



Delving into Iceland: *Conducting Research Abroad*

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This Manifold project aims to show graduate students who are interested in traveling for research the different components that they may encounter in this process, based on my recent experience conducting research for my MA thesis by traveling abroad. My thesis focuses on materiality in medieval Icelandic literature, so I traveled to Reykjavik, Iceland, to meet with researchers and see manuscripts that were relevant to this thesis topic. This trip took careful planning and communication, but was ultimately worth it to immerse myself in my topic. I hope that this guide proves helpful to others who are interested in pursuing travel opportunities for their own research.

Preliminary Research:

Before beginning to plan my travel, I conducted a literature review to understand the scope of my topic. When I first started my project, all I knew was that I was interested in the medieval era in Iceland. I narrowed that down to writing about the sagas, which are a collection of stories from that time period. From there, I had to start by understanding which of the sagas caught my attention the most. This required doing a lot of reading, which was a challenge for me, because I typically don't read much outside of coursework (which, as an English MA student, requires heavy reading every week) and it took a lot of time. Ultimately, I determined the two sagas that I was most interested in were *Egil's Saga* and *Njál's Saga*, which are two of the most popular Icelandic sagas. I decided to write about *Egil's Saga*, but I nonetheless found *Njál* helpful to understand the larger Icelandic canon.

Once I had decided that I wanted to focus on *Egil*, I had to locate what intrigued me the most. I found myself interested in two things in the story itself: the near-constant movement in and out of Iceland throughout the narrative and, the theme of fosterage and how it might be reflected in the materiality of the physical copies of the text. I wanted to explore the way the narrative's themes of moving and being hosted by different groups could relate to the story of the manuscript's provenance history. Once I established specific topics to explore, I was able to move forward with the process.

The first thing I did was use databases I was familiar with to find articles on my topic. Using sources like

GoogleScholar and JSTOR worked for the preliminary research that I needed to complete to get a grasp on the current discourse. Meanwhile, sites like Academia.edu that host scholarship on a more global (and niche) scale showed me specific Icelandic scholars that would fit more with my specific topic.

Introducing myself to Icelandic scholarship also prepared me to meet with people in Iceland, with an understanding of what the scholarly discussion had been thus far. I took notes on these articles, and used them to develop questions that I might ask once in Iceland.

Once I completed my literature review, I researched which manuscripts I wanted to view in Iceland. This was one of the more confusing parts of this trip, as I had to learn how to navigate the different databases (after translating them to English) and determine which manuscripts I could see, and which were hosted in other institutions or even other countries. I was told over email by research professor Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson to navigate via <https://handrit.is/>, which hosts the data for manuscripts of many different institutions across Scandinavia. I found that, occasionally, I would search for a manuscript, thinking that it was part of an Icelandic institution I could visit, only to find out it was actually somewhere else. This took a lot of weeding through the site before I had a confirmed list of three manuscripts I could access.

The screenshot shows the Handrit.is website in a browser. The URL bar displays handrit.is/manuscript/view/is/Lbs04-1415/0#mode/2up. The page title is "handrit.is". Below the header, there are navigation links: Home, Collections, Browse, Power Search, and About. The main content area is titled "Manuscript Detail" and features a large thumbnail image of a manuscript cover. To the right of the image is a sidebar with a "Document" tab and a "Contents" tab. Under the "Document" tab, there is a "Metadata" section with the following information:

- Country:** Iceland
- Place:** Reykjavik
- Institution:** The National and University Library of Iceland
- Repository:** Handritasafn
- Collection:** Handritasafn Landsbókasafns
- Shelfmark:** Lbs 1415 4to
- Keywords:** [Sagas of Icelanders](#)
- Additional pictures:** [CCP](#)
- XML:**

Below the thumbnail image, there is a "Direct Links" section. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 11:39 AM on 5/1/2024.

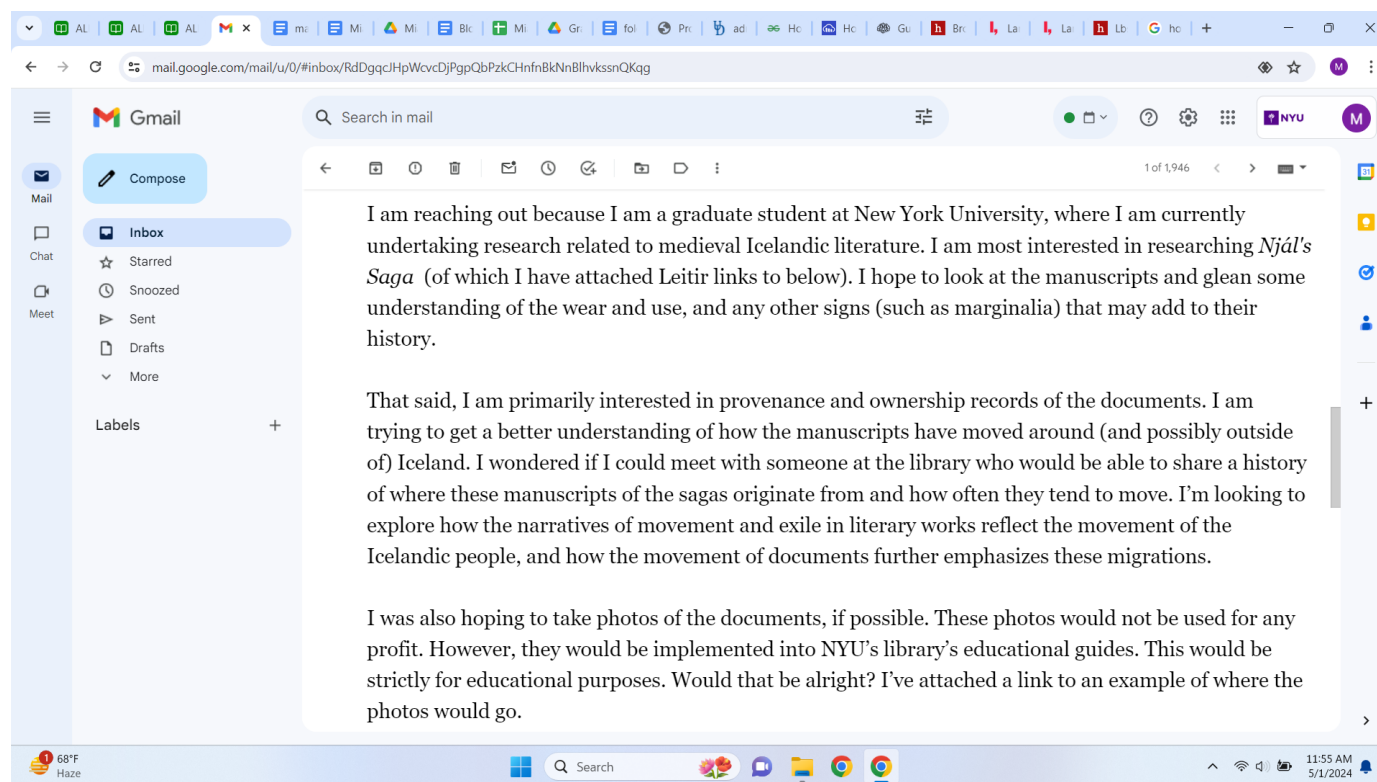
A Handr.it Page

Sending Emails:

In order to see these manuscripts and meet with people to discuss my thesis topic, I had to get into the practice of sending a lot of emails. This was far from a straightforward process, as I learned quickly. Once I emailed one person, I found myself being redirected to another, and then another, and so on. In my case, this process (although a bit frustrating and time consuming) was lucky, because Icelandic

scholarship is a tight network. There's a good chance that if the person you're emailing doesn't have the right answer for your question, they know exactly who does. After emailing the archive email which led me to Professor Gunnlaugsson, he helped to connect me with others. This will not necessarily be the case with every field of study, but you should be aware of the networks at work in your field as you enter into the discourse. Of course, always remember to be courteous over email and aware of the fact that someone is taking time out of their day to help you with your research. Finally, I would suggest that you start sending emails at least three months in advance of your trip, to adequately prepare for the time it takes to communicate and plan.

To be more specific on the nature of sending emails, I am attaching a screenshot of an email that I sent, to show how to reach out to researchers. Please note that Handr.it is the database for Icelandic manuscripts with digital reproductions, and Leitir.is is the search portal for many digital collections, including the Icelandic library system. I used both tools to prepare my research, which is why Leitir.is is mentioned in this email.



Email Sample

Applying for a Grant:

For this project, I was unfortunately unable to secure a research grant. For those interested in pursuing grant funding to support their research, I suggest that you start researching and applying to grants as early as possible, either within your institution or external funding bodies.

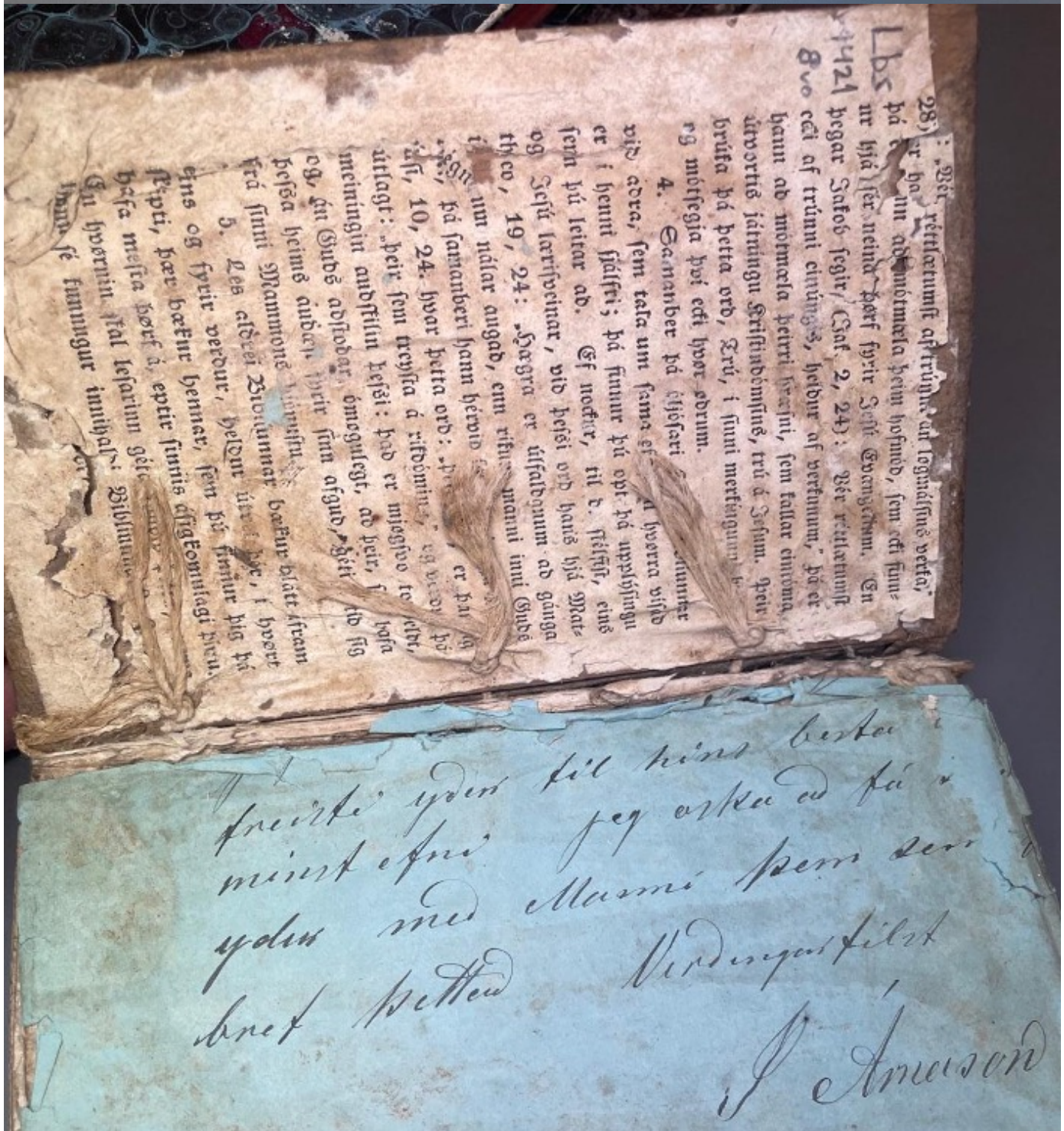
Meetings:

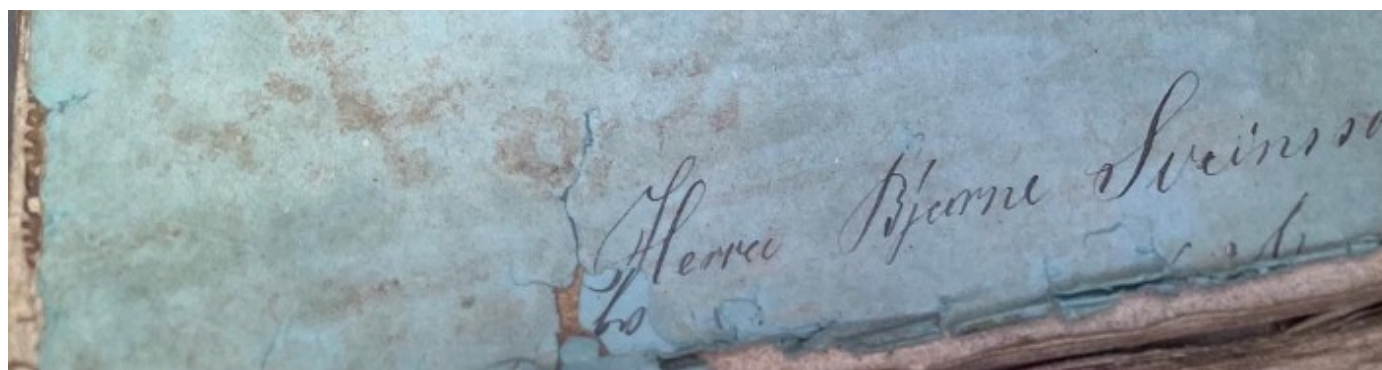
Once I landed in Iceland, one of the first things I did (after recovering from the jetlag) was meet with the scholars with whom I had been emailing. I met with one professor (Emily Diana Lethbridge) and one conservator (Vasaré Rastonis), both of whom focus on materiality, which felt relevant to my research. For both of these meetings, I prepared a list of questions that I wanted to ask ahead of time, and brought a notebook and pencil to write down their answers. For my meeting with the professor, I read a relevant article that she had written and prepared questions that I could ask her about it and her process. After the meetings had concluded, I made sure to send an email thanking both of them for their time and knowledge. Most people in Iceland, especially academics, speak English, so translation was no issue in my meetings. If that is not the case in the country you are visiting, I would recommend some secondary language practice prior to visiting. Or, if possible, making contact with a translator who could attend these meetings with you.

Archive Visits:

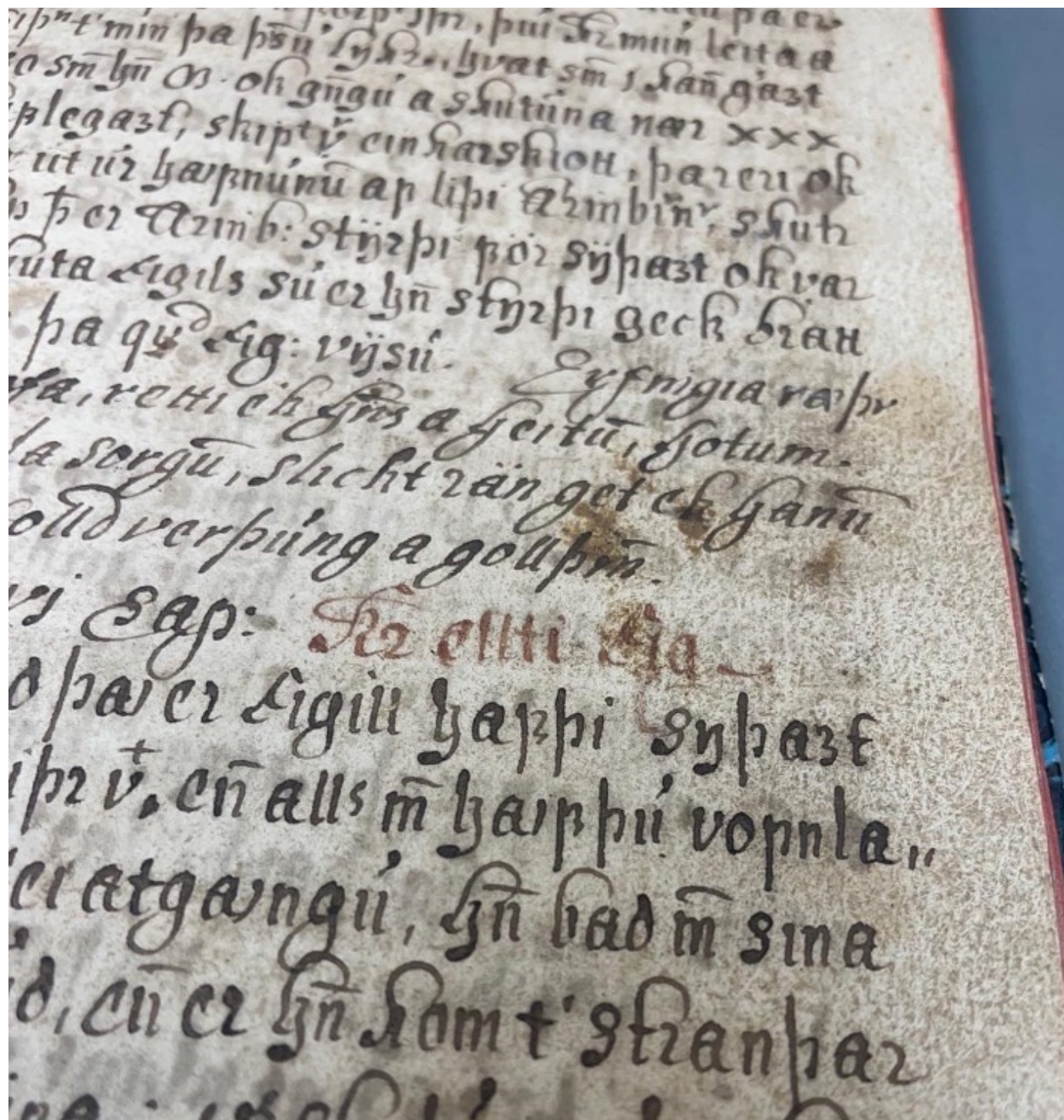
Surprisingly to me, the archive visit was the easiest part of my entire visit. After locating the manuscripts I wanted to visit, all that I had to do was send an email to the archive manager and I was given a timeframe when I could visit the archive. I told him when I would come, but that was more courtesy than necessity. Once at the archive, I put my belongings in a locker and used hand sanitizer to make sure I wouldn't damage the manuscripts. The books were brought out to me and I was given a desk with a magnifier and a ring light where I could examine the artifacts. I have attached below the photos that I took while viewing these pieces, so that readers can see some of the noteworthy details of these manuscripts. In Lbs 1421 8vo, note the detached pages, the blue paper (which appeared to be made from an envelope), and the noticeable binding. In Lbs 825 4to, I would draw attention to the notable fingerprints and the change in ink color. Finally, in Lbs 1415 4to, I was most intrigued by the use of marginalia and how it shows the thought processes of previous readers. I took notes on these features and others, then left the archive, thanking them and making sure to ask their permission to publish these images in this article. There was no explanation of photo permissions on any FAQ page for the library, so direct communication was essential.







Lbs 1421 8vo, Egil's Saga

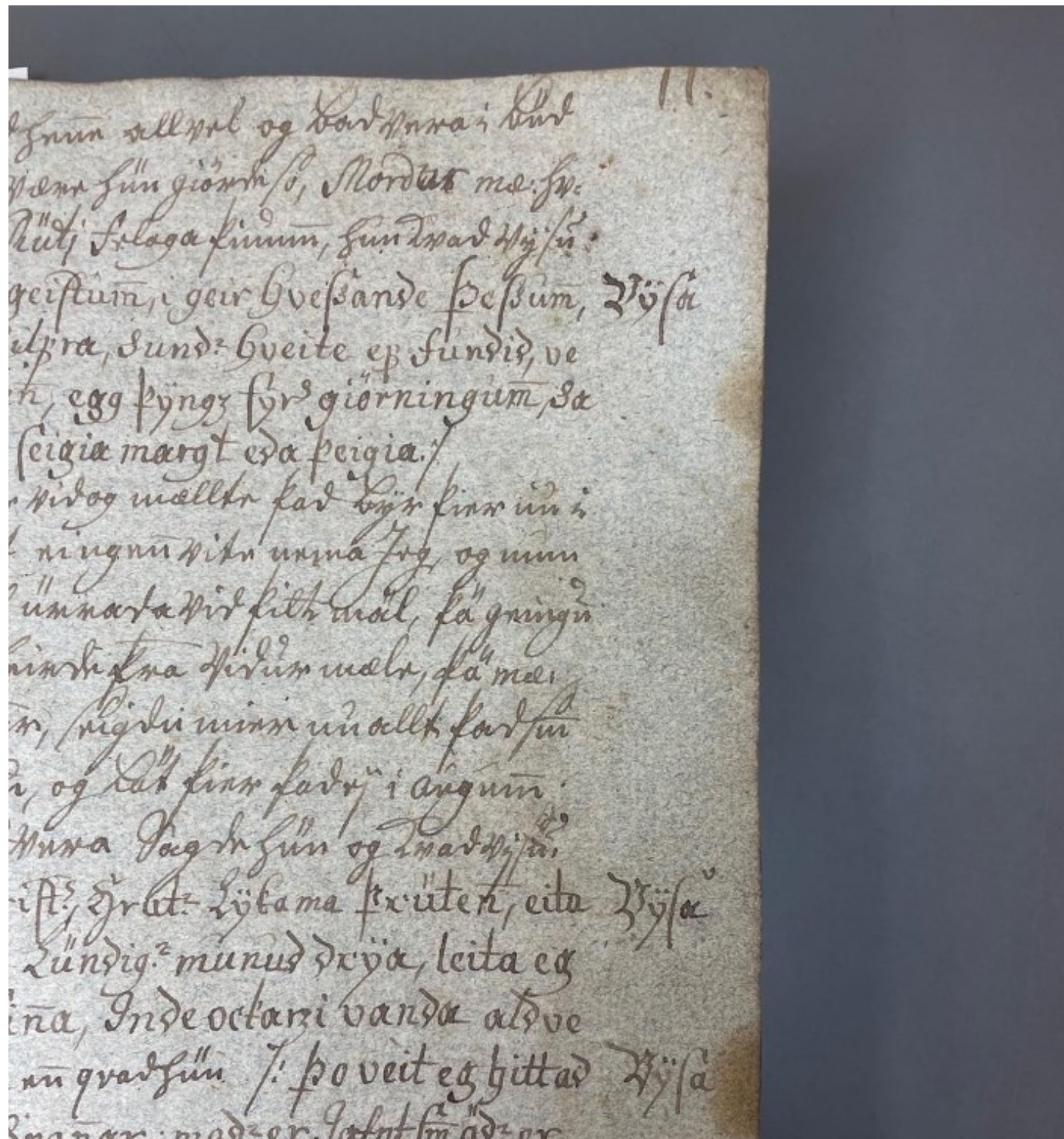


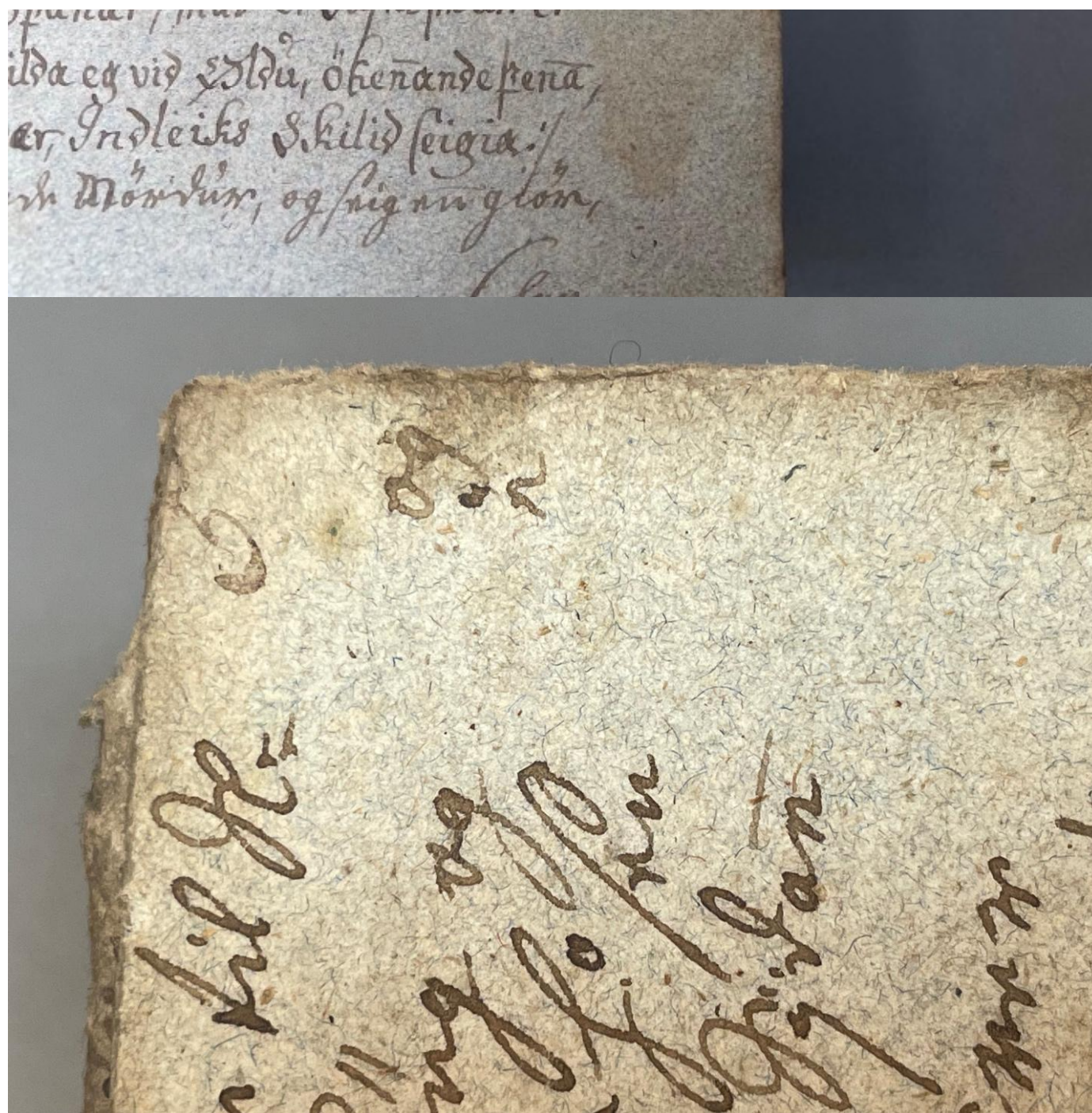
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...hens hlýð. Hn v. Kallahr
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Lbs 825 4to, Egil's Saga





Lbs 1415 4to, *Njál's Saga*

Compiling Your Research:

I am still in the process of compiling my research, as I won't begin writing my thesis until this fall. However, what has helped me most so far has been creating a folder on my computer where I can keep all my notes and all the articles that were recommended to me. I can then refer back to these at a later date, as they grow more relevant. I would also encourage you to keep track of who you were in contact with during this trip, as they may be a helpful contact with further research. I wish you the best of luck in your research, wherever it ends up being, and I hope these notes were helpful! Thank you. (Þakka þér fyrir!)

ARTICLES AND PROJECTS