
Adding a careful reading of European legal contexts and local influence to the many previous studies on the topic, Walgenbach’s short, revised 2016 Yale dissertation fulfills a lingering desideratum in the field. Walgenbach argues in depth for a revision of the direction and chronology of influence between, on the one hand, ‘old’ ‘Germanic’ manifestations of outlawry and the terms and motifs that accompany it, and on the other, changing ecclesiastical and secular legal thought on excommunication and adjacent conditions. While still noticeably engaged with its own methodological limitations (such connections, as the author acknowledges, cannot be ‘proven’ under strict evidential criteria), the study suggestively traces parallel developments that seem plausible as markers of direct influence and unlikely attributable to chance resemblance.

The brief introduction outlines sources, mainly Latin and vernacular law codices and vernacular literary and historical texts, and methods and approaches, reducible to a general comparative approach with a sensitive eye for significant developments within relatively short time periods and how they may be reflected in both source types. Chapter 1 charts excommunication from its origins on the continent to its practice in Iceland, situating the act within changing theological-legal discourses from the earlier Middle Ages through the thirteenth century, a period of significant political turmoil as the Icelandic ‘commonwealth’ gave way to Norwegian hegemony. Excommunication is presented not only as a judgment leading to damnation, but also, as is well-known from other contexts, as a political tool. Walgenbach discusses several discourses surrounding excommunication, including penitential aspects, the concept of community harm, spiritual consequences (e.g., banishment from receiving sacraments), and the growth of overlapping secular sanctions. Developments in canon law, such as those introduced by Gregory VII, increasingly prohibited dealings with the excommunicant as themselves being grounds for excommunication. A comparative treatment of Latin and vernacular sources (primarily Old English) in the early Middle Ages reveals an early shared concern about damnation and consecrated or unconsecrated burial practices. In the twelfth century and onward, Gratian’s *Decretum* and other sources further shaped canon law regarding excommunication by defining gradations (major and minor), anathemas earned without formal procedures, excommunication for disobedience of church authority, and political consequences.

In the next section of the first chapter, the focus turns toward Iceland and highlights the availability of episcopal, epistolary, cartulary, legal, and literary sources in Latin and the vernacular. As on the continent, the story in Iceland begins with anxieties about damnation in the law code *Grágás* and the *Íslensk hómiliubók*. Already in the earliest vernacular attestations several terminological discrepancies arise: sanctions, outlawry, and words that could refer to various conditions appear within the same works in sometimes ambiguous contexts. From the late thirteenth century sources such as the *Kristinréttr Árna*, later law codices, entries from the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, and *Biskupasögur*, particularly *Árna saga* and *Lárentius saga*, demonstrate understandings of excommunication reforms solidified earlier in the century. A focus on bishops and their communications is expected in the ecclesiastical and secular power matrix of Iceland during this period; less expected are the ways in which these sources are shown
to react to standardizations of terms, legislative reforms, and general reception of concepts over time and space.

The second chapter discusses outlawry, disentangling earlier scholarly discourses and false starts surrounding the age and duration of outlawry, its ostensibly pre-Christian beginnings, and scant evidence of practice, processes, and legal statuses. Walgenbach challenges and problematizes the linguistically early *wargus*-outlaw connection, highlighting the fragmentary and unclear evidence gathered to support it, and noting appropriately the widespread nature of similar legal statuses across time and space since biblical antiquity. In Icelandic textual sources, outlawry already appears in a more structured manner despite terminological abundance and sometimes contradictory descriptions. Among the descriptions are two distinct types, full and lesser; legal ways out of outlawry and back to membership in the community; penalties for associating with or aiding outlaws; possible causes and offenses leading to outlawry; and degrees and length of time for various protections in the early stages of outlawry, which altogether paint a picture remarkably similar to excommunication law and typology. Differences and complications also appear in a tradition thoroughly described but often difficult to interpret. Outlawry in many sagas is also fundamentally occupied with strategies of stateless peoples to exercise power and the application of legal principals in literature often lacks detail. Later, however, imported law codes under Norwegian domination, such as the *Jónsbók* and *Járnsíða*, show slow but definite developments in the discussion of both excommunication and outlawry toward the frameworks found in stronger state structures versus the weaker ‘free state’ period in Iceland.

Chapter three provides the argumentative heavy lifting bridging the concepts, not only demonstrating how they are described and “applied” across text types, as has been done many times previously, but also how the material philological basis of sources, particularly manuscript age and transmission histories, support a connection deeper than formal resemblance. Although it may appear somewhat simple, the author notes rightly that discourses on excommunication and the unconsecrated burial of Christians were already part of the legal and social landscape when outlawry began to be recorded in vernacular contexts. Walgenbach’s major contribution here lies in connecting previous claims of influence or resemblance with a framework of legal chronology, treating outlawry as a “branch of Christian law” in which “the laws treated outlawed men as excommunicants” (66). Acknowledging polyvalent interpretations in certain sources, such as *Grágás*, the author rightly focuses on the authority granted legal traditions by the apparent – though not necessarily actual – age of texts and laws. Both concepts also involve diffuse enforcement, in which a lack of local executive power requires networks of convinced actors to enforce legislation collectively; penalties for assisting the condemned; exceptions for the dependents of the condemned; and explicit prohibitions against sharing food (literal nourishment and the Eucharist). Canon law and other Latin legal models appear to have shaped later Icelandic laws, in which lesser outlawry is presented in the same manner as hypothetical legal cases in Latin legal tradition. Turning to various motifs (burial in consecrated ground, damnation, finding sanctuary in churches, and overlapping authority between ecclesiastical and secular laws), Walgenbach provides wide-ranging readings of an increasingly standardized practice that by the time of Norwegian rule could involve outlawry as
a punishment for breaking church law, concerning not only the bishop and his bailiff, but also the king, who could levy his own, additional fines.

Chapters four and five outline various elements of reception in the sagas, primarily *Biskupasögur* and associated texts and fragments. Outlawry and excommunication become political weapons in feuds in Sturla Þórðarson’s late thirteenth-century *Íslendinga saga*, which is compared to the treatment of excommunication in Thomas Becket’s conflict with Henry II, also transmitted in the Icelandic saga literature. *Íslendinga saga, Thómas saga*, and tales of Aron Hjörleifsson provide fodder for various readings of outlawry as excommunication (and the reverse), culminating in an extended reading of the latter figure’s penitential escape from the ‘hell’ of outlawry via pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a reflection of influence from ‘updated’ Norwegian law codes with a reliance on regal authority and protection.

Admittedly speculative and with relatively limited literary sources, *Excommunication and Outlawry* is nevertheless compelling in seeking traces of influence rather than simple parallels. It ties together decades of scholarship and convincingly argues for greater inclusion of legal discursive influence in scholarship of texts from later centuries, of which there are many in the history of Icelandic medieval literature. Given the author’s recent additional work in canon law and the North, we may look forward to additional discussions of Iceland’s deep connections to continental, Christian culture and how they force us to revise anachronistic focuses on survivals of supposedly pre-Christian traditions.

Adam Oberlin,
208 East Pyne, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08540, USA; aoberlin@princeton.edu


In honor of the well-known scholar on medieval mysticism and women, Elizabeth Avilda Petroff, who retired in 2014, her former students have put together a most intriguing volume of critical studies dealing with significant cases of medieval women’s self-empowerment and self-expression. These articles cover both mystical literature and religious text of different kinds, and they include also examples from medieval Arabic and Chinese literature, highlighting relevant cases of major female figures who knew how to establish themselves as authorities in their own ways.

The volume is divided into four sections, the first comprising two articles by Petroff herself, the second covering the topic of self-representation by women, the third engaging with reception (a rather inappropriate term here), and the fourth with appropriation, a similarly vague notion. The volume is bookended by notes on the contributors in the front and an index at the end. Each article is rounded off with notes and a separate bibliography, which is quite a good pragmatic solution, avoiding endless leafing through lengthy appendices for the entire book.