

Faith and Power

Reykjavik MA Deadlines Coming Up

Medieval Icelandic Studies

- ▶ 90 ECTS / 12 months
- ▶ Reykjavik
- ▶ https://english.hi.is/medieval_icelandic_studies

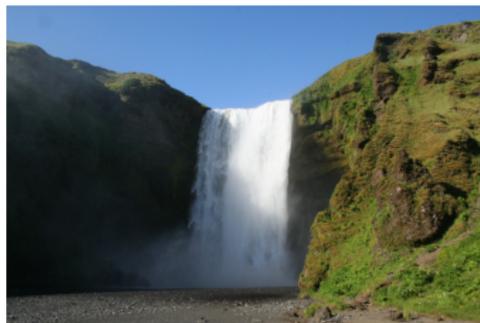


Figure: Skógafoss

Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

- ▶ 120 ECTS / 21 months
- ▶ Reykjavik + Oslo/Aarhus/Copenhagen
- ▶ <http://oldnorse.is>



Figure: University of Iceland

! Deadline 1 February

Soteriological vs Magic Religion (Russell)

- ▶ Soteriological religion promises personal salvation, typically in the afterlife.
- ▶ Magic religion focuses on the here and now and seeks to offer solutions to problems of the present world, such as disease and infertility.
- ▶ Soteriological religion is **world-rejecting**; magic religion is **world-accepting**.
- ▶ Soteriological religion presents the afterlife as essentially other; magic religion envisions it as essentially a continuation of the present life.

Power Factors in Soteriological Adoption Rates

- ▶ Heterogeneous (i.e. urban), anomic societies
- ▶ Repressed social groups
- ▶ Political instability

Motivations for adoption by political leaders:

- ▶ Increase social cohesion, political stability (“imagined community”)
- ▶ Extend influence through the power of the Church
- ▶ Raise threshold for social unrest

Conversion for extrareligious reasons tends to result in syncretism.

Northern Europe

Factors resisting conversion

- ▶ Rural
 - High degree of social cohesion
 - Local, community-based religious culture
- ▶ Society structured around kinship
 - High degree of social cohesion

Factors favouring conversion

- ▶ Desire among kings for consolidation of power
 - A Christian royalty, particularly one on good terms with the Church, discourages revolt among a Christian population
 - The Church could help organize the people into a power structure

Iceland

- ▶ No king!
- ▶ Kings of Norway interested in Christianizing Iceland
 - ▶ Christian mission
 - ▶ Political gain
- ▶ *Goðar* may also have had political reasons to adopt or resist Christianity

King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway (reign 995–1000) saw the potential for political consolidation through missionary activity.

Substitution

“ During the five years in which he [i.e. Óláfr Tryggvason] bore the title of king in Norway, he converted five countries to Christianity: Norway, Iceland, Shetland, Orkney, and fifthly the Faroe Islands. He first erected churches by his own residences, and he did away with sacrifice and sacrificial toasts, substituting the festive toasts of [Christmas](#) and [Easter](#), [St John's Mass](#) brew and the autumn ale at [Michaelmas](#) as a favour to the people (*Ágrip* ch. 19). ”

Iceland officially became Christian in 999 or 1000 and subject to the Norwegian Crown in 1262.

Bibliography

- Driscoll, Matthew, ed. *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway*. Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 10. London: Viking Society for Northern Research / University College London, 2008.
- Russell, James C. *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Strömbäck, Dag. *The Conversion of Iceland: A Survey*. Translated by Peter Foote. Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 6. London: Viking Society for Northern Research / University College London, 1975.