gradually changing in nature over the course of time, sometimes actually providing assistance to those they follow rather than causing trouble, becoming a little like a guardian spirit of some kind. A typical example of such behaviour is found in an account in Sigfús Sigfússon's collection from the early twentieth century which tells of a woman who, early one summer morning, was making cheese in the farm doorway at *Sleðbrjót*:

The sheep were at home, but not in the pen. She hears right beside her: "Time pen, time pen!" She does not know where the sound has come from. Then the same thing is said again: "Time pen, time pen!" She can see nothing. Then a third time, it is said more loudly very close to her: "Time to pen the sheep, time to pen the sheep!" Then she understood what was going on and went to round up the sheep which were escaping. (Sigfús Sigfússon, 1982–1993: II, 268)

The account ends: "The *Móri* had been warning her about that" (*ibid.*).

Our recent survey contains further examples of people talking of "someone" of this kind protecting them from accidents when they are driving, or saving them from being knocked over when they are crossing a road (see Gunnell, 2023). Yet other accounts appear to show them effectively merging with the ever-present modern "vanishing hitchhiker" legends (see Brunvand, 1981: 24–40). A good example of this can be seen in the following account of a man who was driving in his car late one night in the countryside of northern Iceland in the 1950s:

All of a sudden, a girl appears in the road, running in the tracks ahead of the car. She has a red cap on her head and is dressed in peat-coloured clothes. Even though the clothes look rather strange, *Garðar* had no sense that anything odd was going on. He stopped, got out and was planning to offer this traveller a lift. But now the girl was nowhere to be seen, and nobody answers when he calls. This, thinks *Garðar*, is really strange, and

when he thinks a little more about the appearance and clothing of the girl and his earlier feeling [that something was ahead of him when he was walking], he senses that this looks a little suspicious. /.../ When he asked around whether anyone had been walking about there at that time, no one had any such knowledge. Everyone was certain that this must have been the Hleiðargarðs-Skotta playing her usual tricks. (Porsteinn M. Jónsson et al., 1964–1965: IV, 372)

Once again, one notes the reference at the end to a previously known tradition. One also notes the stress on the old-fashioned clothes worn by the being encountered in the dark. This underlines the fact that even though the world around them has changed in nature, the Icelandic *mórar* and *skottur*, much like several other Icelandic folkloric beings first described in print in the nineteenth-century, such as the Icelandic *álfar*, seem to be somewhat bound by their original appearance in print. They are becoming a little like a browning sepia photograph. Their clothing has evidently changed little in style or quality, and they seem to be continuing to walk their legs down. Furthermore, it is somewhat striking that they do not seem to have received any new members in their ranks over the course of time, or attained new skills. While accounts suggest that they can ride, and that they occasionally sit in cars, there is no evidence of them personally learning to drive. Like a number of other earlier malevolent spirits, they also seem to have trouble crossing water. Indeed, when Írafells-Móri does manage to get into a boat to try and follow a family member to an island, accounts suggest that he succumbs to a serious bout of seasickness (Ólafur Davíðsson, 1978–1980: II, 34). Indeed, such problems might help explain why *mórar* and *skottur* seem to have had trouble following Icelandic migrants to America in the late nineteenth century according to several of the legends collected by Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson and Olga Franzdóttir in North America. At least one such *móri* is said to have given up trying to walk on water when halfway across the Atlantic (Gísli Sigurðsson, 2012: 437).

If one attempts to draw some general conclusions from the information provided above, it is evident that the *mórar* and *skottur* have a basic background in Icelanders' deeply rooted beliefs in life after death and in the idea of guardian spirits everybody is believed to be born with and which follow them throughout their lives (sometimes travelling ahead of them or behind them). Also closely connected are the widespread beliefs all over the world that illness, accidents and bad luck in general have a supernatural background (sometimes brought about by antagonistic magic or "bad thoughts"). These are all ideas which in Iceland reach as far back as pre-Christian times, although, as noted at the start, in the case of the *mórar* and *skottur*, we are not dealing (at least initially) with protecting spirits but rather something more antagonistic (see further Hrefna Sigríður Bjartmarsdóttir, 2015; Móeiður Anna Sigurðardóttir, 2015). Such considerations would seem to have a faint connection with another set of deep-rooted early Icelandic beliefs in a fate which we are bound by, and in the case of the legends of poor young people left out to die of exposure, roots in a personified expression of guilt that lives on like a curse in a family, explaining all of the negative things that happen to family members and their relations

over the course of time. Indeed, the idea of powerful curses that affect one's fate are another common feature of the Icelandic sagas, and not least those relating to the famous Icelandic outlaws, Gísli Súrsson and Grettir Ásmundarson, that used to be read out loud as part of the evening storytelling sessions held in the old Icelandic farmhouses at night (*kvöldvökur*: Magnús Gíslason, 1977). In short, death and the close engagement of past and present in everyday life have always played a key role in the Icelandic mentality and will likely continue to do so for some time to come. As this article has shown, the family spirits of the past were clearly a very real phenomenon for those who encountered them. Nonetheless, it seems evident that many of those families afflicted by the presence of *mórar* and *skottur* are now beginning to bring forth the ninth generation of descendants to walk the earth since the curses that placed on them were first uttered. It is also clear that, for some reason or another (perhaps owing to more recent understandings of illness and the potential of magical malevolence), new *mórar* and *skottur* do not seem to have come into being over the last hundred years or so to replace the older beings that are now beginning to lose their power. One thus wonders whether there is any reason for these family "ghosts" to still be walking the Icelandic countryside 50 years from now, or whether the time is coming for them to gain some well-earned rest.

It seems logical to end with an account told to me by a friend and colleague who is a member of the eighth generation of those followed by Ennis-Móri in the north-west of Iceland. As can be seen here, while their end may be approaching, it is clear that, for now at least, the aging *mórar* and *skottur* are still very much alive in Iceland.

*Shortly after we moved north to Kirkjuból, probably in the autumn of 2000, we dug down for a new water source for the farm. /.../ A new ditch for the pipes was dug to the house running from the water source, and it involved a lot of work sorting out everything in the ditch, putting sand over the pipes and so on. I was working on that all autumn, sometimes with the guy with the digger and sometimes alone.*

*One time I was working alone on the ditch in the evening when the guy with the digger drove by, and when I next met him, he asked me quite forcefully who it was that had been working with me on the ditch, because he had clearly witnessed two men at work there, not one. When I confirmed that I had been alone all evening, he said that he was quite certain that my family ghost, the Ennis-Móri must have been helping me. (Jón Jónsson, private communication, 1.6.2025)*

#### STATEMENT ON RESEARCH DATA MANAGEMENT

The author states that except where otherwise noted the article is based on research data that is available in public domain resources as well as publicly accessible archival and museum collections that are cited in the list of references.

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## MAŠČEVANJE ZAVRNJENIH – VZPON, ZATON IN OZADJE ISLANDSKIH VEROVANJ V NADNARAVNE DRUŽINSKE SPREMLJEVALCE

Prispevek obravnava posebno vrsto islandskega duha oziroma nadnaravnega bitja (t. i. *ættarfylgjur*; edn. *ættarfylgja*), ki predstavlja nenavadno zmes poltergeista, vrnjenega mrtveca, preoblikujočega se bitja, spremljevalnega zaščitnega duha, oživiljenega trupla in prekletstva. V nasprotju z nordijskimi verovanji o drugih vrstah osebnih spremljevalnih duhov v živalski ali človeški podobi (*fylgjur*) so bitja, obravnavana v tem prispevku, vezana izključno na določene družine. Običajno se pojavljajo v podobi mladih ljudi in so v osnovi zlonamerna, saj naj bi nad tistimi, ki jim sledijo, izvrševala kazen ali maščevanje. Tovrstna verovanja so omejena predvsem na Islandijo, čeprav je posredne vzporednice mogoče najti tudi drugod.

Prispevek se začne s kratkim prikazom tega, kako so Islandci v preteklosti razumeli »duha« (najpogosteje poimenovanega *afturganga* [edn.]; *afturgöngur* [mn.], dobesedno »vrnjeni mrtvec«) kot vrsto »nemrtvega« bitja. Nato se osredotoči na *ættarfylgjur*, torej na *mórar* (edn. *móri*: moški) in *skottur* (edn. *skotta*: ženska), poimenovanji, ki se nanašata na oblačila teh bitij (*móri* je povezan z zemeljsko barvo *mórauður* – šotno rdečo, medtem ko se *skotta* nanaša na ženske čepice z resami, kakršne so nekoč nosile ženske).

V nadaljevanju prispevek predstavlja vrsto kart razširjenosti, izdelanih na podlagi pripovedi o *mórar* in *skottur* iz podatkovne zbirke *Sagnagrunnur*, ki vsebuje približno 10.000 objavljenih ljudskih pripovedi (<https://sagnagrunnur.arnastofnun.is/english/>). V zbirki je približno 200 pripovedi o *mórar*, nekoliko manj pa o *skottur*; večino obeh vrst pripovedi so pripovedovali moški (sl. 1–3; sl. 3 prikazuje primerjavo razširjenosti obeh tipov). Naslednja karta (sl. 4) prikazuje razširjenost pripovedi iz najzgodnejše in zelo vplivne zbirke Jóna Árnasona *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* (Islandske ljudske pripovedi in pravljice) iz let 1862–1864 ter kaže, da sta bili obe vrsti pripovedi že tedaj razmeroma široko razširjeni.

Nato prispevek obravnava pripovedi o *mórar* in *skottur*, ki so bile posnete na magnetni trak v šestdesetih letih 20. stoletja in so danes vključene v zbirko *Ísmús*, ki vsebuje približno 10.000 pripovedi (<https://www.ismus.is/>). Slika 5 prikazuje razširjenost pripovedi o *móri* v zbirki *Ísmús* (480 zapisov, večinoma zbranih pri moških), slika 6 pa razširjenost približno 240 zapisov o *skottur*. Očitno so bila ta verovanja v tem obdobju še vedno zelo živa.

V naslednjem delu prispevek predstavi poimenovanja teh bitij (glej opombo 8) in pokaže, da so običajno povezana z določenimi kraji, ne pa z osebnimi imeni. Časovno ozadje številnih pripovedi o nastanku teh bitij sega v 18. stoletje, ko so bile življenjske razmere na Islandiji zaradi nizkih temperatur in vulkanskih izbruhov posebej težke. Sledi analiza narave pripovedi, tako tistih v tisku kot zvočno posnetih, ki so večinoma prvo- ali drugorazredni memorati o osebnih srečanjih z *ættarfylgjur*. Nato prispevek podrobno obravnava razloge za njihovo delovanje: navadno so vezana na določene družine do devet rodov in povzročajo

škodo tako družinskim članom kot tudi lokalnemu okolju. Kot je prikazano v članku, naj bi mnoga od teh bitij izvirala iz t. i. *sendingar* – mladih umrlih, ki so jih čarovniki priklicali iz groba in poslali, da napadejo druge ljudi. Takšne napade včasih sprožijo maščevalni zavrtnji snubci; posebej izrazit primer je pripoved o t. i. Sólheima-Móri (navedena v članku). Drugod so povod za nastanek bitij sporni poslovni odnosi ali medosebni konflikti.

Posebej presunljive so pripovedi, katerih ozadje predstavlja želja po maščevanju zaradi nečloveškega in/ali nemoralnega ravnanja, kar kaže na povezavo z občutki krivde. Pri *mórar* in *skottur* izstopajo zlasti zgodbe o mladih brezdomcih, ki so umrli zaradi mraza, potem ko so jim kmetje odrekli gostoljubje; kot primera sta navedeni pripovedi o Sel-Móri in Mývatns-Skotta.

Kot je nadalje poudarjeno, se v teh pripovedih manj pozornosti namenja izvoru bitij kakor izkušnjam srečevanja z *mórar* in *skottur*, ki pogosto prispejo na cilj še pred člani družine, s katero so povezani, ter povzročajo različne motnje. Posebej opazno je, kako pogosto pripovedi vsebujejo podrobne opise njihovih oblačil.

Prispevek se zaključi s predstavitvijo najnovejše islandske raziskave ljudskih verovanj, izvedene leta 2023 na vzorcu več kot 2000 oseb različnih starosti in spolov iz različnih delov države. Rezultati raziskave (sl. 8–11) kažejo, da verovanje v *ættarfylgjur* sicer postopoma slabi, vendar na Islandiji še vedno ostaja živo: več kot 46 % prebivalcev ostaja odprtih za možnost, da bi se s takšnimi bitji lahko srečali. Prispevek se sklene z navedbo več novejših pričevanj.

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