



# Svartárkot, Culture - Nature

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## SVARTÁRKOT

### CULTURE – NATURE

#### Writing Local Cultures

#### Scribal Culture – Local Knowledge – Microhistories

##### Basic information

Time: July 4-12, 2009 (additional work over the Internet)

Registration deadline: March 31, 2009 (early deadline due to high season)

Level: Graduate

Credit units: 10 ECTS

Chief supervisor: Davíð Ólafsson PhD, Reykjavik Academy

Guest lecturer: Professor Margaret J. M. Ezell, Texas A&M University

Language: English

##### Price:

Tuition \$ 950 (US)

Excursions, board, accommodation etc. \$ 1,550 (US)

Total: \$ 2,500 (US)

(Travel to location not included)

##### Course description

The course deals, in an interdisciplinary manner, with three intertwined themes and concepts of cultural history and cultural studies. The focus of the course is both conceptual and empirical, and both local (Icelandic) and global.

The first of these themes is a revisionist view to the history of communication and media in the early modern and modern period. At its core is the recognition that the textual culture of early modern and modern times, often termed as 'the age of print', was not communicated via one medium but rather of 'polymedia'. A linear view of the consecutive phases of communications – oral, scribal and print – has given way to more intertwined depiction. Numerous studies from recent years have revealed that the advent of printing did not lead to the disappearance of handwritten communication. The persistence of manuscript culture – the production, dissemination and consumption of handwritten material – will be examined and discussed in relations with other coexisting and intertwined media, print and oral communications. The participatory elements of manuscript culture will be compared to the elements of the emerging digital, web-based culture.

A leading international scholar in the field, Margaret J. M. Ezell, Professor at Texas A&M University in the United States will appear as guest lecturer. In two three-hour morning sessions she will lecture on the international rise of post-print manuscript studies, discuss her conceptualization of social author and social authorship and address the impact of manuscript studies on the literary and cultural history of women.

Iceland is widely known for its preservation of medieval culture and history through its highly praised vellum manuscripts containing its Saga literature, the Eddaic poetry and its chronicles. What is less known, both in Iceland and internationally, is the literary culture of the following centuries that was principally performed via handwritten publication, despite a fairly early advent



of print in the 1530s. In addition to a well-known body of medieval manuscripts, the case of Iceland encompasses an extremely rich corpus of handwritten material from the sixteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth century. A large proportion of this material was written, read and/or owned by common people, farmers, fisherman and labourers, notably in the nineteenth century, and this gives the Icelandic case a global value. The course will give a brief survey of the saga-literature, the theory of scribal studies will be discussed, but the main focus will be on the scribal and literary culture after 1550, especially local knowledge of the Bárðardalur region, around Svartárkot. International comparison will be drawn and the local aspects will be analyzed in global context. This manuscript culture of post-medieval Iceland and its principal role in the cultural history of the era will be introduced by some of the Icelandic lecturers of the course. It will be discussed in relations with recent studies in the field from other European countries, North America and Asia.

Closely related to this central theme of post-medieval manuscript culture are two paradigms in humanistic and social studies, dedicated to the scope of study. One is the local or regional aspect vs. the national(istic) framework of literary culture. This will take account of the analytical concept of thick description, defined as intensive, small-scale, dense descriptions of social life from observation (See: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973, and *Local Knowledge*, 1983). The second is the approach of microhistory, also first developed in the 1970s as a component of the so called new (cultural) history. Rising from the Italian school of microstoria, microhistory has taken several paths in historiography of the last three decades. The Icelandic school of microhistory, *einsaga*, has notably been intertwined with handwritten material from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, both personal writings (diaries, autobiographies etc) and the production and consumption of literary and historical material.

In relations with these general, conceptual, and theoretical discussions the course will address and introduce varying aspects of Icelandic cultural history that relate to the wider framework. The cultural history of Iceland has many characteristics that are interesting to the wider scholarly community and important aspects of cultural history and cultural studies as they have been practiced in recent years. One is that the printing industry in Iceland was more or less monopolized by the church until the late eighteenth century and played a minor role in the dissemination of texts until the last decades of the nineteenth century. This was somewhat a result of the fact that Iceland was, up to the turn of the nineteenth century, predominantly rural and sparsely populated and was thus lacking most of the infrastructure usually connected with urban centres and the modernization process of the era. Another one is the high level of literacy, i.e. the skill to read, that is argued to have been close to universal in Iceland from the late eighteenth century. The level of writing skills was at that time much lower but through the course of the nineteenth it became common for people of all status to employ the pen and paper for their education, entertainment and expression. Both trajectories happened without the establishment of a formal schooling system.

This course is on graduate level (MA/M.Phil) and is open for students in every field of humanities and social sciences. The actual teaching period consists of 40 hrs of lectures and seminars over nine days. In addition students are expected to employ two full weeks (2x40 hrs) for preparations before arrival in the form of recommended reading. One week (40 hrs) is assigned to individual work between lectures during the stay in Iceland and one week is allocated to a final course project.

### **Expected learning outcomes:**

At the end of the course ...

- students are expected to be familiar with the so called 'manuscript turn' within the historiography of early modern textual communications.
- students should know the broad lines of Icelandic cultural history and its literature from the earliest writings of the eleventh century up to modern times.
- students should know of the role of 'scribal publication' in post-Gutenbergian Iceland.
- will have discussed the concepts and practice of microhistory, local studies and pluralistic approach and its relations with early modern and modern manuscript studies.

**Lecturers:**

Dr. Margaret J. M. Ezell (PhD), literary historian. Distinguished Professor in English Literature at Texas A&M University

Dr. Davíð Ólafsson (PhD), historian at the Reykjavík Academy and part-time lecturer at the University of Iceland

Dr. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon (PhD), historian. Head of Centre for Microhistory at the Reykjavík Academy and part-time lecturer at the University of Iceland

Dr. Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson (PhD), anthropologist. Head of the Húsavík Cultural Centre

Viðar Hreinsson (Mag Art), literary historian. Director of the Reykjavík Academy

Guðný Hallgrímsdóttir (MA), PhD student at the University of Iceland

**Preliminary Programme****Preparation day in Reykjavík (Friday July 3, 2009)**

10.00	Visit at the Reykjavík Academy A selection of short introductory lectures from Icelandic history and culture
12.30	Light lunch before heading with bus up-north to Kiðagil (Svartárkot)
20.00	Arrival at Kiðagil

**Day 1 (Saturday July 4, 2009)***Approaching the scene*

08.00	Breakfast
09.00	Departure for orientation tour in Bárðardalur valley Svartárkot – Aldeyjarfoss – Hrafnarbjargarvöð <i>Lecturer: Sigurlína Tryggvadóttir</i>
12.00	Packed lunch at Hrafnarbjargarvöð
13.30	Arrival in Kiðagil
14.00	Gods, Warriors, and Great Writers: The National(istic) Narrative to Icelandic Literary History from Settlement to the Twentieth Century <i>Lecturer: Viðar Hreinsson</i>
16.00	Student project work
18.00	Dinner

**Day 2 (Sunday July 5, 2009)**

*To be or not to be ... published in print*

08.00	Breakfast
09.00	In the Service of the Lord The History of the (Printed) Book in Iceland, 1530-1930 <i>Lecturer: Dr. Davíð Ólafsson</i>
12.00	Lunch
13.00	Loners, Loonies and Losers: The Alternative Literary History of Iceland <i>Lecturer: Viðar Hreinsson</i>
16.00	Student project work
18.00	Dinner

**Day 3 (Monday July 6, 2009)**

*Manuscript Culture in the Age of Print. A Revisionist Approach*

08.00	Breakfast
09.00	The international coming of post-medieval manuscript studies, 1980-2009 <i>Lecturer: Professor Margaret J.M. Ezell</i>
12.00	Lunch
13.00	Post-medieval manuscript culture in Iceland. The 16th and 17th centuries <i>Lecturer: N.N.</i>
14.30	Break
15.00	Post-medieval Manuscript Culture in Iceland. The 18th and 19th centuries <i>Lecturer: Dr. Davíð Ólafsson</i>
17.00	Student project work
18.00	Dinner

**Day 4 (Tuesday July 7, 2009)**

*Cultural transition from grand narrative to microlevel*

08.00	Breakfast
09.00	Local authors – social authorship <i>Lecturer: Professor Margaret J.M. Ezell</i>
12.00	Lunch
13.00	Microhistory as an approach to cultural history <i>Lecturer: Dr. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon</i>
14.30	Break
15.00	Thick descriptions – local studies <i>Lecturer: Dr. Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson</i>
17.00	Short tour / hiking: The Bárðardalur circle
19.00	Dinner at Kiðagil

**Day 5 (Wednesday July 8, 2009)***The Postmodern plural*

- 08.00 Breakfast  
09.00 The Postmodern Plural:  
Culture /s. *Lecturer:* Dr. Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson  
Literacy /ies. *Lecturer:* Dr. Davíð Ólafsson  
Memory /ies. *Lecturer:* Dr. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon  
12.00 Departure for excursion around the tourist sites  
Goðafoss – Þorgeirskirkja – Ystafell – Húsavík  
13.30 Lunch in Húsavík  
15.00 Visit to the Museum House at Húsavík  
Lecture on the cultural history of the region  
*Lecturer:* NN (Þingeysskur sögugrunnur)  
17.00 Dinner at Húsavík  
19.00 Visit to the Húsavík Whale Museum  
21.00 Whale watching on Skjálfaflói bay in the midnight sun

**Day 6 (Thursday July 9, 2009)***Post-Medieval Scribal Culture in Iceland*

- 08.00 Breakfast  
09.00 Genres and usages:  
Manuscripts and miscellaneity: Sagas, romances and rímur  
*Lecturer:* NN  
Life-writings and memory in Early-Modern and Modern Iceland  
*Lecturer:* Dr. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon  
A Day in the Life. Diaries and Daily Life in 18th and 19th century Iceland  
*Lecturer:* Dr. Davíð Ólafsson  
12.00 Lunch  
13.00 Microhistories and case-studies:  
Playwrights and popular poets in Bárðardalur  
*Lecturer:* Viðar Hreinsson  
Education, love and grief: A tale of two brothers  
*Lecturer:* Dr. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon  
14.30 Break  
15.00 The Life and literary activities of Sighvatur Grímsson  
*Lecturer:* Dr. Davíð Ólafsson  
A Story of a fool? The life and narrative of Guðrún Ketilsdóttir  
*Lecturer:* Guðný Hallgrímsdóttir  
18.00 Dinner



### Day 7 (Friday July 10, 2009)

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.00 Students Presentations. Review essays
- 12.00 Lunch in Húsavík
- 13.00 'Lava-field trip' to Ódáðahraun  
(lectures on outlaws and folk-belief on the way)
- 18.00 Barbecue, 'kvöldvaka' (evening wake),  
and accommodation in isolated Réttartorfa cottage

### Day 8 (Saturday July 11, 2009)

- 09.00 Arrival at Kiðagil and breakfast
- 10.00 Swimming at Stóru-Tjarnarskóli
- 12.00 Lunch
- 13.00 Synopsis and roundtable discussions
- 18.00 Dinner

### Day 9 (Sunday July 12, 2009)

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.00 Dispensing of home assignment. Q and A
- 12.00 Lunch
- 13.00 The trip home. Arrival in Reykjavík ca. 20:00