

# Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society

Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Saga Conference  
2-7 July 2000, University of Sydney

Edited by Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross

Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney  
Sydney, Australia  
July 2000

© 2000, Contributors

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,  
or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,  
without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN 1-86487-3167

## Contents

<b>David Ashurst</b> Journey to the Antipodes. Cosmological and Mythological Themes in <i>Alexanders Saga</i>	1
<b>Sverre Bagge</b> <i>Rigspúla</i> and Viking Age Society	14
<b>Richard N. Bailey</b> Scandinavian Myth on Viking-period Stone Sculpture in England	15
<b>Simonetta Battista</b> Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon in the Old Norse Hagiographic Sagas	24
<b>Mai Elisabeth Berg</b> Myth or Poetry, a Brief Discussion of Some Motives in the <i>Elder Edda</i>	35
<b>Claudia Bornholdt</b> The Bridal-Quest Narratives in <i>Piðreks saga</i> and the German <i>Waltharius</i> Poem as an Extension of the Rhenish Bridal-Quest Tradition	44
<b>Trine Buhl</b> Reflections on the use of narrative form in <i>Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða</i>	53
<b>Phil Cardew</b> <i>Hamhleypur</i> in <i>Forskfirðinga saga</i> : a post-classical ironisation of myth?	54
<b>Martin Chase</b> The Ragnarøk Within: Grundtvig, Jung, and the Subjective Interpretation of Myth	65
<b>Carol Clover</b> Saga facts	74
<b>Einar G. Pétursson</b> Brynjólfur biskup Sveinsson, forn átrúnaður og Eddurnar	75
<b>Alison Finlay</b> Pouring Óðinn's Mead: An Antiquarian Theme?	85
<b>Elena Gurevich</b> Skaldic Praise Poetry and <i>Macrologia</i> : some observations on Óláfr Þórðarson's use of his sources	100
<b>Jan Ragnar Hagland</b> Gerhard Schøning and Saga Literature	109

<b>Anna Mette Hansen</b> The Icelandic <i>Lucidarius</i> , Traditional and New Philology	118
<b>Lotte Hedeager</b> Skandinavisk dyreornamentik: Symbolsk repræsentation af en før-kristen kosmologi	126
<b>Frands Herschend</b> Ship grave hall passage – the Oseberg monument as compound meaning	142
<b>K. S. Heslop</b> ‘Gab mir ein Gott zu sagen, was ich leide’: <i>Sonatorrek</i> and the myth of skaldic lyric	152
<b>John Hines</b> Myth and Reality: the Contribution of Archaeology	165
<b>Peter R. Hupfauf</b> The role of the artist in contemporary society as compared to pre-Christian and early Medieval society in Northern Europe	175
<b>Karl G. Johansson</b> Bergr Sökkason och Arngrímur Brandsson – översättare och författare i samma miljö	181
<b>John Kennedy</b> Translations Of Old Norse Prose 1950-2000	198
<b>Thomas Krömmelbein</b> The Reception of Old Norse Myth in Germany 1760-1820: Enthusiasm, Rejection and Recovery	208
<b>Hans Kuhn</b> Greek gods in Northern costumes: Visual representations of Norse mythology in 19th century Scandinavia	209
<b>Annette Lassen</b> Høðr’s Blindness and the Pledging of Óðinn’s Eye: A Study of the Symbolic Value of the Eyes of Høðr, Óðinn and Þórr	220
<b>Lars Lönnroth</b> Andrew Ramsay’s and Olof Dalin’s influence on the Romantic Interpretation of Old Norse Mythology	229
<b>John McKinnell</b> Encounters with <i>Völur</i>	239
<b>Mindy Macleod</b> <i>Bandrúnir</i> in Icelandic Sagas	252
<b>Rory McTurk</b> Chaucer and Old Norse Mythology	264
<b>Mats Malm</b> <i>Baldrs draumar</i> : literally and literarily	277

<b>Edith Marold</b> Die <i>Húsdrápa</i> als kosmologisches Gedicht	290
<b>John Stanley Martin</b> From Godan to Wotan: An examination of two Langobardic mythological texts	303
<b>Bernard Mees</b> Völkische Altnordistik: The Politics of Nordic Studies in the German-Speaking Countries, 1926-45	316
<b>John Megaard</b> Vagn Ákesons vekst og fall	327
<b>Elena Melnikova</b> The Reminiscences of Old Norse Myths, Cults and Rituals in Old Russian Literature	334
<b>Stephen Mitchell</b> Learning Magic in the Sagas	335
<b>Else Mundal</b> Coexistence of Saami and Norse culture – reflected in and interpreted by Old Norse myths	346
<b>Britt-Mari Nasstrom</b> Healing hands and magical spells	356
<b>Agneta Ney</b> Genus och rumslighet i <i>Völsunga saga</i>	363
<b>Lena Norrman</b> Woman or Warrior? The Construction of Gender in Old Norse Myth	375
<b>Richard North</b> <i>goð geyja</i> : the limits of humour in Old Norse-Icelandic paganism	386
<b>Richard Perkins</b> A verse attributed to Eyvindr <i>skáldaspillir</i> ; and again the origin of <i>dróttkvætt</i>	396
<b>Sandra Petersson</b> Swords, Shields and Disfigurement: Symbols of Law and Justice in Norse and Modern Mythology	397
<b>Russell Poole</b> Old Norse/Icelandic Myth in Relation to <i>Grettis saga</i>	398
<b>Neil Price</b> The ‘Home of their Shapes’: Old Norse Mythology and the Archaeology of Shamanism	410
<b>Catharina Raudvere</b> Myths - ways of telling, ways of arguing	411
<b>Hermann Reichert</b> Probleme der Quellenbewertung am Beispiel der Gruppenbildung von Göttern, insbesondere Asen und Wanen	412

<b>Kári Reid</b> The Advantage of Self-Possession: Knowledge and Advice in <i>Porgils saga ok Hafliða</i>	429
<b>Elizabeth Ashman Rowe</b> Origin Legends and Foundation Myths in Flateyjarbók	441
<b>Jens Peter Schjødt</b> Myter som kilder til ritualer - teoretiske og praktiske implikationer	455
<b>Rudolf Simek</b> Rich and Powerful: The Image of the Female Deity in Migration Age Scandinavia	468
<b>Daniel Sävborg</b> Om dateringen av Eddans hjältedikter	480
<b>Clive Tolley</b> The Adaptability of Myth in Old Norse and Finnish Poetry	498
<b>Matthew Townsend</b> Contextualising the <i>Knútsdrápur</i> : Skaldic Praise-Poetry at the Court of Cnut	511
<b>Torfi H. Tulinius</b> Saga as a myth: the family sagas and social reality in 13 <sup>th</sup> -century Iceland	526
<b>Fedor Uspenskij</b> A Toponymic Aspect of the Euhemeristic Concept. Comments on Snorri's Interpretation of Ásgarðr, Miðgarðr and Útgarðr in the <i>Prose Edda</i> and <i>Ynglingasaga</i>	540
<b>Lars van Wezel</b> Mythic Elements in <i>Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða</i> : Prolonged Echoes and Mythological Overlays	541
<b>Diana Whaley</b> Myth and Religion in the Poetry of a Reluctant Convert	556
<b>Tarrin Wills</b> The reception of myths concerning literacy and poetry	572
<b>Kellinde Wrightson</b> Three Miracles of the Virgin Mary Concerning Childbirth Set in Medieval Iceland	579
<b>Stefanie Würth</b> Ragnarök: Götterdämmerung und Weltende in der nordischen Literatur	580

## Journey to the Antipodes. Cosmological and Mythological Themes in *Alexanders Saga*

David Ashurst

Birkbeck College, London

First a look at evidence for the shape of the world as it was imagined by audiences of *Alexanders saga*, the mid-thirteenth-century account of Alexander the Great which is a translation of Walter of Châtillon's Latin epic, the *Alexandreis*.

Simek (1990, 102-103) has listed a small number of texts which indicate that Old Norse audiences of the thirteenth century, at least in ecclesiastical and courtly circles, were familiar with the belief that the earth is spherical. This idea had been an integral part of scholarly learning in Europe since the Carolingian renaissance of the eighth century, and from the twelfth century it was being taught to most clerics; by the thirteenth century it had found its way into popular literature (Simek 1996, 25). Evidence for the familiarity of this belief at the very start of the thirteenth century in Iceland can be found in a passage from *Elucidarius*, where the teacher explains to his pupil that the head of Man was given a rounded shape in the likeness of the world: *Hofop hans vas bollot ígliking heimballar* (Simek 1990, 401, transcribed from MS AM 674a, 4to, dated ca.1200). Being so brief, the explanation could not have made sense

unless the idea of a spherical world was taken for granted. In mid-thirteenth-century Norway, by contrast, the writer of *Konungs skuggsjá* makes his wise king take the trouble to discuss the shape of the earth at some length, and to clinch his argument with the famous image of an apple hanging next to a candle, where the apple represents the earth and the candle is the sun. The use of this image is rather confused, but the conclusion is perfectly clear: *Nu skal aa þui marka at bollottur er iardar hrijngur* (*Kon. sk.* 1945, 11).

To these references may be added a passage in *Alexanders saga*, not mentioned by Simek, in which the Persian King Darius sends an insulting letter to the youthful Alexander who has already, at this point, made extensive conquests in Persian territory. Darius' envoys present Alexander with a ball which his letter says is to be understood as a plaything more suitable to Alexander's age than are shields and swords. Alexander replies that he puts a different interpretation on the gift, for the shape of the ball represents the world which he will conquer: *Bollrenn markar með vexte sinom heim þenna er ec man undir mec leggja* (*Alexanders saga* 1925, 19<sup>32-33</sup>).<sup>1</sup> This is a close paraphrase of the corresponding lines in the *Alexandreis* (Walter 1978, II.38-39):

Forma rotunda pilae speram speciemque rotundi,  
Quem michi subiciam, pulchre determinat orbis.

The story of Alexander's riposte was certainly well-known in thirteenth-century Europe, not only through the *Alexandreis*, which was hugely successful and became a school text, but because it also occurs at paragraph I.38 in sundry versions of the *Alexander Romance*.<sup>2</sup> Even if the Old Norse audience of *Alexanders saga* did not already know the story, however, it is clear that they were expected to understand its point without difficulty; for it is the translator's habit to explain matters which he thinks might cause difficulty, but here he renders the account pithily and without any comment of his own.

Vestiges of mythological thinking in which the earth seems to be imagined as a flat disk, however, may be found in a passage where the clash of the opposing armies at Gaugamela is said to shake the ground and to make Atlas stagger: *Athals stakraðe við er einn er af þeim er vpp hallda heimenom. sva at hann fek varla staðet vndir byrðe sinne* (*Al. Saga* 1925, 65<sup>25-27</sup>). Here *heimr* means 'sky', in contrast with the earth on which the titan is standing. The explanation of Atlas as 'one of those who hold up the sky', implying that there are others, is an addition to the Latin text (see Walter 1978, IV.293-296). It would have been comprehensible even to an audience unfamiliar with classical

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Finnur Jónsson's edition of *Alexanders saga* in this paper coincide with the wording of the late-thirteenth-century MS AM 519a, 4to, published in facsimile by Jón Helgason (*Alexanders saga* 1966).

<sup>2</sup> For examples see *Historia de preliis* (1975) and *Julii Valerii Epitome* (1867).

literature because it takes the Graeco-Roman myth of Atlas, the sole supporter of the heavens, and brings it into line with the Old Norse myth as told by Snorri (1988, 12) in *Gylfaginning*, where it is said that four dwarfs support the sky. The sky itself is conceived, in Snorri's text, as the dome of a giant's skull set up over what is, by implication, a flat earth. By alluding to this idea, the translator of *Alexanders saga* encourages his audience, like that of *Gylfaginning*, to imagine the world as something like a plate with a basin inverted on top of it; and the brevity of the allusion shows that the audience was ready to substitute this image for that of the spherical earth when prompted by a mythological context. It should be mentioned, however, that at least one medieval reader of the saga in the Arna-Magnæan manuscript 519a (see f. 16<sup>v</sup>) felt called upon to note that the world is not really covered by a bowl-like sky held up by Atlas *et al.*, for at this point he has written in the margin the words *fabulosum est*, 'this is mythical'.

The themes of the spherical earth and the bowl-shaped sky undergo an interesting development and combination in a passage which paraphrases Walter (1978) VII.393-403. It describes Darius' tomb with its glittering columns and the spectacular dome which displays a map of the world on its inner surface (*Al. Saga* 1925, 112<sup>12-20</sup>):

Vppi yvir stolpunum var hvalf sva gagnsétt sem gler. þvilict vaxet sem himinn til at sia. áþvi hvalve var scrifaðr heimrenn allr greindr isina þriðjunga. oc sva hver lond liggia ihveriom þriðjunge [...] oc sva eyiar þér er i hafino liggia. þar var oc markat hversu vthafet gerðer vm oll londin.

Here the expression *heimrinn allr* does not mean the globe but the world in the sense of the three continents inhabited by mankind; it corresponds to Walter's phrase *tripertitus orbis* (1978, VII.397), where *orbis* means 'a rounded surface, disk', or more specifically 'the circle of the world' or simply 'world' (Lewis and Short 1879). It certainly cannot mean 'globe', for no-one ever suggested that the globe was entirely covered by the three known continents. The map omits the possible fourth continent which is mentioned by Isidore (1911), for example, in *Etymologiae* XIV.5.17, and which is occasionally included in world maps from the twelfth century onwards, labelled *terra australis incognita* (Simek 1996, 51). Are Walter and his translator therefore imagining a non-spherical world in this passage, one which has no southern hemisphere? Probably the answer is 'no' because the surface on which the map is drawn is itself hemispherical, as we see from the phrase *vaxit sem himinn*, 'shaped like the sky', which corresponds to Walter's statement (1978, VII.395-396) that the dome is *caelique uolubilis instar, Concaua testudo*, 'an image of the turning sky, a concave shell'. What we seem to have here, then, is a representation of the northern hemisphere drawn inside a hemispherical vault. But in that case we also have here a text in which the northern half of the globe is referred to quite definitely as *heimrinn allr*.

This representation of the world needs to be borne in mind when reading the closing pages of the saga, where Alexander attains the summit of power after reaching the farthest limit of Asia and returning to Babylon via the outer Ocean, conquering any islands in his way. *Nu er aprt at snua til sogunnar*, says the translator after reporting Walter's moralisations on the state of affairs, *oc fra því at segia aðr en Alexander latiz. at hamingian oc fregðen gerir hann einvallz hofðengia yfir heiminvm* (*Al. saga* 1925, 149<sup>32</sup>-150<sup>1</sup>). All the nations which remain unconquered are astounded by the news of Alexander's success, and they decide now to surrender rather than to face certain defeat; accordingly they send their emissaries to Babylon, offering tribute and allegiance. To the modern reader this sudden development may seem almost comical, but it needs to be taken quite seriously for we can see that it fulfils the promise which God, in the likeness of the Jewish High Priest and not fully recognised by Alexander, gave to the young king while he was still in Macedonia: *Farðu abraut af fostr lande þino Alexander. þviat ec man allt folk undir þic leggja* (*Al. saga* 1925, 17<sup>17-18</sup>, corresponding to Walter 1978, I.532-533).<sup>3</sup> In Babylon Alexander takes on his role as world ruler with due solemnity: pious pagan that he is and remains, he thanks the divine powers for the new turn of events, and then assures the emissaries that the peoples who have surrendered to him will be treated with no less mercy than he has already shown to those whom he conquered (*Al. saga* 150<sup>25</sup>-151<sup>3</sup>; Walter X.283-298). Once the emissaries have been dismissed, however, he must face up once and for all to a problem which he has already foreseen. Now that he has gained possession of the whole world - that is to say, the northern hemisphere as it was depicted on the dome of Darius' tomb - what will he do with himself and his army? Speaking to his knights, he gives a typically heroic answer (*Al. saga* 151<sup>13-17</sup>):

þviat nu er ner ecke við at briotaz iþessvm heiminum. þat er vaR frami mege vaxa við. en oss hevir eigi at vaR hvatleicr dofne af atferðarleyse. þa gerum sva vel oc leitum þeira er byggva annan heimenn. at var fregð oc kraptr late engis úfreistat þess er til fremðar se. oc ver megem allan alldr lifa íloflegri frasognn þeira. er var stovvirki vilia ritat hava.

It is important to note how closely this paraphrases Walter (1978) X.312-317:

Nunc quia nil mundo peragendum restat in isto,  
Ne tamen assuetus armorum langueat usus,  
Eia, queramus alio sub sole iacentes  
Antipodum populos ne gloria nostra relinquat  
Vel uirtus quid inexpertum quo crescere possit  
Vel quo perpetui mereatur carminis odas.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> It may also be noted that the writer of *Gyðinga saga* (1995, 3), alluding to the *Alexanders saga* account, takes it as sober historical fact that the Macedonian became sole ruler of the world: *Alexandr hinn Ríki ok hinn mikli kongr. þa er hann hafdi sigrat ok undir sik lagt allar þiðir iheiminum sem fyrr var Ritat [...] þa skipti hann Ríki sino med sinum monnum xii.*

<sup>4</sup> 'Nothing now remains to be completed in this world. Come, then, let us seek the peoples of the Antipodes who lie beneath another sun, that your familiarity with the use of arms may not languish, and that our glory and valour may leave nothing untried whereby they can gain increase,

In the text from *Alexanders saga*, the phrase *þessi heimrinn* clearly means the northern world which Alexander has already conquered, in contrast with the southern hemisphere, which is here signified by *annarr heimrinn*. There appears to be no other passage in Old Norse literature which uses the term *annarr heimrinn* in this way, but it is evident that those who dwell in the other *heimr* and whom Alexander means to seek, are the peoples of the Antipodes.

According to widespread medieval views, such people may or may not actually exist beyond the equatorial Torrid Zone, in the southern temperate region of the globe. Being on the other side of the earth, their feet would be planted opposite those of people in the north - hence the Latin name *antipodes*, for which the Old Norse equivalent, *andfætingar*, is recorded in a very few texts. There is evidence that the existence of the *andfætingar* was believed in quite seriously in Iceland, for a twelfth-century homily makes a brief reference to them in order to illustrate the principle that some people are bound to lack a thing while others enjoy it (*Íslensk Hómilíubók* 1993, 180): *Á sólina koma flestir nytjum, og eru þó rændir aðrir andfætingar hennar ljósi, þá er aðrir hafa*. And a diagram of the world in an Icelandic manuscript from the early fourteenth century shows the southern temperate zone and labels it *synnri bygð*, implying that it is habitable and possibly inhabited (Simek 1990, 320, 406 and 409). The early-fourteenth-century Norwegian writer of the first part of *Stjórn*, on the other hand, is quite certain that there can be no human beings in the southern hemisphere, but at the same time he asserts the reality of the fourth, Antipodean, continent; and in stating his theological reasons for denying the existence of *andfætingar* he has left us a neat summary of the whole topic (*Stjórn* 1862, 99-100):

Vmframm þessar .iii. fyrr sagdar haalfur heimsins. sem fyrr nefndir synir Noa ok þeirra ættmenn ok afkemi skiptu meðr ser. liggir hinn fiordi heimsins þatr ok haalfa til sudrs odrum megin hins meira uthafsins. huerr er sakir yfiruættiss solar hita oss er meðr illu ukunnighr. i huerri er heidnir menn sogdu. ok þo meðr falsi ok hegoma. at þar bygdi andfætingar. Hinn heilagi ok hinn mikli Augustinus segir ok sannar sua meðr fulluligri skynsemd i þeirri bok er hann hefir gírt. ok heitir Augustinus de ciuitate dei. at engin iarðneskr madr ma þagat komaz or uarri byggiligri uerolldu sakir solar hita ok margrar annarrar umattuligrar ufæru.

Alexander himself, in his saga and in its Latin source, is not absolutely certain that he will find any Antipodeans; but he insists that there are good authorities - much the same authorities, no doubt, as those so firmly repudiated by the author of *Stjórn* - who tell of other worlds to be conquered: *þat hofum ver leset i fornum bocum. at fleiri se heimar en einn. oc vist uni ec þvi illa er ec scal enn eigi hafa sigrat einn til fullz* (*Al. saga* 1925, 151<sup>20-22</sup>; corresponding to Walter 1978, X.320-321). Alexander's final reservation, in this remark, turns out to be occasioned by a rebellion which has now been launched by the

Romans, who had previously surrendered. He tells his men that they can easily put down this revolt before setting off south (*Al. saga*, 151<sup>25-28</sup>; Walter X.326-328): *þviat ec vil at fullgort se þat er auke yðra fregð. þa scal nu þessu nest hallda til Rumaborgar. oc briota hana niðr. en heria siðan í annan heim.* At this point, however, he is struck down by a poisoner and so must embark on a journey, one might say, to ‘another world’ different in kind from the one which he meant.

It will already have occurred to the reader that Alexander’s declaration about seeking the people of the other world was ill-omened; for the term *annarr heimr* in Old Norse has another meaning which is well exemplified by the words of Bishop Þorlákr Rúnolfsson in *Sturlunga saga* (1946, I, 40): *Þér mun í öðrum heimi goldit þat, sem nú gerir þú fyrir guðs sakir ok Jóns baptista.* This is a fairly common usage which can be found, as would be expected, in religious writings such as *Stjórn* (1862, 153) and the *Gamal Norsk Homiliebok* (1931, 70), but which also occurs a few times in the family sagas, for example in *Fóstbræðra saga* (*Vestfirðinga sögur* 1943, 124-125): *Meir hugðu þeir jafnan at fremð þessa heims lífs en at dýrð annars heims fagnaðar.*<sup>5</sup> In these texts it properly signifies ‘the next world, the life to come’ in opposition to ‘this present world’ and depends upon the formula ‘in this world and the next’ which occurs in the Vulgate in Eph.1:21, where it is said that Christ is set above all powers, *non solum in hoc saeculo sed et in futuro*, and in Matt.12:32, where it is said that one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, *neque in hoc saeculo neque in futuro* (*Biblia sacra* 1969). The ‘next world’ to which Christian sinners and all pagans were destined to go, of course, was conceived mythologically as a more-or-less physical space located beneath the surface of the earth, irrespective of whether the context of thought was Norse (quasi-)heathen, classical pagan or strictly Christian.<sup>6</sup> This idea can be well illustrated from *Alexanders saga*, in fact, since there is a passage which describes graphically a descent into Hell: in thoroughly epic mythological fashion, the goddess Natura leaves off her work of moulding raw matter *oc leggr leið sína til helvitis [...] oc nu byðr hon at iorðen scyle opnaz í einhveriom stað. oc þar gengr hon niðr eptir þeim stíg er liggr til myrkra heraðs* (*Al. saga*

<sup>5</sup> *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders with Lemmatized Concordance* (1998) gives three separate occurrences, and also one occurrence of the phrase *þessa heims og annars*.

<sup>6</sup> For the quasi-heathen view see Snorri (1988, 9): *Vándir menn fara til Heljar ok þaðan í Niflhel, þat er niðr í inn núnda heim.* An Old Norse view of the situation according to Graeco-Roman mythology is given in *Trójumanna saga* (*Hauksbók* 1892-96, 194), where Saturn distributes the three-tier cosmos between his sons: in descending order, Jupiter gets the sky (*himinn*), Neptune receives the earth (*þessi heimr*), and Pluto becomes the prince of Hell (*hifðingi yfir helvíti*). For an especially interesting account of the subject from a thoroughly Christian perspective, see the passage in *Konungs skuggsiá* (1945, 19-20) which suggests that the place of torment may actually be located in Iceland on account of the great fires ‘in the foundations of the land’ (*j grunduollum landsinz*); it is particularly notable that the treatment of the matter is explicitly both geographical and symbolic, since it is said that the visible fires and ice-fields (on the surface) bear witness to the reality of Hell even if they are not themselves the abode of the damned.

1925, 144<sup>28</sup>-145<sup>10</sup>; Walter 1978, X. 15-30). Alexander himself, however, is not referring to this place when he speaks of making war on those who dwell in the other world. This is shown above all by the geographical considerations of the context, but also by the reference to the Antipodes in the Latin version and by Alexander's apparent expectation of his own actual mortality which is implied by his remark that he and his men will live forever in the accounts of those who write of his deeds - a comment which could hardly be appropriate if he meant to conquer the realm of death itself. Nevertheless, the connotations of the phrase *annarr heimrinn* as 'the land of the dead' must have been very strong for the Old Norse audiences of *Alexanders saga*, to the extent that they probably perceived a double meaning in the text: on the one hand Alexander is actually saying that he will lead an expedition against the southern hemisphere; but on the other hand his words, taken out of context, could suggest an assault on Hell, in which case Alexander would be trying to usurp the role of Christ.

The double meaning involved in the phrase *annarr heimrinn* is at its clearest in the passage from *Alexanders saga* which has just been discussed; but Alexander had in fact already used the term at an earlier point in the saga and in a way which occasions a long mythological episode leading directly to his death.

At the end of Book IX of the original epic, Alexander is poised to complete his conquest of Asia and hence of 'this world'. He begins to consider what his subsequent moves should be: first he will subdue the peoples of the Ocean, and then *vill hann eptir leita hvar oen Nil spretr vpp. er heiðnir menn gatv margs til. en øngir vissv* (*Al. saga* 1925, 142<sup>31-32</sup>; Walter 1978, IX. 507). Although Alexander does not actually say so, the Old Norse audience would probably understand that the army's arrival at the source of the Nile might well lead to an assault on Paradise, since the Nile is one of the four rivers which flow from there.<sup>7</sup> The Macedonians are dismayed to learn that their king will go on risking his life and their own, even after mastering all known lands; but Alexander soon renews their nerve and enthusiasm with a speech which anticipates his later address to them in Babylon, quoted above. His words are an extraordinary blend of piety, pride, insatiable will to power, and intrepid curiosity (*Al. saga* 144<sup>3-10</sup>; Walter IX. 562-570):

Ver hofum sigrat Asiam oc ervm nu nalega komnir til heimsenda. Giarna villda ec at guðen reiddiz mer eigi. þott ec mela þat er mer byr íscapi. heimr þesse er allz of þrongr. oc oflitill einom lavarðe. oc þat er upp at kveða er ec hefe raðet fire mer. at íannan heiminn scal heria þa er ec hefi þenna undir mec lagt allan. oc langar mec til at ver megem sia naturv þess heimsens.

This is the first time that the expression *annarr heimrinn* is used in the saga. As

<sup>7</sup> The other three rivers are the Ganges, the Tigris and the Euphrates. For an example of an account of this in Old Norse, see the short description of the world in AM 736 I, 4to, reproduced by Simek (1990, 430).

in the case of the later speech, the Latin text makes it clear that the other world which Alexander longs to view is in fact the southern hemisphere, for the Antipodes are named in the lines which correspond to the last part of the quotation (Walter IX. 569-570):

Antipodum penetrare sinus aliamque uidere  
Naturam accelero.

It is, however, not so immediately obvious from the Old Norse text alone, without reference to the Latin, that Alexander means for certain to attack the southern world rather than the underworld. In this speech, unlike the later one, the audience is not given the cue of any remarks about people who live in the other *heimr* or of Alexander's eternal life in men's songs; but there is, of course, the same context of geographical thought in which 'the other world' contrasts with 'this world' of the conquered northern continents, and this is the decisive factor in determining Alexander's meaning. Nevertheless the connotations of the phrase *annarr heimrinn* as 'the land of the dead' are stronger in this passage than in the later one, and they colour what follows.

In deciding to organise an expedition against the Antipodes, Alexander is embarking on a course of action which is beyond the power of any human being, according to Augustine as cited by the writer of *Stjórn* quoted earlier, for no living man can cross the equatorial zone on account of the tremendous heat of the sun; but it turns out that Alexander is facing more trouble than just that of a quest doomed to failure. Despite Alexander's pious hopes to the contrary, the goddess Natura takes offence at his words; and in fact it is her indignation over this matter which causes her to descend into the infernal regions beneath the earth, as previously mentioned (*Al. saga* 144<sup>21-29</sup>; Walter X. 6-15):

íannan stað er fra því at segja. at natturan minniz áþat er henne þiccir Alexander hava svivirt sec oc heimenn þa er hann let at hann vere of þrongr oc oflitill einom herra ivir at vera. oc því er hann etlaðe at rannsaka þa lute er hon vill leynda vera lata. oc þviat henne liggr ímiclv rvme. þesse vanvirðing er Alexander hefir gort til hennar. þa gefr hon vpp alla þa scepno er hon hafðe aðr til teket at semia. oc leggr leið sina til helvitis.

The sudden arrival of this deity in a saga narrative comes as something of a shock for the modern reader, and it is scarcely less of one in the context of the epic *Alexandreis*, which has mostly dealt in historical or quasi-historical fact up to this point; but the saga writer seems to think that Natura needs no special introduction to his audience and no explanations of the sort which were given when he mentioned Bacchus and Venus (*Al. saga* 7<sup>7-8</sup>) or Jupiter (*Al. saga* 21<sup>27-28</sup>). His precise and discriminating choice of words (*skepna*, *semja*) shows that he was alive to the School-of-Chartres Neoplatonist doctrine of Natura as the shaper of raw matter in the world, rather than as a creatrix *ex nihilo*,<sup>8</sup> but he

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the following lines from *Anticlaudianus* by Walter's contemporary and rival, Alan of Lille (1955, II.72-73): *diuinum creat ex nichilo, Natura caduca | procreat ex aliquo*. In

avoids taxing his audience with Walter's difficult terminology with its reference to *hyle* (X.11). He was alive also to the sexual innuendo in Walter's remark, in line X.9, that Alexander meant to lay bare Natura's secret parts - *Archanasque sui partes aperire parabat*, where *aperire*, meaning both 'to reveal' and 'to open what was closed', is very fairly rendered by the word *rannsaka*. This, the so-called *nuda Natura* topos, is another twelfth-century Neoplatonist theme which is nicely illustrated by the dream poem *Nature talamos intrans reseransque poeta*, dated *ca.* 1200 and discussed pithily by Peter Dronke (1974, 53 n.1): Natura appears as a naked maiden, trying vainly to cover her pudenda from the dreamer's gaze; she reproaches the dreamer for having debased her secrets and leaves him to be killed by wild animals, at which point he awakes and understands 'that not all things may be told to all'. The idea underlying this poem is that not all men are fit to receive Natura's philosophical mysteries, a notion which descends from the late-fourth-century philosophical commentator Macrobius (1868, I.ii.17), who says that Natura loathes an open, naked exposition of herself, and that this is actually why prudent men discuss her secrets only through the medium of myth. The inclusion of the *nuda Natura* theme in the saga suggests that a Macrobian interpretation of the Natura episode may be appropriate, in which Alexander symbolises the unwise philosopher who blabs arcane truths to vulgar minds; but an allegorical interpretation of this type, if it is valid at all, is surely not the primary meaning of the episode, for the secret parts which Alexander seeks to expose are nothing so vague as high Neoplatonic truths, but are specific geographical locations which Natura has placed out of bounds to mortals. This last notion descends to Walter directly from his main source, the first-century historian Quintus Curtius: in a passage which corresponds to the one in *Alexanders saga* where the king announces for the first time his intention of attacking the southern hemisphere, Curtius (1946, IX.vi.22) makes his Alexander declare that he will grant fame to unknown places and open up to all nations lands which Natura has set apart; and when the army is approaching the Ocean at the edge of the world, Alexander encourages his men by declaring that even though Natura herself could go no farther they will see what was unknown except to the immortals (Curtius 1946, IX.ix.4). Certainly the ideas of disclosure and popularisation figure here, but the concerns are not the theoretical ones of a philosophical demystifier but those of a practical statesman: conquest, colonisation and the exploitation of resources.

In the saga narrative and in the *Alexandreis* (but not in Curtius, who never mentions her again after the references just cited), Natura takes her complaint against Alexander to the Infernal Powers, ethically equivocal as she is, and motivated by wounded pride and the thirst for vengeance. In Walter's poem,

---

*Anticlaudianus* we find Natura involved with the Virtues in the creation of the perfect New Man. She has to apply to God for the soul, after which she fashions an appropriate body out of material in the world.

the figure whom she seeks is called Leviathan (Walter 1978, X.75), but he is unmistakably the Satan of Christian myth, the serpent who contrived mankind's expulsion from the Garden of Eden (X.102-103); in the saga, too, there can be no doubt that the un-named *myrkra hífðingi* who comes to meet Natura is the Christian devil and not some safe classical deity of the underworld, for he is shown changing his appearance, like Satan in 2 Cor. 11:14, from a dragon's to that of an angel of light (*Al. saga* 1925, 146<sup>17-19</sup>): *leggr [hann] nu niðr dreka hofuð þat et ogorliga er hann bar aðr. en tecr nu vpp þa ena biortv engils ásiانو er naturan hafðe gefit honom.* The last words indicate Natura's role as maker of the devil in his original form; the words in which she now addresses him emphasise her continued involvement with her creature even after he his fall (*Al. saga* 146<sup>24-27</sup>; Walter X.85-87): *þic em ec komin at finna sv sama natura er þer feck þenna myrkrastað til herbergis þviat þu vart nockor at vera þott þv verir utlage goR or himnarike fire þinn ofmetnað.* Such is the basis of Satan's debt of allegiance to Natura, which she does not hesitate to invoke. And here her moral ambiguity can be seen: she is august, powerful and in some sense the vicar of God in the work of creating and regenerating the world, the order and limits of which she upholds; but at the same time she is complicit in the processes of death and disorder which are part of her world - the fallen world whose nature she is. It is to the chief representative of death and disorder in the world that she brings her complaint, rather than taking her prayers to God.

The substance of her complaint is that Alexander has terrified the world of the three northern continents, *oc etlar ef honom byriar at koma þar sem Nil spretr vpp. oc heria siðan íparadisum* (*Al. saga* 146<sup>34</sup>-147<sup>1</sup>; Walter X.95-98). Strictly speaking her statement that Alexander means to make war on Paradise is stretching the facts as they have been narrated, for Alexander has only declared his intention of finding the source of the Nile; but the one thing may be said to imply the other. What Natura says next, however, is a piece of pure manipulation of the truth designed to prompt Satan into taking the action which she desires (*Al. saga* 147<sup>1-8</sup>; Walter X.98-104):

ef þu gelldr eigi varhvga við. þa man hann oc heria á yðr helvitis buana. Oc fire þvi gerðu sva vel fire minar sacir oc þinar. hept hans ofsa oc heginn fyR en siðar. eða hver fregð er þer í at hava komet enom fyrsta manne ábrott ór paradiso enn slegasti ormr ef þu scallt þenna mann lata fa með vallde þann ynniliga stað oc innvirðiliga.

Note that it is merely a *possibility* that Alexander will attack the denizens of the underworld and that Natura does not positively say that Alexander has declared any such intention; but this is enough for her purpose. If her rhetorical method seems a little unscrupulous she can justify herself, at least in the saga account, by referring to the secondary meaning of Alexander's phrase *annarr heimrinn*. Now it can be seen why the Old Norse translator has incorporated into his text a play on words which was scarcely present in the Latin original: it gives Natura a

sort of pretext for her accusation, which in the Latin original looked more like pure fabrication.

The possibility of a Macedonian attack on Hell is hardened into supposed fact in the final episode to be discussed here, when Satan, the Father of Lies, addresses his peers in a hastily convened council of devils. What Natura had suggested as a hypothetical risk, Satan now puts forward as an immediate threat; and in explaining the threat he develops the secondary meaning of the phrase *annarr heimrinn* in terms which carry Alexander and the audience to the centre of the Christian myth of redemption (*Al. saga* 147<sup>27</sup>-148<sup>5</sup>; Walter X.131-142):

Ecke kviðe ec því en heyrð heve ec at hann ætla iamvel at koma áhendr oss. oc heria heðan salur þær er ver hofvm vndir oss dregit veit ec þo þat er meir bitr á mic at feðaz mon á iarðriki nockoR maðr vndarligar getinn oc vndarligar borenn en ec mega scilia. Þesse man briota þessa ena sterkv borg. oc eyða vart riki með einv tre því er of mikill timi man fylgia. oc þviat þessi maðr man vera sterkvm sterkare þa varir mec at hann mone mikit herfang draga or hondum oss. En þat er nu til at sinne at þér dauðans drotnar gefit gaum at eigi gangi þessi maðr yvir yðr. raðet honom bana rað at eigi sigri hann oss þott einhverR scyli sa verða.

Here we see that, through the innuendo present in Alexander's declaration that he will attack the other world, the Old Norse translator has prepared the way, more deftly than Walter did, for this development of the theme of Alexander as a forerunner of both Christ and Antichrist. As king of Babylon and as the strong man who rules the secular world, Alexander is a type of the Antichrist even though he rules mercifully and does not demand worship; but if he had genuinely intended to capture the souls of the dead as plunder, as Satan asserts, then he would have been usurping the role of Christ in the Harrowing of Hell, and would have been Antichrist indeed. As it is, the secondary meaning of his words shows him functioning as an unwitting type or precursor of Christ, that is to say a pagan who knows not what he does but who foreshadows the actual Christ. By saying that he will attack the other world the pagan Alexander means simply that he will attack the Antipodes, but by saying it he also foreshadows the work of redemption.

After Satan's speech the infernal conspiracy to do away with Alexander moves swiftly to its conclusion when one of the devils, the allegorical Proditio (Treason), offers to make her human *fóstri* poison the king. Her plan is adopted without delay, and Alexander's death follows as the direct consequence of Satan's accusations. Alexander is murdered, therefore, on account of a threat against Hell which he did not actually make: to be precise, in the Latin version he did not make the threat at all, and in the Old Norse version he did not intend it even though it fell from his lips in a play on words.

To sum up: the *double entendre* in the phrase *annarr heimrinn* depends for its effect on the fact that the audience was fully conversant with the idea of a spherical world with the Antipodes on the far side of it; otherwise the ambiguity

collapses into the simple statement that Alexander wanted to attack the underworld, which would represent a drastic change to Walter's poem of the sort not found anywhere else in the saga. Accepting the *double entendre*, we can see that the Old Norse translator is engaged in a sophisticated manipulation of the mythological episode which he inherited from the Latin text: at a stroke he prepares for the passage which presents Alexander as a type of Christ or as a possible Antichrist, but he protects him from the sin of actually usurping Christ's role in the myth of redemption; and he gives a mythological explanation of his hero's early death, in terms which put the blame largely on the Satanic powers, making Alexander seem innocent of the specific intention for which he is killed and yet not utterly without responsibility. At the same time the translator does full justice to the myth of Natura's revenge on Alexander for his real threat to attack the Antipodes and hence to transgress the boundaries which Natura has imposed. There is a kind of ambiguity even in this, however, because the heroic zest of Alexander's words remains impressive and alluring even though the official significance of the myth is probably the one suggested to Alexander by the emissary of the ascetic Scythians (*Al. saga* 1925, 126<sup>33</sup>-127<sup>8</sup>; Walter 1978, VIII.409-415): We live in simplicity, says the emissary,

oc latom oss þorð vinna þat er nattan sialf en fyrsta moðer vár vill hafa gefet [...] Enn ef þu konungr gengr nockor framaR. þa gengr þu yvir þat marc. er nattan hefir sett þer oc oðrom er alla gerer at sonno sela. þa er hennar raðe vilia fylgia.

The Scythian's advice would no doubt be welcomed by those of a prudent clerical bent; but others in the Old Norse audience would surely rise to the image of Alexander as the representative of that less docile type of man, gloriously and yet sinfully driven always to transcend his world - and this is the heart of the Alexander myth itself, which has proved so potent and so adaptable, like all true myths, for so many generations.

## Bibliography

- Alan of Lille (1955), *Anticlaudianus*, ed. by Robert Bossuat. J. Vrin, Paris.  
*Alexanders saga* (1925), ed. by Finnur Jónsson. Gyldendal, Copenhagen.  
*Alexanders saga: The Arna-Magnæan Manuscript 519a, 4to* (1966), ed. by Jón Helgason. Manuscripta Islandica 7. Munksgaard, Copenhagen.  
*Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatum versionem* (1969), ed. by Robert Weber. 2 vols. Württembergische Bibelanstalt, Stuttgart.  
*Complete Sagas of Icelanders with Lemmatized Concordance* (1998), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. CD ed. by Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir, Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson et al. Mál og menning, Reykjavík.  
Dronke, Peter (1974), *Fabula. Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism*. E.J. Brill, Leiden.  
*Gamal Norsk Homiliebook* (1931), ed. by Gustav Indrebø. Kjeldeskriftfondet, Oslo.  
*Gyðinga saga* (1995), ed. by Kirsten Wolf. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Reykjavík.  
*Hauksbók* (1892-96), ed. by Finnur Jónsson. Thiele, Copenhagen.  
*Historia de preliis. Synoptische Edition* (1975), ed. by Hermann-Josef Bergmeister. Anton Hain, Meisenheim am Glan.

- Isidore of Seville (1911), *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. by W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols. Clarendon, Oxford.
- Íslensk Hómilíubók. *Fornar stólræður* (1993), ed. by Sigurbjörn Einarsson, Guðrún Kvaran et al. Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, Reykjavík.
- Julii Valerii Epitome* (1867), ed. by Julius Zacher. Waisenhaus, Halle.
- Konungs skuggsiá* (1945), ed. by Ludvig Holm-Olsen. Kjeldeskriftfondet, Oslo.
- Lewis, Charlton T. and Charles Short (1879), *A Latin Dictionary*. Clarendon, Oxford.
- Macrobius (1868), *Commentarius in somnium Scipionis* ed. by Franz Eyssenhardt. Teubner, Leipzig.
- Quintus Curtius (1946), *History of Alexander*, ed. and trans. by John C. Rolfe. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.).
- Simek, Rudolf (1990), *Altnordische Kosmographie*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Simek, Rudolf (1996), *Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages. The Physical World Before Columbus*, trans. by Angela Hall. Boydell, Woodbridge.
- Snorri Sturluson (1988), *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning* ed. by Anthony Faulkes. Viking Society, London.
- Stjórni* (1862), ed. by C.R. Unger. Feilberg and Landmarks, Oslo.
- Sturlunga saga* (1946), ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason et al. 2 vols. Sturlunguútgáfan, Reykjavík.
- Vestfirðinga sögur* (1943) ed. by Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson. Hið íslenska fornritfélag, Reykjavík.
- Walter of Châtillon (1978), *Galteri de Castellione Alexandreis*, ed. by Marvin L. Colker. Antenore, Padua.
- Walter of Châtillon (1986), *The Alexandreis*, trans. by R. Telfryn Pritchard. Pontifical Institute, Toronto.

## *Rigspúla* and Viking Age Society

Sverre Bagge

University of Bergen

The date of *Rigspúla* has been the subject of considerable discussion, and a number of scholars have maintained that this "Eddic" poem was actually composed in the thirteenth century. Adherents of this hypothesis have not, however, tried to compare the poem with the theories of society expressed in works that are known to date from this period, such as *A Speech against the Bishops* (c. 1200) and *The King's Mirror* (c. 1250). Such a comparison shows so great a difference regarding the understanding of society as to make it likely that the poem represents the social thought of an earlier period. On the basis of this observation, I shall try to examine *Rigspúla* as a myth about Viking Age society.

# Scandinavian Myth on Viking-period Stone Sculpture in England

Richard N. Bailey

## I

Some 20 years ago I tried to assemble together illustrations of Norse mythology on Viking-age sculpture in England (Bailey 1980, esp. 101-42). In so doing I drew heavily on the work of a series of nineteenth-century scholars. Some, like Bishop G. F. Browne and Professor George Stephens, were national, indeed international, figures but the essential pioneering investigations were often the unsung achievement of local antiquarians like the Cumbrian doctor, Charles Parker (1896) and the Aspatria vicar, W. S. Calverley (1899). That 1980 publication was followed by two papers to the 6th International Saga Conference (Lindow 1987; McKinnell 1987) in which the carvings were used to examine - and reject - the case for an insular Northumbrian locale for the shaping of Norse mythology. Much of the same material was subsequently invoked by Ohlgren (1988) in an article in *Mediaevastik* which was concerned with conversion methodologies. Since then, however, these sculptures have not attracted any further detailed attention; it is perhaps therefore time to re-visit

some of the issues involved, particularly now that the survey work (if not full publication) of the British Academy's Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture is so far advanced.

## II

The first point to make is a comfortingly negative one. Apart from a major find at York Minster showing scenes from the Sigurd story (Lang 1991, ill. 145), no new pieces which might be interpreted as depicting mythology have emerged. The English stone carving corpus of mythology remains therefore relatively small - a conclusion which is not perhaps very surprising given that the overall incidence of figural sculpture represents a minute proportion of the totality of Viking-age carvings in England.

More positively, however, we do now have further examples of secular martial statements involving depictions of armed warriors. Apart from geographical erratics like the man on a shaft from Brailsford in Derbyshire (Kendrick 1948, pl. XLVI), these figures can now be seen to occur in geographical clusters, often reflecting the work of a single sculptor. To the well-known Middleton group (Lang 1991, ill. 676, 686, 688) we can now add another example from Old Malton (Lang 1991, 37, 197; ill. 736) - where the disputed 'throne' element suspected at Middleton is more clearly depicted - together with a seated figure from Holme upon Spalding Moor near York which is clearly linked to the iconography of the familiar Nunburnholme portrait (Lang 1991, 38, ill. 483, 721). There is nothing new to report in the Sockburn/Brompton/Kirkleavington area of North Yorkshire (Bailey 1980, pls. 54, 59; Lang 1991, 37) but, in the Wharfe valley, the Ilkley warrior (Collingwood 1915, 228) is now joined by an impressive armed man from Weston, carved on a re-worked Anglian monument (Bailey 1981, 92). Though we now recognise that secular portraits did exist in stone carving of the pre-Viking period (e.g., Bewcastle: Bailey 1996, 67-9; Karkov 1997), the popularity of this warrior theme in the 10th century undoubtedly reflects an assertion of distinctive aristocratic military ideals on the part of the new economic and political leadership in Northumbria.

Depictions of Sigurd and Weland have long attracted attention (for earlier studies see: Lang 1976; Bailey 1980, 103-25; Margeson 1980; 1983). For some time it has been recognised that there was a distinct 'winged flight' Weland iconography in England which echoed the organisation of elements seen in Scandinavia (Lang 1976; Bailey 1980, figs. 16, 17). That there was an equivalent widespread Sigurd iconography can now no longer be disputed. In English art, as in Scandinavia, we are dealing with a very narrow selection from the complete Sigurd narrative but, allowing for the constraints imposed by the restrictive format of the insular cross-shaft, it is clear that the constituent elements of certain scenes were represented in a consistent manner across

England, the Isle of Man - and, later, into Scandinavia (Bailey 1980, pl. 30; Margeson 1980, figs 9, 10). Thus the main figure from the heart-roasting scene is always shown in profile, sucking his thumb, even when the roasting element is not present (Malew, Halton, Ripon, Kirby Hill, York, Jader: Bailey 1980, figs. 15, 21, 22, pl. 30; Lang 1991, ill. 145); at Kirk Andreas, Halton and York portions of the dragon's heart are held over the fire in the same 'kebab' fashion (Margeson 1980, figs. 1, 6; Lang 1991, ill. 145); the accompanying headless figure of Reginn at Halton, Kirby Hill and York is repeated in Sweden (Bailey 1980, figs. 15, 22, pl. 30; Lang 1991, ill. 145); a horse with a lumpy burden on its back appears at York and in Sweden (Lang 1991, ill. 145; Bailey 1980, pl. 30; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1981, pl. LXI); and there is even an abbreviated Sigurd-less version of the dragon slaying which is common to both England and Viking-age Russia (Bailey 1980, figs. 19a-b). Such standard forms were presumably transmitted through perishable media like fabric decoration, or the shield paintings and wall carvings described in texts like *Ragnarsdrapa*, *Haustlǫng* or *Húsdrápa*. Whatever the means of circulation, however, Northumbrian sculpture shows that there was a recognised Sigurd iconography available by the first half of the tenth century.

Other claims of mythological depictions inevitably remain disputed. Tyr's binding of Fenrir, however, still seems the best interpretation of a scene on a Sockburn hogback (Lang 1972; Bailey 1980, 134-6; Cramp 1984, pl. 146). And there can be no doubt about Thor's fishing expedition at Gosforth (Bailey 1980, 131-2; Bailey and Cramp 1988, 108-9). More difficult are Northumbrian sculptural scenes for which no explanatory literary equivalent is available but whose elements can be paralleled in Scandinavia. The armed encounter on the side of a hogback from Lowther provides a good example; its composition, set above a (world-?) serpent enclosing the complete monument, is so like a scene on a stone from Larbro St Hammars that it is reasonable to suggest that both depict the same story (Bailey and Cramp 1988, ills. 444, 447; Bailey 1980, fig. 28, pl. 35). And the curious symbols which accompany the decoration on another hogback from Lowther are so closely paralleled on figural textiles from Oseberg as to suggest that the busts on the Cumbrian sculpture carried a significance beyond the purely ornamental (Bailey and Cramp 1988, ill. 450; Bailey 1980, fig. 29, pl. 34).

In yet other cases there is now no reason to believe that we are dealing with Scandinavian mythology at all. Thus many of the snake-wrestling scenes such as those from Gosforth and Great Clifton, often identified with the encounters of Ragnarǫk, are more likely to be Hell scenes allied to the type seen in pre-Viking sculpture at Rothbury (Bailey and Cramp 1988, ills. 323, 326; Cramp 1984, ill. 1224; Bailey 1980, 140-2) - or draw upon the encounters with dragons and leviathans familiar from Isaiah, Job, the Psalms and the Book of Revelation. Even more clearly Christian is the figure from Kirklevington on whose shoulders perch two birds (Bailey 1980, pl. 57). Snorri describes Odin's

attendant ravens in this position but the character's dress is hardly appropriate to that god and the iconography can be readily matched on a 5th-century Christian tomb at Tabarka in Tunisia and on an 8th-century Augustine manuscript in the Vatican (Bailey 1996, 91).

### III

Scholarly interest in the range of mythological depictions on English sculpture has focussed mainly on the story of Ragnarøk at Gosforth (Bailey 1980, 125-31; Bailey and Cramp 1988, 100-104; Bailey 1996, 85-90). In 1980 I attempted to draw two other carvings into this discussion, a graffito from Skipwith in Yorkshire (Bailey 1980, pl. 35, 134; Lang 1991, 214-5) and a panel on a cross shaft from Ovingham in the Tyne valley with Heimdallr and the sun-swallowing wolf (Cramp 1984, ill. 1199; Bailey 1980, 133-4; Dronke 1996, VI, 71). Looking at all three together it is reasonable to argue that, though the evidence is thinly spread, it is geographically well distributed; this is a theme which seems to have caught interest across the whole of Northumbria. What is also noticeable is that this widespread interest remains very selective in terms of the total Ragnarøk narrative - as that full story can be inferred from *Völuspá* or as it was later codified by Snorri. The stress is always on the climactic encounter. And the third point to emerge from this grouping of the three English sculptures is that, unlike the case of Sigurd and Weland, there is little sign of an established iconography for Ragnarøk.

I begin with a dating issue. Neither Ovingham or Skipwith can be closely dated but for Gosforth we have a series of chronological pointers. In the 1970s Jim Lang and I recognised that the sculptor of the main cross at Gosforth also produced other carvings at the site; this conclusion was based on identities in handling of knotwork, figural depictions and zoomorphic themes, and included an analysis of cutting profiles and techniques such as the combination of chisel and punch (Bailey and Lang 1975; Bailey and Cramp 1988, 33). This identification of the 'Gosforth master', who worked for no-one else in the region, is significant for chronological purposes - as we will see. It also helps emphasise the fact that either the same patron, or someone associated with him, had a second sculptor working contemporaneously on related themes on the 'Warrior's Tomb' (Bailey and Cramp 1988, ill. 313-22); this evidence suggests that the local dynasty, controlling an important routeway, was intent on visually establishing its identity by reference to Scandinavian-based narratives.

Armed with the recognition of several works from the same hand we are in a strong position to establish the date of the Gosforth cross. It is, first, unlikely that it can date much before the middle of the second decade of the 10th century. The few hints we have in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, a Durham document whose material goes back to the 10th century, indicates that the

region was relatively stable through the late 9<sup>th</sup> century but that there was both civil and ecclesiastical disruption in that south-west Cumbrian area in the 915-920 period (Bailey 1980, 35). Nor do I believe that we can put the carving very far into the second half of the 10th century. There is, first, the fact that the same sculptor carved the 'Saint's Tomb' hogback; Jim Lang's study of that form of monument strongly suggests, on both ornamental and distributional grounds, that the bulk of hogbacks were the product of a thirty-year period leading up to c. 950 (Lang 1984; 1991, 29). This dating is supported by the use of various forms of vertebral ring-chain on the cross. A recent Newcastle thesis on the Borre style has rightly shown that the ring chain, though often claimed as a Borre-style characteristic, is in fact not a Scandinavian-based motif but is essentially an insular phenomenon - but linked to that style (Richardson 1993). The Borre identification is still therefore relevant and, indeed, the multiple ring chain on the cylindrical section of the shaft gives the impression of differing planes of ornament which is characteristic of that style. The implication of this stylistic link is that the Gosforth cross must belong to the first half of the 10th century, when that style flourished. If we add to this catalogue of dating indicators the fact that the partial jaw-outlining of the cross's animals seems to be a local feature of the tenth-century 'circle-head school', then it seems reasonable to argue that the Gosforth master was working in the period c. 920-950. That dating, of course, carries some interesting implications in relation to our literary documents, whose recorded history begins much later and in other countries. Vitharr's rending of the wolf's jaw, for example, which figures in *Vafþrúðnismál* but not in *Völuspá*, can thus be traced back to at least the early tenth century (Dronke 1997, 149).

I noted earlier that placing Skipwith and Ovingham alongside Gosforth emphasises the apparent lack of a consistent Ragnarøk iconography. There is, perhaps one exception to this statement for, as Lang (1991, 214) has noted, the position of the foot of the ?Odin figure at Skipwith in relation to the beast attacking him is exactly matched at Kirk Andreas in the Isle of Man, though the Yorkshire graffito has none of the symbolism which accompanies the Manx figure (Graham-Campbell 1980, fig. 534a). This element apart, however, what distinguishes the three thematically-linked carvings is their lack of iconographic identity.

At Ovingham and Skipwith we cannot see how the selected pieces of the narrative are exploited because we lack the complete monument. At Gosforth this is not a problem and it is to Gosforth that I now turn (Bailey and Cramp 1988, ills. 288-308).

Here there is general agreement that, among the teeming ornament, it is possible to recognise the Ragnarøk themes of Vitharr's jaw rending, the bound Loki with his faithful wife Sigyn, and Heimdallr with his horn. Other elements are more difficult to identify. But I do wonder whether we are being too cautious in dismissing the figure of Tyr from the shaft's repertoire. The

horseman on the south side is distinguished by the fact that he has a bridal which is held by what appears to be a very short (admittedly left) arm. That figure occurs on the only side of the cross where a beast's jaws are bound, and he is set below a canine beast who has broken free from its bonds. All this strongly suggests that the ornament alludes to Tyr and the bound Fenrir, and that the beast immediately above is the figure of Garmr whose escape is a threatening refrain throughout the central stanzas of *Völuspá* - which Snorri tells us will slay the god at Ragnarök.

What I find interesting about this monument is the fact that it works by suggestions and gaps. It responds indeed to that approach which has proved so fruitful in examining pre-Viking Christian art, an approach which is based upon *ruminatio* - the monastic skill in reading, contemplating and digesting texts on which Dom Leclercq has written illuminatingly (Leclercq 1961; Bailey 1996, 61, 63). This skill is that of reflective reading of the scriptures, probing the implications of narratives and words, weighing all, in Dom Leclercq's words, 'in order to sound the depths of their full meaning' (Leclercq 1961, 90). This reflection is stimulated by reflecting on the puzzles posed by juxtapositions and is encouraged by thematic and verbal echoings. Studies of Anglian monuments, such as Ruthwell, have responded to the application of this contemplative methodology to visual 'texts' (see e.g.: Schapiro 1944; Henderson 1985; Meyvaert 1992; O Carragain 1986; 1987; 1988). At Gosforth we are clearly not presented with depictions of a straight sequential narrative. The monument works, rather, by suggestive juxtapositioning of scenes and thematic echoes (pigtailed attendant women; repeated horsemen; snakes; curved objects). This deliberately puzzling organisation is made even more complex by the fact that there is no panel division to define the boundaries of the depictions.

Where, then, are the puzzles and the unexpected juxtapositions at Gosforth? First there is the crucifixion scene. I have elsewhere suggested that its crossless figure of Christ derives from a metal openwork model circulating in Cumbria (Bailey and Cramp 1988, 103, 140-2) but the more intriguing feature of the composition is that it is set so low on the shaft. This is not the position in which that scene appears across the rest of Northumbrian sculpture in the 10th century; its unusual placing thus thrusts it into prominence and demands our thoughtful attention. Once focused on this highlighted scene, the reflective onlooker is then confronted by the unparalleled combination of its subsidiary figures. Normally Longinus, the spearman, would be partnered by Stephaton, the sponge bearer. Here, as I have argued, he is set against Mary Magdelene, carrying her alabastron with its long tapering neck. The manner in which she is drawn, with pigtail and trailing dress, is one which has a long history in Scandinavian art (e.g., Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1981, pls. XXIV, XXVI) but, to the ruminating onlooker, what would be more significant would be the challenge she presented to interpret her significance when paired with Longinus. Among the various meanings attached to this complex figure by the liturgy and the commentators,

she was a symbol of the converted gentiles who recognised Christ's divinity; this is the interpretation given by Bede in both his commentary on Luke and in one of his homilies (Hurst 1955, 227; Hurst 1960, 168). Longinus was a figure who was equally loaded with symbolism for the early Christian world but he, too, represented the recognition of Christ's godhead by the gentiles; in apocryphal narrative his eyes were literally opened by the flow of Christ's blood which, unusually in such scenes, is actually depicted here at Gosforth and thus leads us to this layer of meaning denoted by his presence.

A scene foregrounded by an usual placing thus begins to take on a meaning which relates to the rest of the cross - of conversion from a pagan world. And these links are emphasised by visual 'hooks' reaching out from this panel. The very prominent snakes below the crucifixion no doubt derive from the 'defeated devil' depictions of a serpent below the cross in Carolingian and Ottonian ivories but, in their form, they allude to the numerous serpent-like forms of the Ragnarøk scenes elsewhere on the cross and particularly lead over to the tormenting snake of the Loki scene on the west face. Similarly the caring figure of Magdelene with her ointment container is echoed by the faithful Sigyn with her bowl. And Longinus is not the only belted, spear-carrying figure on the cross.

As the ornamental organisation forces the onlooker to explain and reflect on juxtapositions so the implication of combinations begins to deepen our understanding of the issues being explored by the decoration. Heimdallr is at one and the same time defending the gods against a monstrous onslaught but he is placed above Loki who will slay him in the final encounter - a death which may be signalled by the reversed horseman set between the two scenes. Loki may be bound but, in the same manner as *Völuspá's* description of his punishment, his significance lies in the threat he will pose, when his release heralds Ragnarøk. Similarly above the crucifixion is the figure of Vitharr, defeating a monster by breaking its jaw; any well-informed observer would know that Vithar, like Christ, was triumphant in the final struggle (Dronke 1996, II, 13).

There is no simple narrative sequence here; events from different times are set alongside each other. We are given selected, and suggestive, juxtapositionings from which we are forced to extrapolate meaning - meanings of conversion from pagandom, and suggestions of parallels and contrasts between the ends of various worlds. The cross sets before us the end of the world of the old gods, the end of the world of the Old Covenant and the end of the world which will come with the Christian Doomsday (in which four horsemen play a part) - that latter end accompanied by many of the signs which marked both Ragnarøk and Christ's death, and which the Christian liturgy constantly evoked in contemplation of the crucifixion (Bailey 1980, 129-30, 163-4).

Gosforth's cross is thus a Christian monument which also signals the

social/political allegiances of its patron. The Fishing Stone, now set inside the church, worked in the same way, with a god struggling with evil in a serpent-like form set below a standard Christian symbol of a stag struggling with a snake, the symbol of Christ and the devil (Bailey and Cramp 1988, ill. 332; Bailey 1980, 131-2. But in neither case are we dealing with syncretism, though the mind is drawn to parallels and contrasts between Christian teaching and Scandinavian-based mythology; the message is Christian.

To interpret the carvings in this manner is, of course, to suggest that Gosforth's patron was capable of thinking in a theologically radical manner. It also suggests that there was an audience to whom the reflective skills of ruminatio were not totally alien. In explanation of the existence of such (seemingly unlikely) patterns of thinking in rural Cumbria it is worth remembering that sculptural evidence suggests that there were two pre-Viking monastic sites close to Gosforth, at Irton and Waberthwaite (Bailey and Cramp 1988, 115-7, 151). The possibility that traditional Christian reflective approaches lived on in the area must be recognised; that such a possibility exists is indicated by the Cumbrian site of Dacre where, from a place with a known Anglian monastery, a Viking-age shaft combines two scenes whose significance can only be unlocked by a ruminative approach (Bailey and Cramp 1988, 91-2). But perhaps we ought also to recognise that there was another source where meaning emerges in an allusive and cryptic manner: and that is in the earliest Eddic poetry!

### Bibliography

- Bailey, R. N. 1980. *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England*, London.
- Bailey, R. N. 1981. 'The hammer and the cross', in (ed. E. Roesdahl et al.), *The Vikings in England and in their Danish Homeland*, London, 83-94.
- Bailey, R. N. 1996 *England's Earliest Sculptors*, Toronto.
- Bailey, R. N. and Cramp, R. J. 1988 (eds.) *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture II: Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North of the Sands*, Oxford.
- Bailey R. N. and Lang, J. T. 1975 'The date of the Gosforth sculptors', *Antiquity*, 49, 290-3.
- Calverley, W. S. 1899 *Early Sculptured Crosses, Shrines and Monuments in Carlisle*, Carlisle.
- Cassidy, B. 1992 (ed.) *The Ruthwell Cross*, Princeton.
- Cramp, R. J. 1984 (ed.) *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, I: County Durham and Northumberland*, Oxford.
- Dronke, U. 1996 *Myth and Fiction in Early Norse Lands*, Aldershot.
- Dronke, U. 1997 (ed.) *The Poetic Edda II: Mythological Poems*, Oxford.
- Graham-Campbell, J. 1980 *Viking Artefacts*, London.
- Henderson, G. 1985 'The John the Baptist panel on the Ruthwell cross', *Gesta*, 24, 3-12.
- Hurst, D. 1955 (ed.) *Bedae Venerabilis Opera, pars III* [Corpus Christianorum 122], Turnhout.
- Hurst, D. 1960 *Bedae Venerabilis Opera, pars II*, 3 [Corpus Christianorum 120], Turnhout.
- Karkov, C. 1997 'The Bewcastole cross: some iconographic problems' in (ed. C. Karkov et al.) *The Insular Tradition*, Albany, 9-26.
- Lang, J. T. 1972 'Illustrative carving of the Viking period at Sockburn on Tees', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4, 50, 235-48.
- Lang, J. T. 1976 'Sigurd and Weland in pre-Conquest carving from northern England', *Yorks. Archaeol. Jour.*, 48, 83-94.
- Lang, J. T. 1984 'The hogback: a Viking colonial monument', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in*

- Archaeology and History*, 3, 85-176.
- Lang, J. T. 1991 *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture, III: York and Eastern Yorkshire*, Oxford.
- Leclercq, J. 1961 (trans. C. Mishari) *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, New York.
- Lindow, J. 1987 'Norse mythology and Northumbria: methodological notes', *Scandinavian Studies*, 59, 308-324.
- Margeson, S. 1980 'The Volsung legend in medieval art', in *Medieval Iconography and Narrative*, Odense, 183-211.
- Margeson, S. 1983 'On the iconography of Manx crosses', in (ed. C. Fell et al.) *The Viking Age in the Isle of Man*, London, 95-106.
- Mckinnell, J. 1987 'Norse mythology and Northumbria: a response', *Scandinavian Studies*, 59, 324-37.
- Meyvaert, P. 1992 'A new perspective on the Ruthwell cross', in Cassidy 1992, 95-166.
- O Carragain, E. 1986 'Christ over the beasts and the Agnus Dei...'. in (ed. P. Szarmach) *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, Kalamazoo, 377-403.
- O Carragain, E. 1987 'A liturgical interpretation of the Bewcastle cross', in (ed. M. Stokes and T. Burton) *Medieval Literature and Antiquities*, Cambridge, 15-42.
- O Carragain, E. 1988 'The Ruthwell crucifixion poem in its iconographic and liturgical contexts', *Peritia*, 6-7, 1-71.
- Ohlgren, T. H. 1988 'The pagan iconography of Christian ideas: tree lore in Anglo-Viking England', *Mediaevistik*, 1, 145-73.
- Parker, C. A. 1896 *The Ancient Crosses at Gosforth, Cumberland*, London.
- Richardson, C. 1983 *The Borre Style in the British Isles and Ireland* (Unpublished M. Litt thesis, University of Newcastle upon Tyne).
- Schapiro, M. 1944 'The religious meaning of the Ruthwell cross', *Art Bulletin*, 26, 232-45.
- Wilson, D. M. and Klindt-Jensen, O. 1980 *Viking Art*, 2nd ed., London.

# Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon in the Old Norse Hagiographic Sagas

Simonetta Battista

Ordbog over det Norrøne Prosasprog, København

One of the peculiar features of the religious works translated from Latin into Old Norse is the way in which the Nordic divinities replace the Roman ones in exotic contexts. As scholars have pointed out, it is sometimes difficult to find a pattern in this process of substitution. In this paper I have tried to look anew at the corpus of occurrences of Nordic and Roman gods and goddesses in the hagiographical translations, in particular in Unger's editions of *Postola sögur* and *Heilagra manna sögur*. On the basis of a systematic analysis and comparison of these occurrences with their Latin parallels it is possible to draw conclusions as to the different tendencies in this process of re-contextualization, which sometimes seems to imply a redefinition of the mutual relations between the different divinities.

In these hagiographical texts, only the "official" divinities in one of the pantheons have a counterpart in the other. The gods and goddesses extraneous to both pantheons are kept in their original form and not adapted to the known frame of reference. In the same way the demons and evil spirits from exotic

lands are quoted with the names they have in the Latin sources. Obviously no need was felt to make them familiar to the Scandinavian audience.

The most original and discussed passage about the pagan gods is undoubtedly the one from *Clemens saga*, on which Tveitane focused his attention in a paper on *interpretatio Norræna* delivered at the 6th Saga Conference in Helsingør in 1985.<sup>1</sup> The term *interpretatio Norræna* is coined on the concept of *interpretatio Romana*, already used by Tacitus in his *Germania* (XLIII, 4). Here Tacitus recognises in some of the Germanic divinities the same characteristics of the Roman ones, and uses for them the names familiar to his audience.<sup>2</sup> In the famous passage from the *Germania* (IX, 1) Mercurius is considered the highest divinity, and is quoted together with Hercules and Mars:

Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent. Herculem ac Martem concessis animalibus placant.

The three gods correspond to Wotan/Óðinn, Donar/Þórr and Tiu/Týr. In the oldest sources there is equivalence between the foremost divinity of the Germanic peoples, that is Wotan/Óðinn, and Mercurius. This correspondence was canonized in the rendering of the planetary week days in accordance with the Latin model. The equivalence between Mercurius and Óðinn was based on the functional characteristics of Óðinn as god of poetry, wisdom, magic and eloquence. Moreover, Mercurius is the conductor of departed souls to the Lower World, which is another function he shares with Óðinn, the god of the dead and the presider of the *Valhøll*.

About the second equivalence, between Hercules and Þórr, Turville-Petre has pointed out that “it seems likely that Hercules, with his supernatural strength and his club, was sometimes identified with Þór”.<sup>3</sup> But later sources stress the characteristic of Þórr as the god of thunder and natural elements, which is the dominion of Jupiter. Cf. Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (IV, 26):

Thor, inquit, presidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat [...] Thor autem cum sceptro Iovem simulare videtur.

In the same passage Adam emphasizes the characteristic feature of Óðinn as the promoter of war and struggle, thus identifying him with Mars:

Wodan, id est furor, bella gerit hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos [...] Wodanem vero sculpunt armatum, sicut nostri Martem solent.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mattias Tveitane, *Interpretatio Norroena. Norrøne og antikke gudenavn i Clemens saga*, in: *The Sixth International Saga Conference*, Helsingør 28.7-2.8.1985, Workshop Papers, pp. 1067-1082.

<sup>2</sup> An analogous *interpretatio Graeca* is found in the Greek authors, such as Erodotos, who interpreted the Egyptian pantheon.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North. The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, London 1964, p. 103.

This picture is in contrast with the traditional one, found both in Tacitus and in the names of the planetary week days, according to which Mercurius corresponds to Óðinn and Mars to Týr. Týr is one of the gods who seem to have been of less significance in the later heathen period, but he enjoyed an originally foremost position in the Germanic pantheon, at least if we judge from the etymology, which is the same as the Latin *deus*. The fact that there is no perfect correspondence between the Roman and Scandinavian pantheon is already evident from the existence of these two traditions: on the one side Tacitus and the classical authors, on the other side Adam, one of the precursors of humanistic storiography.

The most heterogeneous figure in the Nordic pantheon, and the most difficult to interpret, seems to be Óðinn. The ambiguity and complexity of his personality is expressed both in the Eddaic poems and in other sources. In the religious translations like elsewhere in Old Norse literature Óðinn and Þórr represent the pagan gods *par excellence*, in many occurrences quoted together as a sort of complementary/competitive figures to signify the whole pantheon. A couple of examples from *Clemens saga*:<sup>4</sup>

<p>ex eorum libris et caeremoniis ostendebat, ubi nati et unde nati essent hi, quos <i>deos</i> putarent et colerent, et quid egissent et qualiter defecissent (516-8)</p>	<p>synde hann þeim með micille scynseme af þeira bócom sialvra, hverso illa oc flerþsamlega þeir Þórr eða Openn eða aþrer eser voro getner, oc hverso illa oc herviliga ðeir lifþo (14234-37)</p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Here the Latin text has only a generic *deos*, without any specific name. In the longer redaction of *Clemens saga*, preserved in AM 645 4<sup>o</sup>, we also find an example of *amplificatio* without counterpart in the Latin source, where Þórr and Óðinn are mentioned together to represent the pagan beliefs, which Clemens is trying to destroy:

<p>Clementem hunc a populo seditiosa vociferatione impeti reperi, cui nulla possit probatio inveniri (71<sup>19</sup>-73<sup>2</sup>)</p>	<p>mikit sundrþyki geresc með Rumaborgar monnom af kenningom Clemens pafa, oc spenr hann alt folc oc allan landher fra alre dýrþ goða varra oc dregr i villo sina oc til atrunaþar við Cristum necqern, oc hann slęsc á it mesta ameþle við Þór eða Openn, oc alla fólur hann þa ese oc øll gob ór (147<sup>23-28</sup>)</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In the eyes of the translator the two gods must have been complementary in many respects: not only in their functions, but also from a temporal, social and

<sup>4</sup> Where nothing different is specified, the Old Norse quotations follow Unger's editions: *Postola sögur*, Kristiania 1874, and *Heilagra manna sögur*, Kristiania 1877. As for the Latin sources, I refer to the ones listed in Ole Widding, Hans Bekker-Nielsen & L.K. Shook, *The Lives of the Saints in Old Norse Prose. A Handlist*, in: *Mediaeval Studies* 25 (1963), pp. 294-337, and *Ordbog over det Norrøne Prosasprog*. Registre, København 1989. For the text of *Passio sancti Clementis* cf. Franciscus Diekamp (ed.), *Patres apostolici* 2, Tübingen 1913.

maybe a geographical point of view. Most scholars agree that Óðinn seems to have been the god of aristocracy, while Þórr was worshipped by a wider part of the population. In the words of Jens Peter Schjødt, Óðinn was not only the king of gods, but also the god of kings. On the basis of the place-names evidence Turville-Petre suggests that the cult of Þórr prevailed in the farming areas of Scandinavia, more independent from a central government (Iceland and southwestern Norway), while Óðinn was venerated in the regions whose powerful military chiefs had little interest in agriculture (Denmark and southern Sweden).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the predominance of Þórr seems to have increased towards the end of paganism. According to Adam of Bremen (ca. 1070), Þórr enjoyed a central place among the three idols in the temple of Uppsala.

As already mentioned, the *Passio Sancti Clementis* and its Old Icelandic equivalent, *Clemens saga*, contain a peculiar passage about the two pantheons. A list of gods and goddesses is named both in the Latin source and in the Old Norse translation, but we find some discrepancies in the correspondences between the Roman and the Scandinavian deities:

Magis artibus ista faciens deorum nostrorum culturam evacuat. Iovem dicit deum non esse, Herculem conservatorem nostrum dicit esse immundum spiritum. Venerem deam sanctam meretricem esse commemorat, Vestam quoque deam magnam ignibus crematam esse blasphemat. Sic sanctam deam Minervam et Dianam et Mercurium simul et Saturnum et Martem accusat, numina etiam universa blasphemat. Aut sacrificet diis nostris aut ipse intreat (69<sup>11-19</sup>)

AM 645 4°

hann seger, at Þórr se eigi goð fultrue varr oc en sterxte Óss areþesfullr, oc er nēr hvars sem hann es blotenn; en þá osømp oc ovirþing veiter hann Óþne orlausnafullom oc hvarfseme, at sia Clemens callar hann fianda oc ohreinan anda; en hann qveþr Freyio portkono verit hafa; fōler hann Frey; en hrøper Heimdaull; lastar hann Loca meþ sløgþ sina oc vęlar, oc callar hann oc illan; hatar hann Hōni; bōlvar hann Baldri; tefr hann Tý; niþer han Niorþ; illan seger hann Ull; flimter hann Frigg; en hann gør Gefion; sekia dōmer hann Sif. Fir ilzco sina qveþr hann svát orþe. Oc sia lagabriotr fōler øll goþ ór oc lastar þau miøc oc gremr at qss, oc engi þeira asa ma hann heyra vel latenn, hvártke Þór ne Óþenn. Øllom bindr hann þeim iamnan sciöld up goþom orom oc callar øll oh ef meþ øllo, eþa hvart heyrþo þer mann slict meþa fyrr? Blóte hann nu þegar í staþ, eþa hafe bana ella. Nu er sa domr várr allra of hann (146<sup>31</sup>-147<sup>6</sup>)

XXVIII a 4°

Segir hann, at Þórr sé eigi guð, ok kallar Óðin óhreinan anda ok segir Freyiu portkonu hafa verit. Fœlir hann Frey. Hrøpir hann Heimdall. Lastar hann Loka. Hatar hann Hœni. Bōlvar hann Baldri. Tefr hann Tý. Níðir hann Njörð. Illan segir hann Ull. Flimtir hann Frigg. Geyr hann Gefiun. Sekia dœmir hann Sif. øll goð ór gremr hann at oss. Blóti hann \*eða bana hafi. Sá er várr dómr (280<sup>4-9</sup>)

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Turville-Petre, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-70.

There is no perfect equivalence between the two groups of divinities, not even in their number. The style of the Latin source is rendered through a rhythmic, alliterating prose, where each sentence starts with a verb that alliterates with the name of the god. Some of the deities, like for instance Ull, belong to an archaic phase of Scandinavian paganism, so the list represents a wide range of divinities both in time and hierarchic position. The translator has obviously paid more attention to the style in the Old Norse text than to the truthfulness of the equivalences, and this is even more evident in the redaction of the saga transmitted in the fragment AM 655 XVIII a 4°, which is shorter and closer to the Latin source.<sup>6</sup> However, the identification of some of the gods is made easier by the related attributes. Jupiter's foremost position is reserved to Þórr, the equivalence that – as we have seen – is most common also in the Latin sources.

Hercules' connotation in the Latin text is *conservator*, that is “keeper, preserver, defender”. This particular feature is also typical of Þórr, the defender of the pagan world against the forces of chaos, but in this occurrence Hercules is instead identified with Óðinn, as showed by the attribute *immundum spiritum*. Apart from this, in the analyzed *corpus* there is only another, ambiguous example of the identification of Hercules with Óðinn (*Vitus saga* 330<sup>9-10</sup>).

A third equivalence that we can deduce from this passage in *Clemens saga* is the one between Venus and Freyja, traditionally associated with lustful behaviour. But somewhere else in the same text the planet Venus is called *Friggiar stiarna* (130<sup>24,28</sup>), thus suggesting that Venus corresponds to Frigg. For some aspects of her character and her functions the goddess of the Vanir, Freyja, can be seen as a parallel to the *ásynja* Frigg. But here it is more probable that the translator has just used the common Old Norse name for the planet Venus, without thinking of the equivalence with the Roman goddess.

*Clemens saga* is not the only *postola saga* where we find incoherence between the names of the deities and placenames which contain these names in their etymology. In the older redaction of *Páls saga* (AM 645 4°) the placename *Athenis* occurs first in its Latin form (221<sup>15</sup>), and later in the text as *Aþenisborg* (222<sup>6</sup>). The *Areopagus* is interpreted and translated with *hof Opens* (221<sup>23</sup>), which implies the identification of Óðinn with the Greek god Ares (Mars). The name of the inhabitants, *Athenienses*, is rendered with *Opensborgar* (221<sup>25,27</sup>). But in the same saga we find the following passage, which translates the *Acts of the Apostles*:

Et vocabant Barnabam Iovem, Paulum vero Mercurium, quoniam ipse erat dux verbi. Sacerdos quoque Iovis... (Act. 14, 11-12)      oc cølluþo þeir Paulum Oþin en Barnabas Þor. Þa com þar blotmaþr Þors... (220<sup>3-4</sup>)

<sup>6</sup>The text of the shorter redaction is quoted from Dietrich Hofmann, *Die Legende von Sankt Clemens in den skandinavischen Ländern im Mittelalter* (“Beiträge zur Skandinavistik” 13), Frankfurt am Main 1997.

Here Óðinn is identified with Mercurius, and not with Mars, so there is inconsistency in the same translation, or at least the translator has not understood the etymology of the Greek term. Another possibility is that he used an already existing equivalent of *Areopagus*, based on the same identification of Mars with Óðinn already found in Adam of Bremen. A comparison of this redaction of *Páls saga* with the one in AM 234 fol shows in the latter the use of *hof Tyss* (246<sup>9</sup>) to translate *Areopagus*, according to the more traditional interpretation Ares/Mars = Týr, which emphasizes the function of Mars' Hill as the highest juridical assembly in Athen and of Týr as the god of the *þing*, the Dumézilian “god of law”.<sup>7</sup> In the words of Polomé<sup>8</sup>:

the link between Mars and Týr rests on the Germanic concept of war as a judgment by arms (ON *vápnadómr*), which puts it into the domain of the juridical functions of Týr, whose association with the judicial and legislative assembly (ON *þing*) is also evidenced by the votive inscriptions to *Mars Thincsus*.

This correspondence is also found in both versions of *Tveggja postola saga Philippus ok Jakobs*:<sup>9</sup>

Deiicite hunc Martem: et confringite: et in loco in quo fixus stat Crucem dei mei Iesu Christi affigite: et hanc adorete. Tunc illi qui cruciabantur cœperunt clamare: recuperetur in nobis uirtus: et deiicimus hunc Martem (385<sup>12-14</sup>)

AM 630 4o

Briotit niðr likneski þetta, er i Tys liki þikkir gort verit hafa, en reisit upp þar i staðinn kross drottins Jesus Kristz, er honum er sigrs ok piningar mark en hinn styrkasti stolpi varrar hialpar ok lausnar. En hinir siuku menn eggjuðu miok, at þat skyllði fram fara sem skiotast, ef þeir væri þa nõkkut nærr heilsu sinni en aðr. Oc var sva gert (73617-22)

AM 628 4º (< Codex Scardensis)

Dragit þer ut skurgoðit þetta ok briotid, enn setid þar i stadinn cross drottins mins Jesus Cristz. þa kaulludu þeir sem siukir voru: Gef þu oss afl ok heilsu, ok munu vær briöta Ty þenna, sem vær höfum blotad (7413-6)

Also the texts from the *Heilagra manna sögur* show quite different interpretations of the Roman pantheon. The canonical readings, corresponding to the names of the week days, are found for instance in *Martinus saga* and

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Georges Dumézil, *Les dieux des Germains*, Paris 1959, chapter 2. The aspect of Týr as a counterpart of the Roman god of war is found for instance in the prologue of *Rómverja saga*: er svá sagt að þeir (Romulus ok Remus) væri synir Martis er Rómverjar kölluðu orrostuguð en vér köllum Tý.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Edgar C. Polomé, The Indo-European Component in Germanic Religion, in: *Essays on Germanic Religion* (“Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Number Six”), Washington 1989, pp. 1-29, esp. note 9; first appeared in Jaan Puhvel (ed.), *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans. Studies of Indo-European Comparative Mythology*, University of California Press at Berkeley and Los Angeles 1970, pp. 55-82.

<sup>9</sup> The *Passio Beati Philippi Apostoli* is quoted from Boninus Mombritius (ed.), *Sanctuarium, seu, Vitae sanctorum* 2, Paris 1910.

*Agǫtu saga meyju:*<sup>10</sup>

Mercurium maxime patiebatur infestum, Iouem brutum adque hebetem esse dicebat ( <i>DialMart</i> <sup>l</sup> 196 <sup>17-18</sup> )	Þor callaði hann heimscan, en Oþen deigan, en Freyio portcono ( <i>Martin</i> <sup>l</sup> 569 <sup>25-26</sup> )
Frequenter autem diabolus [...] nam interdum in Iouis personam, plerumque Mercuri, saepe etiam se Veneris ac Mineruae transfiguratum uultibus offerebat ( <i>VitMart</i> 131 <sup>7-11</sup> )	Optliga bra diðfullinn a sik ymsum likium [...] stundum i Þors liki, stundum Odins, stundum Freyiu, en stundum i Friggjar liki edr annarra heidinna manna ( <i>Martin</i> <sup>3</sup> 618 <sup>23-25</sup> )
Agatha respondit: Sit talis uxor tua: qualis tua dea Venus fuit: et tu sis talis qualis deus tuus Iouis extitit ( <i>PassAgat</i> 38 <sup>16-18</sup> )	Heilog mæR svaradi: Ver þu sem gud þinn Odinn, en kona þin slik sem Freyia gydia þin ( <i>Agat</i> <sup>l</sup> 2 <sup>31-32</sup> )

But the equivalence between Mercurius and Óðinn on the one hand and Jupiter and Þorr on the other is not so immediate in some other translations. The problems related with the rendering of the Roman Jupiter into Old Norse are evident if we compare version *A* and *C* of *Ceciliu saga*:<sup>11</sup>

Locus igitur qui vocabatur Pagus quarto miliario ab urbe situs erat, in quo per templi ianuam transitus erat, ut omnis qui ingrederetur, si Iovi tura non poneret, puniretur (*PassCaec* 214<sup>1-3</sup>)

Bær sa var fíorar mílor fra Romaborg, er þíodgata læ fyrir framán dyr hía hofí Þors, ok var hverr píndr, er eigi vílđi blota Þor (CecA 28916-18)	Stadr var kalladr Pagus, sa var fíorar mílur fra Romaborg, þar læ þíodgata í gegnum Odens hof... (CecC 289 n. 3)
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The equivalence between Jupiter and Óðinn occurs also in another passage of version *C* of *Ceciliu saga*:

Almachius dixit: Ergo Iobis Dei nomen non est? ( <i>PassCaec</i> 211 <sup>20-21</sup> )	Almachius męllti: Er eigi Oþenn gud? ( <i>CecC</i> 287 <sup>30</sup> )
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------

In Unger's edition, version *A* is taken from the manuscript Holm perg 2 fol (c1425-1445), while version *C* is taken from AM 429 12<sup>o</sup> (c1500). They seem to represent two different traditions and therefore two alternative interpretations in the rendering of the Roman Jupiter.

If we turn to the goddesses, the two already quoted examples where an identification is possible show the canonical correspondences of Venus with Freyja and Minerva with Frigg. Among the lesser deities, Diana and Vesta are both translated with Gefjon, in *Agnesar saga* and *Nikolas saga* respectively.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The quoted sources of *Martini saga* are Vita S. Martini and Dialogi Martini, in: Carolus Halm (ed.), Sulpicius Severus: Libri qui supersunt, Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 1, Wien 1866. For the *Passio sanctae Agathae* cf. Mombricitus, op. cit. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Passio sanctae Caeciliae*, in: Hippolyte Delehaye (ed.), Étude sur le Légendier Romain: Les Saints de Novembre et de Décembre, Subsidia hagiographica 23, Bruxelles 1936.

<sup>12</sup> For the Latin texts cf. *Acta S. Agnetis*, in: Bolland & Henschen (ed.), *Acta Sanctorum Ianuarii* 2, Antwerpen 1643, and Vincentius Bellovacensis, *Speculum Historiale*, Douay 1624.

Symphronius Præfectus dixit: Vnum tibi e duobus elige, aut cum virginibus Deæ Vestæ sacrificæ... (*PassAgn* 352a<sup>21-22</sup>)

Simphronius mællti: Nu skaltt þu kiosa um tvo kosti, annattveggia at blota Gefion gydiu vora med meyum... (*AgnesA* 17<sup>16-17</sup>)

Præterea cum vsque ad tempus illud, serui Dei regio illa simulacrum Dianæ coluisset [...] hæc est impudica Diana (*NicSpecH* 530a<sup>15-39</sup>)

Sva er sagt, at allra blota mest var þa magnat Gefionar blot [...] þat var en odyggva Gefion (*Nik2* 30<sup>11-28</sup>)

Gefjon appears in most occurrences as the counterpart of Diana, for instance also in both redactions of *Páls saga* (224<sup>2</sup>, 253<sup>25</sup>). As Peter Hallberg has pointed out:<sup>13</sup>

Diana, or Artemis, was a goddess of fertility, and so was Gefjun. Moreover, according to Snorri Gefjun was a virgin, and Diana is seen as a symbol of virginity. Thus the equivalence Diana-Gefjun seems to be appropriate.

On the other hand – I think – the equivalence Vesta-Gefjon can be based on the fact that the cult of the Roman goddess was associated with her priestesses, the Vestal virgins, an aspect which also corresponds to what Snorri says about Gefjon: *hón er mærl ok henni þjóna þær, er meylar andast.*

The most original interpretation of Óðinn as a counterpart of a Roman god is found in *Sebastianus saga*:<sup>14</sup>

Numquid antequam Saturnus Cretensibus imperaret, et filiorum suorum carnes comederet, Deus in cælis non erat, aut Creta insula habebat Regem, et cæli Deum non habebant? Valde errat qui putat Iouem filium eius, imperare fulminibus, homuncionem in quo malitia et libido regnabat [...] quia sordidissima Iuno quod et soror et coniunx fuerit gloriatur (*PassSeb* 271b<sup>23-33</sup>)

Eda mundi eigi gud vera fyrr a himni, en Odin var konungr i Krit, þa er hann át holld sona sinna, sem þekr ydrar segia? Miok villaz þeir, er Þor son hans etla elldingum styra, þann er ser sialfum styrdi eigi fra ohefum hlutum, ok fôdur sinn let meida, en atti systur sina at eiginkonu (*Seb* 230<sup>14-19</sup>)

Here the parental relationship between Saturnus and Jupiter is privileged and kept in the translation, therefore Saturnus is rendered with Óðinn. Fritzner quotes no other examples of this equivalence, but the problem of the non-coincidence of Óðinn's and Þorr's genealogical tree has also been touched upon by other medieval authors, such as Ælfric and Saxo. In his *Gesta Danorum* Saxo observes that:<sup>15</sup>

Eos tamen, qui a nostris colebantur, non esse, quos Romanorum vetustissimi Iovem Mercuriumque dixere, vel quibus Græcia Latiumque plenum superstitionis obsequium exsolverunt, ex ipsa liquido feriarum appellatione colligitur. Ea enim, quæ apud nostros Thor vel Othini dies dicitur, apud illos Iovis vel Mercurii feria nuncupatur. Si ergo Thor Iovem, Othinum Mercurium iuxta designatæ interpretationis distinctionem accipimus,

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Peter Hallberg, Imagery in Religious Old Norse Prose Literature. An Outline, in: *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 102 (1987), p. 124.

<sup>14</sup> The Latin source is quoted from *Acta Sanctorum Ianuarii* 2.

<sup>15</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 6, 5, 4.

manente nostrorum assertione Iovem Mercurii filium exstitisse convincitur, apud quos Thor Othini genitus vulgari sententia perhibetur. Cum ergo Latini contrario opinionis tenore Mercurium Iove editum asseverunt, restat, ut constante eorum affirmatione Thor alium quam Iovem, Othinum quoque Mercurio sentiamus exstitisse diversum.

From the analysis of the names of the planetary weekdays we learn that Jupiter corresponds to Þórr and Mercurius to Óðinn. On the other hand it is well known that Þórr is Óðinn's son, while Jupiter is Mercurius's father. By this exercise of eloquence – as Friis-Jensen has defined it – Saxo comes to the conclusion that the Roman gods are not the same as the Scandinavian ones.<sup>16</sup> The same objection about Jupiter's identification with Þórr is found in Ælfric's homily *De falsis diis*.<sup>17</sup>

More confused passages, from which it is difficult to draw conclusions, are found for instance in *Vitus saga*, where the same gods occur in a different sequence twice in the text:<sup>18</sup>

hactenus nescisti o fili deos esse inuictos Iouem et Herculem. Iunonem. Mineruam et Appollinem: quos diui principes: et uniuersus excollit orbis romanus? ( <i>Mombr</i> II, 635 <sup>17-19</sup> )	Veizt þu eige oðaudleg god vera Odenn, Þor ok Frey, Frigg ok Freyiu, er konungar gofga ( <i>Vitus</i> 328 <sup>10-11</sup> )
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Vitus dixit: Si sanus vis fieri, abrenuntia Jovi, Herculi, Junoni, Minervæ, Vestæ, atque Apollini ( <i>PassVit</i> 1023a <sup>13-15</sup> )	Vitus mælte: Neit þu Þor ok Odne, Frigg ok Frey ok Freyiu (330 <sup>9-10</sup> )
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------

According to Tveitane, this saga is more than 200 years younger than a text like *Clemens saga*, and therefore from a time when the correspondences between the Roman and the Norse gods were no longer clear for the translator. However, in the two Old Norse quotations we find the same gods and goddesses. If we assume that the sequence in the Icelandic text follows the Latin, in the first case Jupiter corresponds to Óðinn and Hercules to Þórr, while in the second it is the other way round. But in other sources we have seen both examples of equivalence, Jupiter = Þórr/Óðinn, Hercules = Þórr/Óðinn, which must have contributed to some confusion in the translator. In the first example Frigg and Freyja correspond to Juno and Minerva respectively, while in the second there is no one-to-one equivalence between the Roman and the Norse goddesses. The

<sup>16</sup> Karsten Friis-Jensen suggests that this passage be read as an ironical comment by Saxo, to underline that the two pantheons actually are similar. Cf. Karsten Friis-Jensen, *Nordisk hedenskab og europæisk latinhumanisme hos Saxo*, in: Niels Lund (ed.), *Norden og Europa i vikingetid og tidlig middelalder*, København 1993, pp. 212-232, esp. pp. 231-232.

<sup>17</sup> Nu secgað þa Deniscan on heora gedwylde / þæt se Iouis wære, þe hi Þór hátað, / Mercuries sunu, þe hi Oðon hatað; / ac hi nabbað na riht, for þam þe we rædað on bocum, / ge on hæpenum ge on Cristenum, þæt se hetola Iouis / to soðan wære Saturnes sunu, / and þa béc ne magon beon awægede / þe þa ealdan hæðenan be him awriton þuss; / and eac on martira þrowungum we gemetað swa awriten (141-149).

<sup>18</sup> A single Latin source for this saga has not been identified, since the translation corresponds in part to the version of the *passio* found in Mombritius and in part to the one in Henschen & al. (ed.), *Acta Sanctorum Iunii* 2, Antwerpen 1698.

god Freyr could in both cases be the equivalent of Apollo, but it is more probable that his name appears as a counterpart of Freyja, and for the sake of alliteration. Actually there are no other examples to testify the use of an Old Norse equivalence to the god Apollo in the texts that I have analysed. He is only quoted in the original form, for instance in *Clemens saga: i musteri solar goðs, es Apollo heiter* (127<sup>33-34</sup>). Freyr appears in *Laurentius saga* as the counterpart of Mars:<sup>19</sup>

Sed ducantur ad templum Martis iterum: et sacrificent [...] Sanctum uero Xistum episcopum et Felicissimum et Agapetum diacones duxerunt in cliuum Martis ante templum ( <i>PassSixt</i> 650 <sup>52</sup> -651 <sup>4</sup> )	leidit þa til Freys hofs ok hoggvit þa [...] En þeir leiddu Sixtum pafa ok diakna hans Felicissimum ok Agapitum i Freys brecku hia hofinu ( <i>Laur</i> 425 <sup>2-14</sup> )
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In some occurrences all the names of the Roman divinities are kept in Latin in the hagiographic translations, like in *Antonius saga*:

Liberæ raptum, terram; semiclaudum Vulcanum debilem, ignem; Junonem, aelem; Apollinem, solem; Dianam, lunam; Neptunum, maria; et libidinum principem Jovem ætherem interpretantes (105 n. 2)	Libervm favðvr, en iorðina Simiclavdivm, elld Wlkanvm, loptið Jvnonem, sol Apollinem, tvngll Dianam, hafit Neptvnm, Jovem hofðingia allrar lostasemi segit er himinloptið sialft vera (105 <sup>7-10</sup> )
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

As we have seen from the analysed texts, different translations show a wide range of different interpretations, and this is especially true in the case of the most ambiguous figure in the Scandinavian pantheon, that is to say, Óðinn. The data found in the hagiographical texts – though they do not add any new element to our knowledge of Old Norse mythology – confirm the polyhedric image that other sources, both indigenous and not, give of the Scandinavian pantheon. To sum up, I have found examples of the following equivalences:

Óðinn: Mercurius, Mars, Jupiter, Hercules, Saturnus; Þórr: Jupiter, Hercules; Týr: Mars; Freyr: Mars; Freyja: Minerva, Venus; Frigg: Juno, Minerva, Venus; Gefjon: Vesta, Diana.	Mercurius: Óðinn; Jupiter: Óðinn, Þórr; Mars: Týr, Óðinn, Freyr; Hercules: Þórr, Óðinn; Saturnus: Óðinn; Venus: Freyja, Frigg; Minerva: Freyja, Frigg; Diana: Gefjon; Vesta: Gefjon.
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The hagiographic translations are quite late, from a period where paganism had officially been replaced by Christianity, so this process of interpretation and adaptation of the Roman pantheon is significant in itself. In re-contextualizing the Scandinavian deities into an exotic frame the translators show the same concern for the pagan religion as for instance Snorri with his *Edda*. In the words

<sup>19</sup> The Latin text is quoted from Mombritius, *op. cit.* 2.

of Margaret Clunies Ross:<sup>20</sup>

[...] one of Snorri's aims was to give a comprehensive account of the language of skaldic poetry. However, this aim seems to have been coexistent with and sometimes subordinate to a desire to show how the language of early Icelandic poetry expressed the basic tenets of the pre-Christian Scandinavian religion and represented a serious attempt to understand the basic principles of the cosmos.

Different choices taken when translating the same Roman deity could simply be seen as a sign of the fact that knowledge of the Scandinavian pantheon was no longer so immanent for the translators. Another consideration could be the issue of how much these authors/translators actually knew about the Roman pantheon in the first place. But the wide range of possible interpretations in the analysed texts can also reflect different traditions and the extent of the popularity one particular god or goddess enjoyed during a particular period. For instance, the fact that Mars is sometimes translated as Óðinn (*Páls saga* in AM 645 4s) and Freyr (*Laurentius saga*), instead of the canonical Týr, can support the hypothesis that Týr's cult was fading in the later period of paganism, while Freyr was becoming more important. If Þórr in many ways was a Hercules, because of his strength and his role as the defender of the pagan world, he enjoyed on the other hand a much more pre-eminent status in the Scandinavian pantheon, a status that corresponds more to that of Jupiter. As for the goddesses, it seems that the borders between the different spheres of influence were not very clearly defined.

In the process of conversion from one frame of reference to the other, there can be in some cases a discrepancy between the role and function of the god and his hierarchic position in the pantheon. Sometimes the translator seems to choose a counterpart of the Roman that reflects correspondence of status, while in other cases he privileges the functional role. This is especially evident in the case of Jupiter, the uncontrasted chief god among the Romans, whose counterpart in the Scandinavian pantheon shifts between Óðinn and Þórr. This is both due to the non-coincidence of their functions and to the different status that Óðinn and Þórr enjoyed in the course of time, among different social classes and in different areas in Scandinavia.

---

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál*, Odense 1987, p. 20.

# Myth or Poetry, a Brief Discussion of Some Motives in the Elder Edda

Mai Elisabeth Berg

Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU), Trondheim

The question of the origin of the mythological poems in the manuscript Codex Regius has still not been answered. *Some* scholars have suggested that *some* poems could be literary, written products from the 11th century, or from about the same period as the manuscript. But the dominating trend still is to consider these poems as originally oral. As such, the mythological poems of the Elder Edda are taken to be a versified version of Old Norse myth. Although today the poems are not thought to have the same religious or cultic function as previously believed, they are regarded as expressions of mythological material or mythological structures, which also means that they express heathen thoughts and ‘truths’. As myths they are regarded as collective products, formed and changed through a long process of oral delivery.

In my investigation of these poems, however, I am trying to study them from a literary point of view, as poetic compositions or works. That means that I try to read and analyse the poems as poetic language, as art, as written texts, such as they are presented to us in the manuscript. After all, the written texts are all we have, and all we know something about.

The question of the relationship between myth and poetry is complex, and could fill my whole paper. I will just say that although myth and poetry in one way belong to the same language of fictional discourse, I see it as languages with different semiological functions. While myth is a product of a whole culture, a collective product, poetry, as art, is an individual expression. That means for instance that poetry is creating its own autonomous poetic universes. By way of personification and anthropomorphism, myth projects its phenomena into narratives in an outer world, and thereby focusses on what is general or common. Poetry, as a symbolic language, rather tries to show the general or common through the individual. When using material from the mythological tradition, poetry will, by a process of poetic transformation, also try to liberate itself from the very same tradition. As literature poetry is thus using mythological motives for its own purpose. In order to become aware of this purpose, poetry must be understood on its own merits, not by standards of meaning imported from outside. And to understand poetry on its own merits we must look at all the aspects of the poetic language.

In this paper I will try, by a few examples from some of the mythological poems in Codex Regius, to show how literary analysis may produce an understanding that is different from a 'mythological' one.

I start with a stanza from the beginning of *Völuspá*, asking whether this reflects the thoughts and ideas of a heathen culture concerning the creation of the universe, or whether it is a free poetic use of mythological motives. Stanza 5 sounds like this:

Sól varp sunnan  
 sinni mána  
 hendi inni hægri  
 um himinjöður  
 sól þat ne vissi  
 hvar hón salí átti  
 stjörmor þat ne visso  
 hvar þær staði áttu  
 máni þat ne vissi  
 hvat hann megins átti.

Already the characterization of the sun as *sinni mána*, 'the moon's companion', makes this a bit confusing as an expression of a cosmological theory, since we are rather used to be thinking of the relationship between sun and moon in a pattern of oppositions. And besides it seems strange that the sun, which already in the preceding stanza was shining on *salar steina* (4/6), now does no longer know its *salr*. Many scholars find it difficult to see how stanza 5 is related to stanza 4, and some think it must have been interpolated. Ursula Dronke thinks lines 5-8 are interpolated, while the original lines are missing. These lost lines could have helped to make it clearer how this relates to an archaic concept of the cosmic mill, by which the heaven turns on the world pillar (Dronke 1997: 116). If we take what is said here about the heavenly bodies, not as a reference to heathen thoughts about the universe, but as elements in the poem's own

fictional world, we can understand the stanza in another way. As a poetic symbol, the sun has connotations of light and life, whereas the moon connotes the opposite, namely death. As *sinni mána*, the moon's 'companion', the sun could then refer to light or life as the companion, or counterpart, of death. A similar approach by way of symbolic interpretation will also show that the last line, telling us that the moon was not aware of its power, suggests that darkness or death are the ultimate powers, as it is also in the poem by the figure of *Niðhoggr*, the dragon with the dead bodies in its feathers, breaking the light of the new world with its dark and threatening shadow in the last stanza (66).

Within the fictional world of the poem lines 3-4, telling that the sun was throwing its right arm around the edge of heaven, can also be understood as a metaphorical reference to the sun's course as it is searching for its *salar* throughout the entire poem. As I mentioned above, the sun is shining at *salar steina* already in stanza 4. *Salr* is here usually understood figuratively as 'earth', a meaning which we also find in some kennings. If we follow the poem's narrative course, we will see that *salr* is an element which is repeated throughout the text. From this stony *salr* in the beginning we move to Frigg's *Fensalir* (33), then to the three *salr* filled with anguish and pain, at *Niðavollom*, *Ókólni* and *Náströndo* (37,38), and finally to the bright *salr* at *Gimlé* in the new world (64). Thus we must conclude that *salr* is not only a kenning for earth, but must be understood as a reference to different 'rooms' or 'places' which outline a way from the hard and stony beginning, through the sorrowful *Fensalr* (by its name a figure of a 'wet place') moistened with Frigg's tears, to the following *salr* of anguish or pain, until we end with the glimpse of the bright *salr* at *Gimlé*. This narrative line forms a movement through different 'rooms' which can be understood as figurative expressions of mental 'rooms' or emotional conditions. As we know, the sun in the vision of *ragnarök* goes black and disappears in the ocean before the new earth emerges. In some glimpses the last part of the poem gives a picture of this world, where the *salr* at *Gimlé* is *sólo fegra*, 'more beautiful than the sun'. This can be understood as a vision of 'ideality', of 'eternity', or should we say, of 'heaven'. Thus we can interpret the sun stretching its right arm around the 'edge of heaven' as a reference to this final vision. The beginning both suggests and conceals what will follow, and a complete understanding of the beginning is not available until we have reached the end. In this manner the poem also manifests itself as an artistic composition, as a work of art.

My next example is some stanzas from the second poem in the manuscript, *Hávamál*. I will not discuss here whether this poem is composed as a poetic unity or put together from different materials by a scribe or an editor, but just look at one part of it. The part I have in mind (stanzas 96-110) tells the two love-stories leading to the acquisition of the mead of poetry. Commenting on the last of these stories, scholars usually refer to Snorri's 'version' in his younger Edda. Snorri's myth in *Skaldskaparmál* (ch. 5-6) tells how *Óðinn*

obtains the mead of poetry by seducing the daughter of the giant *Suttungr*. By means of the auger Rati he bores an opening through the rock, and by turning himself into a snake he gets access to *Suttungr's* dwelling so that he can bring the mead with him out. I will look briefly at some of the elements of the poem's version of the story, in order to show how I think Snorri 's myth can be understood as a translation of the poetic language into the language of myth.

I start with some comments on the first story, that of *Billings mey*. This woman has been interpreted in different ways, both as daughter and wife of *Billingr*, who is explained by Gering as a giant like *Suttungr*, the father of *Gunnlōð* (Gering 1927: 124). But Gering also notes that *billingr* means 'twin'. I think it could be a possible interpretation to read *Billings mey* as a reference to a 'twin woman', that is, the twin of the man who finds her sleeping in her bed, *sólhvitr*. Maybe you will find this interpretation too daring, but my suggestion is that this way of naming the woman can be understood as a reference or allusion to the myth of love told by Aristophanes in Plato's dialogue *Symposion*, where man and woman originally were two parts of the same being. After having been divided, the parts will be striving for a reunion, and this search is what we call love. In *Háv.*, the 'reunion' with the twin does not, however, lead up or back to an original ideality, as was the hope of the ancient Greeks, but to a fall and to struggle. Maybe this can be understood as the poem's way of marking a distance to the pre-Christian ideas of antiquity? The Christian idea of division and fall has, as we know, quite another character. The following shows that *Háv.* rather reflects this idea of an inner division or splitting. Next stanza says, for instance: *Auk nær apni/ skaltu, Óðinn, koma...* (98/1-2). Like Gering I think *auk* in this connection should be understood as 'more', not 'again'. Stressing the importance of coming back as 'more', or should we say coming back 'stronger', the point of the poem seems to be that the man who is searching for the woman sleeping *sólhvitr* in the bed is lacking something, which is also in my eyes confirmed by what is said afterwards, in the much discussed second part of the stanza:

...  
alt ero óskop  
nema einir viti  
slíkan lqst saman

(98/4-6). If such a 'defect', or maybe 'desire', is not 'belonging to' or affecting 'both together' (*einir saman*), everything will be 'disorder' (*óskop*). Grammatically *einir saman* must be understood as a reference to two masculines, also confirms that this can be understood as a statement of the consequences of the man's split mind. Although this is not analogous to Eve tempting Adam with the apple, we can see that the place where the man finds the woman, the bed, together with the epithet *sólhvitr*, and her being asleep, are elements that are pointing to a kind of slumbering bodily condition, connected with sensuality and unconsciousness.

Before I turn to the next story, I would like to comment briefly on two elements that suggest the further development of this relation. Stanza 100 tells of *vígdrótt ǫll um vakin* which is contrasted by *saldrótt um sofin* in the next stanza (101/3). The ‘fighting troop all awake’ has become a ‘sleeping household’, or, the struggle has come to an end. And finally the poem also tells us that the ‘good woman’ is replaced by a ‘bitch’. I think this bitch tied to the bed should be understood metaphorically, figuring a bit of the same state as the ‘sleeping household’. In other words: The sunbright woman he first found was wakened and stirred to fight by the man who came to her bed and then just left her. This the waking *vígdrótt* tells us. In this manner she was a ‘good woman’. *Saldrótt um sofin* points to a condition of sleep, which leaves a free way to her bed. Tied to the bed, or should we say enslaved by desire or lust, she becomes a ‘bitch’. *Ek* telling this story concludes by stating that he got nothing from this woman, nothing but humiliation (102). After referring this experience, the poem states the importance of language in a proverbial stanza (103), then in the next is telling that ‘I’ was searching the old giant *Suttungr*, ‘*Suð-þungr*’ (104). This we could call a prosopopeia, figuring the experience of heavy sorrow. In these ‘halls of heavy sorrow’ ‘I’ gained little by being silent. So, to his own advantage he spoke ‘many words’, or: by means of the language he managed to get out from these ‘halls’, or condition of sorrow.

Then we come to *Gunnlǫð* (105) and the next story, and I will look a bit closer at the stanzas 105-107. As the name says *Gunnlǫð* is an ‘invitation to battle or struggle’ (by the combination of the elements *gunnr* (*guðr*), ‘battle’ and *lǫð*, ‘invitation’). This woman gave *Óðinn* a drink of the ‘precious mead’ on a ‘golden chair’, which seems to be something quite different from what he gained from the bitch in the bed. *Ek*, however, gave in return *ill iðgjöld*. The woman had to pay for her gift with her *heila hugar* and *svára sefa*, with her ‘whole mind and heavy heart’.

The next stanza tells about *rata munnr*, which is thought to be the ‘auger’ Snorri is referring to, boring a hole through a stone wall in *Suttung*’s dwelling. According to the poem, however, this seems rather to be something boring inside the ‘I’. The poem says:

Rata munn  
létomk rúms um fá  
ok um grjót gnaga,  
...

(106/1-3). *Létomk* must be the same as *lét ek mér*, (also Gering), and then this *rata munnr* should be something that is ‘let to have room in me’. As we see, there is no stony wall either. The stone (*grjót*) also seems to be inside the *ek* or ‘I’, expressing a hardness which is now bored by means of this *rata munnr*. *Rata* means to ‘roam’ or ‘rove’, a semantic element often repeated in the corpus. If you are roaming you may also fall, and that is (according to De Vries) another possible meaning of the verb. So this ‘auger’ can be a figurative

expression of the effect on *ek* of his roaming or falling: something gnawing like a mouth through his hardness. And this ‘stony’ condition at the beginning, a condition which is changed through an overthrowing movement, or a ‘fall’, could have its analogue in the sun’s movement through the different *salir* in *Vsp.*, which I have already mentioned.

What is gained, is stated in the next stanza as *Óðrerir*. How this comes about is discussed among scholars. *Vel keyptz litar/hefi ek vel notit/fás er fróðdom vant*,...is the first statement of the poem (107/1-3). Gering (following Richert) thinks *litar*, should be understood as ‘a poetic circumlocution for *Gunnlǫð*, as an expression of ‘beauty’. Then the first line should mean: ‘der glücklich erworbenen Schönheit’, as an expression of how the mead was gained by *Óðinn*’s seduction of *Gunnlǫð* (Gering 1927: 128). I think this needs some more interpretation, and I think *two* semantic elements are of special interest in these lines: *litar* and *vel*. *Litar*, a form of *litr*, ‘colour’, ‘hue’ (also Evans 1986: 121), must be a reference to the outward appearance or what we could call the sensual and living aspect of a human being. I think we have the same word in the third element given to Ask and Embla in *Vsp.* (...), *lá ok lito góða* (18/8). So what is ‘bought’ and ‘enjoyed’ or ‘used with advantage’ is the ‘sensuality’. But in what way? *Vel* in *vel keyptz* can also be understood in different ways, as Gering says, or as *vél* with a long vowel. Then the expression could mean ‘bought by fraud’ rather than ‘glücklich erworben’ (La Farge and Tucker 1992). And is not that just what is said in stanza 105: *Ill iðgjöld* was what he gave her for the precious mead. To make it even more complex: *Vél* with a long vowel, has a double meaning. It also means ‘skill’ or ‘work of art’. And by this double meaning *vél* points to the same connection between the acquisition of the gift of poetry and ‘fraud’, as does also the whole stanza. *Vel keyptz.../vel notit* thus is a figure that is emphatically stressing this special and quite interesting double aspect of *vél*.

The name of the mead adds further information: According to De Vries, *Óðrerir* means ‘der den Geist zur Extase erregt’ (De Vries 1962). It is what ‘sætter sjælen i bevægelse’, ‘moves the soul’ says *Lexicon Poeticum*. In my opinion, translating *óðr* as ‘Geist’ or ‘soul’, implies an interpretation. According to *Vsp.* *óðr* is the element given to Ask and Embla by *Hæmir* (18), while *qnd* is given by *Óðinn*. So maybe we should just let it mean ‘rage’, or ‘excitement’? What the poem tells us then is possibly that *óðr*, the ‘rage’ has been moved by *litr*, and so by *vél* as a third component referring to both ‘fraud’ and ‘art’ *Óðrerir* is brought up to *alda véð jarðar*, ‘men’s (holy) homes on earth’. According to the last statement this acquisition of *Óðrerir* by *vél* implies that something is brought up from the underground and has become a kind of joint ownership of men.

Is this the same story that Snorri tells us? According to the poem *Gunnlǫð* is not *Suttungs* daughter, *rata munnr* is no auger, *grjót* is not a stony wall. Or could it be? If we look at the elements in Snorri’s myth as a translation from the

poetic language to the language of myth, we will see that maybe it is in a way the same story. But before I explain how I think this could be so, I must say something about how I think this last story is related to the foregoing story of *Billings mey*. I think we here have to do with a kind of self-reflexive repetition. As von See has pointed out, the story of *Billings mey* is framed as the experience of the 'I' by the lines *þat ek þá reynda...*, *þá ek þat reynda* (96, 102) (von See 1972: 56). This experience is referred to in both stanzas as an experience of getting nothing, or of a loss. And this naturally leads the 'I' into the halls of *Suttungr*, 'the heavy sorrow'. By means of language, by 'many words' as is said in stanza 104, the 'I' gets out from these halls. What is told afterwards, in the new story, is perhaps not the story of another woman, but the story of how the experience is transformed into poetry. The story of *Billings mey* is thus the experience which by the story of *Gunnlǫð* is given back or reshaped as poetry. (As a transformation of an experience of loss this is also connected to a long and well known tradition of how melancholy is regarded as a source of poetry). And this transformation from experience to poetry the 'new' story both tells or refers to, and shows or symbolizes. As I have already mentioned it tells how 'the colours' bought by 'fraud' or *vel*, brings about poetry, and it tells how *Gunnlǫð* is paying for this with her wounded heart. Furthermore, this leap from experience to poetry is shown or symbolized by several elements, for instance the bed from the story of experience is turned into a golden chair, the struggle of the 'good woman' into this new woman called *Gunnlǫð*, and the experience of having 'nothing but humiliation' has become a *drykk ins dýra mjaðar*, a 'drink of the precious mead'. In this way the poem also confirms its character as a work of art that by the poetic language is both referring to and symbolizing what it is about.

By a new repetition this transformation is also further developed in stanza 110. By the contribution of *Óðinn* an element from the 'high' sphere is added. When this is combined with what is gained from 'down' by the upbringing of *Óðrerir*, the mead, now named *sumbl*, is gained: *Suttung svikinn! hann lét sumbli frá! ok grætta Gunnlǫðo* (110/4-6). But I have to stop here.

Now we can return to Snorri and ask: Is not this interpretation also Snorri's interpretation when he calls *Gunnlǫð Suttung's* daughter? In the concentrated narrative of the myth this is an image of how she is a product of *Suttungr*, or of the 'heavy sorrow'. In the same way I think we can see how the other elements in Snorri's narrative can be understood as translations of the poetic language into myth. For instance *rata munnr*, as an auger boring a hole for the snake, is the mythological way of telling about the erotic 'meeting' -- or should we say 'sin'? And the stone wall which blocks the way into *Suttung's* dwelling is the myth's concentrated image of how hard it is to get through to the 'place' of sorrow. 'The same but different' must be the right characteristic when we compare these two texts. The myth has no *ek* or 'I'. The poem's reference to the inner state of an 'I' is here transformed to an outer mythological world of

animate beings.

Finally a third example, this time from the last of the mythological poems in the manuscript, *Alvíssmál*, which is a verbal duel between *Alvíss* and *þórr*. Again the stone forms a part of the beginning. Usually it is also understood to constitute a central element of the end of the poem, which then takes us from stone to stone, so to speak. I will try with a few comments to question this interpretation. *Alvíss* is, as he introduces himself in the beginning of the poem, a dwarf living under the earth and under a stone: *á ek undir steini stað*, he says (3/3), which to me sounds like a distressful condition of life. This seems to be confirmed by *þórr* when he comments upon his looking pale as death and thus not *til brúðar borinn* not ‘born to have a bride’(2/6). As his name suggests, *Alvíss* has enough knowledge, but now he also, according to his demand in the first stanza, wants to bring a bride back home with him. After an interesting discussion, which I will not comment on here, the duellers come to an agreement. If *Alvíss* can tell *þórr* the name of different phenomena in all worlds, he will not be ‘denied’ his bride. These questions and answers constitute the mainpart of the poem. I will proceed straight to the last stanza. *Alvíss* has answered the final question and *þórr*, after stating that he never saw *fleira forna stafí*, more ‘staves’, ‘words’ or ‘ancient lore’ in one bosom, tells *Alvíss* that he is betrayed: *...uppi ertu, dvergr, um dagaðr! nú skínn sól í sali!*, are the last words of the poem (35/6-7). The conclusion is usually understood as an expression of how the dwarf, by being kept up till dawn, has been betrayed and will be turned into stone. This interpretation is based on what happens to such figures in the fairy tales or in the myths. But once again, this is a poem. What the poem says is: *...uppi ertu, dvergr, um dagaðr!*, ‘you are up in the day, dwarf’. And why should this dwarf living under the stone in the beginning, just become a stone in the end? That the meaning of the poem is more complex is, furthermore, suggested in a quite sophisticated manner by the last line: *...nú skínn sól í sali!* Does not this line also remind us of the beginning of the first poem, *Vsp.*? There it was stated that the sun throws its right arm around the edge of heaven, still not knowing its *salr*. Does not this suggest that the edge of heaven, represented by *Gimlé*, is not the sun’s ultimate stop – a reading which is also suggested by the epitet *sólo fegra*, ‘more beautiful than the sun’? Could it not be that the sun (the poetic light, so to speak) is stretching its arms over the entire poetic corpus, finding finally its *salr* by bringing the dwarf up from the underground, in the final stanza of the last mythological poem of the Codex Regius? In that way, the rounded or circular structure of work of art is reopened at the moment of its closure by the suggestion of a new beginning.

## References

- De Vries, J. (1962): *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Leiden.  
 Dronke, U.(1997): *The Poetic Edda*, Volume II Mythological Poems, Clarendon Press, Oxford.  
 Evans, D.A.H.( 1986): *Hávamál*, Viking Society for Northern Research, University College,

London.

Gering, H. (1927): *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, Götterlieder (v. B. Sijmons), Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, Halle (Saale).

La Farge, B., Tucker, J. (1992): *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*, Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg.

*Lexicon Poeticum*, (1966): (Opr. forf. av Sveinbjörn Egilsson), 2.utg. v. Finnur Jónsson, København.

Von See, K.: (1972): *Die Gestalt der Hávamál: Eine Studie zur Eddischen Spruchdichtung*, Frankfurt/Main, Athenäum.

# The Bridal-Quest Narratives in *Piðreks saga* and the German *Waltharius* Poem as an Extension of the Rhenish Bridal-Quest Tradition

Claudia Bornholdt

Indiana University Bloomington

*Piðreks saga* contains six tales which are generally assigned to the bridal-quest genre. In the order of Bertelsen's edition,<sup>1</sup> these tales are:

1. "Samson and Hildisvið" (I, 8-13)
2. "Ósantrix and Oda" (I, 49-56)
3. "Attila and Erka" (I, 57-73)
4. "Herburt and Hildir" (II, 47-60)
5. "Apollonius and Herborg" (II, 109-142).
6. "Íron and Bolfriana" (II, 147-157).

Additionally, the saga contains four well-known tales which do not go beyond simple wooing stories and are therefore not included in the list above:

- A. "Sigmundr and Sisibe" (I, 282-286)

---

<sup>1</sup> Henrik Bertelsen, *Piðriks saga af Bern*, 2 vols, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, Vol. 34 (Copenhagen: 1905-11).

- B. "Gunnar and Brynhildr" (II, 37-43)
- C. "Þiðrekr, Fasold and Þéttleifr's marriages with three of Drusian's daughters" (II, 60-63)
- D. "Attila and Grímhildr" (II, 275-279).

In brief, the bridal-quest scheme consists of the introduction of the protagonists; the hero's decision to woo for a princess, who has been recommended to him but is well-protected and difficult to obtain; the wooer's journey to the girl's country; his stay at the girl's court until he has reached such a reputable position that he is able to meet secretly with the girl; the wooer's proposal; elopement; pursuit by the girl's father and/or his army; a fight, and, finally, the wedding in the wooer's home country.

*Þiðreks saga* contains the largest collection of bridal-quest narratives in a single medieval work. It outnumbers even the more famous corpus of medieval German bridal-quest epics, the so-called German *Spielmannsepen* or minstrel epics.<sup>2</sup> These minstrel epics and also the bridal-quest plots contained in the German *Nibelungenlied* and *Kudrun* epic traditionally serve as the basis for studies of medieval (German and Scandinavian) bridal-quest narrative. With the exception of "Ósantrix and Oda" and its connection with *König Rother*, however, the bridal-quest stories contained in *Þiðreks saga* are often neglected in scholarly discussions of the genre.<sup>3</sup> In more recent studies, the saga's bridal-quest and wooing tales played an important role in the discussion of the saga's transmission and structure. These studies, however, were limited to the position of the individual tales in the saga, but did not look at the tales' transmission and possible origin. In this paper, I will look at the saga's bridal-quest stories in connection with the earliest German material and show that the stories in *Þiðreks saga* stem from an old Franconian bridal-quest tradition. This study will, on the one hand, firmly place this saga's bridal-quest tales in the discussion of the bridal-quest genre, and, on the other hand, give additional support to the Northwest German heritage of the material that has been incorporated into the saga.

The first bridal-quest tale, "Samson and Hildisvið," is only contained in the later Icelandic (AB) and Swedish manuscripts (Sv). In these works the remaining bridal-quest stories are arranged in the order given above (Bertelsen's order). Ósantrix and Attila's quests, which belong to *Vilkinasaga*, are narrated fairly early in the saga, whereas "Herburt and Hildr," "Apollonius and Herborg," as well as "Íron and Bolfriana" are incorporated as a block in the middle of the work. In the Norwegian parchment manuscript Mb<sub>3</sub>, however, *Vilkinasaga* is placed right after Herburt's quest, so that all of the bridal-quest stories are grouped together:

<sup>2</sup> The German minstrel epics are: *König Rother*, *St. Oswald*, *Ortnit*, *Orendel*, *Salman and Morolf*, and the Hugdietrich story in *Wolfdietrich B*.

<sup>3</sup> The rather late Yiddish *Dukus Horant* must be read in connection with the Hilde and *Kudrun* tradition.

1. "Herburt and Hildir"
2. "Ósantrix and Oda"
3. "Attila and Erka"
4. "Apollonius and Herborg"
5. "Íron and Bolfriana."

The great number of bridal-quest tales in the saga is astonishing and seems rather unmotivated. Thomas Klein offered an interpretation of the saga that attempts to integrate these stories into the saga structure. According to Klein, the sequence of stories in Mb<sub>3</sub> is original and forms the middle part of a proposed tripartite saga structure that is divided into youth, marriage, and death (*Jugend—Heirat—Tod*).<sup>4</sup> If this interpretation is correct, the question remains why no more than two of the bridal-quest stories in *Piðreks saga* are connected with the saga's hero Piðrekr: "Samson and Hildisvið," which is also the opening tale of the saga, and "Herburt and Hildir."<sup>5</sup> The first tale gives some genealogical background information about Piðrekr's alleged grandparents, telling us about Samson's elopement with Hildisvið from her father's court. "Herburt and Hildir" is the story of Piðrekr's bridal-quest going awry, since his messenger Herburt elopes with the bride himself. With the exception of the initial set-up of the quest, Piðrekr does not intervene in the events, which are not elaborated on any further. Herburt and Hildir disappear from the saga and the failed bridal-quest does not have any consequences for Herburt or Piðrekr. On the contrary, after this quest has failed, we learn that Piðrekr marries one of King Drusian's daughters as do his two companions Fasold and Þéttleifr. If we consider the number of bridal-quest tales in the saga, it is surprising that Piðrekr's marriage is not told in a bridal-quest scheme but is merely mentioned *en passant*.

The saga's other bridal-quest stories are even more loosely connected with Piðrekr: "Ósantrix and Oda" and "Attila and Erka" are part of *Vilkinasaga*; Attila's wooing for Grímhildir and Gunnar's quest for Brynhildir, both not fully developed bridal-quest plots, belong to the Niflung/Nibelung tradition; and Sigmundur's briefly described wooing for Sisibe belongs to the tradition of stories about Siegfried/Sigurðr's youth.

The last two tales, "Apollonius and Herborg" and "Íron and Bolfriana," seem to have been independent tales that were included in the saga for no apparent reason other than their entertainment value. The former received the name of its protagonist from the Greek romance *Apollonius of Tyre* which was

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Klein, "Zur Piðreks saga," *Arbeiten zur Skandinavistik: Sechste Arbeitstagung der Skandinavisten des deutschen Sprachgebietes: 26.9.-1.10. 1983 in Bonn*, Ed. Heinrich Beck (Frankfurt/Main, et.al.: Lang, 1983), pp. 521-25.

<sup>5</sup> Susanne Kramarz-Bein made a similar observation in "Zum Dietrich-Bild der Piðrekssaga," *Arbeiten zur Skandinavistik: Zehnte Arbeitstagung der deutschsprachigen Skandinavistik: 22.-27.9.1991 am Weißenhäuser Strand*, Ed. Bernhard Glienke and Edith Marold (Frankfurt/Main, et.al.: Lang, 1993), p. 113.

already famous in the early Middle Ages and has, for example, influenced some of the episodes in the German *Kaiserchronik* (ca. 1150). The saga's bridal-quest tale, however, does not bear much resemblance to the romance. Since the tale is located in Franconia and shares several motifs with the German minstrel epics, it is possible that it circulated as an independent tale in Franconia before it was incorporated into the saga.

The last bridal-quest story, "Íron and Bolfriana," is linked to the saga only through the guest list at the feast during which the love-story evolves, and, secondly, through the fact that Þiðrekr finds the dead Earl Íron at the end. I have my doubts about including this tale in the list of bridal-quest stories, because it is rather a tale of adultery, deceit, and trickery.

The tale which is the focus of this paper, "Valtari and Hildigunnr," was not included in the initial list of bridal-quest stories in *Þiðreks saga* given above, but it certainly contains all the motifs inherent in this genre. Structurally, it plays the same role as the two bridal quests in *Vilkinasaga*. It follows Ósantrix and Attila's quests in all of the manuscripts, so that it appears fairly early in AB, whereas it is part of the block of bridal-quest tales in Mb<sub>3</sub> (where it stands between the *Vilkinasaga* and the Apollonius tale).<sup>6</sup> This placement in Mb<sub>3</sub> might be a first indication that the tale was indeed considered bridal quest. Additional support for this hypothesis is supplied by the tradition of the tale's content.

The oldest and best-known version of the "Walter and Hildegunde" tale is the German *Waltharius* poem, whose provenance, date of composition, and transmission are still much debated.<sup>7</sup> All we know with certainty is that this Latin poem was composed in a German monastery in either the ninth or tenth century and that it contains a multitude of allusions to the classical tradition, direct quotations from classical authors, as well as very early written evidence of some of the main protagonists of the Nibelung/Niflung tradition. Various hypotheses have been proposed with respect to the poem's original form and content. It has variously been interpreted as an original composition by a German monk (F. Panzer, F. Genzmer), as a translation and alternation of an old Germanic heroic lay (K. Langosch) of either Langobardic (W. Regeniter),

<sup>6</sup> The tale is missing in the extant parts of Mb<sub>2</sub>. The different placement of the *Vilkinasaga* and "Valtari and Hildigunnr" has led to several theories. Bertelsen argues that the order in Mb<sub>2</sub> is the original order and that this order has been reintroduced in the later copies AB (*Om Didrik af Berns sagas oprindelige skikkelse, omarbejdelse og håndskrifter* [Copenhagen, 1902], p.147). D. von Kralik, on the other hand, claims that *Vilkinasaga* and "Valtari and Hildigunnr" have been added to the saga only later and that the composer moved their position from the beginning of the saga to the middle part (*Die Überlieferung und Entstehung der Thidrekssaga* [Halle/Saale, 1931], pp. 11, 89). Klein, finally, regards the order in Mb<sub>3</sub> as most original and intended by the saga composer. He argues that this order was no longer understood by later copyists and redactors of the work so that they moved some of the stories. (*Zur Þiðreks saga*, pp. 520-43).

<sup>7</sup> The Walter story in *Þiðreks saga* is loosely connected with the saga proper through family relations that are not known in other versions of the tale: Valtari is introduced as Ermanrikr's nephew and Hildigunnr is the daughter of King Ilias of Greece.

German (K. Langosch), or as of Gothic-Mediterranean (R. Menéndez Pidal, P. Dronke, V. Millet) origin. I would like to propose, however, that the poem is an early example of bridal-quest narrative and key evidence for the existence of an early Franconian bridal-quest tradition. Additional evidence for this tradition is contained in Franconian and Langobardic chronicles. Most important are the tales about King Clovis's wooing for the Burgundian princess Clotild, which is contained in the so-called *Chronica Fredegarii* (finished ca. 640)<sup>8</sup> and, in a slightly different version, also in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* (finished 727).<sup>9</sup> Another early bridal-quest tale is King Authari's wooing for the Bavarian princess Theudelinda which Paul the Deacon relates in his *Historia Langobardorum* (end of eighth century).<sup>10</sup> A brief outline of *Waltharius* in which I have focused on the main bridal-quest motifs will serve to illustrate my claim:

- The hero Waltharius and his bride Hildegunde are of noble birth.
- Waltharius lives at a foreign court where his bride lives well protected and guarded.<sup>11</sup>
- At this court the hero establishes a position of high reputation and trust for himself so that he can meet with his bride without arousing any suspicion.
- At the highpoint of Waltharius' career, the couple meets alone in a chamber; the girl passes a glass of wine to the hero whereupon he touches and kisses her hand.
- The hero proposes to the girl and reveals his plan to elope from the court, but the girl hesitates and questions the seriousness of his intentions.
- After Hildegunde has been convinced, she admits her love for Waltharius and both proceed to plan their escape by means of a trick.
- During a feast, Waltharius and Hildegunde serve so much wine to the king and his retinue that they all fall asleep.
- The couple rides off during the night, taking a treasure with them.
- Waltharius has to fight and defeat twelve attackers after he has crossed the Rhine. He then returns to his home country where he marries Hildegunde.

The *Waltharius* poem clearly develops according to the bridal-quest scheme given at the beginning of this paper. However, it seems to lack two important

<sup>8</sup> Fredegar, *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici libri iv cum continuationibus*, ed. Bruno Krusch, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. 2 (Hannover, 1888), pp. 99-100.

<sup>9</sup> *Liber historiae Francorum*, ed. Bruno Krusch, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. 2 (Hannover 1888), pp. 253-59.

<sup>10</sup> Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, ed. L. Bethmann and G. Waitz, : *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec VI-IX* (Hannover, 1878), pp. 109-10.

<sup>11</sup> In *Waltharius* Attila and his wife Ospirin take on the same function the girl's parents have in other bridal-quest narratives.

bridal-quest motifs: First of all, Walter does not travel to the girl's court in order to woo her, but rather lives as a hostage with Hildegunde to whom he had been betrothed as a child. Secondly, Walter does not fight against the girl's protector and/or his army (i.e. the Huns) who have pursued the runaways. Instead he is attacked by the Franconian King Guntharius and his former fellow-hostage and friend Haganus.

These two deviations from the bridal-quest scheme, however, are only present in the *Waltharius* poem, whereas they are missing from the remaining versions of the Walter story. In "Valtari and Hildigunnr," the two Middle High German Walter fragments (Vienna 12d-13d), and in the allusions to the story that are contained in *Biterolf and Dietleib* (lines 575-8) the couple is attacked by the pursuing Huns, and only the MHG Walter fragments contain a very vague reference to an earlier betrothal of the couple, of which Walter, however, had no previous knowledge (Graz fragment).<sup>12</sup> Considering the outline given above and the alternate versions of the tale, it is safe to conclude that the Walter story was indeed composed according to the bridal-quest scheme and circulated in that form. The *Waltharius* poem is only one variation of the tale, which, as its extant literary witnesses from Anglo-Saxon, Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, and Poland document, circulated widely in medieval Europe. Furthermore, *Waltharius* is not necessarily the immediate source of "Valtari and Hildigunnr" in *Piðreks saga*, because the latter is in many respects much more closely related to the MHG Walter fragments and to the allusions contained in the MHG epics than to *Waltharius*, although none of these texts can be singled out as its source text. The saga version is an independent example of what I call the Walter tradition. The saga composer must have been quite familiar with this tradition, since its influence is also visible in other bridal-quest tales of the saga.

The second part of the "Herburt and Hildir" tale, for example, seems to be modeled on the Walter story as well. To develop a plan for their escape, Herburt and Hildir use a trick in which alcohol plays a major role: Hildir makes her father drunk and then obtains his promise to make Herburt her steward so that he can spend all his time close to her. Eventually, the couple rides away into the woods on two horses. Hildir's father sends his retainers after them (led by the knight Hermann) and gives orders to bring back Herburt's head (as in "Valtari and Hildigunnr"). When Herburt hears the pursuers approaching, he does not suspect any danger but rather assumes that Hildir's father has sent knights to accompany the couple on their journey. This feeling of safety, which may also be called naïvety, is familiar from *Waltharius*, where Walter initially also assumes that the approaching Franconian army won't do him any harm. In both stories it is the woman who convinces the hero of the seriousness of the events.

---

<sup>12</sup> Quotes from Marion D. Learned, *The Saga of Walther of Aquitaine* (Westport: Greenwood, 1892) and *Biterolf und Dietleib*, Ed. Oskar Jänicke, Deutsches Heldenbuch I (Berlin, Zürich: Weidmann, 1866).

Both heroes defeat twelve attackers and have their brides dress their wounds before they continue their journeys.

Motifs known from *Waltharius* also occur in “Samson and Hildisvið”: Samson lives at the girl’s court because he is one of her father’s retainers. After his daughter’s elopement, the girl’s father feels *harmar*, but is unable to react to the events (in *Waltharius* Attila is torn between sadness and anger but remains passive) and, last, but not least, Samson and Hildisvið escape into the woods on horseback with a treasure.

A comparison with the corpus of the German minstrel epics reveals that the tales in *Piðreks saga* and the Walter tradition have two main motifs in common that set them off from the German epics: the first is the importance of alcohol for the successful elopement and the second the couple’s escape on horseback. In the *Waltharius* poem, the trick that allows the couple to escape is based exclusively on overindulgence. The motif is weakened in the saga version, but here Valtari still proposes his escape plan to Hildigunnr during a banquet (*þat er i dag at veizla rik er i grasgarði attila konungs oc danz ríkr*, *Ps.*106). In “Herbert and Hildir,” Hildir drinks with her father to win Herbert as her steward and in “Attila and Erka” the girl elopes with Attila’s messenger “one night after the king and all his men had gone to sleep after drinking much wine” (*ok æitt kvælld er konongr var sofnaðr ok aðr miok drukkin af vini ok aller hans mænn* [*Ps.* 70]). Furthermore, the secret conversation between the two lovers Íron and Bolfriana is only possible because Íron drinks moderately, whereas all the other guests at the feast have fallen asleep from too much wine (*hann gair litt at drecka um kuellit...allir menn arir drecka oc eru katir oc um sidir legiaz allir dauð drucknir niðr næma jron jarll oc bolfriana* [*Ps.* 148]).

The second motif that is shared between the Walter story and all the bridal-quest stories in *Piðreks saga* is the couple’s escape on horseback. That motif only occurs in *Ortnit*, which is in many respects closely related to the Walter tradition and most likely of Northern heritage, but is missing from the other German epics where the couple usually escapes on ships. Possible sources for these two motifs that appear only in the saga’s bridal-quest stories and in the Walter tradition are contained in the Franconian chronicle tradition, especially in Gregory of Tours’ *Historia Francorum*.<sup>13</sup> One example that has already been pointed out by Joaquín Pizarro is the Attalus tale in the *Historia Francorum* (III, 15), which is narrated according to the bridal-quest scheme. Surprisingly, this tale shows many similarities with the Walter story and some of the tales in *Piðreks saga*, as this brief summary shows:<sup>14</sup>

Attalus, the nephew of St. Gregory, lives as a hostage in the house of a

<sup>13</sup> Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, “A ‘Brautwerbung’ Variant in Gregory of Tours: Attalus’ Escape from Captivity,” *Neophilologus* 62 (1978), 109-18.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historiarum Libri Decem*, 2 vol., Ed. Bruno Krusch, 7<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. By Rudolf Buchner, Tr. W. Giesebrecht (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988).

noble Frank in Trier. His uncle's retainer Leo disguises himself as a cook and is taken in by the Frank whose trust he slowly gains. After a year has passed, Leo approaches Attalus in a secret conversation during which both men lie with their backs to each other in a meadow. After a banquet they use the excuse of alcohol to fetch Attalus' sword and weapons and ride away on two horses. They are attacked while they are trying to cross the Moselle, but escape successfully and eventually return home to Gregory.

The *Historia Francorum* also contains several examples of stories that recall the use of alcohol in *Waltharius* and in the bridal-quest tales in *Þiðreks saga*: the slaying of the Frank Andarchius after he and his men have fallen asleep from drinking too much wine (*Hist. Franc.* IV, 46), Queen Fredegunde's order to kill three Franks who have fallen asleep after a feast, and, finally, the killing of Lupus (*Hist. Franc.* X, 27), a citizen of Tours, whom his wife murders after he has fallen asleep drunk and who is then burned in the hall she ignited (*Hist. Franc.* VI, 13). This last tale recalls the most famous slaying after a feast and burning of a hall, namely, Guðrun's revenge on Atli in *Atlakviða*. The similarities between the eddic poem and *Waltharius* have in fact been frequently pointed out, but, to the best of my knowledge, a connection between *Waltharius* and the tales in the *Historia Francorum* has never been established.

Gregory of Tours was familiar with most of the short tales he integrated into his chronicle through hearsay, and it is safe to assume therefore that there existed a very lively oral tradition of these tales in the sixth but also in subsequent centuries. That this oral tradition also comprised bridal-quest tales is indicated by the Attalus tale, which is clearly structured according to the bridal-quest scheme. Interestingly, the story is one of the few tales in the *Historia Francorum* which is set in Austrasia, more specifically in Trier. It might be mere coincidence that this oldest example of German bridal-quest narrative comes from the city that produced at least two of the thirteenth-century German bridal-quest epics, namely *Orendel* and *Wolfdietrich*, but it is also possible that these later works are the products of an old bridal-quest tradition in that region. The transmission of the "Clovis and Clotild" tale gives additional evidence for the existence of such a Franconian tradition. The two versions of the tale in the *Chronica Fredegarii* and in the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, which contain various contextual discrepancies, have been entered into the chronicles independently of one another in two different parts of the Franconian realm so that it is generally assumed that the writers knew the tale from oral sources.

To sum up: bridal-quest narrative was known in Franconia as early as the sixth century because the tales that were told and written down at that time already contained most of the stereotyped motifs and structural elements of bridal-quest narrative. The composition and circulation of the *Waltharius* poem and the Walter story in general must be seen in the light of this oral, and partly also written, bridal-quest tradition. Furthermore, the bridal-quest tales in *Þiðreks saga* are closely connected with this tradition. The Walter tradition is

doubtlessly the source for “Valtari and Hildigunnr” but further motific similarities, especially the importance alcohol plays in the tales and the couple’s elopement on horseback, connect the saga’s bridal-quest tales with the Walter story and, subsequently, with the Franconian bridal-quest tradition.

Scholars generally agree that *Piðreks saga* is a compilation of material from Northwest Germany which is otherwise only transmitted in Southern German and Austrian manuscripts. This observation holds true for the bridal-quest tales as well. The majority of the tales incorporated in the saga originated in the Rhenish regions, or at the very least, circulated widely in that area. Further support for this claim comes from *König Rother*, the oldest and “purest” German bridal-quest epic. Though in its complete form extant only in a Bavarian manuscript, the epic most likely is of Franconian or, as Klein claims, even Low German origin.<sup>15</sup> *König Rother* has a relative in *Piðreks saga* in the “Ósantrix and Oda” tale. Because neither of the two works could have served as the immediate source for the other, their connection can best be explained on the basis of a Rhenish bridal-quest tradition which extended from the Franconian to the Low German regions.

---

<sup>15</sup> Klein, pp. 499-507.

## Reflections on the use of narrative form in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*

Trine Buhl

Aarhus universitet

One of the most discussed issues in saga scholarship has been the question of how the sagas came into being. Traditionally, *Hrafnkels saga* was at the heart of this discussion, and has been used to examine questions of saga origin. For decades scholars regarded *Hrafnkels saga* as one of the earliest sagas (written about 1200) because of its stylistic and narrative qualities. More recently the same argument based on style and narrative has reached the opposite conclusion, and dates *Hrafnkels saga* a hundred years later.

Even though there have been different views on the dating of the saga, scholars generally agree that *Hrafnkels saga* is a typical saga. I would like to offer a paper which examines the so-called typical aspects of the saga and the meaning behind its use. My hypothesis is that the saga writer has consciously exploited the narrative form in order to make the saga form interpretative, and that an analysis of these aspects can lead to new information on the dating of the saga.

## *Hamhleypur* in *Þorskfirðinga saga*: a post-classical ironisation of myth?

Phil Cardew

School of Cultural Studies, King Alfred's College, Winchester<sup>1</sup>

The notion of the *hamhleypa*, an individual able to change shape at will, is common enough within Icelandic saga narrative, particularly within fantastic narratives commonly classed as *fornaldarsögur*. These individuals hover on the fringes between the human and the non-human, possessing abilities which are beyond the reach of individuals who operate within the sphere of the natural, but appearing (at least at times) to also share the form of their human protagonists. They are found in narratives such as *Völsunga saga*; narratives which belong to the dim-and-distant past, a world in which the laws of nature – the nature of human life within the Middle Ages – are suspended. A world populated by dragons and trolls; former inhabitants of an earth since taken over by human kind.

The world in which the narrative of *Þorskfirðinga saga* is set is very much

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my grateful thanks to *The British Academy for research in the Humanities* for their kind award of a travel grant in order that I might present this paper to the 11<sup>th</sup> International Saga Conference at the University of Sydney in July 2000.

the world of the Middle Ages, albeit the early Middle Ages. The events narrated in *Porskfirðinga saga* take place only just outside the historical period normally called the *söguöld*<sup>2</sup> A.D. 930-1030. The only reference in the saga to which any form of date may be attached is the statement at the end of chapter 15 that:

Ekki var þessi sætt í saksóknir, því at þessi tíðindi urðu fyrr en Úlfjótr flutti lög til Íslands út<sup>3</sup>

[This truce was not brought to court, because these events took place before [that time] when Úlfjótr brought the law out to Iceland.]

Although the dating of this event is not precise, Jón Jóhannesson suggests that in the *Konungsannáll Úlfjótr* is said to have arrived in Iceland in A.D. 927.<sup>4</sup> This is enough to give us a context for the action of *Porskfirðinga saga*. It takes place before the establishment of the Alþingi, and, certainly, before Christianity reached Iceland. Yet it takes place after the semi-mythical world of pre-history in which the *fornaldarsögur* are set; this is the world of the *fortidssagaer*<sup>5</sup> rather than that of the *oldtidssagaer*.<sup>6</sup>

In one way, the setting of the saga within an historical framework earlier than that normally found within the *Íslendinga sögur* allows the saga more freedom with respect to those supernatural and fantastic elements that form part of its narrative. However, this freedom in no way tinges the naturalistic narrative of events taking place within Iceland. Whilst there are no law courts in which the characters may engage in legal conflict, there is a scrupulous sense of fair play in the settlements that occur after the relevant characters have engaged in battle. A sense of fair play which, moreover, operated within the same constraints as the overtly legal settlements of other, more classical, sagas. As an example, after the first conflict involving Þórir, upon his return to Iceland, when Þórir, Hallsteinn and Hallr have fought a hard battle it is said that:

Hallr bauð þá sættir, ok kom því svá, at hann seldi Hallsteini sjálfðæmi fyrir víg Þórarins. En hann gerði tvau hundruð silfrs; en menn þeir, er fellu við Búlká, skyldu koma fyrir tilfór. En sá, er Þórir vá á Vaðilseyri, var fé bætrr, ok kom þar fyrir Uppsaland, ok skyldi allt ógert, ef Hallr heldi eigi sættina. Fór Hallr við þetta heim ok undi illa við.<sup>7</sup>

[Hallr then offered terms of reconciliation, and arranged things in such a way that he granted to Hallsteinn the right of self-judgement for the killing of Þórarinn, and he fixed the compensation amount at the silver equivalent of two long-hundred ells [of wadmal];

<sup>2</sup> Age of the sagas.

<sup>3</sup> *Porskfirðinga saga*, p.214.

<sup>4</sup> Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, translated by Haraldur Bessason as *A history of the old Icelandic commonwealth* (Winnipeg, 1974), p.40.

<sup>5</sup> In Icelandic the *fortidarsögur*. The phrase is coined, in Danish, by Sigurður Nordal in "Sagalitteraturen", *Litteratur-historie B: Norge og Island* (Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, 1953) pp.180-273. See the discussion of Nordal's generic groups in chapter 1, above.

<sup>6</sup> In Icelandic, *forneskjusögur*.

<sup>7</sup> *Porskfirðinga saga*, p.195.

but those men who fell by the Búlk river were to make up for the attack. But the one whom Þórir killed at Vaðilseyrr, was compensated for with wergild, and for that the land at Uppsálar served as equivalent, and everything would be null and void, if Hallr did not keep the agreement. Hallr went home at that, and was profoundly displeased.]

This settlement, which is entirely typical of the way disputes are arbitrated in the saga, bears all the marks of one arrived at through legal proceedings. The estimation of the value of an individual's death, the granting of *sjálfðæmi* to an aggrieved party, the waiving of compensation because of ambush, or unprovoked attack, and the granting of land as well as money in compensation, are all elements found frequently in other sagas. Another common feature is the dissatisfaction of one side with the settlement, providing an excuse for the disagreement to be re-kindled when the opportunity next arises.

However, the narrative of the saga, whilst dealing in the main part with a fairly natural dispute revolving around land, family loyalty and the control of temple tolls, contains elements which might, at the very least, be considered unusual within a naturalistic setting. Characters travel abroad and meet mound-dwellers and dragons and, within Iceland itself, there are occasional moments of magic and the supernatural, involving shape changing and sorcery. It is the differentiation between these two settings – Iceland and abroad – and the representation of the fantastic within those two settings that is of central interest to this paper.

The main *útanferð* episode within *Þorskfirðinga saga* occurs in chapters three to six, where Þórir Oddsson and his *fóstbræðra* travel abroad in search of fame and fortune. Events narrated within these chapters provide, for many scholars, the most important features of the saga, providing, as they do, links with the 'Bear's son' type of the folktale and thence with the Old English poem *Beowulf*. Such features as can be shown to be held in common between *Þorskfirðinga saga* and the 'Bear's son' type of the folktale are associated more with Beowulf's descent into the *mere*<sup>8</sup> to fight Grendel's mother (*Beowulf*, ll.1492-1643)<sup>9</sup> than with his fight with the dragon at the end of the poem (*Beowulf*, ll. 2460-2751),<sup>10</sup> despite the nature of the adversaries in *Þorskfirðinga saga*.

The *útanferð* narrative of *Þorskfirðinga saga* differs significantly from characteristic representations of the 'Bear's son' tale, particularly as identified by Friedrich Panzer.<sup>11</sup> Þórir is not alone in his quest, and is not chasing after a monster that he has already wounded, as the classic 'Bear's son' scenario would demand. The 'demons' he encounters are, in this case, dragons, who have done little harm to humanity, and are content to sit guarding their hoard in a remote

<sup>8</sup> i.e. "lake".

<sup>9</sup> Fr. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd. ed. (Boston, 1950), pp. 56-61.

<sup>10</sup> *Beowulf*, pp.92-103.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Panzer, *Studien zur germanischen Sagen Geschichte I. Beowulf* (Munich, 1910).

place, away from human habitation.<sup>12</sup> Þórir is guided in his quest by a third party, in the form of Agnarr, the mound-dweller who claims to be his paternal uncle, and it is through Agnarr's agency that he is able to gain the treasure that the dragons are guarding. Agnarr is responsible for the light which enables the companions to find their way through the cave, and which puts the dragons to sleep when it shines upon them, at the same time making the swords apparent to Þórir and his companions. Þórir's companions do not abandon him; those who are with him stay in the cave as long as he does, while those who await him above engage the dragon that flies out of the cave, wounding it with a spear. One of them receives a mortal wound from the blood that gushes from that wound, and the other is severely incapacitated in his foot, so that he is unable to give any assistance to his companions below. Þórir restores him to health with the gloves Agnarr gave him, on his return.

All the changes made in *Þorskfirðinga saga* to Panzer's model tend to have an effect of making the expedition more practical and believable. Þórir and his companions do not dive into a lake or engage their adversaries at its bottom, but climb through a waterfall into a cave behind it. They make elaborate plans in order to accomplish this endeavour which are scrupulous in their practicality in taking account of how the difficult terrain to be overcome. We do not witness a venture in which there is one superhuman hero with loyal followers who allow him to take all the risks and accomplish all the heroic feats. It is true that Þórir is more accomplished than his companions; however, many of them accompany him, and all join him in stabbing the dragons; this is a joint venture with a leader, not the act of a single hero. Þórir's prowess is particularly evident, for he is the only one athletic enough to make the return journey unaided. However, he makes this journey lightly-clad, and drags the treasure and his companions up after him, having left people below who can tie the treasure onto the rope for him.

*Þorskfirðinga saga* seems to have attached great importance to making an unlikely tale plausible and believable. In this respect the narrative follows the path suggested by Vladimir Propp, in his comparison of the treatment of reality in folklore and literature.<sup>13</sup>

In literature, the unusual is depicted as something possible and arouses emotions of horror, rapture, and amazement; we are ready to believe in the events described. In folk prose, the unusual acquires dimensions impossible in life.<sup>14</sup>

Admittedly, the dragons that Þórir and his companions encounter are not part of the everyday, realistic, world. However, everything has been done to provide a

<sup>12</sup> In this respect they are far more like the dragon in *Beowulf*, before it is angered by the theft of part of its hoard and turns on humanity in vengeance for this action.

<sup>13</sup> Propp, Vladimir, trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin, ed. Anatoly Liberman, *Theory and history of folklore* (Manchester, 1984), esp. pp.16-38.

<sup>14</sup> Vladimir Propp, *op. cit.*, p.19.

logical train of events despite the fantastic nature of the monsters encountered. The dragons must be overcome in order for Þórir and his companions to get hold of the treasure; the existence of the treasure has been revealed to Þórir by a third party, Agnarr, who is thus protecting his own hoard of wealth; Þórir has become aware of that hoard of wealth through seeing a strange light in the sky following a fishing trip; Þórir and his companions are engaging in fishing in order to gain some wealth during their trip abroad; Þórir and his companions travelled abroad in search of wealth and adventure. Despite the improbability of the actions undertaken, the logical cause and effect that moves the companions from one scenario to another is ordinary and practical. They react to the circumstances that confront them as the story advances, and behave as we would expect them so to do.

This sense of logicity within the narrative of even the most improbable event within the saga may well have to do with the nature of the characters involved. If we were to use the theory of modes as adapted from Northrop Frye by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards,<sup>15</sup> it would be possible to state that the fundamental difference between the heroic characters of *Völsunga saga* and Þórir is that they function somewhere between the ‘romance’ and ‘myth’ modes of narrative whereas Þórir is placed firmly within the ‘high mimetic’ mode during the *útanferð* episode, slipping back into the ‘low mimetic’ mode only after he returns to Iceland.<sup>16</sup> Þórir is completely human, and therefore requires the assistance of a non-human agency (in the form of Agnarr) in order to confront and overcome the fantastic monsters which he encounters in the cave of Valr the viking.

Þórir’s basic humanity is important as he is, in the words of R.W. Chambers,<sup>17</sup> ‘a historical character; he was one of the early settlers of Iceland’. Chambers’ only authority for this statement is *Landnámabók*, which includes Þórir Oddsson amongst those settlers whose land claims it lists. In terms of the current discussion, it might be less problematic to say that Þórir is presented to

<sup>15</sup> Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Legendary fiction in Medieval Iceland* (Reykjavík, 1971).

<sup>16</sup> This, in itself, provides a useful contrast between the nature of the *útanferð* and Icelandic section of the saga’s narrative. The shift from one to another is, in terms of the rôle of the central character, modal, and illustrates the effects of the combination of narratives from different modal perspectives (we will not, at this stage, go as far as to say genres). This may well be the cause of such explicatory lines within the *útanferð* episode as: “{THORN]eir fundu, at Þórir var allr maðr annarr en hann hafði verit’[They found that Þórir was altogether a different person from what he had been] (Porsfirðinga saga, p.187). That Þórir is “altogether different’ is not obviously explained by the narrative that has led the audience to this point within the saga. Some explanation is therefore required as to why Þórir has moved onto a different level; the explanation for this is that the narrative has shifted modes.

<sup>17</sup> R.W. Chambers, *Beowulf: an introduction to the study of the poem with a discussion of the stories of Offa and Finn*, third edition, with a supplement by C.L. Wrenn (Cambridge, 1959, rpt. 1963), p.459.

us as an historical person by his inclusion within *Landnámabók*.

The *útanferð* incident is also of importance to us, here, because of the nature of the dragons from whom Þórir and his companions take the treasure. These, as the narrative of *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar* makes clear, were once humans - the viking, Valr and his sons, Kötrr and Kisi who, in order to escape capture, fled to the cave with their treasure and turned themselves into dragons.

Valr var í ferð með þeim. Hann greip upp gullkistur tvær. Þær váru svá þungar, at tveir menn höfðu nóg at bera þær. Oddr hljóp eftir honum, en er þeir kómu at fossinum, steypiti Valr sér ofan í hann, ok skildi svá með þeim.

Þá komu þeir at Kötrr ok Kisi, Gaukr ok Haukr, ok sem þeir kómu at fossinum, þa greip Kötrr Hauk, en Kisi Gauk, ok steiptust með þá ofan í fossinn ok drápu þá báða. Hellir stórr var undir fossinum, ok köfuðu þeir feðgar þangat ok lögðust á gullit ok urðu at flugdrekum ok höfðu hjálma á höfðum, en sverð undir bæglum, ok lágu þeir þar, til þess at Gull-Þórir vann fossinn.<sup>18</sup>

[Valr was travelling with them (Kötrr and Kisi). He took up two gold-chests. They were so heavy that two men would have had enough (to do) to carry them. Oddr ran after him, and when they came to the waterfall Valr threw himself down into it, and so they parted.]

Then Kötrr and Kisi, Gaukr and Haukr approached, and when they came to the waterfall, Kötrr grabbed Haukr, and Kisi Gaukr, and fell down with them into the waterfall and killed them both (Gaukr and Haukr). There was a large cave was behind the waterfall and father and sons swam thither and laid themselves on the gold and became flying dragons and had helmets on their heads and swords under their wing-pits, and they lay there until that time when Gull-Þórir overcame the waterfall.]

This form of shape-changing is quite in keeping with our perception of the presentation of the fantastic within a mythic environment. It is very much not in keeping with our perception of Þórir as a *landnámsmaður*. Indeed, the narrative of *Þorskfirðinga saga* displays a similar ambivalence of attitude in its portrayal of similar events within the portion of the saga set in Iceland. The setting of the saga in a pre-Christian society allows for a relative degree of freedom in the practice of what might be considered witchcraft in the saga. Its use is not frowned upon in the same way as it is, say, in *Laxdæla saga*, and its practitioners are not instantly executed. Indeed, there are individuals on both sides who use supernatural forces for their own ends, and for the most part it is only those not on Þórir's side who suffer for it.

Indeed, those instances of the use of some special, supernatural, skill form the only instances of fantastic events occurring within the Icelandic part of the saga. These events are interesting in their mixture of supernatural and naturalistic settings, and in their indication of the possession of strange powers by seemingly ordinary people.

In chapter 10, after the murder of Már Hallvarðsson, the first member of the *föstbræðralag* to die within Iceland, Þórir and some of his *föstbræðr* trap one of

<sup>18</sup> *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar*, pp. 284-5.

the murderers in his house, setting a fire against the door.

... ok er fallin váru flest húsin ok menn gengu út, þeir er grið váru gefin, sá þeir Þórir, at svín tvau hlupu eins vegar frá húsunum, gyltr ok gríss. Þórir þreif einn rapt ór eldinum ok skaut logbrandinum á lær galtanum, ok brotnuðu báðir lærleggirnir, ok fell hann þegar; en er Þórir kom at, sá hann at þar var Askmaðr. Gekk Þórir af honum dauðum, en gyltrin hljóp í skóg, ok var þat Katla.<sup>19</sup>

[... and when most of the buildings had collapsed, and those who had been given quarter came out, Þórir and his companions saw two pigs running from the buildings on one side, a young sow and a hog. Þórir caught up one rafter from the fire, and threw the lighted brand at the thigh of the hog, and both the thigh bones broke, and he fell immediately; and when Þórir came there he saw that it was Askmaðr. Þórir left him dead, but the sow ran into a wood, and it was Katla.]

This is not the only occurrence of shape-changing in the saga. In chapter 14, Þórir comes across two women playing a game of *hnettafl*;<sup>20</sup> one is said to be the daughter of Varði from Vörðufell, an ogress, and the other Kerling, the daughter of Styrkárr in Barmr, a *hamhleypa*, or shape-changing witch. Furthermore, in chapter 17, an incident occurs when Styrkárr and Kerling are attacking Þórir at his home which, if not explicitly an act of shape-changing, certainly contains echoes of the incident quoted above.

Þau gengu frá skipi ofanverða nótt, ok gekk Kerling fyrst í virkit, því at þegar spratt lássinn fyrir henni, er hon kom at; ok er hon kom í virkit, hljóp at henni gyltr mikil ok svá hart í fang henni, at hon fór öfug út af virkinu, ok í því hljóp upp Þuríðr drikinn ok bað Þóri vápnast, segir, at ófriðr var kominn at bænum.<sup>21</sup>

[They went from the ship towards the end of the night and Kerling went into the stronghold first because the lock sprang open at once before her, as she approached; and when she came into the stronghold, a huge young sow rushed at her, and so hard into her arms that she went backwards out of the stronghold, and then Þuríðr drikkin ran up and asked Þórir to get armed, saying that war had come to the farm.]

Even if one does not connect the young sow with Þuríðr drikkin, a connection which has been thought to have some validity,<sup>22</sup> the image of a young sow running out of a besieged house clearly reminds the reader/listener of the earlier incident. That the reference is made obliquely is interesting, suggesting a certain amount of caution in the narrative when dealing with unusual or potentially supernatural events; a caution which might seem somewhat out of place within the fantastic world of the *fornaldarsögur*, but which is very apt within the realistic world of the *Íslendinga sögur*.

Most striking about both these references to shape-changing is that the

<sup>19</sup> *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p.200 - 201.

<sup>20</sup> A game of strategy, not unlike chess.

<sup>21</sup> *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p.216.

<sup>22</sup> Notably by Inger M. Boberg, in her *Motif-index of early Icelandic literature*, (Copenhagen, 1966) who refers to chapter 17 of *Þorskfirðinga saga* under the heading of "D630: Transformation at will".

people who transform themselves do so into domestic animals, which seem to have little in the way of heroic connections. H.E. Ellis Davidson,<sup>23</sup> in a study which deals chiefly with the transformation of individuals into bears and wolves, comments on such incidents that:

Sometimes men and women take the shape of pigs, but such episodes are of a different nature from those concerned with wolves and bears. [...] In the saga stories, the change into a boar or pig is generally used as a means of disguise to avoid attack by enemies [...]. Such stories are of a more conventional kind, and have not the convincing force of the tales of shape-changing [into wolves and bears]. These supernatural instances might, therefore, be deemed more domestic than heroic, and actually be seen to undermine the potential symbolic force they might, otherwise, possess.

Chapter 17 contains three other references to supernatural events, all connected with Kerling Styrkárzdóttir, the *hamhleypa* of chapter 14. On the way over to the encounter discussed above, she hides the attackers' ship with a *huliðshjálmr* [concealment-helmet] so that they cannot be seen crossing the fjord. Then, at the beginning of the attack, Þórir and his men have the worst of it "því at vápn þeira bitu ekki"<sup>24</sup>, until Þuríðr drikkin notices Kerling behaving strangely:

... Kerling fór um völlin at húsbaki ok hafði klæðin á baki sér uppi, en niðri höfuðit, ok sá svá sk[yacute]in á milli fóta sér.<sup>25</sup> Þuríðr hljóp þa út af virkinu ok rann á hana ok þreif í hárit ok reif af aprt hnakkafilluna. ... ok í því tók at bíta vápn Þóris, ok urðu þá mjök skeinusamir.<sup>26</sup>

[... Kerling was going across the field at the back of the house, and had the clothes on her back [pulled] up, and her head down, and was thus looking at the clouds between her legs. Þuríðr then rushed out of the stronghold and leapt upon her and seized hold of her hair and ripped it off at the nape of the neck, backwards. ... and at this [point] Þórir's weapon began to bite, and they [Hallr's men] became highly prone to being wounded.]

This last account, like that of the pig knocking Kerling down, is, in a somewhat morbid sense, rather comical. Although the effect of Kerling's actions is serious (rendering the weapons of her opponents little more than useless) the method

<sup>23</sup> H.R. Ellis Davidson, "Shape-changing in the Old Norse sagas" in Porter, J.R. and W.M.S. Russell, *Animals in folklore* (Ipswich and Cambridge, 1978), pp.126-142.

<sup>24</sup> Because their weapons did not cut

<sup>25</sup> There is an interesting comparison with this ritual to be found in chapter 10 of *Kormáks saga*, wherein the description for the *hólmganga* between Kormákr and Bersi includes the following: "þat váru hólmgöngulög, at feldr skal vera fimm alna i skaut ok lykkjur í hornum; skyldi þar setja niðr hæla þá, er höfuð var á öðrum enda; þat hétu tjösnur; sá er um bjó, skyldi ganga at tjösnunum, svá at sæi himin milli fóta sér ok heldi í eyrasnepla með þeim formála, sem síðan er eptir hafðr í blótr því, at kallat er tjösnuþlót." [It was the law of *hólmganga*, that (the) the cloak should be five ells square and (have) loops in (the) corners; therein should be driven pegs of the kind that had a head at one end; they were called *tjösnur*; the one who made these preparations should go towards the *tjösnur*, so that (he) could see the sky between his legs and hold onto (his) earlobes with the invocation, that has since been used again in the sacrifice which is called *tjösnuþlót*]. (*Kormáks saga*, in Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga* [Reykjavík, 1939], p.237).

<sup>26</sup> *Þorskfirðinga saga*, pp. 216-7.

she employs to carry out her spell (if that is what it is) exposes her to ridicule. The punishment she receives<sup>27</sup> is cruel and startling, but, considered in relation to the types of death and mutilation that are common in saga narrative, not surprising. It also functions well in retaining a shocking sense of reality within the context of the chapter. These may be characters with strange powers, but they are human underneath it all.

The last reference to shape-changing within the saga is more typical of the kind of imagery we would associate with a mythic, or heroic, tale, and draws both the Icelandic and *útanferð* elements together around the gold that Þórir takes from Valr's cave at the beginning of the saga. References have been made in earlier chapters to Þórir going into a berserk rage, which has links with the idea of shape-changing; at the end of the saga his reaction to the (mis-)reported death of his son is:

at hann hvarf á brott frá búi sínu, ok vissi engi maðr, hvat af honum væri orðit eðr hann kom niðr, en þat hafa menn fyrir satt, at hann hafi at dreka orðit ok hafi lagizt á gullkistur sínar. Helzt þat ok lengi síðan, at menn sá dreka fljúga ofan um þeim megin frá Þórisstöðum ok Gullfors er kallaðr ok yfir fjörðinn í fjall þat, er stendr yfir bænum í Hlíð...<sup>28</sup>

[that he disappeared from his farm, and no one knew what had become of him or [where] he ended up, but people hold it to be true that he became a dragon and lay down on his gold-filled coffers. It went on happening for a long time afterwards that people saw a dragon flying downwards on the side of Þórisstaðir that is called Gullfors, and across the fjord into the mountain which stands over the farm at Hlíð.]

This section of the saga brings the narrative (at least as far as the gold is concerned) full circle. Yet that circle is not complete from a generic viewpoint. Whilst at the beginning of the saga the narrative is matter-of-fact about strange events (magical storms, dreams involving conversations with the undead, wonderful gifts, dragons and the like), at the end the style is more circumspect, leading to the suggestion that the events being related are open to question. “[Þ]at hafa menn fyrir satt” that Þórir turned into a dragon, and it is only “menn” in general, rather than named individuals who see a dragon flying about the neighbourhood

The relatively matter-of-fact use of supernatural forces within the main body of the story further illustrates the mingling of fantastic and naturalistic narrative within the saga as a whole. However, the individuals who move between the supernatural and the natural are still presented as human in aspect. Þuríðr drikkin “var mörgu slegin ok gerði manna mun mikinn”<sup>29</sup>, and Kerling

<sup>27</sup> And the revenge she metes out to Þuríðr, who loses her ears and the topmost parts of her cheeks

<sup>28</sup> *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p.226.

<sup>29</sup> “was touchy and had strong likes and dislikes.” *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p.177

is only “heldr margkunnig”<sup>30</sup>. Other individuals are not presented as strange in any way, until such time as they manifest themselves as pigs, for example, or are discovered to have undead uncles occupying cairns. The other world is very much a part of everyday life, and is essentially human.

This movement towards the naturalisation of mythic narrative elements in the section of the saga taking place on Icelandic soil, would seem to fit very well with a conceptualisation of that part of the narrative, and the characters within it, as ordinary human beings - albeit from a relatively archaic society. This is not the world of the *fornaldarsögur*, where dragons and trolls are taken as a matter of fact. This is a world where too much cannot be asked of the imagination, a world of reality.

Why, then, the dragons of the *útanferð* episode? One possibility - one accepted by the editors of the *Íslensk fornrit* edition - is that an older narrative concerning Þórir Oddsson and Oddr *skrauti* existed prior to the relatively late transcription of the saga narrative that we now have. If this is the case then it would certainly explain allusions to Þórir’s marvellous adventures within *Landnámabók* which are evidential of the narrative being in circulation prior to transcription of AM 561 4to which is generally dated to somewhere around 1400. This older version may well have presented a narrative which only dealt with the *útanferð* episode, but such a theory is, at best, speculative.

The inclusion of narrative elements which reflect an interest in the fantastic is, of course, not uncommon in the later *Íslendinga sögur*, the *fornaldarsögur* and some *riddara sögur* and thus *Þorskfirðinga saga* reflects a general tendency criticised by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson concerning the degeneration of the saga form due, as he saw it, to its, increasingly, uncritical inclusion of material of a fabulous nature.

... the country was now deluged with chivalric romances, whose falsehoods were added to the wonders of the legends and native superstition. Gradually all things dulled men’s judgement. Norway became more and more Europeanized, and holy relics from the South were everywhere. ... And the closer grew the connection between Iceland and Norway, the less independent of the international way of thinking the Icelanders became.<sup>31</sup>

However, *Þorskfirðinga saga* only displays this lack of judgement, as Einar Ólafur has it, in that section of the saga which takes place outside Iceland. Once the narrative returns home, as it were, the narration of shape-changing, magic events, and the like, becomes far more circumspect, a circumspection that is summed up by the second-hand reporting of Þórir’s transformation into a dragon at the end of the saga. Furthermore those supernatural events which are narrated as taking place within Iceland are placed firmly in the hands of humans, rather than fantastic monsters or being beyond the pale of humanity. In

<sup>30</sup> i.e. “rather skilled in magic.” *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p.176

<sup>31</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *The age of the Sturlungs. Icelandic civilisation in the thirteenth century*, trans. Jóhann S. Hannesson (Ithaca, N.Y., 1953), pp.124-125.

some respects these events undermine the heroic atmosphere created by the *útanferð* section of the saga, with the transformation of men into pigs, for example, adding a touch of domesticity to an otherwise fantastic event. This could indicate a sense of irony at times in the saga's narrative; an ironic sense which refuses to take aspects of the saga's own narrative too seriously.

It is this ironic treatment of the supernatural within an Icelandic setting which is of the most interest. It shows a narrative form which, whilst wishing to develop its subject matter into the realm of the fantastic does so in such a way as to avoid the very accusations levelled at it by Einar. The events narrated are unbelievable, therefore they are naturalised, placed within an everyday setting and given a sense of internal logic. It is this sense of internal logic and narrative development which, more than anything, indicates a generic form which is not degenerating but experimenting, pushing at the boundaries of the traditional and becoming self-consciously literary.

# The Ragnarøk Within: Grundtvig, Jung, and the Subjective Interpretation of Myth

Martin Chase

Center for Medieval Studies, Fordham University

It is hard to overestimate the influence of N. F. S. Grundtvig on Danish culture. Indeed, in many ways he can be called the inventor (or at least the re-inventor) of Danish culture. He published more than any Danish author before or since, and his name is as familiar in Denmark as that of Shakespeare in the English-speaking world. His writings on church and on education still form the core of theological and pedagogical studies at Danish universities, and any school-aged child in Denmark can recite several Grundtvig hymns or songs from memory. Kierkegaard scholars from other countries are often surprised to come to Denmark and find that his contemporary Grundtvig figures far more prominently.

Grundtvig's major writings on myth (*Lidet om sangene i Edda*,<sup>1</sup> *Om Asalæren*,<sup>2</sup> *Nordens Mytologi 1808*,<sup>3</sup> *Nordens Mythologi 1832*,<sup>4</sup> and *Græsk og*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ny Minerva* (Sept. 1806), rpt. *Nik. Fred. Sev. Grundtvigs Udvalgte Skrifter [US]*, 10 vols., ed. Holger Begtrup (København: Gyldendal, 1904-1909) 5: 116-134.

<sup>2</sup> *Ny Minerva* (May 1807), rpt. *US* 1: 203-223.

*Nordisk Mythologi for Ungdommen*<sup>5</sup>) form a significant part of his authorship, but from the beginning they have been far less studied or understood than his works on society, education, and church. Scholarship on Grundtvig's theory of myth has been almost entirely from the point of view either of theologians or of educators associated with the *højskole* movement.<sup>6</sup> In Grundtvig's day, as to a large extent in ours, *højskole* and university were separate worlds, and although both took note of Grundtvig's first book on myth, the academic community distanced itself as Grundtvig became increasingly associated with popular education. As he noted in the introduction to his second book on myth, published in 1832 on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first, the scholarly mythographers had shown him no more courtesy in the interim than to act as though he either never had existed or was long dead and gone.<sup>7</sup> Twentieth-century scholars of Old Norse are no different: apart from Axel Olrik<sup>8</sup>, who grants Grundtvig a brief and ambivalent mention in his survey of scholarship on Nordic myth, they have ignored him.

The second centenary of Grundtvig's birth in 1983 brought a new wave of publication on Grundtvig, and for the first time in recent history, there were contributions from outside the usual circles. Villy Sørensen's *Ragnarok*,<sup>9</sup> a retelling of the Nordic cosmogony and eschatology based on Grundtvig's principles, scandalized *højskole*-Grundtvigians and gave rise to a bitter debate in the popular press.<sup>10</sup> Villy Sørensen ignores or recasts the allegorical interpretations of the myths that had become associated with Grundtvig and fossilized in the *højskole* tradition, and instead interprets them psychologically. The fresh eyes of Ejvind Larsen<sup>11</sup> and Poul Borum,<sup>12</sup> two critics not usually concerned with Grundtvig, turned their attention to him in the anniversary year

<sup>3</sup> *Nordens Mytologi eller Udsigt over Eddalæren for dannede Mænd der ei selv ere Mytologer* (København, 1808) rpt. *US* 1: 243-373.

<sup>4</sup> *Nordens Mythologi eller Sindbilled-Sprog historisk-poetisk udviklet og oplyst* (København, 1832) rpt. *US* 5: 378-767.

<sup>5</sup> *Græsk og Nordisk Mythologi for Ungdommen* (København, 1847).

<sup>6</sup> Noteworthy recent studies from the *højskole* milieu include Jens Peter Ægidius, *Bragesnak: Nordiske myter og mytefortælling i dansk tradition (indtil 1910)*; *Bragesnak 2: Den mytologiske tradition i dansk folkeoplysning i det tyvende århundrede (1910-1985)*, Odense University Studies in Scandinavian Languages and Literatures 11 and 23 (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1985 and 1992); and Ole Vind, *Grundtvigs historiefilosofi*, Skrifter udgivet af Grundtvig-Selskabet 32 (København: Gyldendal, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> *US* 5: 388.

<sup>8</sup> Axel Olrik and Hans Ellekilde, *Nordens Gudeverden*, 2 vols. (København: Gyldendal, 1926) 1:14-16.

<sup>9</sup> Villy Sørensen, *Ragnarok: En gudefortælling* (København: Centrum, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Per Warming and Karen Marie Bonde, "Midtpunkt," *Jyllandsposten* 7 January 1983; Villy Sørensen, "Midtpunktet," *Jyllandsposten* 14 January 1983; Carsten Høgh, "'Ragnarok' – og hvad deraf fulgte . . ." *Højskolebladet* 14 (1983): 220-22.

<sup>11</sup> Ejvind Larsen, *Det Levende Ord: Om Grundtvig* (København: Rosinante) 1983.

<sup>12</sup> Poul Borum, *Digteren Grundtvig* (København: Gyldendal, 1983).

and were likewise quick to see the psychological possibilities in Grundtvig's method.

Scholars of Old Norse have traditionally regarded Grundtvig's passionately subjective reading of myth as irrelevant to serious (i.e. historical) interpretation. Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen speaks for most when he says that for Grundtvig, "the synthetic understanding, 'the *vision*,' has priority over the sources, which he rejects as late and spurious if they do not fit in with *his* interpretation. . . . Grundtvig does not, as he alleges in the introduction to *Nordens Mytologi* [1808], see edda in edda's own light."<sup>13</sup> This is indisputably true: from a historical point of view Grundtvig has nothing to contribute to our understanding of the texts. But the same subjectivity that literary historians scorn has wide-reaching theoretical implications which have been ignored.

Grundtvig calls myth "sindbilled-sprog," the picture-language of the mind, and he presumes that the images of this language are common to the human spirit ("ånden"), to that which since Jung we call the collective unconscious. According to Jung's classical definition, myths are not invented, they are experienced: "Myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings."<sup>14</sup> Like dreams, myths find appropriate images to associate with the archetypes of the unconscious in order to show us what is going on in the areas of our psyches that are hidden from us. Grundtvig hopes that seeing how myths have awakened and made visible the archetypes in *his* mind will help others to recognize them in their own psyches.

Ejvind Larsen suggests that the insights gained from psychoanalysis in recent years can help us see the point of Grundtvig's method. He acknowledges that "what could be used was decided by what spoke to *him*," but argues that Grundtvig's emphasis on his own experience does not imply self-centeredness or a lack of interest in the concerns of others. Rather, Grundtvig intends his experience to be a model and an inspiration.<sup>15</sup> Poul Borum likewise points to the centrality of this insight. True, Grundtvig uses the imagery of Nordic mythology widely (some would say wildly) in a variety of contexts in his authorship: "The gods function at once anecdotally, polemically, allegorically, symbolically, and typologically." But the "incomparable discovery" that Grundtvig made in 1808 and was to draw on the rest of his life, was of "the psychic process which takes place in time (history) and ends in a timeless, cultic paradise, where power and wisdom are united and where spirit joins soul and

<sup>13</sup> Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, *N. F. S. Grundtvig: Skæbne og Forsyn: Dyufirt i Grundtvigs nordisk-romantiske dramatik*, Skrifter Udgivet af Grundtvig-Selskabet 14 (København: Gyldendal, 1965) 20.

<sup>14</sup> C. G. Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series 20, The Collected Works of C. G. Jung 9, 1 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1968) 154.

<sup>15</sup> Larsen 175.

body.”<sup>16</sup> The meaning of myth is to evoke and reflect this process.

The process is what Carl Gustav Jung a century after Grundtvig would call individuation. According to Jung the human psyche is composed of two elements: the ego and the Self. The ego is the seat of subjective, conscious identity, one’s own awareness of who and what one is. The Self is the seat of objective identity, the supreme ordering principle of the entire contents of the psyche, unconscious as well as conscious, transpersonal as well as personal. The ego is the product of one’s personal experience; the Self includes also the inherited archetypes of the collective unconscious, that is, nothing less than the distilled summation of all human experience. The Self is the central archetype of wholeness, the presence of the Divine in us. The ego is who I think I am; the Self is all that I really am.

Individuation, the task of human existence, is the establishment of a right relationship between the two entities. This means first establishing the ego by separating it from the Self, and then after developing the ego and bringing the Self to consciousness, reuniting the two in such a way that they are integrated but not identified. One relinquishes ego awareness in such a way that one becomes conscious of participation in the transpersonal, while at the same time retaining ego awareness in such a way that one knows one is oneself and not God.<sup>17</sup> The process is not linear, although ego separation and development tends to characterize the first half of life, and reintegration with the Self the second. It is cyclical or spiral, a repeated pattern of becoming conscious of the presence of various archetypes, separating them out from the Self, and then reintegrating them into the conscious psyche.

Myths are essential to this process. They form a bridge between the unconscious and conscious psyche by attaching symbolic images to the unconscious archetypes and representing the complex and painful struggle of separation and re-unification in narratives which consciousness can apprehend. Grundtvig saw all this in the image of Bifröst, the rainbow bridge: “The rainbow is a visual image of the invisible bridge between heaven and earth, between the worlds of the spirit and of the body, which picture-language sets up and reason must defend. The lovely play of colors is also an image of the source from which all spiritual understanding springs forth.”<sup>18</sup> Because the process is

---

<sup>16</sup> Borum 46.

<sup>17</sup> On the process of individuation see Edward F. Edinger, *Ego and Archetype: Individuation and the Religious Function of the Psyche* (New York: Putnam, 1972); Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, Bollingen Series 42 (New York: Pantheon, 1954); and M.-L. von Franz, “The Process of Individuation,” in *Man and his Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung (New York: Dell, 1964) 157-254.

<sup>18</sup> *Nordisk Mythologi* 1832, US 5: 675. Jung noted the significance of the rainbow-image in his work on alchemy as a metaphor for the individuation process: “The ‘*omnes colores*’ are frequently mentioned in the texts as indicating something like totality. They all unite in the *albedo*, which for many alchemists was the climax of the work. The first part was completed when the various components separated out from the chaos of the *massa confusa* were brought

transpersonal or common to all, myths have universal qualities. But the struggles take on a particular form in the life of each individual, so the interpretation of myth needs to be subjective, and myths need to be continually reinterpreted in each new situation if they are to remain meaningful.

Jung says that interpretation should be diachronic as well as synchronic: the living context of a myth is most important, but it cannot be fully understood apart from its historical context. The psychotherapist who lacks a historical knowledge of the archetypes observed in a patient “is not in a position to perceive the parallelism between his observations and the findings of anthropology and the humane sciences in general,” while an expert in mythology and comparative religion “is as a rule no psychiatrist and consequently does not know that his mythologems are still fresh and living . . . in the hidden recesses of our most personal life, which we would on no account deliver up to scientific dissection. . . . The individual images . . . need a context, and the context is not only a myth but an individual anamnesis.”<sup>19</sup>

Grundtvig knew about this from his own experience. Like Jung, he recognized the importance of understanding the historical context of a myth, but he was more adamant than Jung about the true meaning of a myth being the living meaning, i.e. the meaning perceived by the hearer. We read in *Nordens Mytologi* 1832, “It makes little or no difference to us what floated before the eyes of the myth-maker, because only that which we lay in the myth and what lies *comfortably* in it is good to preserve.”<sup>20</sup> Grundtvig resented what he regarded as the trivializing of myths by the mythographers of his time, who viewed myths as primitive attempts to explain natural phenomena. As Grundtvig saw it, the natural phenomena merely provided imagery for the description of inner processes: “When the myth-maker lifted his weary eyes to the heavens, he saw the light struggle against the darkness and against itself. And when he gazed into the depths of the human spirit, into himself, he perceived the outward battle to be no more than a weak symbol of the battle which made his whole being recoil.”<sup>21</sup>

Jung liked to speak of being “gripped” by a myth, and anyone familiar with Grundtvig will agree that he was nothing if not that. His case is typical: the actual process of individuation generally begins with a psychic trauma which

---

back to unity in the *albedo* and ‘all became one.’ Morally, this means that the original state of psychic disunity, the inner chaos of conflicting part-souls which Origen likens to herds of animals, becomes the ‘*vir unus*,’ the unified man.” In *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series 20, The Collected Works of C. G. Jung 14 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1970) 285-86.

<sup>19</sup> C. G. Jung, “The Psychological Aspects of the Kore,” in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series 20, The Collected Works of C. G. Jung 9, 1 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1968) 189.

<sup>20</sup> *US* 5: 636.

<sup>21</sup> *Nordens Mytologi* 1808, *US* 1: 333.

amounts to a sort of call.<sup>22</sup> In 1805 the twenty-one-year-old Grundtvig took a job as tutor on an estate on Langeland and soon fell hopelessly in love with the lady of the house. The suffering caused by his apparently unrequited feelings led eventually to the breakthrough he called his “*asarus*” (literally, “*æsir-high*”). For two years he was high on the gods, utterly possessed by the archetypes. “Now I came to the beginning of my life,” he wrote in his journal in 1806,<sup>23</sup> “from now on I live in antiquity, and reality will never again make me its slave. . . .”<sup>24</sup> “My soul fought night and day, and I lived among the *æsir*; then my view of the doctrine of the *æsir* came into being.”<sup>25</sup> Falling in love, according to Jung, involves a projection of the anima, or feminine archetype of a man’s psyche.<sup>26</sup> As the individuation process begins, a man becomes conscious of his feminine side: it is “separated out” of his unconscious. The developing ego, which is masculine, has difficulty containing this archetype, so it is projected onto a woman. She in turn reflects back to the man his own feminine qualities, which he at first admires as hers, but eventually begins to re-assimilate into his own psyche, where they become a part of the conscious ego. Grundtvig’s poem, “*Synet*” (“The Vision”), written in 1807, shows his awareness of this process in his life.

In this short narrative poem Grundtvig describes a vision of a “Spirit” (“*ånden*”), loosely associated with his recently dead sister. Grundtvig tells her of his pondering of “this mysterious life,” and laments that unlike the Spirit, we can only regard “the one who is and was” in a mirror. He has in fact seen this image mirrored in “a woman”—Jung would say that by projecting his anima onto her he caught a glimpse of the Self—but the mirror broke and the picture cannot be re-constituted. The Spirit chastises him for looking unfeelingly and in the wrong place, and urges him to “*see*” the reality reflected in the Nordic myths he has been “staring” at for so long: “Stop staring and dare to see/ the image of the great one still standing/ in the never-frozen waters of Ifing!”<sup>27</sup> According to *Vafþrúðnismál* 16, Ifing is the river that separates the land of the gods and the land of the giants.<sup>28</sup> The myth shows Grundtvig that the Self is to be found at the boundary of consciousness and the unconscious, precisely where he found himself at the time of this experience. The fleeting glimpse of the projected Self he caught reflected in the beloved was but the first step, and

<sup>22</sup> von Franz 169.

<sup>23</sup> *US* 1: 112.

<sup>24</sup> *US* 1:113.

<sup>25</sup> *US* 1: 114.

<sup>26</sup> A woman similarly projects the animus, the masculine archetype in a woman’s psyche.

<sup>27</sup> Chr. K. F. Molbech, ed., *Christian Molbech og Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig: En Brevvexling* (København, 1888) 199-205. The image of myth as a mirror is central in Grundtvig’s theory of myth: see e.g. *US* 5: 390, 476, 496, 513, 514, 520, 541, 542, 555, 556, 557, 617, 618,702; *Græsk og Nordisk Mythologi* vi, 25.

<sup>28</sup> *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Germanische Bibliothek Reihe 4, Texte, ed. Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Karl Winter, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1983) 1: 47.

Grundtvig understands that the next will be the appropriation of what he saw to his own psyche.<sup>29</sup>

The significance of this experience of young adulthood lies less in the unhappy infatuation than in the insight it precipitated. Grundtvig got over Fru Constance Leth, but his insight into the relevance of myth remained a guiding force throughout his life. In 1808 he wrote in *Nordens Mytologi* of his certainty of what he long had suspected: “the life of the gods would set the terms for mine.”<sup>30</sup> This means simply that Grundtvig discovered the unconscious and its archetypes, for which the gods provide symbols. His first published work on myth, “Lidet om Sangene i Edda,” was written in reaction to the publication of Jens Møller’s *Skirners Rejse*, a poem inspired by *Skírnismál*.<sup>31</sup> Grundtvig, at the height of his “asarus” was deeply offended by this comic take-off on the eddic text. His treatise has often been regarded as the result of his juvenile identification with Freyr’s unhappy infatuation with the giantess and his resentment that anyone would find it amusing. But Grundtvig’s experience of the myth was much deeper. He saw in it the entire cosmogony and eschatology of the gods’ life and his own.

As Grundtvig interprets the myth of Freyr and Gerðr, the Norns have determined that the gods, who are enfeoffed with the eternal, must give up their eternity and assimilate themselves to the mortal in order to come under its laws and eventually fall. This is reflected in Freyr’s disarming of himself in order to obtain Gerðr. Óðinn is angry that Freyr has sat in Hliðskjálf, not because his dignity has been offended, but because the sight of Gerðr is “the first link in the chain of misfortune, which the others of necessity would follow.”<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Later in his life Grundtvig read this myth at the macrocosmic level, but the meaning for him remained the same. In *Græsk og Nordisk Mythologi for Ungdommen* (164-65) he sees the joining of gods and the giants “in a kind of marriage” on a “common ground” on the banks of the Ifing as symbolic of the reconciliation of “the spirit of history” and “the self-consciousness of all that is demonstrable.” The union of the unconscious and the ego in the Self mirrors (and is mirrored in) the relationship of history and science, “which can be tense enough in day-to-day experience, but becomes irreconcilable only when history has abandoned spirit (“ånden”) and tries like a zombie to scare the life out of people, or when science obstinately claims that the demonstrable is the only reality and with heartless arrogance tries to disturb the historical world of the spirit in human life by dismissing it as idle fantasy and delusion.” The same could be said of the dynamics of the individual psyche.

<sup>30</sup> “Deres *Liv* skulde, i sin Tid, vorde Betingelsen for *mit*.” *US* 1: 251. The phrase is almost certainly meant to echo Schelling’s famous phrase, “der Grund von Sein,” which makes it no less weighty. The role of myth in his life was even more clear to him in his middle age, as we see in *Nordens Mytologi* (1832): “. . . everyone who is conscious of his spiritual nature is such a wonderful mystery to himself, that he rejects nothing simply because it is strange . . . on the contrary, he constantly draws what is strange to himself, because in essence it resembles him, and because he expects to find in it the resolution of his mystery—which he certainly does not expect of that which he can see through as though it were nothing” (*US* 5: 400).

<sup>31</sup> *Ny Minerva* (May 1806).

<sup>32</sup> *US* 1: 132. The myth is rich in allusions to archetypal myths from the Judeo-Christian tradition. The view from Hliðskjálf resonates with the fruit of the tree of knowledge (Gen 2), the marriage of Frey and Gerda with the origin of the Nephilim (Gen 6), and the assimilation of the “eternal”

What gripped Grundtvig was the apocalyptic aspect of the myth. Indeed, he saw all the imagery and themes of Nordic myth as somehow related to its fundamental eschatological revelation. At the time of his “asarus” or initial breakthrough he was much taken with the romantic philosophy of F. W. J. Schelling. The opposition of contraries and its destined outcome was a principal element of Schelling’s world view. As M. H. Abrams neatly summarizes it, “The driving force of all process . . . is the compulsion within any element to pose, or else to pass over into, its opposite, or contrary, or antithesis, which in turn generates its own opponent, in a ceaseless movement toward a consummation which is the annulment, or else the stable equilibrium, of all oppositions.”<sup>33</sup> Schelling saw this pattern of original unity followed by separation and opposition followed by a destined return to unity as applicable to every aspect of existence. The archetypal pattern is that of apocalypse,<sup>34</sup> and as we have seen, of individuation, which itself is a kind of apocalypse or unveiling.

In the beginning, according to Grundtvig’s “asalære,” or doctrine of the Æsir, there was “Alfader,” the source of energy and life, and “mass” or “matter.”<sup>35</sup> As matter began to contract and expand life emerged in it, which meant that there now were two life-principles.<sup>36</sup> Thus the first opposition, energy (the gods) versus matter (the giants), came into being. In Grundtvig’s eyes all the myths told in the Poetic Edda and Snorri are variations on this single theme. Separations (and consequently creations) multiply on both sides of the opposition, but the power remains balanced. In the language of analytical psychology, this represents the relationship between the ego and the Self. In the beginning there is a unity of the two, but it is unconscious and chaotic. Once the ego begins gradually to distinguish itself from the Self, there is a long series of separations as the various archetypes of the unconscious (shadow, anima/animus, etc.) are constellated and identified. The ego becomes increasingly conscious, but also correspondingly alienated from the Self. The awareness of these oppositions is like an inner apocalypse—it is as though one’s world has been destroyed. But if one can contain the conflicts, that is, find meaning in them and integrate them back into the Self, then it is as though a

---

gods to the laws of mortality recalls Paul’s interpretation of the incarnation (Phil 2).

<sup>33</sup> M. H. Abrams, “Apocalypse: theme and variations,” *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents, and Repercussions*, Ed. C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984) 346.

<sup>34</sup> As seen in the biblical Book of Revelation and many other apocalyptic myths. See Edward F. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse: A Jungian Study of the Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> See *Om Asalæren*, (US 1) 207-218, and *Nordens Mytologi*, (US 1) 270-273.

<sup>36</sup> A favorite theory of Schelling: see e.g. F. W. J. v. Schelling, *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*, in K. F. A. Schelling, ed. *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart/Augsburg 1856-61) 2: 1-343, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988).

new world arises with all its possibilities.<sup>37</sup> In Grundtvig's version of the aftermath of Ragnarøk, "Energy must return to its source, and this happens, because Ragnarøk is the twilight of the Æsir, the evening of the day they themselves created. But it is likewise the dawn of true day. Balder is risen from Hel, and the Æsir cleansed of their striving for individuality. They no longer rule, but they are still the expression of energy, the strong arm of the eternal."<sup>38</sup> The archetypes have not been eliminated, but they have been re-incorporated and the Self re-constituted in a new form. The archetypes are still the source of energy, but the energy can be focused and directed. They no longer rule tyrannically from the unconscious or demand a separate existence for themselves as projections.

This victory is not achieved by one battle, and Grundtvig envisions the process of creation, opposition, fall, and renewal as a repeated cycle, moving gradually in a spiral motion towards the goal: "While other nations depict a single creation, the North shows us a double, almost triple creation, and the process still is not finished. While others let all life perish in the grave, our fathers begin theirs beyond it, standing powerfully in Valhalla and striving towards a life still higher. The Æsir advance with a majesty and fullness of power, unity, and harmony, which we elsewhere seek in vain."<sup>39</sup> Grundtvig knew this pattern in his own life as he experienced alternating periods of illuminating insight and chaotic psychosis, and this is undoubtedly why the "asalære" meant so much to him. He allowed himself to recognize the same processes in the myths and in his own psyche. The battles of the archetypal gods matched those of the archetypes within him, and by recognizing the correspondence he could engage in the battles knowing both the cost and the outcome.<sup>40</sup>

Grundtvig's work on myth merits more scholarly consideration than it has received. While insisting on the importance of understanding history, it shifts the focus of interpretation to the synchronic or timeless meaning of myth, and reminds us that the true nature of myth is to be meaningful, if only we will allow it.

---

<sup>37</sup> This is the theme of Edinger's *Archetype of the Apocalypse*.

<sup>38</sup> *Om Asalæren* (US 1) 216.

<sup>39</sup> *Om Asalæren* (US 1) 206.

<sup>40</sup> It was a source of anguish for Grundtvig that the orthodox Lutheran Christianity of his day did not permit the Bible to be read in a similar manner, and this led to his famous assertion that the Bible "is only a book, a dead thing that in itself has nothing to say" ("Skal den Lutherske Reformation Virkelig Fortsættes?" US 5: 345).

## Saga facts

Carol Clover

Department of Scandinavian and Rhetoric, University of California (Berkeley)

My paper uses the Icelandic sagas to challenge the claim of legal historians that primitive law is mere formalist process, unable to find fact much less distinguish law from it. I argue that the sagas are intensely interested in legal fact, and that their facticity is at the heart of the famed “objectivity” or “externality” of saga style. This paper relates to a book I’m writing on “legal entertainment” in those societies (like the early Icelandic and the later Anglo-American ones) that have an adversarial style.

## Brynjólfur biskup Sveinsson, forn átrúnaður og Eddurnar

Einar G. Pétursson

Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi

Það verður alltaf umhugsunar- og íhugunarefni af hverju Íslendingar hófu ritstörf snemma á 12. öld og urðu mikil bókmenntaþjóð. Líklegt finnst mér, að Jón Helgason prófessor fari nærri sannleikanum, er hann sagði, að eftir “að kröftunum hafði einusinni verið beint inn á þessa braut, er haldið áfram alla tíð.” Oft er sagt frá því í Íslendingasögum að Íslendingar færðu konungum kvæði. Íslendingar fluttu ekki aðeins út kveðskap, heldur var verulegur útflutningur handrita frá Íslandi til Noregs langt fram á 14. öld, en í lok hennar var munur á tungumálum orðinn svo mikill að bókamarkaðurinn gat ekki lengur verið sameiginlegur.

Þótt ekki væri lengur markaður fyrir íslensk handrit í Noregi eftir 1400, hættu Íslendingar ekki skriftum; ort var m. a. mikið af rímum og sögur samdar, aðallega riddarasögur. Á seinustu áratugum kaþólsks siðar á Íslandi, þ. e. í lok 15. aldar og fram undir 1550, var nokkuð þýtt af kristilegum ritum. Þessar þýðingar voru ekki eingöngu úr latínu, heldur einnig þjóðtungum eins og ensku, þýsku og dönsku. Víst er að þessi kristilegu rit á móðurmáli hafa rutt brautina

fyrir því að siðaskiptamenn gátu síðar komið ritum sínum á framfæri á íslensku en tóku ekki við guðsorðabókum á dönsku sem hefði getað orðið dauðadómur fyrir íslenska tungu.

Prentsmiðja var flutt til Íslands um 1530. Þáttaskil verða í prentlistar- og bókmenntasögu Íslendinga árið 1571 er Guðbrandur Þorláksson verður biskup á Hólum og gegndi hann því embætti í 56 ár. Í hans biskupstíð voru prentaðar um 100 bækur, nærri allt guðsorð, en ekki urðu veraldleg rit prentuð að marki fyrr en tveimur öldum síðar. Um líkt leyti og prentlistin barst til Íslands kom líka pappírinn, og þar með varð framleiðsla á handritum miklu ódýrari og auðveldari og jókst þar af leiðandi mjög. Á móti kom að pappírinn var ekki eins endingargóður og skinnið svo að skrifaðar bækur entust skemur.

Guðbrandur biskup Þorláksson virðist ekki hafa verið snortinn af húmanismanum og hafði þar af leiðandi ekki áhuga á fornum íslenskum ritum. Hann hafði aftur á móti áhyggjur af mörgum lastskrifum um Ísland og lét frænda sinn Arngrím Jónsson lærða svara þeim með mörgum bókum á latínu, þar sem vitnað var til íslenskra fornrita og urðu þau þar með umheiminum kunn. Fyrsta bók Arngríms kom út 1593. Merkasta bók Arngríms er *Crymogea*, gefin út í Hamborg 1609. Hún var einkum saga Íslands og þar var kafla um tungu þjóðarinnar með myndum af rúnastafrófi. Það var m. a. til þess að Ole Worm leitaði til Íslendinga um skýringar á rúnum og verður vikið að því síðar.

Frá því um siðaskiptin um 1550 og nærri því þangað til Guðbrandur var allur 1627, eða þangað á milli 1620 til 1630, var mjög lítið skrifað upp af fornum íslenskum veraldlegum textum, ef rímur og lögbækur eru undanskildar. Þorlákur Skúlason Hólabiskup hóf mikla fræðastarfsemi fyrir 1630 og Brynjólfur Sveinsson Skálholtsbiskup um 1640. Að fordæmi biskupsstólanna og fleiri var farið að skrifa upp fornar sögur víða um land og jókst þessi starfsemi mjög þegar upp úr 1640 og hélst svo fram á 20. öld. Starfsemin hafði mikil og varanleg áhrif á varðveislu íslenskra fornþekktar mennta, stöðu íslenskrar tungu og viðhorf Íslendinga til sjálfra sín. Þessi fræðastarfsemi hefur töluvert verið rannsökuð á seinustu áratugum en mikilla rannsókna er enn þörf.

### Forn fræði í upphafi 17. aldar

Tveir miðaldartextar voru þó mjög útbreiddir og vinsælir í upphafi 17. aldar. Lögbókin, *Jónsbók*, var eðlilega sá forni texti, sem Íslendingar á 16. og 17. öld þekktu hvað best þar sem hún var gildandi lög. Hún var prentuð nokkrum sinnum í tíð Guðbrands Hólabiskups og þrátt fyrir það var hún einnig oft skrifuð upp, en þáttur laga hefur ekki verið ofmetinn við varðveislu íslenskrar tungu.

Annar miðaldartexti, *Snorra-Edda*, var vel þekktur og hafði mikil áhrif á 17. öld. Hún var skrifuð upp á pappír rétt fyrir aldamótin 1600, eða 1595, og var það handrit síðar nefnt *Treктarþók* (*Codex Trajectinus*). Forritið er nú glatað, en talið frá 13. öld. Magnús Ólafsson síðar prestur í Laufási setti veturinn 1608-

1609 saman Eddugerð þá, sem nefnd hefur verið *Laufás-Edda*, en útgefandinn, Anthony Faulkes, kallaði *Eddu Magnúsar Ólafssonar*. Einkenni þeirrar gerðar er að *Gylfaginningu* er skipt niður í dæmisögur og kenningum *Skáldskaparmála* raðað í stafrófsröð. Magnús setti Edduna saman að beiðni Arngríms Jónssonar lærða og er þetta eina ritið um íslenskar fornþekkingar, sem Arngrímur stóð fyrir, og ætlað var Íslendingum. Heimild *Eddu Magnúsar* var handrit sem Arngrímur lærði átti og gaf síðar Ole Worm og hefur það síðan verið kallað *Wormsbók Snorra-Eddu*. Einnig segir Magnús glögglega að hann hafi notað annað handrit, sem nú er glatað. Það var talið skylt gömlum og varðveittum brotum Eddu, en hefur að líkindum verið ungt pappírshandrit.

**Alþýðufræðimenn:** Þótt flestir hafi um 1600 sýnt fornum fræðum lítinn áhuga, þá er svo að sjá að nokkrir menn hafi samt sinnt þeim og skrifað upp sögur og fleiri texta. Má þar einkum nefna Jón Guðmundsson, sem nefndur var hinn lærði, og jafnaldra hans Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá, en þeir voru báðir fæddir árið 1574. Hvorugur þeirra gekk nokkurn tímann í latínuskóla, sem sýnir að óskólagengnir menn hafa kunnað að lesa og skrifa, og hinir lærðustu menn leituðu til þeirra í fræðilegum tilgangi.

Um fræðastarfsemi Jóns lærða á yngri árum er vitað m. a., að hann skrifaði upp handrit *sögu Guðmundar biskups Arasonar* og jók inn í uppskrift sína “jarteinaefni” úr annarri gerð sögunnar. Einnig skrifaði hann upp rím og Helgisíðabók skrifaði Jón lærði upp 1596-97 og skreytti fögnum upphafsstöfum, en þá bók hafði Guðbrandur Þorláksson Hólabiskup látið prenta 1581. Fyrir vikið er nú texti hennar varðveittur heill, því að aðeins er varðveitt eitt óheilt eintak af prentuninni. Fleira skrifaði Jón af kristilegum ritum og óljósar heimildir eru um að Jón hafi skrifað upp *Jónsbók*, lögbókina, fjórum sinnum á sínum ungdómsárum. Þau trúarlegu rit, sem Jón lærði skrifaði upp ungur, þ. e. fyrir 1600, voru sum á þeim árum nauðsynleg við guðspjónustu, en öllum hefur tæpast þótt við hæfi að láta skrifa upp sögu dýrlings með jarteinaefni. Ekki eru heimildir til að eigna öðrum frumkvæði að þessum skrifum Jóns lærða eða að beiðni hafi komið frá einhverjum fræðamiðstöðvum.

Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá, jafnaldri Jóns lærða, var alinn á Reynistað hjá Sigurði Jónssyni sýslumanni, en var ekki settur í skóla. Björn var lögréttumaður um fjörutíu ára skeið, eða frá 1609-1650, en hann fékkst mikið við lagaskýringar sem Jón lærði gerði ekki. Ekki eru heimildir um, að Björn hafi á ungum aldri skrifað eins mikið og Jón lærði, a. m. k. eru engar heimildir um að hann skrifað upp nein kristileg rit. Talið er víst, að Björn hafi skrifað upp útdrátt af handriti *Sturlungu* um aldamótin 1600 og notað síðar við rit sitt um lagaskýringar, sem er frá 1626. Ýmis yngri lagaskýringarit eru til frá hans hendi, en þau eru órannsökuð, en hann vitnar þar í marga forna texta.

## Upphaf fræðastarfsemi á móðurmáli

Fyrstur Íslendinga til að láta hefja uppskriftir fornra sagnatexta að einhverju marki var eftirmaður Guðbrands, Þorlákur biskup Skúlason, en honum og fræðastarfsemi hans þyrfti að gera miklu betri skil en gert hefur verið til þessa. Fræðastarfsemi Þorláks hefur goldið þess að standa í skugga frægra bóka Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar, sem settist að stóli í Skálholti 1639. Þorlákur var alinn upp hjá afa sínum, Guðbrandi biskupi, hann nam við Hafnarháskóla á árunum 1616-1619. Eftir heimkomuna varð hann skólameistari á Hólum og eftir andlát afa síns 1627 varð hann kjörinn biskup og gegndi því starfi til dauðadags 1656. Þorlákur varð fyrstur íslenskra stúdenta til að hafa Ole Worm fyrir einkakennara, en alls voru þeir a. m. k. 19 sem gerðu það, svo að áhrif Worms á Íslendinga hafa verið veruleg. Sumarið 1622 hófust ævilöng bréfaskipti Worms við Þorlák, en einnig skiptist Worm á bréfum við marga aðra Íslendinga þangað til hann lést 1654. Þorlákur lét aðra skrifa upp sögur og meðal annarra landseta biskupsstólsins. Nokkrar bækur voru skrifaðar á skinn, þótt annars væri þá mest skrifað á pappír.

Eitt fyrsta rit sem vitað er að Jón lærði hafi skrifað að beiðni annarra í fræðilegum tilgangi voru *Grænlands annál* fyrir Hólamenn upp um 1623, en þau eru nú aðeins varðveitt í endurskoðaðri gerð Björns Jónssonar á Skarðsá. Ósannað er, þótt vel sé líklegt, að Jón hafi eitthvað fyrr gert útdrætti úr *Hauksbók*, sem hann notaði í *Grænlands annálum*. Ekki er vitað hvaða menn á Hólum stóðu fyrir þessari fræðastarfsemi, en líklegast er að það hafi verið Þorlákur Skúlason, sem var þá skólameistari. Þetta virðist meðal elstu dæma í upphafi 17. aldar um fræðastarfsemi á móðurmáli á grundvelli gamalla veraldlegra texta fyrir tilstilli biskupsstólanna, því að fremur ber að kalla *Grænlands annál* Jóns lærða fræðastarfsemi en hreina uppskrift fornra texta.

Eins og fyrr gat birti Arngrímur lærði rúnastafróf í *Crymogeu* 1609, las Ole Worm það og spurði Þorlák Skúlason um ýmislegt viðvíkjandi íslensku máli og rúnum í bréfi árið 1623. Þorlákur svaraði með því að senda Worm rúnastafróf, sem hann sagðist hafa fengið frá ónefndum manni, sem væri snjallastur rúnafræðinga. Á árunum 1630-1632 er Jón lærði nefndur í bréfum til Worms frá Magnúsi Ólafssyni í Laufási. Magnús gat ekki ráðið úr rúnum, sem Worm sendi honum, en sagðist ekki geta ráðfært sig við mesta snilling í þessari grein Jón Guðmundsson lærða. Áður hefur verið giskað á að ónefndi rúnasérfræðingurinn, sem Þorlákur Skúlason nefndi 1623, hefði verið Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá, en þegar vitað er um samband Hólamanna við Jón lærða um sama leyti og það mikla orð sem fór síðar af Jóni, er eins eðlilegt að giska á að Þorlákur hafi þar átt við Jón lærða. Annars er víst, að báðir fengust nokkuð við rúnir.

Á fjórða áratug 17. aldar var Jón lærði á miklum hrakningum, en um 1640 fer hann að frumkvæði Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar aftur að fást við fræði og verður vikið að þeim hér síðar.

Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá hóf miklar uppskriftir miðaldatexta eftir að Þorlákur Skúlason varð biskup og má þar m. a. nefna *Landnámu* og *Sturlungu*,

en þekktasta rit Björns er sagnaritið *Skarðsárannáll*.

Hér er nauðsynlegt að nefna eitt rit, sem Björn á Skarðsá skrifaði áður en Brynjólfur settist að stóli í Skálholti, en það eru skýringar hans á *Höfuðlausn Egils Skallagrímssonar*. Björn virðist hafa lokið við þær árið 1634 og þær voru notaðar er Ole Worm gaf kvæðið út í riti sínu um rúnir 1636, *Literatura Runica*. Frá þeim árum er til latnesk þýðing eftir Brynjólf biskup Sveinsson á *Höfuðlausnarskýringunum* og eiginhandarrit Björns er til frá því um 1641, eða nokkru yngra en prentunin, en annars þarfnast þessar skýringar Björns nánari rannsókna. Þetta rit sýnir svo ekki verður um villst að Björn hefur verið talinn vel að sér um fornan kveðskap og málfræði. Um fleiri rit Björns um þetta efni verður rætt hér á eftir.

### Fræðastarfsemi Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar

Árið 1639 varð Brynjólfur Sveinsson biskup í Skálholti. Hann hóf söfnun og uppskriftir fornra handrita og eignaðist þær skinnbækur íslenskar sem mestar gersemar hafa þótt, má þar nefna *Flateyjarbók* og *Konungsbók Eddukvæða*. Hann hafði mikinn fræðaáhuga og hugðist semja mikið rit um fornan norrænan átrúnað, þ. e. heiðni. Um hugmyndir biskups að því riti eru ekki glöggar heimildir, en þær eru raktar í bók minni *Edduritum Jóns Guðmundssonar lærða*. Um fyrirhugað rit Brynjólfs er það að segja að ekki varð neitt úr, en áformin og aðdrættirnir að ritinu urðu til þess að hann eignaðist flest gömul handrit *Snorra-Eddu* og einu varðveittu skinnhandrit *Eddukvæða* og *Völsunga sögu*. Aðdrættirnir að fyrrnefndu riti urðu til þess að sum ofangreind fornrit eru enn varðveitt. Því miður eru bréfabækur Brynjólfs frá fyrstu árum hans glataðar, eða til 1652, svo að í þeim er ekki að finna neinar heimildir um fræðastörf og handritaúttegun á fyrstu embættisárum hans.

Ráðagerð Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar um að semja rit um fornan norrænan átrúnað varð ekki einungis til að hann safnaði að sér ritum, heldur einnig að ýmiss konar fræðastarfsemi var sett í gang, sem hér á eftir verður reynt að gera nokkru nánari grein fyrir en áður hefur verið gert.

**Snorra-Edda** var eins og fyrr gat vinsæl og áhrifarík á 17. öld. Brynjólfur Sveinsson átti elsta handrit hennar, *Uppsala-Eddu*, og gaf það sínum langvin danska fornfræðingnum Stephaniusi vorið 1639. Áður hafði Jón Guðmundsson lærði skrifað þessa Eddu upp og er það handrit varðveitt í Oxford, Bodley MS Marshall 114. Í byrjun næsta árs, eða 31. jan. 1640, keypti Brynjólfur biskup aðalhandrit *Snorra-Eddu*, sem síðar hlaut nafnið *Konungsbók*. Einnig er vitað að biskupinn átti tvö af þremur gömlum Eddubrotum, sem Finnur Jónsson táknaði sem C og A í útgáfu sinni. Um 1630 voru bæði *Wormsbók* og *Trekarbók Snorra-Eddu* komnar úr landi. Aðeins eitt gamalt handrit Eddu, B-brotið, var þá hérlendis, sem Brynjólfur náði ekki í.

Þetta var Brynjólfi ekki nóg um *Snorra-Eddu*. Hann fékk Jón Guðmundsson

lærða til að skrifa upp fyrir sig Eddu með miklum útskýringum og kallaði Jón það rit *Samantektir um skilning á Eddu* og lauk Jón því 1641. Forrit Jóns að ritinu virðist hafa verið glatað handrit náskylt *Wormsbók*, en annars þarf að rannsaka ungar uppskriftir *Snorra-Eddu* og athuga hvort þar geti leynst sjálfstæð handrit, sem ekki eru uppskriftir varðveittra miðaldagerða. Uppskrift Jóns lærða á *Uppsala-Eddu* í Oxford var ekki notuð sem forrit Eddutexta *Samantekta*. Heilar eru *Samantektir* aðeins varðveittar í Stokkhólmi í einu handriti, sem skrifað var í laumi fyrir Svía. Ástæðan fyrir lélegri varðveislu er, að í brunanum 1728 fór illa allt sem Árni Magnússon hafði safnað til bókmenntasögu, þar á meðal kvæðaskýringar frá 17. öld og uppskriftir *Sæmundar-Eddu*. Fyrir vikið eru bestu og elstu handrit *Samantekta* glötuð og sama er að segja um þau rit sem fjallað er um hér á eftir, en sumt af því líku tæi gæti verið gjörsamlega glatað. Ekki sýnist vafi á því, að tilgangur biskups með því að fá Jón til að setja saman *Samantektir* var að skýra goðsögur *Snorra-Eddu*. Meginefnið í viðbótum Jóns er ýmiss konar lýsing á norrænum átrúnaði og ásamt því að reyna að tengja saman heiðni og grísk-rómverskan átrúnað og kristni.

Af *Samantektum* Jóns lærða er til styttr gerð sem er komin úr smiðju Björns Jónssonar á Skarðsá, þar sem felldir eru niður flestir kaflar úr Eddu, en aftur á móti er viðbótum Jóns haldið til haga. Hér er aftur eins og með *Grænlands annál* dæmi um að Björn á Skarðsá ritstýrði efni sem Jón lærði hafði áður sett saman, en í þessu tilviki er texti Jóns lærða varðveittur í upphaflegri gerð, þótt litlu hefði munað að hann týndist. Aftur á móti eru engin kunn dæmi um að Jón lærði hafi endurskoðað rit, sem Björn á Skarðsá hafði áður sett saman. Gerð Björns af *Samantekum* sýnir, svo að ekki verður um villst, náð samband milli fræðamiðstöðvanna í Skálholti og á Hólum. Í sömu átt bendir vissulega, að árið 1641 var á Hólum í Hjaltadal skrifað Edduhandrit á skinn fyrir Þorlák biskup Skúlason. Forrit var texti *Konungsbókar* en einnig eru þar leshættir úr *Uppsala-Eddu*. Mögulegt er, en ekki víst, að uppskrift Björns á Skarðsá af *Snorra-Eddu* í AM. 742, 4to sé gerð fyrir Brynjólf biskup Sveinsson.

Þetta var um *Snorra-Eddu* og af þessu má sjá, að Brynjólfi biskupi Sveinssyni hefur þótt efni hennar mikilvægt, en hún er líka ein meginheimild um norræna goðafræði. Ekki eru nú kunn fleiri rit, sem Brynjólfur biskup lét skrifa til skýringa á *Snorra-Eddu*. Á þessum árum, eða um 1640, var *Sæmundar-Edda* ekki þekkt. Í skýringum eftir danska fræðimanninn Stephanus Johannis Stephanius við *Gesta Danorum* eftir Danann Saxo málspaka, sem komu út 1645, er fræg tilvitnun í bréf frá Brynjólfi Sveinssyni, sem hann á að hafa skrifað nærri þremur árum áður, eða 1641-42. Þar segir að glötuð sé Edda Sæmundar hins fróða, en aðeins 1000. partur varðveittur í Eddu Snorra Sturlusonar. Elstu heimildir um Eddu kennda við Sæmund fróða eru frá Jóni lærða í fyrrnefndum *Grænlands annálum*. Öruggt er, að klausan er runnin frá Jóni lærða en ekki Birni á Skarðsá, því að hún er endurtekin síðar í *Samantektum*. Eftir hugmynd Jóns lærða í *Grænlands annálum* um *Sæmundar-*

*Eddu fara síðan Magnús Ólafsson í Laufási, Arngrímur Jónsson lærði og Brynjólfur biskups Sveinsson, þegar þeir tala um aðra og eldri Eddu en Snorra-Eddu.*

**Völsunga saga** er aðeins varðveitt í einu skinnhandriti, sem öll varðveitt handrit eru runnin frá. Arngrímur Jónsson lærði og Magnús Ólafsson í Laufási hafa næstum örugglega notað þetta handrit hennar fyrir 1640. Í sögunni eru *Sigurdrífumál*, öðru nafni *Brynhildarljóð*, en texti sama kvæðis er einnig næst á undan eyðunni í *Konungsbók Eddukvæða*, en þar er niðurlagið glatað. Í kvæðinu eru m. a. mörg rúnanöfn. Athyglisvert er þó að aldrei sendu þeir Arngrímur og Magnús *Brynhildarljóð* til Ole Worms, þótt hann spyrði þá og einkum Magnús mikið um rúnir. Talið hefur verið að Magnús hafi ekki þorað það, svo að hann yrði ekki grunaður um galdra.

Sumarið 1641 eignaðist Brynjólfur biskup skinnhandrit *Völsunga sögu* og sést þar enn sami áhuginn á fornum norrænum átrúnaði. Biskupinn fékk Torfa Jónsson frænda sinn til að þýða söguna á latínu, en þýðingunni varð aldrei lokið. Einnig er til brot af annarri þýðingu frá sama tíma, en ekki er vitað hvernig á henni stendur, þótt eðlilegt sé að tengja hana við fræðastarfsemi Brynjólfs.

Ekki þótti Brynjólfi þetta nóg, því að hann fékk ýmsa til að skýra *Brynhildarljóð* eftir texta *Völsunga sögu*, enda *Konungsbók Eddukvæða* óþekkt þá. Svo var lengst af talið, að Björn á Skarðsá hefði samið tvö rit til skýringar á *Brynhildarljóðum* í *Völsunga sögu*. Rit þessi eru mjög mislöng og er annað meira en sex sinnum styttra en hitt. Fyrirsögn styttra ritsins er: *Að fornu í þeirri gömlu norrænu kölluðust rúnir bæði ristingar og skrifelsi* (= stytt heiti *Ristingar*). Það rit var gefið út í bók minni *Eddurit Jóns Guðmundssonar lærða* og leidd rök að því, að höfundur hlyti að vera Jón lærði, þar sem svo mörg efnisatriði voru sameiginleg við önnur rit hans. Einnig er fjarskalega ólíklegt, að sami maður hafi sett saman tvö gjörólík rit um sama efni og láta bæði frá sér.

*Ristingar* voru ekki vinsælar, því að aðeins eru kunn fimm handrit. Varðveislunni er þann veg háttáð, að textinn var gefinn út eftir handriti frá því um 1760, því að þar eru ekki sannanlegir milliliðir milli þess og handrits Jóns lærða. Aftur á móti eru sannanlegir tveir glataðir milliliðir frá frumriti Jóns og elsta varðveitta handrits *Ristinga* frá því 1692, en elstu handrit brunnu 1728.

Að efni til eru *Ristingar* skýringar á efni *Brynhildarljóða* eftir *Völsunga sögu* og athyglisvert er hve Jón er stutturður í samanburði við Björn á Skarðsá. Mætti ímynda sér, að Jón hafi annars staðar og áður verið búinn að skrifa eitthvað um rúnir. Kvæðinu hefur Jón greinilega verið vel kunnugur og hann tilgreinir leshátt úr Eddubálki forgömlum, sem ekki á sér hliðstæðu í *Völsunga sögu* eða *Konungsbók Eddukvæða*. Fimbultýr er nefndur og er heimild að því óþekkt og sama er að segja um Vafprúðni og *Vafprúðnismál*. Fjórða atriðið eftir ókunnri heimild í Eddukvæðum eru tvær tilvísanir til *Hávamála*, þar sem þau eru lögð völu í munn en ekki Óðni. Um *Hávamál* verður rætt sérstaklega hér á

eftir.

Hvaðan eru heimildirnar? Helst væri hægt að ímynda sér, að þarna væri notað glatað handrit með Eddukvæðum, en þar mætti láta sér detta í hug AM. 748 I, 4to eða *Ormsbók*, þegar þau handrit voru fyllri en nú; handritið sem var forrit *Samantekta* og loks segist Jón hafa séð Eddu í æsku sinni, sem í var fleira en í öðrum Eddum.

Einsýnt er, að Jón lærði hafi skrifað *Ristingar* eins og *Samantektir* að beiðni Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar í Skálholti og hafi það verið hluti af aðdráttum biskups að fyrirhuguðu riti um fornan norrænan átrúnað.

**Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá** skrifaði rit, *Nokkuð lítið samtak*, til skýringar á *Brynhildarljóðum* í *Völsunga sögu* og skýringar á *Völuspá*, en þar er í upphafi 1. kafla “um það hvaðan bókin Edda hefur sitt heiti.” Vafalaust er, að bæði ritin voru samin að beiðni Brynjólfs biskups Sveinssonar til útskýringar á fornum norrænum átrúnaði. Því til stuðnings má nefna, að hér er staðfesting á orðum Grunnavíkur-Jóns, þegar hann sagði að á alþingi hefði Björn látið Brynjólf hafa rit, sem biskupinn hefði borgað vel fyrir. Hérna eru komin rit, sem Björn samdi fyrir Skálholtsbiskup.

Fyrirnefnt rit Björns Jónssonar á Skarðsá hefur í handritinu Papp. fol. nr 38 svohljóðandi titil: *Nokkuð lítið samtak um rúnir*, hvaðan þær séu, hvorir þær hafi mest tíðkað, hvar af sitt nafn hafi, um margfjölda þeirra, megn og kraft ásamt ráðningum þeirra dimmu rúnaljóða Brynhildar Buðladóttur með því fleira hér að hnígur. Bráðafangs uppteiknað til umbóta vitra manna á Skarðsá í Skagafirði annó 1642. Björn Jónsson.

Í titlinum er eins konar efnisyfirlit ritsins. Ekki er vafi á hver er höfundur og ritið hefur orðið miklu vinsælla en *Ristingar*, því að ég hef getað fundið um 35 handrit. Þótt Björn á Skarðsá hafi ekki samið tvö rit til skýringa á Sigurdrífumálum, er þetta rit, *Nokkuð lítið samtak*, einkum varðveitt í tveimur gerðum. Sú styttri er varðveitt í átta handritum og er einkenni þess flokks, að þar er aðeins sá hluti, sem er eiginleg útpýðing á ljóðum Brynhildar og um kraft og mátt rúnanna. Þar er greinilegt að áhersla hefur verið lögð á útpýðingu eða ráðningu Brynhildarljóða, þ. e. ljóðanna sjálfra. Aftan við er kafli sem nefnist: “Um mátt og kraft rúnanna” og er aðallega endursagnir úr *Egils sögu*, er Egill Skallagrímsson hjálpaði stúlkunni, sem veiktist vegna þess að henni voru ristnar rúnir, og einnig er frásögnin af því er Egill reisti níðstöng. Þessi styttri gerð er nokkru lengri en *Ristingar*.

Upphaf lengri og algengari gerðar er um komu Asíumanna hingað í Norðurlönd, þ. e. hvenær æsir komu þangað. Þar er vitnað í vitra fræðimenn, Jón Ögmundsson og Sæmund fróða Sigfússon, og sagt að Sæmundur fróði hafi stundað sagnaskrif. Vitnað er í unga annála, sem sagt er að Sæmundur hafi sett saman, en það er aðeins eitt af mörgum dæmum um að honum voru eignuð mörg rit á 17. öld. Annar og þriðji kafli eru um hvaða tungu æsir hafi talað og “hvort letur æsir haft hafi.” Niðurstaðan er að tungan hafi verið kölluð norræna

eður dönsk tunga, en letrið verið rúnir. Fjórði kafli heitir: “Hvað rúnir merki í nafninu sjálfu” og er aðallega hugleiðingar um uppruna orða. Einnig eru þar tilvitnanir í Háttatal Snorra í Eddu hans og klausa úr 1. málfræðiritgerðinni, sem sýnir að Björn hefur haft uppskrift af henni, en handrit hennar, Wormsbók, var þá farin úr landi. Næsti kafli er “Um rúnanna margfaldleg nöfn”. Þar er m. a. sagt, að rúnir hafi nafn af myndan þeirra, landaheitum og loks “af verkum þeirra, eður því sem fyrir þær skyldi framkvæmast”. Hér eru mörg nöfn, sem þyrfti að kanna heimildir og fyrirmyndir að. Þetta er seinasti partur á undan þeim, sem er sameiginlegur lengri og styttri gerð skýringanna.

Lengri gerðin hefur til viðbótar kafla um “hvað leyfilegt eður loflegt sé um rúnanna meðferð”. Þar segir að loflegt sé að vita hvernig “rúnaletur hefur verið myndað og margfaldlega niðursett á bækur eður steina”. “Og þó þeir fjölkynngismenn nokkurir hafi haft eður hafi rúnanna myndir til nokkurra óguðlegra athafna, spilla þeir sjálfum sér en ekki rúnaritinu, því svo má til vonds hafa það letur, sem vér nú daglega tíðkum.” Álíka skoðanir voru algengar á 17. öld. Við niðurlag er lof um fyrnefnt rit Ole Worms *Literatura Runica* 1636.

Að lokum er rétt að nefna, að í þremur handritum er textinn á *Nokkuð lítið samtak* lengdur. Þar er aukið inn Rúnakvæðinu íslenska og framan við stendur í Nks. 1878 a, 4to: “s(eiger) S. P. B. S.”. Fyrir löngu síðan í grein í *Griplu* 6 (1984) “Hvenær týndist kverið úr Konungsbók Eddukvæða?” datt mér í hug að hér gæti verið átt við Þorstein Björnsson prest á Útskálum (d. 1675). Heimildir eru til fyrir því, að Þorsteinn hafi skrifað skýringar á Brynhildarljóðum, en þær eru nú ókunnar. Annað handrit, ÍB. 68, 4to, fyllir hér út skammstöfunina séra Þorleifur Bjarnason (d. 1668). Annars sýndist víst, að lenging textans á ekkert skylt við Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá.

Hér kom fram, að styttri gamla gerðin af *Nokkuð lítið samtak* er næstum aðeins skýringar á kvæðinu sjálfu, en síðan er til lengingar settur framan og aftan við almennur fróðleikur um rúnir. Sýnist því augljóst, að styttri gerðin ætti að vera samin fyrst og vera þar af leiðandi upphaflegri, enda virðast vera viðbætur í lengri gerðinni.

Af heimildum þessa rits er merkast að þar eru sex vísur úr *Hávamálum* og benti Bugge á það fyrir löngu. Eins og áður sagði eru tilvísanir til *Hávamála* í Ristingum Jóns lærða. Einnig vitnar Björn á Skarðsá til *Hávamála* í lögbókarskýringum sem hann samdi 1626 og til eru í eiginhandarriti. Texti Björns er skyldur útgáfu Resens frá 1665 og ekki er víst að *Hávamál* séu komin úr Konungsbók Eddukvæða. Fjarri fer að þetta sé fyllilega rannsakað og fleiri gamlar heimildir eru til um *Hávamál*.

Um heitið á Eddukvæðum segir Björn í Völuspárskýringum sínum frá 1644: “bók Sæmundar sem áður hét Ljóðabók”. Ekki verður þetta öðruvísi skilið en Björn á Skarðsá hafi þekkt Ljóðabók sem heiti á Eddukvæðum. Það gæti svo aftur á móti bent til að Björn hafi þekkt handrit með þeim áður en Brynjólfur fékk Konungsbók Eddukvæða í hendur.

Eins og fyrr gat skrifaði ég grein í 6. bindi af *Griplu*, þar sem ég reyndi að tímasetja hvenær kverið týndist úr Konungsbók Eddukvæða, en þar vantar nærri 9 heilar vísur aftan af *Sigurdrífumálum*. Sá texti er heill í pappírsuppskriftum og víst þykir að hann sé kominn úr Konungsbók meðan hún var heil. Jón Helgason athugaði niðurlagið og gerði ættarskrá 4 handrita þess, en taldi a. m. k. tvo milliliði frá upphaflegri uppskrift. Texti handrita með niðurlaginu er þannig samsettur, að sá sem skrifaði *Sigurdrífumál* til loka eftir Konungsbók hefur haft uppskrift á kvæðinu eftir *Völsunga sögu*. Það sést greinilega á AM. 161, 8vo, þar sem textinn stendur næst uppskriftinni eftir Konungsbók. Þar er hlaupið yfir vísu 13.4-21.3, síðan er textinn til loka eftir Konungsbók, og aftan við eru vísur 13-17 eftir *Völsunga sögu*, þótt fyllri texti sé í Konungsbók. Af þremur af fjórum fyrrnefndum handritum með niðurlagi *Sigurdrífumála* er styttri gerðin af *Nokkuð lítið samtak* eftir Björn á Skarðsá og eðlilegt að líta svo á að samband sé á milli. Einhver sem fékkst við skýringar á kvæðinu hefur aukið við eftir Konungsbók. Ekki er gott að sjá hver áhrif hafði að það handrit kom í leitirnar, en í bréfum til Worms sagði Brynjólfur að texti *Sigurdrífumála* sé betri þar en í *Völsunga sögu*.

Úr Konungsbók hefur þá orðið að tynast á bilinu 1641-43, en hér er ekki reynt að svara því hvað hafi valdið því að kverið týndist eða að spyrja um ástæðuna fyrir því að glataða kverið varð viðskila við bókina. Ekki eru kunnar eða varðveittar neinar skýringar á *Sigurdrífumálum* frá 17. öld, aðrar en þær sem að framan voru nefndar og þess vegna er ómögulegt að í slíkum skýringum sé texti Konungsbókar.

### Niðurstaða

Ekki er vitað um eldri heimildir um Eddu kennda við Sæmund fróða en í *Grænlands annálum* Jóns lærða frá því um 1623 og frá honum er heitið runnið.

Fræðastarfsemi á vegum biskupsstólanna á 17. öld var mikilvæg fyrir rannsóknir og útbreiðslu fornra íslenskra bókmennta og hefur líklegast skipti sköpum fyrir varðveislu *Eddukvæða*. Brynjólfur biskup Sveinsson fékk óskólagengna menn til að skýra fyrir sig forn fræði til undirbúnings rits um fornan norrænan átrúnað og hafi hann leitað til lærðra manna um slíkt er það ekki varðveitt. Í þeim athugunum kom *Konungsbók Eddukvæða* í leitirnar og örlitlu munaði að hún varðveittist heil. Ekki verður annað ráðið af orðum Björns Jónssonar á Skarðsá en Eddukvæði hafi áður verið kölluð *Ljóðabók*.

Að lokum er hægt að spyrja. Er von til að eitthvað fleira komi í leitirnar, sem bent gæti til annarra handrita Eddukvæða en *Konungsbókar* eða verður hægt að vita eitthvað um *Konungsbók Eddukvæða* áður en Brynjólfur biskup Sveinsson fékk hana í hendur?

## Pouring Óðinn's Mead: An Antiquarian Theme?

Alison Finlay

Birkbeck College, University of London

Skalds both pagan and Christian repeatedly invoke the myth of Óðinn's mediation of poetry from the supernatural to the human world: *Suttungar mjǫð gaf Óðinn Ásunum ok þeim mǫnnum er yrkja kunnu* (*Skáldskaparmál* 5). The kenning of the earliest skald Bragi, *drykkja Fiqlnis fjalla* 'drink of the mountain-Fiqlnir (Óðinn; giant)' follows the same pattern as that of the Christian Arnórr jarlaskáld, *hrosta brim Alfǫður* 'All-father's (Óðinn's) mash-surf (beer)' (Whaley, 220). The taste for cataloguing attributed to Snorri by Roberta Frank (1981) may have prompted over-elaboration in his version of the myth, but also reflects the formulaic practice of the skalds, whose intention amounts to the association of their craft – represented as a liquid of virtually any kind – with the supernatural, signified either by Óðinn, or by the dwarfs or giants, whether named or generalized, who are given roles in Snorri's story.

These kennings occur no more and no less in verses attributed to the poets of the poets' sagas than those of their supposed contemporaries. The proportion of seven attributed to Kormákr to one to Björn Hítðelakappi reflects the greater preponderance of mythological references in ninth-century poetry. These

invocations of the myth do nothing to identify the poetic persona of the speaker or to articulate beliefs about the nature of poetry and the process of composition underlying the mythic conception of poetry as a supernaturally-produced intoxicating drink. The characterization of these poets as marginal, aggressive characters, intimidating in appearance and temperament, has been taken to derive from the association of poets with Óðinn, but the link remains subliminal – or rather, is mediated by the much more overt interest in poetic characterization in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*.

The stereotype of the dark and difficult poet hinted at in other poets' sagas is fully explored in *Egils saga's* portrait of a violent, obsessive, moody man who was also a creative genius. The thirteenth-century author refashioned the model of the archetypal pre-Christian poet according to his own antiquarian prepossessions, giving final shape to an evolving body of legend that had added anecdotes and verses to the core of the poet's surviving longer poems and perhaps some occasional verses.<sup>1</sup> If the characterization of Egill was partly shaped by conventional ideas of what poets were like, the portrait is so strikingly individualised that it must have influenced the presentation of poets of more shadowy reputation in their sagas.

### 'Wolf-grey hat's stump'

At the thematic heart of the saga are two episodes narrating acts of poetic composition and affirming, in contrasting modes, the life-giving, indeed life-saving function of the art. Egill's third longer poem, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, lacks this vivid narrative placing, but incongruously devotes nine strophes, more than a third of its length, to an account of the *Höfuðlausn* episode. I suggest that the tradition of Egill's dark ugliness owes much to the account of his dangerous encounter in York in *Arinbjarnarkviða*, which alludes to his *dökkva skqr* (3; 258-9):

drók djarfhøtt  
of dökkva skqr,  
létk hersi  
heim of sóttan.

I drew a bold hood  
over my dark hair,  
paid to the ruler  
a visit at home.

This may be the kernel of the saga's veritable obsession with Egill's appearance, which is frequently mentioned in verse and prose. If *Arinbjarnarkviða* is Egill's own work, it vouches for his dark colouring as a matter of historical fact. The literary fact of the poet's strongly-marked looks serves a number of symbolic and practical purposes, and may have percolated from traditions about Egill into other poets' sagas with dark, ugly or rugged-

<sup>1</sup>My working assumption is that Egill did compose the longer poems but that many *lausavísur* were added at a pre-literary stage, and some possibly by the author.

looking heroes. The emphasis on Egill's ugly head elaborates the conceit of *hofuðlausn*. This is the name given to the twenty-strophe *drápa* which Egill composed overnight to save his skin at the court of his enemy, King Eiríkr blóðøx.<sup>2</sup> The name is alluded to in Eiríkr's *ek gef þér hofuð þitt at sinni* and in Egill's rueful verse response which fittingly closes the ironic episode (193-4),<sup>3</sup>

Erumka leitt,  
þótt ljótr séi,  
hjalma klett  
af hilmí þiggja;  
hvar's sás gat  
af gøfuglyndum  
æðri gjøf  
allvalds syni.

I am not unwilling,  
ugly though it be,  
the helmet-crag  
from the prince to accept;  
where is he who has received  
from the generously-minded  
a greater gift  
(from) a mighty king's son?

but the word *hofuðlausn* occurs not in that poem nor the prose text, but in the account of the 'head to head' confrontation of Egill and Eiríkr in *Arinbjarnarkviða*. Both are represented almost as disembodied heads, the king by his terrifyingly glittering gaze, and the poet more disjointedly by a collection of features combining to make up his ugly head (vv. 5-9; 259-61):

Né hamfagrt  
høðum þótti  
skaldfé mitt  
at skata húsum,  
þás ulfgrátt  
við Yggjar miði  
hattar staup  
at hilmí þák.

Not fair to look at  
seemed to men  
my poet's payment  
in the generous man's hall,  
when a wolf-grey  
in exchange for Yggr's mead (= poetry)  
hat-stump (= head)  
from the prince I received.

Við því tók,  
en tvau fylgðu  
søkk sámléit  
siðra brúna  
ok sá muðr,  
es mína bar  
hofuðlausn  
fyr hilmis kné.

I accepted it,  
and with it went two  
dark-coloured gems  
of wide brows,  
and that mouth  
which carried my  
head-ransom  
before the king's knee,

Þars tannfjöld  
með tungu þák  
ok hlertjöld  
hlustum gøfðuð,

where a crowd of teeth  
with a tongue I accepted,  
and ear-tents  
endowed with hearing,

<sup>2</sup> Except in W (185 n. 1). *Hofuðlausn* stories are also told of Bragi inn gamli (*Egils saga* 182), Þórarinn loftunga (*Knýtlinga saga* 125) and Óttarr inn svarti (*Flateyjarbók*). The metonymy 'head' for 'life' occurs in Óðinn's words in *Hávamál* 106, *svá hætta ek hofði til*; cf. *hafelan beorgan* (*Beowulf* 1372).

<sup>3</sup> A further verse repeats the motif of the head as physical object, reporting Egill's success in keeping his *svartbrúnum sjónum* 'black-brown eyes' and regaining control of his *áttgøfguðum Ála hattar arfstóli* (194) 'noble hereditary seat of Áli's hat (the helmet)'.

en sú gjöf  
golli betri  
hróðugs konungs  
of heitin vas.

but that gift  
better than gold  
of the glorious king  
was considered to be.

This parodies conventional poems such as the shield *drápa*, of which Egill is credited with two, describing precious gifts for which the donor is thanked. The head's ugliness is rhetorically necessary to contrast with conventionally praised rings and shields. It is characteristic of the saga's use of thematic repetition that the 'ugly head' motif is further developed and bound up with other themes, but the idea of Egill's ugliness, together with the rugged appearance attributed to other poets, may be rooted in the poetic joke of *Arinbjarnarkviða*.<sup>4</sup>

Other references to Egill's dark, ugly head indicate his individuality, his savage temperament, his poetic articulateness, his inheritance from a dark supernatural strain linking his family with Óðinn. He is most fully described at Athelstan's court, out of sympathy with the celebration of a battle in which his brother has died (143-4):

Egill var mikilleitr, ennibreiðr, brúnamikill, nefit ekki langt, en ákafliga digrt, granstæðit vítt ok langt, hakan breið furðuliga, ok svá allt um kjálkana, hálsdigr ok herðimikill, svá at þat bar frá því, sem aðrir menn váru, harðleitr ok grimmligr, þá er hann var reiðr; hann var vel í vexti ok hverjum manni hæri, úlfgrátt hárit ok þykkt ok varð snimma skollótr; en er hann sat þá hleypði hann annarri brúninni ofan á kinnina, en annarri upp í hárrætr; Egill var svarteygr ok skolbrúnn. Ekki vildi hann drekka, þó at honum væri borit, en ýmsum hleypði hann brúnunum ofan eða upp.

The detail of Egill's grotesquely mobile brows may arise from a literal interpretation of a verse recording the easing of the hero's mood by the king's gifts, but perhaps originally intended as more general praise of a ruler whose generosity smoothes worry from his followers' brows:

Knáttu hvarms af harmi  
hnúpgnípur mér drúpa,  
nú fann ek þanns ennis  
ósléttur þær rétti;  
gramr hefr gerðihomrum  
grundar upp of hrundit,  
sá's til ýgr, af augum,  
armsíma, mér grímu.

With grief the jutting peaks  
of my eyebrows did droop;  
now I have found one who righted  
those unevennesses of the forehead.  
The king has pushed up girdling cliffs  
cliffs (=eyebrows) of the mask's ground  
(= face) from my eyes,  
he who is fierce to (= gives away) arm-rings.

Other features, 'wolf-grey' hair, dark eyes and wide brow, are all mentioned in *Arinbjarnar-kviða* and repeated elsewhere in the saga. This cameo of the dark and threatening hero is placed tellingly at the moment where he affirms his

<sup>4</sup> The same joke occurs in the *hofuðlausn* story told of Óttarr inn svarti in *Flateyjarbók*, possibly in imitation of *Egils saga* (*Íslendingasögur* III, 2201-2): 'Þat mun ráð Óttar að þú þiggir höfuð þitt í þessu sinni fyrir drápuna.' Óttar svarar: 'Þessi gjöf þykir mér allgóð herra þótt höfuðið sé eigi fagurt.'

allegiance to the brother so unlike him in appearance and temperament.

Here the saga author accentuates for a specific purpose the theme of Egill's remarkable appearance, which goes back to his references to his own dark and ugly looks. The 'ugly head' verses following the *Höfuðlausn* story were probably an earlier replication of Egill's original conceit. The origin of this theme may be a poetic joke, in which the head is represented as a dubious poetic prize. It is more likely, given the widespread reference to the darkness and ugliness of other poets, that Egill himself was drawing on older beliefs about the temperamental characteristics of poets and the visible signs of these reflected in their appearance. The existence of a substantial body of pre-Christian poetry attached to *Egils saga* gives unique access to the kernel of tradition on which a thirteenth-century author, and earlier contributors to the development of the saga's material, built a substantial physical portrait.

#### **'Very ugly and like his father'**

Egill's striking appearance contributes to the theme, based in another of his poems, of the importance of family ties. *Sonatorrek* locates the poet's distress in his outrage at the breaching of his *frændgarðr*, the cutting of his *ættar þond*. Egill's sense of family has a political dimension, opposed to the dangerous aspiration of service of a king which kills his uncle and brother. This contrast is articulated by the family's division into two strains: the dark, ugly, aggressive and individualistic, with hints of the supernatural, to which Egill belongs, and the fair, sociable and reasonable side represented by the two Þórólfrs (and Egill's son Þorsteinn). Whether this division originated with the saga or was already strong in tradition, it took firm hold and was generalised beyond the confines of *Egils saga*, as a passage in the last chapter of the saga, paraphrased in the earlier MS of *Gunnlaugs saga*, demonstrates (299-300):

Frá Þorsteini er mikil ætt komin ok mart stórmenni ok skáld mǫrg, ok er þat Mýramannakyn, ok svá allt þat, er komit er frá Skalla-Grími. Lengi helzk þat í ætt þeiri, at menn váru sterkir ok vígamenn miklir, en sumir spakir at viti. Þat var sundrleitt mjök, því at í þeiri ætt hafa fœzk þeir menn, er fríðastir hafa verit á Íslandi, sem var Þorsteinn Egilsson ok Kjartan Ólafsson, systursonr Þorsteins, ok Hallr Guðmundarson, svá ok Helga in fagra, dóttir Þorsteins, er þeir deildu um Gunnlaugr ormstunga ok Skáld-Hrafn; en fleiri váru Mýramenn manna ljótastir.

The names Úlfr inn óargi ('the un-cowardly'; by litotes, 'the ferocious'), Bjálfi ('animal skin'), and Hallbjörn háftroll sketch in these suggestions even before the more extensive accounts of the *mjök hamrammr* Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr. Grímr is a cognomen of Óðinn, and *skalli* 'bald head' associates him with the berserks, who are said in some sources to be bald with unusually hard bones in their heads.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 1976, 47-54. *Skalli* occurs as a wolf *heiti*; the saga uses it alongside a reference

Supernatural tendencies fade with the family's emigration to Iceland. Egill finds redress for his sons' and brother's death in the measures of the *Sonatorrek* rather than in animalistic rage. But a hint of savagery lives on, in Skalla-Grímr's violent attack (he is said to *hamask*) on his twelve-year-old son, and killing of a man, in a ball game *um kveldi eptir sólafall* (101). Egill's similar behaviour as a six-year-old is one of the saga's many structural repetitions, binding his temperament into the pattern established by his forebears. Elements of savagery in Egill's later history are not overtly supernatural; the wolfish strain is suggested by association, as in his fight against Atli inn skammi, killed when Egill *beit í sundr í honum barkann* (210), a possible allusion to Sigmundur's attack on his son/nephew in *Völsunga saga*.

These suggestions of supernatural and wolfish family traits probably existed in oral tradition in the form of names that the author is unlikely to have invented. But he was clearly concerned to weave Egill's personality and appearance inextricably into the legend. The family tradition of darkness and ugliness must have fed into the poet's creation of his own poetic persona, to be emphasised in his self-representation in the image of a grotesque, even threatening, head, which was the antithesis of the glittering prizes conventionally courted by poets, and which also embodied the mechanical means by which the poet conveyed his poetic creations.

### Egill and Óðinn

The family's wolf-like qualities suggest their affinity with Óðinn,<sup>6</sup> whose association with the wolf is developed in the iconography of warfare. The *berserkr* 'bear-shirt' was identified as Óðinn's warrior; the term and its synonym *úlfheðinn* 'wolf-skin' imply a belief that warriors adopted the physical forms of animals as well as their strength and ferocity. The idea of metamorphosis fits Óðinn's reputation as a shape-changer. Among the legendary heroes, some divine or semi-divine in origin, represented as Óðinn's protégés is Starkaðr, of whom there are confused accounts in Saxo and *Gautreks saga*. Poised uneasily between Óðinn's patronage and Þórr's enmity, he invites comparison with Egill in several ways. Of giant origin, he acquires the gift of poetry from Óðinn, and is represented as grey-haired, wolf-like, and

---

to his *úlfúð* (Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir 1997, 75-77). Nordal's view of the ideological and temperamental division within the family as a conflict of the values of farmer and viking within Egill's own character is over-simplified (1924, 154-5). Richard North sees the progressive humanisation from Kveld-Úlfr to Egill as 'part of the author's image of surreptitious transformation from pagan to Christian cultures' (1991, 148-9). From this perspective, the fair strain in the family is a 'modern' development, in contrast with the ancient pagan tendencies represented by the hints of wolfishness and monstrosity in their genealogy.

<sup>6</sup> Despite the theory that Egill turned away from his family's earlier devotion to Þórr (Nordal, 1924), which was recently supported by Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson's proposed reading of *Sonatorrek* 22 (1999, 173-4).

old (*inn gamli*).

Among the names of the one-eyed god are Bileygr ‘Failing-eyed’, Blindr ‘blind’, Tvíblindi ‘Double-blind’, Helblindi ‘Hell-blind’, and several Odinic heroes share the god’s blindness. Starkaðr ends his life almost blind, Haraldr hilditǫnn, another semi-legendary king with Odinic connections, completely blind. Egill’s blindness in old age may seem more like a realistic element in the physical decline of an eighty-year-old man than a reminiscence of the hero’s Odinic attributes; but then, the emphasis on the hero’s old age itself recalls the depiction of the god himself (also known as Karl ‘old man’), and of heroes like Starkaðr.

Most significantly, Egill is a self-announced adherent of Óðinn, affirming his allegiance in plain terms in *Sonatorrek*. He refers to his past relationship with Óðinn and finds resolution for his grief in the present intention to offer reluctant sacrifices to the god. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson argues that ‘a poet with the temperament that the composer of *Sonatorrek* had would hardly have gone on sacrificing to a god who had let him down in times of need’ (1999, 173-4). This misreads the bleak resignation of the poem’s resolution. The poet’s progression from reluctant sacrifice to acknowledgement of divine gifts affirms that adherence to the god implies acceptance of his nature; Óðinn grants *bætr* on his own terms (*Sonatorrek* 24; 256):

Gofumk íþrótt  
úlfs of bági  
vígi vanr  
vammi firrða  
ok þat geð,  
es ek gerða mér  
vísa fjandr  
af vélǫndum.

Gave to me  
the wolf’s adversary,  
accustomed to battle,  
a craft beyond reproach,  
and the faculty  
to make for myself  
true enemies  
from plotters. (*af* emended from MS *at*)

Apparently modern in its psychological analysis of the process of healing set in motion by the process of composition, the poem has also been read as a genuine manifestation of pagan ritual. Joseph Harris (1999) suggests that the poet, as devotee of Óðinn, re-enacts the mythological ‘experience’ of to Óðinn himself, drawing out aspects of his mourning for his son’s death which parallel Óðinn’s loss of Baldr. Most famously parallel is the father’s inability to avenge his son, since the ‘slayer’ was the inanimate sea; this may be alluded to in the poem’s title. The poet’s identification with Óðinn is reinforced by the imagery of Ragnarǫk particularly at the end of the poem; Óðinn is referred to in terms invoking that conflagration (*úlfs bági*, *Míms vinr*). The poet represents himself as, like Óðinn, in need of friends and supporters, and includes what Harris calls a ‘satire’ comparable to the description in *Vǫluspá* of the world’s decadence as the last days approach.

The parallel with Óðinn’s mourning for Baldr probably weighed with the saga author in his firm identification of the poem with Þoðvarr’s death, despite

the plural *sona-* in the title and the poem's references to the deaths of at least two sons. The closing strophe, in which the poet, stripped of friends and kin, resignedly awaits the goddess Hel, seems so like the words of closure with which the saga should end that it is disconcerting to realise that, according to the conventional dating, Egill has another 30 years to live. Ironically, the stimulus for the series of loosely structured anecdotes about the poet's old age with which the saga continues may have been precisely the image of old age which Egill constructed for himself in *Sonatorrek*.

### Óðinn and poetry

Another kind of re-enactment suggested by Harris's account of *Sonatorrek* is its representation of the poetic process. Despite its apparently modern endorsement of the therapeutic power of self-expression, a religious listener of the tenth century may have understood from the poem's opening that the poet, finding speech weigh heavily on his tongue, is forced by an act of will to re-enact Óðinn's mystical *þjóf* of poetry. The transformation of this theft into the *fagnafundr* 'joyful find' of v.3 presages the poem's progression towards the acknowledgement of poetry as Óðinn's gift. Its drawing out from the recesses of the mind corresponds to Óðinn's appropriation of the mead from the giant's cave. The link between intoxication and inspiration suggested by the metaphor of fermented drink for poetry remains subliminal; poets use it 'with no suggestion of ecstasis' (Dronke 1984, 55). Dronke finds in *Hávamál* 13-14 a play on the special nature of Óðinn's drinking; whereas men lose their *geð* 'wits' under the influence of drink, the god gained *geð*, a specific poetic faculty, from his drinking in the giant's home. Óðinn's vomiting of the poetic mead may be alluded to in stories of Egill's extravagant drinking feats: '*Síðan þeysti Egill upp ór sér spýju mikla, ok gaus í andlit Ármóði, í augun ok nasarnar ok í munninn*' (226).<sup>7</sup> The verb *þeysa* is echoed in *Sonatorrek* 2, where poetry era *auðþeystr* 'is not easily made to rush' from the grief-stricken poet's mind. The image of vomiting for the production of poetry suggests effort and pain but at the same time the involuntary spasm of intoxication.

Egill has something to say about the psychological process of producing poetry, locating its raw material in the poet's *hugar fylgsni* 'hiding place of

<sup>7</sup> Egill hooks out Ármóðr's eye, recalling an incident in *Sturlu saga* ch. 31, in which Hvamm-Sturla, Snorri Sturluson's father, is attacked and explicitly labelled an Odinic figure: *Þorbjörg, konu Páls í hljóp fram milli manna ok hafði kníf í hendi ok lagði til Sturlu ok stefndi í augat ok mælti þetta við, 'Hví skal ek eigi gera þik þeim líkastan, er þú vill líkastr vera, – en þar er Óðinn?' If Snorri wrote *Egils saga*, he must have drawn this detail, not corroborated in verse, from his own family history. At first sight the parallel is not close, since in *Egils saga* the Odinic character himself does the blinding; but forcing a victim into the likeness of Óðinn suggests a sacrifice to the god, as in the practice of hanging a sacrificial victim in tribute to the 'Hanging-god'. Likewise, during his spectacular vomiting feat, Egill makes Ármóðr vomit too by spewing into his mouth.*

thought', from which it must be dragged or driven. As fluency returns, he speaks of carrying the *mærðar timbr* 'timber of praise' out of the *orðhof* 'temple of words', suggesting a location within the mind of a sacred store of words and emotions, the potentialities for poetry, which have to be shaped and projected by the poet's craft. This transformation is worked by the two gifts of Óðinn which Egill acknowledges at the end of the poem, the *íþrótt vamma firrða* 'flawless skill' and the *geð* 'spirit' that enables him to unmask his enemies.

The idea of poetry as an *íþrótt*, a skill that has to be learned, fits Egill's metaphors of building and shaping. But *vamma firrða* 'removed from faults' makes a more mystical claim, echoed by the reference in *Arinbjarnarkviða* to the *grunlaust grepps æði* 'unsuspicious mind of the poet', and *lastalauss* 'blameless' in the corrupt *Sonatorrek* 3. *Geð* means passion, temperament, or a particular mental faculty; in the context of poetry, Richard North argues for a sense like 'poetic soul'. The inspirational mead of poetry operates on the poet's *geð*, 'the special parts of man this poetic mead reaches and rouses' (1991, 38-51). This is supported by the term *Óðrerir* 'rouser of the mind', interpreted by Snorri as one of the three vats containing the poetic mead, but most likely a name for the mead itself: 'As Óðinn therefore gave *Óðrerir* to men (*Hávamál* 107), so would he give Egill (and Starcatherus) a pure art, but at the same time a passionate spirit which the art had to stir for a poem to be composed' (North 1991, 51).

So *geð* is a temperament or state of mind special to poets. Unfortunately, Egill's definition, *þat geð, es ek gerða mér vísa fjáendr af vélǫndum* 'that temperament by which I made for myself true enemies out of deceivers', is not illuminating. Perhaps, together with the 'flawless' quality attributed to poetry and the claim to professional discernment in *Arinbjarnarkviða*, it suggests an authority based on honesty, which not only arrives at true judgements of the poet's subjects but can detect subterfuge in all his associates. But this claim for a poet's spiritual authority is not supported elsewhere. Alternatively, the words may refer to the aggressiveness proper to a follower of the god of war; Egill forces those who would scheme against him into outright confrontation. As North says, 'It is possible that in alluding to Óðinn as the "wolf's foe, used to combat", Egill shows that as a favourite, he still expected to train and fight for his god in Ragnarök, the Armageddon of the northern world' (1991, 51).

### 'I carve runes'

Egill uses a different divine gift, skill in runes, to uncover the treachery of Bárðr and Queen Gunnhildr, who have poisoned his drinking-horn. Egill carves runes on the suspect horn and reddens them with blood, whereupon the horn breaks (109). The accompanying verse mentions rune-carving but not the breaking of the horn, which is probably inspired by a story told in Gregory's dialogues of St Benedict, who broke a poisoned drinking-cup by making the sign of the cross

over it (Bjarni Einarsson 1975, 176). This could have been pressed into service by a learned author to dramatise the instructions given to Sigurðr by the valkyrie Sigrdrífa for the carving of *qlrúnar* (*Sigrdrífumál* 7-8). On another occasion Egill acts uncharacteristically as healer, curing a sick girl by detecting and correcting a bungled attempt to work on her with *manrúnar* ‘love runes’. This story was probably not the saga author’s invention, since it is clumsily told, giving two conflicting accounts of the girl’s illness (229, 238). But it looks like antiquarian reconstruction of the occult practices of paganism, and again Bjarni Einarsson may be right to see parallels in hagiographic (this time biblical) miracle stories (1975, 260-61).

Egill’s third essay in runes is the carving of a *formáli* ‘spell’, which he also pronounces, on his *níðstong* against Eiríkr and Gunnhildr (171). The runes are not mentioned in the two verses believed to paraphrase the spoken formula. While there is evidence elsewhere that the reciting of verses accompanied the raising of *níð*, the carving of runes is more doubtful.<sup>8</sup> We may speculate that the magic power of the *níð* is inherent in the horse-decked pole and the spoken curse, and that the idea of its being reinforced by a written inscription is likely to be the addition of a later, literate culture.

In the mysterious myth of *Hávamál* 138-45, Óðinn hangs himself on a ‘windy tree’; he snatches up *rúnar*, and acquires nine mighty spells, wisdom from the ‘son of Bǫlþórr’ (a giant, apparently Óðinn’s grandfather), and a drink of the precious mead. Here, poetry and runes are closely allied among the esoteric wisdom Óðinn gains from the giants and the realm of the dead. Egill is the only poet of the poets’ sagas given skill in runes. This aspect of his persona probably developed to strengthen the poet’s affinity with Óðinn, and the mystical powers claimed for poetry itself. Egill’s exploits as rune-master are extraneous to the main themes and narrative of the saga, and the idea may be a comparatively late, antiquarian development.

### Other poets

Generalized references to ‘the characteristic depiction of the skalds of [the poets’ sagas] as dark, with crooked or ugly noses, pale complexions and heavy eyebrows’ (Clunies Ross 1978, 4) are influenced by the ‘Egill effect’; the strong visual picture of Egill in his saga colours our impressions of lesser poets. Only Kormákr (*svartr á hár ok sveipr í hárinu*; *KS*, 206) can be described as dark, though Gunnlaugr also has dark eyes, and Pormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld is *svartr á hárslit* (*FS*, 124). The others are all red- or chestnut-haired; Björn Hítðælakappi is *mikill maðr vexti ok vænn ok freknótt, rauðskeggjaðr, skrúfhárr* (*BS*, 197); Hallfreðr is *jarpr á hár, ok fór vel* (*HS*, 141); Gunnlaugr *ljósjarpr á hár, ok fór allvel* (*GS*, 59).

<sup>8</sup> Another *níðreising*, including the carving of a *formáli* in runes, is described in *Vatnsdæla saga*, but may be borrowed from *Egils saga*.

The stereotype of the red-haired poet competes with a tendency for poets to announce themselves in verse as dark or dark-eyed, perhaps a convention established by Egill himself or in his time.<sup>9</sup> This accounts for Gunnlaugr's unlikely combination of light chestnut hair and black eyes, which is based on his reference in a verse to *svört augu mér* (*GS*, 96). Darkness is also a prerequisite for Gunnlaugr in a saga which is closest to *Egils saga* in its contrasting of dark and fair characters. Like Egill, Gunnlaugr is contrasted with a more easy-going brother; but more significantly with the father of his beloved, Þorsteinn Egilsson, already established in *Egils saga* as belonging to his family's fair strain. Gunnlaugr mocks him in a verse as *hǫldr inn hvíti* (*GS*, 90). This is reminiscent of Björn Hítðlakappi's two sneering verse references to his rival Þórðr Kolbeinsson as *sveinn inn hvíti* (*BS*, 140, 144),<sup>10</sup> and Hallfreðr's address to his rival Gríss as *halr enn hvíti* (*HS*, 182). A jibe equating fair colouring with cowardice would hardly be effective unless spoken by a dark man; and Kormákr uses an opposing epithet of himself: *sveinn enn svartí, sonr +gmundar, skáldit* (206). *Kormáks saga* opposes dark and fair only in a verse in which the poet boasts that despite his *svört augu* and *allfǫlr* complexion, he has had as much success with women as *drengr enn fagri* (211). No rival in love other than this hypothetical fair man has emerged at this point, but the reference may be based on an opposition in an older version of the story between a dark poet and his fair rival.

The tradition of the dark poet underlies, and sometimes conflicts with, the superficial physical descriptions of their heroes constructed by thirteenth-century saga authors. The rhetoric of contrast between dark and fair surfaces incompletely in most of the poets' sagas, but is not realised thematically as in *Egils saga*. It is impossible to say whether the theme of the dark poet originated with Egill himself, or was an early tradition about poets in general; but the fact that it is clearly articulated by Egill himself, one of the earliest of these poets, credits him with an important role in the development of the idea.

Some descriptions of poets do share with *Egils saga* the suggestion of striking and strongly marked appearance, which supports, better than the dark colouring she asserts, Clunies Ross's point that the poets' physical appearance mirrors their temperamental turbulence. Hallfreðr is *skolbrúnn*<sup>11</sup> *nokkut ok heldr*

<sup>9</sup> Sighvatr Þórðarson refers in verses to his *svört skǫr* and *þessi augun íslenzk en svörtu* (*Heimskringla*, II 62, 140); his poet nephew Óttarr is nicknamed *inn svartí*, as are other poets.

<sup>10</sup> Þórðr's appearance is not described in the (incomplete) saga, but the taunt implies fair colouring, like that against Þorsteinn Egilsson (*allra manna fríðastr sýnum, hvítr á hár ok bjartr álitum*) in *Egils saga*: 'Rennr þú nú, Þorsteinn hvíti?' (291). In *Laxdæla saga* (90), Kjartan is referred to as *hvítan mann ok huglausan*.

<sup>11</sup> The suggestion that *skolbrúnn* means 'dark-browed', since Egill is also *svartbrýnn* (vv. 35, 49), is improbable since it often applies, as in *Hallfreðar saga*, to otherwise fair men. It often goes together with the suggestion of ugliness or large, strongly marked features, occurring alongside *mikilleitr*, *skarpleitr*, *ljótr* and *heldr ósýniligr*, and specifically with ugly or large noses in *Hallfreðar saga*, *Egils saga* and elsewhere.

*nefljótr* (HS, 141); Gunnlaugr, in a description probably modelled on that of Hallfreðr, is *noðkut nefljótr ok skapfelligr í andliti* (GS, 59).<sup>12</sup>

Although no other poet's saga characterizes its hero as purposefully as *Egils saga*, the heroes of all four poets' sagas sharing the love-rivalry theme have instability or aggression or both in their make-up. Instability is built in to the overall theme in the form of tension between the hero's love and his desire to make his reputation abroad. In addition, all (except *Bjarnar saga*, the lost beginning of which probably included an introductory description of the hero) comment explicitly on the hero's temperament.

Kormákr is described as *áhlaupamaðr í skapi, forzmaðr* and *óráðþægr* (206, 235). As in *Egils saga*, his brother's moderate disposition is a foil for the poet's difficult temperament (206). Beyond these explicit comments it is difficult to determine how far inconsistency is intended to be characteristic of Kormákr, since the saga's imperfectly assembled overlapping narratives themselves create arbitrariness. Kormákr's abrupt and complete abandonment of his wedding suggests extraordinary instability, but the saga author does not wholeheartedly attribute it to Kormákr's temperament, offering the justifications of the witch's curse and disagreements over settlements. Multiple strands in the saga's sources have not been fully reconciled. But the mention of inconsistency as a characteristic of the hero suggests that this was the basic explanation of his behaviour; it is easy to imagine later transmitters of the material feeling the need to rationalize, adding elements such as the witch's curse which, as a supernatural phenomenon, could be seen as a metaphorical expression of irrationality.

It has been said of characterisation in the work of Snorri Sturluson that 'a man's character is basically the sum of his acts' (Bagge 1991, 187). In some sagas this tendency may be partly result from the author's attempt to construct a biography from traditional narratives that themselves privilege 'acts' over description. A saga made up of a composite of inconsistent traditions, such as *Kormáks saga*, or one with a compressed, laconic style, such as *Hallfreðar saga*, may give the impression of arbitrary, irresolute behaviour, and the question whether the author intended this to reflect on the hero's personality must be carefully considered.

Hallfreðr is described as *margbreytinn*. This is not borne out, as in *Kormáks saga*, by his failure to marry; he is robustly consistent in separating love from marriage in his treatment of Kolfinna. The poet's marriage, framed by the beginning and end of his affair with Kolfinna, does suggest inconsistency. His

<sup>12</sup> Their rugged looks do not in themselves mark them out as poets; the same link between physique and temperament is made with characters who are not poets, such as Skarpheðinn in *Njáls saga*: *Hann var jarpr á hár ok sveipr í hárinu, eygðr vel, fólleitr ok skarpleitr, liðr á nefi ok lá hátt tanngarðrinn, munnljótr noðkut ok þó maðr hermannligastr* (*Njáls saga*, 70). Skarpheðinn, if not a skald, is a producer of *níð* (303-315). The older Reykjabók MS (c. 1300) adds *ok skáld gott* (70, n.4), and some late MSS attribute verses to him.

love is introduced in the same words as his first fancy, but leads, this time, to marriage: *Hallfreðr lagði hug á Ingibjörgu ok bað hennar* (176). His sorrow at his wife's death is summarily related just before the adulterous interlude with Kolfinna (179). This inconsistency reflects the saga's divided structure and laconic style rather than the hero's capricious temperament. The term *margbreytinn* probably reflects Hallfreðr's embodiment of the conflict between Christianity and paganism. His resistance to the new faith, defiant espousal of pagan versifying and his apostasy in Sweden demonstrate the independence of spirit commented upon by both Jarl Hákon: *Líkligr ertu til at vera hofðingjadjarfr maðr; þann veg ertu í bragði* (151) and King Óláfr: *Þann veg værir þú í bragði, at fás myndir þú svífask ok mart láta þér sóma* (153-4). Some inconsistency is directly attributed to the Conversion theme: Hallfreðr gives up a duel with his rival Gríss because of distress at King Óláfr's death (and under his tutelage, the king having appeared to him in a dream), and his plan to attack Jarl Eiríkr is also abandoned at Óláfr's posthumous command.

Gunnlaugr is called *óráðinn* because of his simultaneous ambitions to marry and to go abroad. Over and above what may be a mere fault of youth, though, the saga explicitly calls him *hávaðamaðr mikill í öllu skaplyndi ok framgjarn snimmendis ok við allt óvæginn ok harðr* (GS, 59). Several episodes – his precocious defiance of his father's authority, his brawl with a shepherd, his encounter with a berserkr in England – seem designed to confirm this element in Gunnlaugr's character, and it is likely that this saga in particular, later than the others and with obvious connections with Egill's home at Borg, was directly influenced by *Egils saga* in its depiction of the turbulent hero.

No other saga develops the poet's relationship with Óðinn as explicitly as *Egils saga*. There are seven references to the myth of poetry in the 64 verses attributed to Kormákr: *skald, sás orkar ásar ólverki* (v. 68) 'the poet who does the god's ale-work', *hefk yðr of aukit Aurreks drykk* (v. 81) 'I have augmented the dwarf's drink for you', but the prose makes no suggestion of the poet's religious attachments or identification with Óðinn. Björn Hítðælakappi, chronologically the latest of the poets, his religious beliefs defined by his devotion to St Óláfr (notwithstanding the one conventional declaration *vinnk bjór Háars inna* (v. 32) 'I work to produce Óðinn's beer'), recites a dream verse strangely mingling Christian and pagan images, in which he is invited *heim* by a *hjalmfaldin armleggjar orma Ilmr dagleygjar hilmis* 'helmet-covered Ilmr of arm's serpents of the prince of day's fire'. The valkyrie bidding him to Óðinn's hall is associated with *dagleygjar hilmir*, a kenning for the Christian God. Animal imagery is also used of Björn in the form of puns on his name, but does not involve shape-changing or Óðinn's animal, the wolf. Both animal imagery and the valkyrie suggest an attachment of the hero to Óðinn as warrior, rather than poet.

The poet's dedication to Óðinn is an issue in *Hallfreðar saga* in the context of Conversion, the saga's most consistent theme. He recites a sequence of

verses in which, having received baptism, he renounces his old pagan allegiance for the new religion. The renunciation grows in scope until all the major deities are rejected, but begins with the poet abandoning his initial preference for Óðinn (*HS*, 157):

Fyrr vas hitt, es harra  
Hliðskjalfar gatk sjalfan,  
skipt es á gumna giptu,  
geðskjótan vel blóta.

It used to be that to the lord  
of Hliðskálfr I myself –  
men's fortune has changed –  
to the quick-witted one, sacrificed.

also referring to Óðinn as the poet's patron (*þvítt vel Viðris / vald hugnaðisk skaldi* 'for Viðrir's (Óðinn's) rule well-pleased the poet', and renouncing *nafni hrafnblóts goða ór heiðnum dómi, þess es ól lóm við lof lýða* 'the name of the priest of raven sacrifice from the heathen religion, who produced deceit in exchange for men's praise'. The reference to Óðinn's deceit, his demotion from god to priest, and the use of the past tense, mark the end of Hallfreðr's hankering for the old beliefs.

Margaret Clunies Ross (1978) overstates the extent to which the saturnine view of the poet's temperament developed in *Egils saga* is perceptible in the shorter sagas. Nevertheless, the poets share certain features. Their striking, even grotesque appearance reflects the individuality revealed in traits of aggressiveness and instability. The sagas attain the common end of poetic individualism in varied ways, so that, although the similar descriptions of Gunnlaugr and Hallfreðr suggest influence from *Hallfreðar saga* on *Gunnlaugs saga*, no close relationship amongst the sagas in the characterization of the poets can be shown. Rashness or changeability of temperament is so variously interpreted that it is difficult to categorize it as a common feature, but it may ultimately derive from the association of poets with Óðinn. It is perceptible even where, as in *Bjarnar saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*, there is a competing impulse to mellow the hero's character. In *Bjarnar saga*, this impulse arises from the inclusion of an explicitly Christian vein, at odds with much of the narrative material; in *Hallfreðar saga*, the traditional relationship of poetic skill with pagan values is more directly dealt with.

The idea of the dark and dangerous poet is far more consciously developed in *Egils saga*. To some extent this must be the work of the antiquarian-minded saga author, who probably deepened and emphasized features such as Egill's intimidating appearance, and may have added elements such as the hero's skill in runes, which would have seemed appropriate to an author learned in mythological lore such as Snorri Sturluson as an extension of the poet's indebtedness to Óðinn. This paper has endeavoured to show, however, that the most important elements of Egill's characterization are present in embryo in his own words, in the three long poems associated with the saga. During the two-century gestation period between the hero's death and the ultimate writing of the saga, this model was evolved by some of the processes of repetition and

accretion described here, reinforcing and adapting the themes expressed by Egill himself. In the course of this process some of the mead of inspiration would undoubtedly have spilled over and mingled with the stories of other poets which must have started evolving at the same time. It is impossible to assess how much of the myth of poetic identity was Egill's own invention, and how much he drew on pre-existing conceptions of the Odinic hero and the poet's personal identification with Óðinn, but our understanding of them is largely shaped from his articulation. Only in the late *Gunnlaugs saga* are there obvious signs of direct literary influence from *Egils saga*, but the persona of the most famous Icelandic poet must have been influential in creating the literary model for how a skald should look and behave.

## Bibliography

All texts cited are those of Íslenzk fornrit editions unless stated otherwise, with the following abbreviations: *BS* = *Bjarnar saga hítðelakappa*, *FS* = *Fóstbræðra saga*, *GS* = *Gunnlaugs saga*, *HS* = *Hallfreðar saga*, *KS* = *Kormáks saga*. Unspecified references are to *Egils saga*.

- Bagge, Sverre. 1991. *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.
- Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir. 1997. 'Primum caput: Um höfuð Egils Skalla-Grímssonar, John frá Salisbury o.fl.'. In *Skáldskaparmál*, 4: 74-96.
- Bjarni Einarsson. 1975. *Litterære forudsætninger for Egils saga*. Reykjavík.
- Bjarni Einarsson. 1976. 'Hörð höfuðbein'. In *Minjar og menntir. Afmælisrit helgað Kristjáni Eldjárn 6, desember 1976*. Reykjavík. 47-54.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1978. 'The Art of Poetry and the Figure of the Poet in *Egils saga*'. In *Parergon* 27: 3-12.
- Dronke, Ursula. 1984. 'Óminnis hegrí', *Festskrift til Ludvig Holm-Olsen*. Ed. Bjarne Fidjestøl et al. Øvre Ervik. 53-60.
- Frank, Roberta. 1981. 'Snorri and the mead of poetry'. In *Speculum norrænum*. Odense. 155-70.
- Harris, Joseph. 1999. "'Goðsögn sem hjálp til að lifa af" í *Sonatorreki*'. In *Heiðin minni: Greinar um fornar bókmenntir*. Ed. Haraldur Bessason and Baldur Hafstað. Reykjavík. 47-70.
- Íslendingasögur* = Bragi Halldórsson, Jón Torfason and Örnólfur Thorsson, eds. 1991. *Íslendingasögur og þættir*, 3 vols. Reykjavík.
- Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson. 1999. 'Religious ideas in *Sonatorrek*'. In *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, XXV, 2: 159-178.
- Nordal, Sigurður. 1924. 'Átrúnaður Egils Skalla-Grímssonar'. In *Skírnir*, 97: 145-66.
- North, Richard. 1991. *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings*. Amsterdam.
- Skáldskaparmál* = Anthony Faulkes, ed. 1998. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*. 2 vols. London: Viking Society for Northern Research.
- Whaley, Diana, ed. 1998. *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*. An edition and study. Turnhout, Belgium.

## Skaldic Praise Poetry and *Macrologia*: some observations on Óláfr Þórðarson's use of his sources

Elena Gurevich

Institute of World Literature, Russian Academy of Sciences

In a well known episode in *Morkinskinna* (*Saga Magnús góða ok Haralds harðráða*) we find an account of Arnórr Þórðarson's recital of his praise poems composed in praise of the co-regents, King Haraldr and King Magnús of Norway.

The saga relates that when Arnórr, the skald of the Orkney earls, got to the hall where both kings were sitting at table and greeted them King Haraldr asked:

'To whom will you recite your poem first?'  
He said, 'To the younger one first.'  
The king asked, 'Why him first?'  
'My lord,' said Arnor, 'it is said that young men are impatient.'

But both of them considered it more honourable to receive their poem first.

The poet began his poem, mentioning first the earls in the west, and then

describing his own journeys.

Hearing this, King Harald said to King Magnus, ‘How, sir, can you waste time on this poem, since it is mainly about his journeys and the earls in the islands in the west?’

King Magnus said, ‘Let’s wait a bit, uncle. I suspect that before it’s finished you’ll find the praise of me more than enough.

Then the poet recited this stanza:

Magnús, hlýð til máttigs óðar, Mangi veit ek fremra annan; Yppa røðumk yðru kappi, Jóta gramr, í kvæði fljótu; Haukr réttir est þú, Hørða dróttinn, Hverr gramr es þér stórum verri; Meiri verði þinn en þeira þrifnuðr allr, unz himinn rifnar.	Magnus, hear my potent poem, I know no one surpassing you. Prince of Jutes, I aim to praise your prowess in this flowing poem. Lord of Hordaland, you’re heroic. Other leaders fall short of you. May all your success surpass theirs until the heavens are sundered.
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

(Hrynhenda, 1: Skj. B I 306, 2)

Then King Harald said, ‘Praise this king as you wish, but do not belittle other kings.’<sup>1</sup>

The poet continued his recital, praising Magnús in every stanza of his panegyric. While listening to the poem King Haraldr made another comment (“This man composes very boldly, and I have no idea how it will end.”). It is difficult to decide whether Haraldr was implying that the skald went too far “carrying panegyric to superlative heights which earlier poets, from a certain sense of poetic tact, had refrained from approaching”<sup>2</sup> or rather that this comment (“*Allákafliga yrkir sjá maðr*”) referred to the unusual swift tempo of Arnórr’s “flowing poem” composed in a new *hrynhent* metre.<sup>3</sup>

When the poem was finished, Arnórr recited Haraldr’s poem. The saga tells us that it was a good poem called *Blágagladrápa*. When the recital was over and King Haraldr was asked which poem he considered the better, he replied: “We can see the difference between the poems. My poem will soon fade away and be forgotten, while the *drápa* composed about King Magnús will be recited as long as there are people in the North.”<sup>4</sup> (And we know that, true to his prophecy, no remnants of Haraldr’s praise-poem have been preserved.) After that Arnórr received handsome gifts — his *bragarlaun*, reward for poetry. Finally the skald had promised King Haraldr to compose an *erfidrápa* in his honour if he survived him. And this he did, and extensive fragment of this memorial poem has come down to us.

According to this account, the above cited stanza No. 1 of *Hrynhenda* (“*Magnús, hlýð til máttigs óðar...*”) was preceded by an introductory part, probably a stanza (or several stanzas) which provoked Haraldr *harðráði*, a well known expert in skaldic poetry, to make a critical remark on the content of the verses. We are told that Haraldr found fault because Arnórr began his poem not

by addressing himself to King Magnús but by referring to the Orkney earls and to his own travels, i.e. to something that had nothing to do with the praise of the king.

There are good grounds for believing that two couplets (*fjórðungar*) ascribed to Arnórr in the *Third Grammatical Treatise (TGT)* belong to this otherwise unknown prelude to *Hrynhenda*. In *TGT* the first of these fragments illustrates *macrologia* (“loquacity”), one of the categories borrowed from Latin *ars poetica* and listed among the so called *læstir* — poetic “slips” or “faults” which it was necessary to avoid in poetry. Cf.:

“Macrologia ær kallað langt sæn, þat ær tekr onytsamliga lvti til þess mals, ær skalld talar, ok ær þessi figura víða sætt iǵndverðvm kvæðvm, sæm arnoR qvað i Magnvs drapu:

‘Sæinkvn varð þa ær hlæbarð hanka  
hnika ár hin liota bára’.

her sægir hann fra rakförvum sinum, ænn þat hæyrir ekci konvngs lofi. Þæssi figvra verðr ok, ef maðr talar þörfvm flæira vm hinn sama lvt <...>”<sup>5</sup>

[“Macrologia is a long utterance (‘sentence’) which adds unnecessary things to the skald’s speech, and this figure is often placed at the beginnings of poems, as Arnórr said in *Magnúsdrápa*:

‘My bear of the rope (= ship) was late  
when an ugly wave carried away an oar.’

Here he tells of his own hard times at sea and that does not belong to the king’s praise. The same figure arises when one is saying more than will suffice about one and the same thing...”]

Later in the treatise we find another couplet by Arnórr, presumably, extracted from the same context:

klivfa let ec i kaupföR dvfv  
knarra minn við borðin stinnv.<sup>6</sup>

[“I was urging my strong-sided ship to break waves in a journey.”]

Thus, the king of Norway and two centuries later the author of the learned poetics have agreed that in the opening stanzas of his famous poem Arnórr deviates from certain rules regulating the composition of praise-poetry. However, there is no room for doubt that they came to this conclusion by different ways for the very notion of “rules” had essentially different implications for both parties. Whereas for Haraldr “rules” implied unwritten traditional patterns and modes of composition established since olden times and supported by the authority of the great poets of the past (*höfuðskáld*), for Óláfr Þórðarson, the author of *TGT*, “rules” meant first and foremost those instructions one could learn from the medieval Latin poetics which he was taking for universal and therefore applicable to native poetry. The theoretical foundation for applying the norms of Latin rhetoric to the local tradition was an

idea of internal unity of classical and Norse poetic craft seen as a result of their common origins. This idea, probably developed from the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*,<sup>7</sup> was clearly expressed in the introductory chapter to *Málskrúðsfræði*: “In this book it may be fully understood that all is one craft — that art of poetry which Roman wise men learned at Athens in Greece and afterwards turned into the Latin language, and that metrical form or art of poetry which Óðinn and other men of Asia brought here to the northern half of the world <...>”.<sup>8</sup>

Following — in compliance with this argument — Continental rhetorical handbooks Óláfr in the spirit of Latin *ars poetica* was warning the skalds against various “faults” (*læstir*) discussed in his learned sources. One of these “faults” was *macrologia*, which was presented in *TGT* in the same way as in *Ars maior* (book 3) of Donat (Cf.: “*Macrologia est longa sententia, res non necessarias comprehendens <...>*”).<sup>9</sup>

It is quite obvious that internal differences between the two poetic systems throw doubt upon validity of a standard range of classical rhetorical categories employed in *TGT*. Traditional skaldic poetry with its particular modes of composition, diction and style could not be easily forced into the Procrustean bed of an experimental “doctrine of rhetoric” which was an adaptation of foreign models. Accordingly, what was considered “a fault” in the opinion of such authorities as Priscian or Donat in reality could have been a normal skaldic practice. However, in the case of *macrologia* Óláfr’s argument seems to be corroborated by one piece of evidence produced by the native tradition itself, namely, by the story about Arnórr’s presentation of his poems at the Norwegian court. Although Haraldr harðráði was entirely unaware of classical rhetoric, as an expert in skaldic poetry he took notice of a rhetorical “fault” which was later discussed by a learned grammarian.

Nevertheless, there is one point in Óláfr’s account of *macrologia* that cannot but draw our attention. I have in mind the statement of *TGT* that “this figure is often placed at the beginnings of poems”. It follows from this remark that “macrological” introductions to praise-poems of the type that was exemplified by a couplet from Arnórr’s *drápa* were not exceptional in skaldic tradition. But if so, such introductions could hardly have been regarded as inappropriate in a panegyric. When composing their verses the skalds were drawing not on some abstract prescriptions or rules, but on specific precedents in poems they knew. Thus, in spite of what is said in the report from *Morkinskinna*, it is questionable whether “loquacity” was ever considered a deviation from traditional norms.

In order to give an answer to this question, it is necessary to analyze the sources it would be natural to rely on, namely, other introductory sections of skaldic praise-poems. Unfortunately, preserved fragments of skaldic poems composed in praise of princes are not especially illuminating in this respect. As is well known, most of the stanzas from praise-poems have come down to us only because they are cited in the king’s sagas where they appear as source-

quotations intended to support the prose reports about events in the lives of celebrated rulers. No wonder that such poetic quotations can tell us little about anything “that does not belong to the king’s praise”. Thus, the fate of the lost prelude to Arnórr’s *Hrynhenda* was hardly a unique one. Due to the very conditions of its transmission in the king’s sagas a great deal of skaldic praise poetry had no chance to survive at all. It is worth remembering in this connection that the only fully preserved panegyric composed before the second half of the twelfth century, *Höfuðlausn* by Egill Skalla-Grímsson, was transmitted in a different way — as a supplement to *Egils saga*.

However, even those defective verses we have at our disposal can tell us a lot about the genre of skaldic panegyric. Although poetry of this kind is more impersonal than *lausavísur* and the main hero of a praise-poem is its addressee, there is still place for the poet himself. The theme of the authorial presence in skaldic poetry has been thoroughly discussed in modern criticism, so, there is no need to dwell on it at length. Besides first person intrusions and various short parenthetical inserts into the eulogistic text which we usually meet throughout the poems, we may now and then run across even more extensive accounts of a skald’s own experiences. *Upphaf* and *slæmr*, introductory and concluding parts of a *drápa*, can be seen as special “territories” where the skald’s authorial presence is to be expected.

As a rule, a praise-poem opens with the traditional “bid for a hearing” (*heyri, hljóðs biðk*) most frequently expressed in its very first lines.<sup>10</sup> (Cf.: “*Jöfurr heyri upphaf, / ofrask mun konungs lof / háttu nemi hann rétt, / hróðrs síns bragar míns*”. Óttar svarti, *Óláfsdrápa sænska: Skj. B I 267, 1* — “Lord, listen to the beginning of your poem, a true praise of the king is going to be pronounced, he will appreciate the meter of my verses”). This formal introduction, an invocation to the eulogized prince and a request for silence, was a direct outcome of conditions of actual oral delivery in the king’s hall. That is why, in spite of its formalized structure, it was no mere convention (comparable, for instance, with a similar introduction in *Völuspá*, 1: *Hlióðs bið ec allar helgar kindir* <...>), but retained its meaning and function of an appeal to a specific person made in a situation of skaldic recitation.

Sometimes we find this formal beginning expanded and developed into a rather extensive introductory part of the poem. The well known and most admirable example of such *drápu-upphaf* are the first six strophes of Einarr skálaglamm’s *Vellekla*, a poem in honour of Earl Hákon of Norway. Einarr starts by addressing the earl with the traditional “bid for a hearing” formula (“*Hugstóran biðk heyra / heyr jarl Kvasis dreyra* <...>” *Vell.*, 1: *Skj. B I 117, 1* — “Great-heart, I bid you listen — listen, earl, to Kvasir’s blood [i.e., poetry]”<sup>11</sup>), then elaborates with great artistry the conventional theme of poetry and poetic performance which is expressed in varied “sea” images, and ends the prologue by urging the audience to listen (“*Nú ’s þats Boðnar bára, / berg-Saxa, tér vaxa, / gervi í holl ok heyri / hljóð fley jöfurs þjóðir*.” *Vell.*, 6 — “Now

Boðn's wave [i.e., poetry] waxes — the prince's men give silence in the hall and listen to the ship of the berg-Saxar [berg-Saxar = dwarves; i.e., poetry]."<sup>12</sup>

The other great skald, Egill, when addressing the eulogized king in the first strophes of *Höfuðlausn* did not confine himself to the theme of poetic performance:

Vestr komk of ver  
en ek Viðris ber  
Munstrandar mar,  
svá 's mitt of far;  
drók eik á flot  
við ísabrot;  
hlóðk mærdar hlut  
munknarrar skut.

“West I came over the sea bearing the sea of Viðrir's breast [Viðrir = Óðinn; i.e., poetry]; thus is it with me. I led the boat at ice-break; I loaded the stern of the ship of spirit [i.e., breast] with praise.”

Buðumk hilmir lqð,  
ák hróðrs of kvqð,  
berk Óðins mjqð  
á Engla bjqð;  
lofat vísa vann,  
víst mærik þann;  
hljóðs biðjum hann,  
þvíat hróðr of fann.

“The prince invited me; I have to pronounce the song; I bear Óðinn's mead [i.e., poetry] to the table of the Angles; I made praise to the king, I am going to glorify him; I bid him to listen to me for I have brought forth the verses.”

Hygg vísi at,  
vel sómir þat,  
hvé ek þylja fet,  
ef ek þqgn of get;

“Give heed, lord, for I compose well, I need silence <...>.”

(*Höfuðlausn*, 1—3: Skj. B I 30—31).

This introduction is echoed in the closing:

Jqfurr hyggi at,  
hvé ek yrkja fat;  
gótt þykkjumk þat,  
es ek þqgn of gat;  
hr[oe]rðak munni  
af munar grunni  
Óðins ægi  
of joru fægi.

“Lord, consider, how I have composed my verses; I am glad that silence was given to me; with my mouth I have stirred from the bottom of the mind [i.e., breast] Óðinn's sea [i.e., poetry] over the warrior.”

Bark þengils lof  
á þagnar rof;  
kank mála mjot  
of manna sjot;  
ór hlátra ham  
hróðr berk fyr gram;  
svá fór þat fram,  
at flestr of nam.

“I have delivered the lord's praise loud and clear; I speak truly in the halls of men; out from the harbor of laughter [i.e., breast] I brought poetry; and it went forth so that all took it in.”<sup>13</sup>

(*Höfuðlausn*, 19—20: Skj. B I 33).

According to Cecil Wood,<sup>14</sup> only two instances show a variance with the

traditional pattern for the position of *hljóðs biðk* in skaldic praise-poems. In Egill's *Höfuðlausn* we find one of such occasions. Not until the last lines of the second stanza does the skald's bid for a hearing take place (*hljóðs biðjum hann*, it also pays to notice that Egill's impersonal request is formally irregular). In contrast to other sustained skaldic praise-poems, that most frequently start with an appeal to the prince, *Höfuðlausn* opens with Egill's report of his journey to England. Evidently, Egill presents this otherwise "macrological" topic in such a way that it is by no means alien to the king's praise, for it is introduced simultaneously with the theme of poetry. As is usual, the latter is expressed by means of kennings referring to the myth of the origin of poetry. We may suspect, however, that in the opening verses of *Höfuðlausn* some of these conventional periphrastic images could allude to the skald's own situation.<sup>15</sup> His praise-poem, the poetic mead loaded on "the stern of the ship of spirit" (= his breast) the skald is bearing to the table of his enemy, the king of England, is intended to ransom him from death in the same way as the mead of poetry ransomed from death on the skerry the mythical dwarves Fjalar and Galar (hence, a kenning for poetry "dwarves' ship"). A distinct parallelism between the real sea the skald came over and the boat he led at ice-break, on the one hand, and "the sea of Viðrir's breast" (= poetry) he brought with him and his "ship of spirit" with poetry on the stern, on the other, is apparent.

However singularly the theme of poet's sea journey was elaborated by Egill, Arnórr's *Hrynhenda* was not the first skaldic panegyric that employed it. It is noteworthy too that in *Höfuðlausn* it occurs in the same position as in Arnórr's poem, i.e. in the *drápu-upphaf* where it precedes the phrase of formal introduction — the skald's bid for a hearing. It is probably mere coincidence that another poem in this genre which makes use of the theme of poet's sea journey was composed by a descendant of Skalla-Grímr and an elder kinsman of Óláfr Þórðarson, Snorri Sturluson. Although Snorri was acknowledged to be the greatest authority on skaldic poetics, it can be easily demonstrated that some stanzas of his *Háttatal* provide us with obvious instances of "the fault" his nephew, the author of *TGT*, found in Arnórr's *Hrynhenda*.

As was mentioned above, not only opening but also closing stanzas of a *drápa* are those parts where we can expect to find the skald speaking about himself. That is true for Egill's *Höfuðlausn*. As to Snorri's *Háttatal*, a *drápa* of one hundred and two stanzas, which is both a praise-poem celebrating Earl Skúli and King Hákon and a skaldic key to metres, it has a unique construction. According to the prose commentary, the panegyric consists of three poems (marked at stanzas 31 and 68); however, in the body of the poem at stanza 69 Snorri mentions that he is starting the fourth poem.<sup>16</sup> Besides that, in contrast to other poems in praise of princes, *Háttatal* has no formal introduction at all.

The first poem which glorifies the king opens with an account of his deeds and lacks the traditional bid for a hearing. But in spite of this irregularity of construction the first poem has a rather extensive closing (*slæmr*) which takes

as a main topic the poet himself. What, actually, draws our attention in these verses is the theme of skald's sea travels presented side by side with the theme of poet's reward, traditional for this part of a *drápa*. Cf.:

Ískalda skark ǫldu  
eik, vas súð en bleika  
reynd, til ræsis fundar  
ríks; emk kuðr at slíku;  
brjótr þá hersis heiti  
hátt, dugir s[oe]mð at vátta,  
auðs af jarla prýði  
ítrs; vasa siglt til lítils.

“My boat was cleaving an ice-cold wave on the way to the mighty king, the pale boards (literally: ‘the clinchings of a ship’s boards’) were given a trial; I am known for that. The destroyer of beautiful treasures (i.e., the warrior = I) received the glorious name of hersir from the adorer of earls (i.e., the king); this is a clear mark of honour; I would not travel for a thing of little value.”

(*Skj. B II 68, 27*)

Starting with a report of his journey to Norway the skald then gives a poetic account of his stay at the king's court:

Tvær mank hilmi hýrum  
heims vistir ótvistar,  
hlautk á-samt at sitja  
seimgildi fé mildum;  
fúss gaf fylkir hnossir  
fleinstýri margdýrar;  
holtr vas hersa stilli  
hodspennir fjölmennum.

“I remember my two joyful visits to the gracious prince; it was my fortune to sit next to the generous gold-payer; the lord willingly gave costly valuables to the thrower of shafts (i.e., to the warrior = to me); the breaker of treasure (i.e., the warrior = I) was well disposed towards the retainers of the ‘stiller’ of chiefs (*hersar*).”

(*Skj. B II 69, 29*).

Then the theme of skald's sea travels appears in the concluding stanzas of the third and the last poem in which Snorri demonstrates his self-pride, speaking about his poetic abilities and the high quality of his creation:

Gløggva grein  
hefk gort til bragar;  
svá 's tír[oe]tt hundrað talit;  
hróðrs örverðr  
skala maðr heitinn vesa,  
ef svá fær alla háttu ort.

“I have made a clear distinction between the verse-forms, so that a hundred of them are enumerated; the man who is able to compose in every metre will not be called unworthy of praise.”

Sóttak fremð,  
sóttak fund konungs,  
sóttak ítran jarl,  
þás ek reist,  
þás ek renna gat  
kaldan straum kili,  
kaldan sjá kili.

“I sought for fame, I sought the king's company, I sought the company of the glorious earl, when I was cleaving the cold stream with the keel, when I was gliding through the cold sea (with the keel).”

(*Skj. B II 88, 100—101*).

Since even such a great rhetorician as Snorri could permit himself “to add unnecessary things” to the praise of the rulers and to glorify his own poetic skill and production in a panegyric, “loquacity” of this sort was hardly considered a

fault in skaldic tradition.

There is thus no sufficient evidence that self-referring authorial intrusions in the introductory and closing parts of a praise-poem in which a poet could give an account of his own experiences (at sea or elsewhere) were ever regarded as a deviation from traditional rules of skaldic composition. In all likelihood the very category of *macrologia* as it is described in *TGT* must have been inapplicable in skaldic poetics for the high degree of self-consciousness in the skald encouraged the Old Norse poet to speak openly about himself in his verses.

As to the above cited anecdote from *Morkinskinna* we may assume that the real cause of King Haraldr's displeasure must have been envy of his co-ruler, King Magnús, who received his poem first. There is not much doubt, that Óláfr Þórðarson knew the saga report of Arnórr's recitation of *Hrynhenda* and, pursuing his own ends, used a couplet from this poem to illustrate an adopted rhetorical category. Certainly, it was no mere chance that he fixed upon this very example for it was supported by the authority of Haraldr harðráði, the most accomplished royal critic of skaldic production and the best poet of all Norwegian kings.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> *Morkinskinna*. Udg. C.R.Unger. Christiania, 1867, p. 31. Trans. Judith Jesch from *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*. Viking Age Classics. Leifur Eiríksson Publ., Reykjavík, Vol. 1, p. 335 f. All the verses are quoted from *Den norsk-islandske óskjaldedigting*. (A: Text efter håndskrifterne, 2 vols. B: Rettet text, 2 vols.). Udg. ved Finnur Jónsson (1912—15). København: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1967—73.
- <sup>2</sup> Hallvard Lie, "Hrynhenda." *KLNM* 7 (1962), p. 27.
- <sup>3</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, "Arnórr Þórðarson: skald of the Orkney jarls." In: Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Selected Papers*. Ed. Odd Einar Haugen & Else Mundal. Trans. by Peter Foote. The Viking Collection 9. Odense: Odense Univ. Press, 1997, p. 113.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, Vol. 1, p. 336.
- <sup>5</sup> *Den tredje og fjærde grammatiske Afhandling i Snorres Edda*. Udg. Björn M. Ólsen. Copenhagen, 1884, p. 81 f. See Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*. Øvre Ervik: Alvheim & Eide, 1982, p. 128.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- <sup>7</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's ars poetica and medieval theories of language*. The Viking Collection 4. Odense: Odense Univ. Press, 1987, p. 27.
- <sup>8</sup> *Den tredje og fjærde grammatiske Afhandling*, p. 60; trans. from Margaret Clunies Ross, *Op. cit.*, p. 27.
- <sup>9</sup> *Den tredje og fjærde grammatiske Afhandling*, p. 81 (notes).
- <sup>10</sup> See Cecil Wood, The Skald's Bid for a Hearing. In: *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 59 (1960), p. 240—254.
- <sup>11</sup> Trans. from Carol J. Clover, Skaldic Sensibility. In: *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, bd. 93 (1978), p. 77.
- <sup>12</sup> Trans. from Clover, *Op. cit.*, p. 78.
- <sup>13</sup> Trans. from Clover, *Op. cit.*, p. 74—75.
- <sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 245 ff.
- <sup>15</sup> See Clover, *Op. cit.*, p. 75.
- <sup>16</sup> See Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*. Ed. Anthony Faulkes. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 17, 29—30.

## Gerhard Schøning and Saga Literature

Jan Ragnar Hagland

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

It is fair to say that Gerhard Schøning (1722-80) through his scholarly work created an increased awareness of and interest in Norwegian medieval history and Old Norse literature, among Norwegians in the first place, but also further afield. The edition of *Heimskringla* in Old Norse, Danish and Latin (I-III, 1777-83) commonly referred to as Schøning's edition – is without doubt the most important contribution to this process. Several aspects of this edition together with Schøning's apparent interest in a wider scope of saga literature deserve, as I see it, to be dwelt with at some length within the framework of a Saga Conference.

In order to appreciate these interests a few facts from Schøning's biography may be relevant as a background: He was born at Buksnes in the islands of Lofoten, Northern Norway 1722. From 1739 to 1742 he was a student at the Cathedral School in Trondheim, the rector of which was the well-known Benjamin Dass. After having finished his studies in Trondheim Schøning went on to university studies in Copenhagen where he obtained a degree in theology in 1744 and a Master's degree in 1748 (*magistergrad*). Along with his theological studies Schøning devoted himself to the study of classical philology and history. For the study of history he even taught himself Old Norse and he

read saga literature. As printed editions of this kind of literature were still few and far between the student of saga literature had to turn directly to the study of manuscripts, a source material which, of course, was plentiful and rich in Copenhagen. This contributed, to quote Ludvig Holm-Olsen (1981: 40), to making Schøning one of the finest connoisseurs of Old Norse language and literature in his time. Be this as it may. There is, at any rate, every reason to believe that he was not a completely self-taught person in these matters as the Icelander Jón Eiríksson, later professor at the Academy of Soroe in Denmark, seems to have coached Gerhard Schøning's learning of the Old Norse language very competently so as to enable him to use manuscripts as primary sources for his historiographical work as well as that of editing texts in Old Norse (cf. also Jakobsen 1987 on this point). After having finished his studies in Copenhagen Schøning moved back to Trondheim where he, although still a young man, succeeded Benjamin Dass as rector of the Cathedral School in 1751. In this position he stayed until 1765 when he was appointed professor of history and rhetoric at the Academy of Soroe in Denmark. In 1774 he became titular councillor of justice and in 1775 archivist of the Privy Council. He died 8 July 1780. In his period as the rector of Trondheim Cathedral School Schøning together with bishop Johan Ernst Gunnerus and Peter Frederik Suhm founded (in 1760) a learned society which was seven years later to be known as The Royal Norwegian Society of Science and Letters (Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab, still in full activity). The library of this society was eventually endowed with Schøning's great collection of books and manuscripts. The Society's library has in recent years been incorporated in the University Library in Trondheim. Relevant to the present paper is also the biographical fact that Schøning from 1776 was appointed member of the Arnamagnaean Commission in which capacity he took part in the 1778-edition of *Hungurvaka*<sup>1</sup> and was asked to take charge of the 1777–83-edition of *Heimskringla*<sup>2</sup>.

Schøning's interest in the kings' sagas is thus well attested and obvious. We shall return to this project in a short while. But there is evidence that he took an interest in saga literature of a much wider range than this. The most palpable manifestation of this interest is a collection attributable to Schøning of more than thirty transcripts of sagas, *þættir* and poetry, now kept in the University Library, Trondheim. The collection was catalogued and assessed for its text-critical value by Jónas Kristjánsson in 1967 (*Skrá um íslenzk handrit í Noregi*,

<sup>1</sup> *Hungurvaka*, sive *Historia primorum quinque Skalholtensium in Islandia Episcoporum, Pals Biskups Saga, sive Historia Pauli Episcopi, & Patr af Thorvalldi Vidförla, sive Narratio de Thorvaldo Peregrinatore, Ex Manuscriptis Legati Magnaeani, cum Interpretatione Latina, annotationibus, Chronologica, tabulis Genealogicis, & Indicibus, tam rerum, quam verborum, Hafniae 1778.*

<sup>2</sup> *Heimskringla*, edr *Noregs konungasögur af Snorra Sturlusyni = Snorre Sturlesons Norske Kongers Historie = Historia regum norvegorum conscripta a Snorrio Sturlae Filio. Nova, emendata et aucta editione in lucem prodit, opera Gerhardi Schøning. I-III, Hafniae 1777-83, vol. II, 1778.*

mimeo). So, even if editors have thus become increasingly aware of the collection in Trondheim, the problems of provenance for each individual transcript are not solved in every detail. Here is, however, neither the place nor the time to go much further into these matters. In general the transcripts may be identified as copies of manuscripts still extant, a fact which makes the collection less interesting from a text-critical point of view.<sup>3</sup> The collection deserves nonetheless to be looked at again in its totality as a valid piece of evidence for the history of saga studies at large.

In addition to saga texts Schøning's collection in the University Library, Trondheim consists of some ten transcripts of varying content ranging from poetry (one being an extract of verses from The Saga of Haraldr Hárfagri in *Heimskringla* and one a copy of Einar Skúlason's *Geisli* copied from *Flatleyjarbók*) to history, grammar, law and topography. Even a transcript of the *Konungs skuggsjá* (The King's Mirror) which does not display any explicit sign of having been in Schøning's collection may have belonged there (see below). It is written, according to Jónas Kristjánsson, by Jón Marteinsson most likely for Schøning as this copyist has also written two of the saga transcripts in Schøning's collection in addition to six others in the University Library's possession, all of which had most likely been in Schøning's possession as well<sup>4</sup>. None of these shall be dealt with in any detail here. Suffice it here to point out that this section of transcripts from Schøning's collection reveals a wide interest in Icelandic matters – archaeology, history, language and topography – an interest which in the end also encompasses the interest in medieval literary texts as evidenced by the remaining transcripts of 33 sagas and *þættir* that had provably been in his possession.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Thus for instance a total of twelve texts in the collection can be traced back to *Flatleyjarbók*. That is to say *Pátr af Rongvaldi i Ærviki*, *Pátr af Þorvaldi Tasalda systursyni Viga Glums*, *Sögu þátr af Olafi konungi sem kallaþr var Digurbeini*, *Sagann af Slysa Hroa*, *Rauðulfs þátr ok sona hans*, *Orkneyinga þátr*, *Pátr af Karli hinum vesali*, *Stufts þátr Kattarsyni (bis)*, *Saga af Snegluhalli*, *Pátr af Ásgrimi*, and [*Játvarðar saga helga*]. None of these are copied from *Flatleyjarbók* directly, but from copies made by 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century scribes such as the well-known Ásgeir Jónsson. fMs 5f in Trondheim (the *Orkneyinga þátr*), transcribed by Oddur Jónsson, may be taken to be a representative example. Oddur Jónsson's transcript is without much doubt copied from AM 48, fol. that is an extract from *Flatleyjarbók* made by Ásgeir Jónsson, pp. 343-432 of which contains the *Orkneyinga þátr*. This part of AM 48, fol. was used as one of the main mss. for the 1780-edition of *Orkneyinga Saga*. There is positive evidence that Oddur Jónsson made transcripts even for P. F. Suhm. In the 1780-edition of *Orkneyinga Saga* one of the manuscripts used for the section about St. Magnus is explicitly said to be a copy written by Oddur [“Charta Illustriss. herois de Suhm, nitida fidaqve Oddi Jonæ manu exarata”]. The copy taken of AM 48, fol. for Schøning and the transcript of a *Magnus saga helga Eyjajarls* for Suhm may then be part of an early phase of the preparations for the 1780-edition of *Orkneyinga Saga*. fMs 5c (*Sögu-þátr af Olafi konungi sem kallaþr var Digurbeini*), written by an unidentified hand, is evidently copied from AM 49, fol., also an extract from *Flatleyjarbók* written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Jón Erlendsson and so on.

<sup>4</sup> The six other manuscripts written by Jón Marteinsson are folio mss. nos 7, 35, 36, 37 and 134 together with quarto ms. no 14.

<sup>5</sup> Schøning's interest in Iceland explicitly manifests itself even in his preface to Vice-Lavmand E.

Why, we may then ask, did Schøning take an interest in texts such as these and what kind of texts from the corpus of Old Icelandic literature do we have in the preserved collection of transcripts? When were they transcribed? How do Schøning's transcripts relate to saga texts edited and published in and before his time – to what extent do they overlap? Do we see any traces in his historiographical work of the texts in his collection and does Schøning himself express opinions on them? And possibly more.

The transcripts of the saga texts seem to have been carried out by relatively few hands. According to Jónas Kristjánsson's catalogue a majority of twenty-two are copied by Oddur Jónsson (1734-1814), two by Jón Marteinsson (1711-1771), one by Jón Erlendsson í Villingaholti (fMs 5g the provenance of which, however, is somewhat uncertain), and one by a scribe who identifies himself as 'I.I.S.' (fMs 4a). Two of the transcripts (fMss 4f and l) seem to be copied by the same hand, and one (fMs 4m) is copied by a hand that has copied a transcript of annals apparently for Schøning as well (fMs 139). Thus only three transcribed texts (fMss 4d, 4n and 5c, cf. Appendix below) are written by hands, which can not be identified elsewhere in Schøning's collection.

One of the transcripts (fMs 4a, *Gull-Póris Saga*, the one written by "I.I.S.") dates itself in a note stating that it was copied from AM 495, 4to in "Hafniae Ao 1763 d. 4. Martij".<sup>6</sup> A note attached to fMs 5f (*Orkneyinga þátr* copied by Oddur Jónsson) states that this transcript is copied from AM 101, fol. which is one of the transcripts that Ásgeir Jónsson made for Torfæus.<sup>7</sup> There is reason to believe that most of the remaining saga transcripts in Schøning's collection have also been made in the 1760s or early 1770s – at least those which can be identified as having been written by Oddur Jónsson. His work in this field seems to belong to the period after he graduated in theology in 1759. According to Páll Eggert Ólason (1951, 15) Oddur was back in Iceland in 1775. In the preface to the 1777-edition of *Heimskringla* Oddur is still entitled 'the Icelandic student' ["den Iislandske Student Oddur Jonssen"]. He is commended by Schøning for having written the fair copy including *variantes lectionis* for the printed edition (1777, p. xxiv). Even if that particular work seems to have been carried out under the auspices of Councillor of State Bernhard Møllman (†1778) Oddur Jónsson's activities in the field of transcribing manuscripts thus appears to have been relatively close to Schøning's own scholarly work [see below]. Jón Marteinsson died in 1771, which means that most of the transcripts written by

---

Olafsens of Land-Physici B. Povelsens *Reise igiennem Island*, foranstaltet af Videnskabernes Selskab i Kiøbenhavn, og beskreven af E. Olafsen. Soroe 1772.

<sup>6</sup> AM 495, 4to is Ásgeirr Jónsson's copy of the only preserved medieval ms. of the text, AM 561, 4to (Kålund 1898, ix). In Kålund's list of existing transcripts of AM 495, 4to the one from Schøning's collection is missing.

<sup>7</sup> The note has the following wording: "exarata juxta Exempla chartaccum in Folio, quod olim fuit Thormodi Torfæi, cujus manu propria annotationes marginales in isto ad scripta sunt. Postea in possessionem venit A. Magnæi, et nunc in ejusdem Bibliotheca inter Libros Folio msc<sup>os</sup> extat No 101."

him were completed in the 1760s.

Three texts in Schøning's collection of saga manuscripts had appeared in print when they were transcribed: fMs 4m, containing *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, fMs 4d, containing *Sagan af Halfdane Eysteinsyni* and fMs 4f, containing *Sagan af Samsone fagra*. Verelius in Uppsala published the former of these already in 1672<sup>8</sup>; the two latter are included in a collection of saga texts published in Icelandic with Latin and Swedish translations by Erik Julius Björner in 1737.<sup>9</sup> Of the remaining texts the *Gunnlaugs saga* was published in 1775.<sup>10</sup> According to Jónas Kristjánsson Jón Marteinsson wrote the transcript of this text in Schøning's collection (fMs 4b). As we have seen he died in 1771. Thus the transcript predates the printed edition, as does also the transcript of *Orkneyinga Saga* (fMs 5f, cf. note 3 above). This saga appeared in print in 1780.<sup>11</sup> These facts taken together accentuate a certain similarity between Schøning's acquisition of transcripts of Old Icelandic texts and that of historians preceding him, first of all Thormod Torfæus (1636-1719) who had a very extensive programme of copying old manuscripts to be used as historical source material. In Schøning's case, however, it is less obvious than in the case of Torfæus exactly for what purpose the transcribed texts were made or whether the acquisition was organised according to fixed plans or not.

An 18<sup>th</sup> century scholar like Schøning was, needless to say, less preoccupied with problems relating to literary kind and source value of saga texts than scholars of later times. It is a fact that Icelandic texts from *fornaldarsögur* and *þættir* of various kinds to *íslendingasögur* and *þættir* referring predominantly to Icelandic matters constitute a major part of the collection with which we are concerned here [cf. Appendix below]. Even so narrative episodes taking place in Norway and references to Norway are, as we all know, so common that these elements may well be looked upon as literary *topoi* in most of these texts. Judging from general statements in the Preface to

<sup>8</sup> *Hervarar Saga På Gammal Götska Med Olai Verelii Uttolkning Och Notis*. Upsaliae.

<sup>9</sup> Björner, Erik Julius, *Nordiska Kämpa Dater, i en Sagoflock samlade Om forna Kongar och Hjältar*. Stockholm 1737. The two sagas represented in Schøning's collection are printed as texts nos 11 and 12. The two manuscripts in Schøning's collection (fMs 4d and 4f, hands unidentified) are clearly independent of the printed versions in Björner's edition. The manuscript texts are more elaborate and contain narrative parts which are absent in the printed versions. Particularly in his early work Schøning quite frequently refers to texts in Björner's edition (including *Sagan af Halfdan Eysteinsyne* cf. e.g. Schøning 1751, 30, 40). It is, in consequence, possible to see the two mss. in Schøning's collection as an expression of subsequent scepticism towards Björner's versions.

<sup>10</sup> *Sagan af Gunnlaugi Ormstungu ok Skalld-Rafni, sive Gunnlaugi Vermilingvis & Rafnis Poetae Vita*. Ex Manuscriptis Legati Magnaeani cum Interpretatione Latina, notis, Chronologia tabulis Genealogicis & Indicibus, tam rerum, quam Verborum. Hafniae.

<sup>11</sup> *Orkneyinga Saga sive Historia Orcadensium a prima Orcadum per Norvegos Occupatione ad Exitum Seculi Duodecimi*. Saga His Helga Magnusar Eyia Jarls sive Vita Sancti Magni Insularum Comitis. Ex Mss. Legati Arna-Magnaeani cum versione Latina, varietate lectionum et indicibus, chronologico, reali et philologico edidit Jonas Jonaeus Isl., Hafniae.

his History of Norway<sup>12</sup> Schøning considered, not very surprisingly, saga texts in general to be valid sources. He rebukes German scholars for calling into doubt the validity of “vore gamle Efterretninger” – a general term which covers sagas of different kinds as it appears. If these scholars had really known the texts, they would have thought differently, Schøning says before elaborating on the sagas as sources to the history of Norway in particular. In so doing he admits that fantastic elements do occur in these texts, a fact which does not, however, deprive ‘the so-called sagas’ (“saa kaldte Sagar”) of credibility.<sup>13</sup> To Schøning, then, the key words to the appreciation of sagas were, as it appears, “Sandhed og Rigtighed” (‘veracity and correctness’). There is every reason to believe that this was an important, if not the most important, reason for Schøning to provide himself with a quite impressive collection of saga transcripts – the major part of which were, as we have seen, most likely copied in the 1760s.<sup>14</sup>

In Schøning’s published work the footprints of the saga texts in his collection of transcripts are, however, rather few and far between. Nevertheless there are some illuminating examples in vol. II (455f.) of the ‘History of Norway’, as can be illustrated by the use made of *Gull-Póris saga* (fMs 4a), also known as *Porskfirðinga saga*. When making an account of important cod fisheries in Hálogaland at the time of Haraldr Hárfagri, Schøning quotes an episode from Þórir’s visit to Ulfr at Þrondarnes (for the saga text cf. Kålund ed. 1898, 9-15). Schøning incorporates episodes such as this more or less at face value as part of his ‘History of Norway’. The only critical remark about the source value of this piece of narrative is directed towards Þórir’s mode of conduct when he was about to ravage Agnar the Berserk’s burial mound. Þórir changed his plans, Schøning tells us on the basis of the saga text, when told that Agnar the Berserk was a close relative. In a critical note to this Schøning, referring to the saga text, informs us that Agnar the Berserk is told to have

<sup>12</sup> Gerhard Schøning, *Norges Riiges Historie I-III*, Sorø (Mumme og Faber) 1771-81, Fortale, vol I.

<sup>13</sup> “Der findes i vore gamle Nordiske Historier, eller saa kaldte Sagar, en Hob Fabler, det er sandt; det er skeet, ved et Slags Vanhæld, at just de af bemeldte Sagar ere komme (sic) for Lyset, som med saadanne Fabler vare meest udspækkede: men de ret fabelagtige Historiers Antal blandt vore gamle Sagar er dog meget ringe, mod deres Mængde, som bære de ægte og kiendeligste Mærker af Sandhed og Rigtighed, eller mod dem at regne, i hvilke det Falske læt kan skilles fra det Sande. De i vore gamle Historier, Vers og Sange indstrøede Fabler kunne desuden saa lidet betage dem deres Troværdighed, at de tvertimod, efter mine Tanker, bør ansees for eet af de gyldigste Beviiser for deres Ælde og Rigtighed; og de kunne ligesaa lidt kuldkaste vore gamle Fortællinger, i sig selv betragtede, som man bør ansee andre Landes ældste Historier for opdigtede eller urigtige, aleene for de deriblandt indmængede Fabler.” Schøning 1771, *Fortale*. For the German criticism of saga literature as historical sources, see e.g. Mundal 1977, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Thus in one of the mss (fMs 5b), which contains five saga texts (see Appendix) there is a list of contents on the first page. After three of the listed texts a note is added in a contemporary hand connecting *Þáttur af Karli hinum Vesala* to “Magni Boni” (Magnus the Good), *Þáttur af Röngvaldi í Ærvík* to “Olafi Tryggv.” (Óláfr Tryggvasonr) and *Stúfs þáttur Kattarsonar* to “Har: Sigurdi filii” (Haraldr Sigurðssonr), a clear indication of the intended use of these texts as sources.

revealed himself to Þórir in a dream unveiling the relationship which was unknown to Þórir. This is an addition, Schøning remarks, made by the saga author only to dress up the story.<sup>15</sup>

This use of a saga text, quite representative of the work as a whole, may be seen as a direct consequence of Schøning's belief in the "Sandhed" and "Rigtighed" of these stories as expressed in the preface of his 'History of Norway' (cf. note 13). Furthermore, the scarcity of references in his written work to saga texts represented in his collection indicates that there was no fixed or premeditated plan behind Schøning's acquisition of saga transcripts

To posterity Schøning's interest in saga literature may seem to concentrate on the kings' sagas. It is known that he started preparations for an edition of the King's Mirror (*Konungs skuggsiá*) in his Trondheim period before moving to Soroe in 1765, but these plans were never carried through (cf. Holm-Olsen 1981, 41). The most influential contribution by Schøning to the reception of saga literature was, of course, the edition of *Heimskringla* (cf. above) – an enterprise led rather than carried out by Schøning himself it is fair to say. In scholarly work of our time Schøning's edition is commonly spoken of in rather reserved terms when its text-critical methods and approaches are concerned (cf. e. g. Holm-Olsen 1981, 42). In my opinion it is, however, anachronistic and unfair to judge its philological shortcomings by the standards of modern editorial practices.

Having said this, it seems pertinent here again to underline the fact that Schøning's main contribution to the edition was to bring together the many different pieces of work carried out by a whole editorial group as it were. The preparatory work of establishing a textual basis for the Old Norse version of the printed text was, as recognised by Schøning in the preface (p. xxii) supervised by the then late Hans Gram (†1748) and Bernhard Møllman (†1778). The fair copy for that part of the edition seems to have been made by Oddur Jónsson which means that it must have been finished by 1775 (see above). The Danish translation, the *Index Verborum* and the general index are accredited to the well-known Jón Ólafsson [frá Grunavík], whereas Schøning himself takes credit for the Latin translation. The philological assessment of the text-critical value of the manuscripts upon which the edition was based (given on pp. xxiv-xxvi of the preface) does, in my opinion, deserve to be looked upon as a foreshadowing of developments in editorial philology in the following centuries. At face value it may then seem as if Schøning was ahead of his time in this respect, belonging more in the 19<sup>th</sup> than in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A closer look at this, however, clearly reveals that the rather 'modern' attitude to textual criticism, the importance of *variantes lectionis* etc. as expressed in this section of the preface, may with due respect be considered borrowed plumes. The assessment of the manuscripts

<sup>15</sup> "Gull-Þorers Saga beretter, at Agnar selv i en Drøm aabenbarede dette for Þorer; et Tillæg af Forfatteren, for at pynte paa Historien." (Schøning 1773, 456, note u).

seems without much doubt to be the work of Jón Ólafsson. The text in the preface to *Heimskringla* on this point is just a slight paraphrasing of an undated note written by Jón. It is now kept in The Royal Library, Copenhagen (Ny kgl. Saml. 2077b, 4to). Under the same catalogue number several small notes also written by Jón, are preserved showing the very close co-operation between Jón Ólafsson and Schøning in the final stages of the editorial work.<sup>16</sup> Schøning seems to have accepted Jón Ólafsson's critical attitude towards the use of manuscripts for editorial purposes, communicating Jón's view as his own in the preface. There is every reason to believe, however, that Schøning himself belonged to a less advanced position on this point. His collection of saga transcripts copied from manuscripts of varying text-critical value does, it seems natural to say, materialise this less advanced position thus making his corpus of collected transcripts a representative expression of the early history of modern saga studies.

## Appendix

### Schøning's collection of saga transcripts

Signum in Library	Title of transcript
<b>I. Kings' sagas and kings' chronicles</b>	
fMs 4k	Rauðulfs þátr ok sona hans
fMs 5f	Orkneyjunga þátr
<b>II. Íslendinga sögur</b> (Cf. the classification in <i>Íslendingasagnaútgáfan</i> )	
fMs 4a	Gullþórir's saga [= <i>Þorskfirðinga saga</i> ]
fMs 4b	Saga af Hrafne og Gunnlauge Ormstungu epter firi sögu Ara Prests hins frøða Þorgilssonar
fMs 4c	Droplaugar søna saga
fMs 4g	Saga Eiriks Rauða
fMs 4h	Sagan af Gunnari Þiðranda bane
fMs 4i	Svarfdæla saga
fMs 4k	Saga af Snegluhalli
fMs 4k	Þátr af Þorvaldi Tasallda systursyni Viga Glums
fMs 4l	Sagan af Havarde Isfirðingi
fMs 4n	Sagan af Viga-Skútu ok Reikdælum
fMs 4p	Sagan af Broddhelga er oðru nafne kallaz Vopnfirðinga saga
fMs 4q	Saga af Finnboga ramma
fMs 5b	Stúfs Þátr Kattarsonar [inn meiri]
fMs 5d	Þátr af Ormi Storólfssyni
fMs 5e	Þátr af Auðunne Íslending
fMs 5e	Þátr Stúfs Kattarsonar Íslending [inn skemmri]
fMs 5e	Þátr Þórvarþz Krákunefs Íslendingz
qMs 4	Sagann af Þoorde Hredu

<sup>16</sup> One of these notes (also undated) is a request by Jón to Schøning for pages 176 to 241 of the fair copy as Jón wanted to check on the verses (which was his particular responsibility): "om Hr. Justitieraad Schøning vilde være saa god at laane paa en kort Tid Manuscriptet af Sn. Sturlesen fra Pag. 176 til 241, eller saameget deraf som Hr. Justitieraaden icke bruger. Det er viserne der i, jeg gierne vilde efterse".

**III. Fornögur norðurlanda** (Cf. the classification in *Íslendingasagnaútgáfan*)

fMs 4d	Sagann af Halfdane Eysteinsyne
fMs 4k	Af Tóka Tókasyni litit æfintýr
fMs 4m	Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs
fMs 5c	Sögu þátrr af Olafi konungi sem kallaþr var Digurbeini

**IV. Old Norse-Icelandic Romances** (Cf. Kalinke & Mitchell's classification 1985)<sup>17</sup>

fMs 5b	Damusta Saga
fMs 4f	Sagann af Samsone Fagra
fMs 5b	Valdimars Sögu Fragment <sup>18</sup>

**V. Other**

fMs 4e	Sagan af Haralldi Hrings bane <sup>19</sup>
fMs 5e	Játvarðar saga helga]

**VI. Þættir known mainly from *Flateyjarbók*** (but not transcribed from it) cf. *Vigfússon & Unger* (eds.)

fMs 5b	Frá Raungvalldi ok Raud alías Þátrr af Røngvaldi í Ærvik	I, 288-299
fMs 5g	Sagann af Slysá Hróa	II, 73-80
fMs 5a	Þátrr af Karli hinum Vesala	III, 253-261
fMs 4k	Þátrr af Ásgrimi	III, 432-434

**References**

- Holm-Olsen, Ludvig 1981, *Lys over norrøne kultur. Norrøne studier i Norge*. Oslo (J.W.Cappelens Forlag A.S).
- Jakobsen, Alfred 1987, Jon Erichsen. In: *DKVNS Forhandlingar 1987*, pp. 41-47. Trondheim (Tapir).
- Kalinke, Marianne E. & P. M. Mitchell 1985, *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* = *Islandica XLIV*. Ithaca and London (Cornell University Press).
- Kålund, Kr. 1898, *Gull-Þóris Saga eller Þorskfirðinga Saga* = Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel nordisk Litteratur XXVI. København.
- Ólafur Halldórsson 1973, *Haralds rímur Hringsbana* = Íslenzkar miðaldarímur I. Reykjavík (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi).
- Páll Eggert Ólason 1951, *Íslenzkar æviskrár IV*. Reykjavík (Hið Íslenzka Bókmenntafélag).

<sup>17</sup> The relevant mss. in Schøning's collection are all recorded in the bibliography of Kalinke & Mitchell 1985.

<sup>18</sup> On the first page: "Ex Membrana B. A. H."

<sup>19</sup> On the genesis of this saga, which is considered to be composed as late as in the 17th c., cf. Ólafur Halldórsson (1973, 17) with bibliographical notes. No reference to Schøning's ms. is given in scholarly work on this saga. According to Jónas Kristjánsson the present transcript is written by Jón Marteinsson (1711-71, see above).

## The Icelandic *Lucidarius*, Traditional and New Philology

Anna Mette Hansen

University of Copenhagen

### **The *Lucidarius* and the *Lucidarius*-texts**

*Lucidarius*, i. e. the Donor of Light, is the name of an anonymous work of instruction within the medieval European encyclopaedic tradition. It was first written in Germany around 1190, one of the earliest German vernacular works in prose (and thus the German version of this European chapbook is very well studied). The book is written as a dialogue between a teacher (the ‘Magister’) and a pupil (the ‘discipulus’) and disseminates a medieval Christian outlook in the form of the teacher’s answers to the pupil’s questions concerning theology, biblical history, cosmography, geography and ethnography. The German *Lucidarius* was translated into other vernaculars during the Middle Ages, among them Danish and Icelandic.

The dialogue consists of three parts, plus a prologue, in which the cause and the purpose of the book is explained. The content of the book can be systematised: Part 1 deals with the Creator, the Creation and the created world including geography, meteorology, astrology and biology. Part 2 treats faith and

life, i. e. Christianity and the liturgy of the Christian church. Part 3 throws light on eschatology, Doomsday and salvation.

The source of inspiration is *Elucidarium*, a Latin treatise on theology written by Honorius Augustodunensis c. 1098. *Elucidarium* forms together with two other works by Honorius himself and some works of his contemporaries the sources of the German *Lucidarius*. *Elucidarium* was translated into Old Norse around 1150. This translation is called *Elucidarius*, and because of the similarity of the two names the younger Icelandic version of the German *Lucidarius* has often been confused with this older translation.

The German and the Danish *Lucidarius* are well known. They have both been edited several times, are constantly the object of research, and they both hold a strong position in the history of literature in the two countries. But the Icelandic *Lucidarius* is a relatively unknown work. It was never printed, like the German and Danish counterparts, and it has not yet been edited. In its manuscript state is it not easy accessible, one has to be experienced in manuscripts to know of it. The young *Lucidarius* has been pushed into the background by its predecessor *Elucidarius*, which has claimed attention for its antiquity and transmission in old vellums, and only recently have Icelandic *Lucidarius* manuscripts been identified and the texts examined.

Since the first monograph on the German *Lucidarius* and its textual history was published in 1894 (Karl Schorbach: *Studien über das deutsche Volksbuch Lucidarius und seine Bearbeitungen in fremden Sprachen*) and the first critical edition in 1920 (*Lucidarius aus der Berliner Handschrift*, ed. Felix Heidlauf) and up to the newest edition from 1994 (*Der deutsche 'Lucidarius'*, ed. Dagmar Gottschall & Georg Steer) scholars have agreed that *Lucidarius* is a commissioned work. The German duke Heinrich der Löwe gave his curate in Braunschweig the assignment of composing the work in German prose. It should have been titled *Aurea Gemma*, but the author preferred the name *Lucidarius*. This is how the making of *Lucidarius* is described in the A-prologue that is only preserved in a minority of 8 younger manuscripts from the second half the 15th century. Together these manuscripts form a young and abridged version. The B-prologue brings no information on the time and place of origin, nor the circumstances, but it is found in the majority of the text witnesses including incunabula and prints, and it is this prologue that is reproduced in the Icelandic version.

The German *Lucidarius* is nowadays characterised as an 'open' text in which the author has reworked his own original text, a shorter version (the so-called x-version) into a longer redaction (the y-version), using the same sources in the original shorter version and in the additions of the longer redaction. The A-prologue is reduced to a secondary place partly on the basis of principles of textual criticism and partly because the B-prologue both structurally and as regards contents, corresponds with the three books of the *Lucidarius* text.

The Icelandic *Lucidarius* consists of the prologue and one big part forming

the rest of the book. This part cannot be divided into three books in correspondence with the three books of the German *Lucidarius*; nothing of the textual material found in book II and III of the German *Lucidarius* is found in the Icelandic version. But maintaining the tripartite structure one may organise the Icelandic text in three parts: part 1 being a theological and dogmatic part, part 2 dealing with biblical history and part 3 on geography. Furthermore, each part is divisible into minor passages defined by subject and content.

A collation between the Icelandic and the German *Lucidarius* texts shows that the Icelandic version was made on the basis of the German. The prologue and some of the following passages in all three parts are translations of a German text. The closest I have so far been able to identify the source of translation is a Middle Low German version printed at the Brandis family printing office in 1485. Another Low German version printed at the Mohnkopfdruckerei in 1520 might be the source of the Icelandic version. This redaction of the German *Lucidarius* is not found in any other text witness and is supposed to contain material that, according to descriptions of the print in the *Lucidarius* monograph from 1894, might correspond with material in the Icelandic *Lucidarius*. Unfortunately it appears that all the catalogued copies of this edition have subsequently been lost and the hypothesis of a closer relationship between the two versions cannot be tested, at least for the time being.

However the Icelandic *Lucidarius* is more than a translation of passages from a German text source. It is a compilation bringing together material from different Icelandic and foreign works. I would like to draw attention to a twelve-part apologetic version of the Apostles' Creed. Here each apostle states one article of faith followed by opinions of named heretics, thus bringing Christian doctrine in a polemic against heresy. This version, which is not known elsewhere in Icelandic dogmatic literature, is presumably founded on St Augustine's writing on heresy *De Haeresibus* or on Isidor's *Etymologiae*. The Icelandic *Lucidarius* compiler also used Low German legendary material on the birth of Jesus Christ and the Three Wise Men that is also found in *Reykjahólarbók*. Of particular interest is an otherwise lost geographical description of Scandinavia, the Arctic and North America.

In Iceland the *Lucidarius* was transmitted in a complex of teacher-pupil dialogues comprising both religious and secular texts (*Samtal meistara og lærisveins*, *Eftirgrennslan leyndra hluta* and *Problemata Aristotelis*). In Denmark the earliest version of *Lucidarius* is transmitted in both manuscript and printed form. The relationship between the Danish and the Icelandic version has not been closely examined, but there does not seem to be a direct connection between the two. The Danish version, too, can be traced back to the German, the structure of which recurs in the Danish version with a rearrangement of the books. The first part of the German *Lucidarius*, the one dealing with God and the created world, has been separated into two

independent parts, after which the second part on Christian practice is squeezed in between the two separated parts. The third part on Doomsday remains as the last part. Along with the Reformation a revision of *Lucidarius* was provided with the same title, *Mester Lucidarius*, as in the German printed versions. This so-called younger Danish *Lucidarius* was printed many times in the following centuries as a chapbook.

Like its Danish namesake, the Icelandic *Lucidarius* is an original and creative rewriting of the German model. The Icelandic author creates within the structural and thematic framework of the *Lucidarius* genre a work with a focus on the miraculous aspects of human life. The theological and biblical sections of the German source of translation have been elaborated, illustrated and explained by the supply of biblical, homiletic and legendary material from Icelandic texts, and the cosmographic and geographic passages are adapted to an Icelandic audience by working in an Old Icelandic book on geography. This rewriting of the German *Lucidarius* reflects the work of a compiler who is concerned with hermeneutics and education. Thus, the Icelandic version is representative of the time and place of its origin and a significant and elucidating text in the research field of Icelandic history of education and mentality in the time of transition between Catholicism and Protestantism.

### **Icelandic *Lucidarius*-manuscripts**

The Icelandic *Lucidarius* is transmitted in a few post-medieval manuscripts; the oldest being a fragment from the beginning of the 17th century, while the youngest are copies from 1893. One manuscript has a complete text, two most of the text, three manuscripts contain extracts and, finally, four fragmentary pieces of texts have survived in one manuscript. Some of the manuscripts belong to the category ‘miscellanies’ a term often used in manuscript catalogues to cover manuscripts with a variety of different texts, and a few are composite too, put together from originally different physical objects.

Taking an approach from Material Philology one may supply a description of a manuscript asking the following questions: What does the physical manuscript tell of its intellectual content? Is it possible to draw any conclusions on the use and the purpose of a manuscript from the physical look of the book, the script, layout, binding etc.?

Additional Manuscript 4889 in the British Library consists of four physically different parts written by different unidentified scribes during the 18th century. The first two parts date from the beginning of the century, and the last two were written later on. All the parts are in octavo. The four original units were soon united to one book, before the manuscript was presented to the museum in January 1778 or in March 1781. No title page indicates that the collection has been looked on as a textual unity, but as it comprises the same literary genres as the other *Lucidarius* miscellanies it seems reasonable to

assume that the parts were brought together by tradition and not by accident or for pragmatic reasons. In a whole the texts make up a book of knowledge that communicates old and popular knowledge about the physical world and divine Creation through different literary genres. A closer examination of the paper supporting the four parts might give some idea of the production of the contemporary parts, where they were produced in the same cultural context and regarded as parts of a larger whole.

Lbs 2305 4to in the Icelandic National Library is in turn planned as a whole book. The scribe has carefully worked out the title page surrounded by a coloured frame decorated with geometrical patterns and flower ornamentation. Attention is drawn to the title of the book, *Kálfavíkurbók*, which is written in coloured fracture. The decorated frame and the following list of contents are not the inventions of the scribe or a contemporary illustrator but most likely reproductions from the source of the manuscript. Here it may be mentioned that the well-known saga manuscript AM 426 fol. in the Arnarnagnaean Collection has a similar though more refined decoration of the title page, not to mention the illustrations of the saga heroes Egill and Grettir and an index. On the front page of Lbs 2305 the reader is informed that the book is a copy of an old manuscript, that it is written by the Icelander Sighvatur Grímsson Borgfirðingur on his farm Höfði in Dýrafjörður in the year 1893. One may try to answer the question whether the transcriber made any changes of the original, changes determined by an audience or a specific use. He has been true to the text of the original, indicating lacunae or illegible text by pricking. The *Lucidarius* text in Lbs 2305 4to appears to be more easily read than the text in BLAdd 4889. There are punctuation marks, and it is marked when a question switches on to an answer by a new line or a larger space between the words, but still no indication of paragraphs and no rubrics. The readers were expected to be trained.

Sighvatur entered his handwritten books in a catalogue where he gives the information that *Kálfavíkurbók* contains different kinds of knowledge and is a transcription of an old manuscript from 1695. This manuscript is lost, but the title reflects an indication of locality, and the dating makes it reasonable to connect *Kálfavíkurbók* with Jón Þorðarson, a scribe who worked for Magnús Jónsson in Vigur and lived at Kálfavík on the east side of Skötufjörður in Ögurssveit in Norður-Ísafjarðarsýsla. The book, a thick exercise book with a red paper cover, gives the impression of having been written for private purposes. This presumption is supported by the fact that Sighvatur in the same year wrote another manuscript containing some passages of *Lucidarius*. This manuscript, Lbs 4614 4to, is a book commissioned by a local farmer. It is therefore more attractively produced than Sighvatur's own copy and has been bound in a half binding with a leather spine. The title is not *Kálfavíkurbók* but 'merkileg fróðleiksbók', which provides the reader with more information on content as well as use than the title *Kálfavíkurbók*, which tell us about the origin

of the book.

### **Traditional and New Philology**

What does one do when one would like to make an edition of the Icelandic *Lucidarius*? Does one prepare a traditional historical-philological edition on the basis of the stemmatic method (the Best Text Edition) or does one try a rather new practice: an edition based on the theories of New Philology.

Textual criticism and the editorial technique of traditional classical philology were recently challenged by a chiefly American initiative whose manifesto was presented in *The New Philology* (a theme number of *Speculum* from 1990). New Philology is a theory of medieval writing in the vernacular and it brings the physical manuscripts and manuscript culture into the focus of philology. The intention, it was claimed, was a renewal, rethinking and re-establishment of philology as the uniting discipline within medieval studies. One of the pioneers, Bernard Cerquiglini, stated the basic standpoints in 1989 (*Eloge de la variante. Histoire critique de la philologie*). Medieval writing is variance, mobility and rewriting, which is why the content of the manuscripts must be understood as synchronic texts of equal value. This view of medieval writing as an open and variable text that cannot be fixed makes it absurd to employ a concept of the original text or the author, according to new philologists. The focus of textual criticism has changed from the relationship between text witnesses and the establishment of the best text to a presentation and reproduction of the individual witnesses and the texts as a corpus. The editorial consequence is that all texts are reproduced in diplomatic and synoptic editions, for which electronic media are especially suitable, as discussed by Matthew James Driscoll in his plenary lecture at this conference. An electronic edition reproduces the variance and the variety of the writing, which a traditional critical edition reduces.

New Philology has developed into Material Philology, which focuses on the material artefacts and their historical context (G. Nichols: 'Why Material Philology?', *Philologie als Textwissenschaft*, pp. 10-30. 1997). Medieval literature both in theory and in practice must be studied by reinserting literature into its historical context, and the material artefacts, the manuscripts themselves, are the nucleus in this historical context. The manuscripts are more than text witnesses and historical documents, in fact they are themselves historical and cultural events because they are material. They often are the only surviving witnesses or the most reliable witnesses to the production, reception and dissemination of texts in their social and historical context. A medieval scribe or illuminator was influenced by his social milieu in the same way as a later transcriber was influenced by his historical context. The physical aspects of a manuscript: the script such as it is written on the support of parchment or paper with scribal errors and corrections, additions and omissions, layout,

illuminations, decoration and binding all give information about the conditions of production. Thus the manuscripts are unique witnesses to history, whatever their position in a stemma may be. A corrected and constructed reproduction of a manuscript text supplied with text material from other manuscripts does not represent the medieval manuscript: it is a post-medieval reconstruction, and such a text can not tell anything at all about the social and historical context of the manuscript.

Some have asked the question: what is new in New Philology? Some philologists have interpreted the theories of New Philology as ideological criticism without any methods of textual criticism or editorial technique. They are concerned about abandoning the printed critical editions in favour of electronic multiple-texts versions. The future reception of the texts by a modern audience depends on the philologists' textual work and the interpretation of the manuscript material, since most modern readers are not experts in manuscripts and not experienced in the reading of handwritten texts (Ingrid Bennewitz: 'Alte "neue" Philologie?', *Philologie als Textwissenschaft*, pp. 46-61).

In the historical-philological tradition there has always been a great interest in codicology and manuscript culture, and new philological synoptic editions with diplomatic or semi-diplomatic transcriptions of the texts along with facsimile editions are produced all the time. The newest initiatives and projects on digitization of manuscripts: pictures, texts and descriptions are results of new philological practice.

What is 'new' in New Philology is the focus on the manuscripts as material objects and social and historical witnesses and the stressing on the analysis of the correlation between the textual content and the physical appearance that tells about production, reception and dissemination of medieval literature.

Thus far, New Philology has been concerned more with textual theory and less with practice, and no specific methods of editing have been developed, though it has been suggested that single-manuscript editions where textual variants are treated according to their historical value, not their value for textual criticism, are to be preferred.

One might be slightly sceptical towards a new philological edition based on a material and socio-centric textual criticism. Will it be a useful and scientifically sound basic or standard edition? The qualities of such an edition may hardly be evaluated without a traditional critical edition that has considered the textual tradition reproducing an 'authoritative' text. But undoubtedly the textual theory of New Philology is a fruitful supplement to the methods of traditional philology, and the focusing on the materiality of the manuscripts and manuscript culture brings a renewal to philology.

As far as the Icelandic *Lucidarius* is concerned, the textual variance is small, so my interest is focused on the text itself as a member of the European *Lucidarius* tradition and as an almost unknown text in the history of Icelandic literature. It is fascinating to see how the *Lucidarius* concept has been adapted

to an Icelandic audience. The manuscripts are relatively young and they give information of the conditions of production when they were produced. If one wants to learn something about what people might be concerned about in the late Middle Ages, one has to study the text as a non-material witness. The physical manuscripts may tell us about the life of the text after its composition.

If one wants to prepare a standard edition, a best-text edition, one cannot avoid the stemmatic method of traditional philology. The purpose of such a qualitative textual critique is to establish the Icelandic author's original work, if possible, and the best way to describe the textual tradition is thought to be through stemmatic work. The variance and variety in the reproduction of the Icelandic *Lucidarius* must be documented in the textual apparatus and described in the codicological and philological sections of the introduction. This author-centric view focusing on the text and the interpretative work is to some extent opposed to the view of New Philology with its open and dynamic textual concept. A new philological electronic edition containing pictures of every manuscript and transcriptions of every text gives the reader the opportunity to study all the text witnesses and to study the dissemination of a work. It is going to be interesting to investigate the consequences of the different philological approaches for textual editing. I am sure that traditional textual criticism is facing a strong competitor in New Philology, especially if one is concerned with the production, dissemination and reception of medieval and post-medieval literature. So the answer to the question about which type of edition one is going to prepare is that one does not just produce a traditional critical edition, but also a new philological electronic version.

# Skandinavisk dyreornamentik: Symbolsk repræsentation af en før-kristen kosmologi

Lotte Hedeager

Universitetet i Oslo

Med udviklingen af skandinavisk og germansk dyreornamentik i begyndelsen af 400-tallet skabes et abstrakt formsprog, som dominerer det kunstneriske udtryk frem til kristendommen. Fra først til sidst var dyreornamentikken en uadskillelig del af elitens materielle udtryk, og det bliver naturligt at rejse spørgsmålet om dens betydning. Er dyrestile en dekorativ detalje, som bibeholdes gennem århundreder mere af vane end af vilje, eller har dyrestilene en bevidst meningsbærende funktion i de før-kristne samfund?

I det følgende skal jeg argumentere for, at dyrestilene er en uadskillelig del af den før-kristne kosmologi, og jeg skal diskutere dyremetaforen i relation til den norrøne mytekreds.

## **Meningsbærende dyrestile?**

Arkeologer og kunsthistorikere har traditionelt beskæftiget sig med stilene ud fra kronologiske og typologiske problemstillinger, ornamentik har været

betragtet som nøglen til at organisere det arkeologiske materiale i tid og rum, og stilstudier har i realiteten været det centrale redskab til at konstruere forhistorien. Bag dette ligger opfattelsen af stil og ornamentik som et passivt, neutralt og traditionsbetinget udtryk og forandringer i stil som ændret "mode"; stil tillægges således ingen selvstændig mening eller betydning. Selv om stilistiske forskelle har vist sig velegnede til at definere "arkeologiske kulturer", så har enhver diskussion af stile i relation til sociale og historiske forandringer i de fleste tilfælde været undgået. Dybest set betragtes stil som uden mening – dvs. menings-løs (Shanks 1993:86, se også Shanks & Hodder 1995:33), og den rejste problemstilling – om dyrenes symbolske betydning – derfor som både uløselig og uvæsentlig, når man ser bort fra en eventuel identificering af genkendelige dyrs betydning i den norrøne litteratur, f.eks. vildsvinet, rovfuglen, hesten/hjortedyret etc.

Over for denne positivtisk funderede opfattelse af stil og ornamentik står den teoretisk/anthropologiske tilnærning, hvor stil opfattes som et aktivt element i den sociale reproduktion, såvel for individer som for grupper, inden for et givet kultursystem. Stilelementer, ikke mindst de ikonografiske stile, betragtes som værende udvalgt med stor omhyggelighed, på samme måde som genstande er specielt udvalgt for at kunne indgå i ceremonier, fordi de er bærere af vigtige budskaber og f.eks. kommunikerer bestemte tilhørsforhold, etnisk tilknytning osv. (eks. Earle 1990:73, deMarrias et.al. 1996). Stil betragtes dermed som et aktivt element i skabelsen og opretholdelsen af den socio-kosmologiske orden og indgår således i legitimering af kontrol og magt. Opretholdelse af en bestemt stil kan derfor opfattes på linje med bevarelsen af bestemte ritualer, oprindelsesmyter, gudefortællinger og symbolske genstande – dvs. alt, hvad der tilsammen konstituerer en given gruppes identitet. Set i dette lys får de skandinaviske - og germanske – dyrestile en ny og mere signifikant betydning, der gør ovennævnte problemstilling – spørgsmålet om dyrenes symbolske betydning – til genstand for diskussion.

Især etableringsfasen, dvs. Nydamstilen og Stil I (Salin 1904), er præget af en mangfoldighed og kunstnerisk eksperimenteren, hvor budskabet endnu ikke er underlagt et standardiseret og abstraheret formsprog som i senere århundreder. Men selv om dyreornamentikken i sin tidlige form antager en vis grad af realisme, omend dyrene kan være brudt op i enkeltelementer, så må det formodes, at den i sit indhold er mytologisk og dermed aktiv for konstitueringen af en given kosmologi, hvad enten det er bevidst eller på et ubevidst plan (cf. Bloch 1995 & 1997). I det følgende er det ikke hensigten at diskutere ikonografiens mytologiske indhold *per se*, men derimod forsøge at forstå dyreornamentikken som en integreret del af samfundets kosmologiske orden. Under hensyntagen til dyreornamentikkens vide europæiske udbredelse skal jeg imidlertid kort gøre rede for, hvorledes de germanske dyrestile kan betragtes i en historiske kontekst, hvor folkevandringstidsgrupper som langobarderne, goterne, alemannerne og angel-sakserne, der alle gennem deres

oprindelsesmyter er knyttet til Skandinavien, også ses at anvende dette abstraherede formsprog (Hedeager 1997a, 2000).

### **Dyreornamentikken i historisk perspektiv**

Den tidligste udvikling af dyrestilene i Skandinavien, på kontinentet og i England, er senest analyseret af Günther Haseloff (1981). Gennem brugen af typologiske, kronologiske og geografiske kriterier mener han at kunne vise, at udviklingen af Nydamstilen/Stil I var snævert knyttet til det sydlige Skandinavien, dvs. Jylland, de danske øer, det sydlige Sverige og den sydligste del af Norge. I løbet af første halvdel af 400-tallet udvikles der i dette område en bemærkelsesværdig rig variation af former og figurer, ofte med anthropomorfe træk (masker). Det er ikke muligt at udpege direkte forløbere og forudsætninger, hverken i Skandinavien eller andre steder. Da Nydamstilen/ Stil I indeholder en stor variation af elementer, hvoraf en del lader sig føre tilbage til de senromerske karvsnitbronzer, andre derimod til asiatisk ornamental og polykrom kunst, er den eneste plausible forklaring, at denne stil, karakteriseret ved sin unikke håndværksmæssige kvalitet, må have udviklet sig i det sydsandinaviske område i første del af 400-tallet (Haseloff *ibid.*). Fund fra England og kontinentet er velrepræsenteret fra den senere del af 400-tallet, hvor de fortsætter frem til den senere del af 500-tallet, hvorefter en ny stil, Stil II, der grundlæggende i sit abstrakte formsprog er ensartet fra Italien til Norge, udvikles som den sidste af de fælles-germanske dyrestile (Salin 1904, se desuden Lund Hansen 1992:187 m. litteratur).

Stil I-genstande fra kontinentet og det angel-saksiske område, hovedsagelig relieffibler og brakteater, deler sig i to kategorier. Den første består af nordiske fibler eller brakteater, importerede eller kopierede, den anden af kontinentale/angel-saksiske fibler eller brakteater som har en egen selvstændig udvikling af den nordiske Stil I og af brakteaternes ikonografi (fig.2). De nordiske fibler, hvad enten de er originale eller eftergjorte, kendes fra Rhinområdet, i det alemanniske område og i Thüringen såvel som i det sydlige England efter angel-saksernes bosættelse (Hines 1984, Näsman 1984:map 10; 1991:fig.8). Den kontinentale Stil I er til stede i Pannonien, hvor den kan knyttes til langobardernes tilstedeværelse, og ligeledes i det alemanniske område af Sydvesttyskland, men den er desuden fundet spredt over store dele af kontinentet og det sydlige England (Haseloff 1981:Abb.359; Roth 1979:59). På kontinentet var disse Stil I fibler i cirkulation længere end i Skandinavien og de videreudvikles til Stil II (følger Salin 1904), hvor dyrenes zoomorfe karakter og forskellighed opløses i et båndflet af slangeagtige dyr. Den omhyggelighed hvormed alle detaljer er blevet udført, den høje håndværksmæssige standard og præcisionen i formgivningen antyder et bagvedliggende idéset på samme måde som det kendes fra f.eks. klassisk græsk keramik (Shanks 1993 m. referencer).

De nordiske guldbrakteater er som nævnt den anden gruppe af genstande,

som kendes fra store dele af Europa, fra England i vest til Ungarn og Ukraine i øst (Haseloff 1981:Abb.92). Visse af disse brakteater er nordiske af oprindelse, andre er efterlavet – eller videreudformet inden for rammerne af et selvstændigt ikonografisk univers; de angel-saksiske brakteater er desuden ofte fremstillet af sølv. Skønt både motiv og design er umiskendelig nordisk, har brakteaterne uden tvivl deres udspring i senantik kunst og byzantinske kejsermedaljoner (Hauck 1985-1989).

Mange af de germanske folk på kontinentet og i England må oprindeligt have haft en vis forståelse for brakteaternes og fiblernes ikonografiske univers, og gennem 500- og 600-tallet opretholdes dette specielle figurative formsprog blandt en række af de germanske folk. Den nordiske stil blev imiteret og videreudviklet til en kunststil, hvis meningsbærende indhold ikke nødvendigvis behøver at have været konstant over tid og rum. Det overraskende er imidlertid, at dette symbolsprog aldrig optages af visse germanske folk, som f.eks. frankerne - nemlig de folk, hvis vandringshistorie og oprindelsesmyte ikke giver dem nogen tilknytning til Skandinavien (Hedeager 2000).

Accepteres dyrestilene som et vigtigt element i den sociale praksis, fremstår de konventionelle kunsthistoriske analyser også som utilstrækkelige, fordi de ikke kan forholde sig til dyreornamentikkens ideologiske og sociale kontekst. I stedet refereres til dyrestilenes – eller disses enkeltelementers - baggrund i simple, ofte diffusionistiske, termer som “social kontakt” eller “handelskontakt” (Shanks 1993:101). Forudsættes det derimod at stil er meningsbærende, så vil også stilforandringer og ikke mindst opkomsten af en ny stil, skulle tillægges central betydning for spørgsmålet om sociale og politiske forandringer. Hvis stil derimod betragtes først og fremmest som dekoration, fri for mening, må andre forklaringer som diffusion, “ændret smag” eller “handel” være aktuelle. Herved mister stilforandringer og stilbrud sin analytiske signifikans, og den kontinuerlige stiludvikling med fokus på kronologi og typologi bliver forskningens endemål. Dette har også været tilfældet for de germanske dyrestile (eks. Salin 1904, Ørsnes 1966, 1969, Haseloff 1981, Menghin 1983; undtagelse Johansen 1979). Forskningen har i vid udstrækning overset betydningen af to af de mest markante forandringer i stiludviklingen, nemlig opkomsten af Nydamstilen/Stil I og opkomsten af Stil II, og har ikke forsøgt at samtænke disse stilforandringer med samfundsprocesserne i øvrigt, ligesom man ikke har diskuteret ophøret af dyreornamentikken i forbindelse med etableringen af den kristne kirke.

Folkevandringstidens begyndelse, første halvdel af 400-tallet, er karakteriseret ved introduktionen af dyret i ornamentikken – forvredne dyr med tydelig hoved- og øjenmarkering (Nydamstilen/Stil I), dens afslutning ved begyndelsen af Stil II med en påfaldende nedtoning af de zoomorfe træk til fordel for sammenslyngede, båndformede eller slangeformede dyr; det fire-fodede dyr, som karakteriserede Stil I, forsvinder (fig.3). Dette stærkt abstraherede formsprog repræsenterer afslutningen på en lang udvikling, og

hovedforskellen mellem de to stilistiske traditioner er at dyret står som det centrale element i Stil I, mens det i Stil II er underordnet og delvist opløst i zoomorfiserede båndmønstre.

Oprindelsen til Stil II (=Vendel stil A-C) har været – og er – stærkt omdiskuteret: der har været argumenteret for Skandinavien (ex. Arwidsson 1942), der har været fokuseret på senromersk kunst (ex. Lindqvist 1926) eller på det langobardiske Italien (ex. Åberg 1946, Werner 1935, Haseloff 1956), mens endnu andre har henført Stil II's oprindelse til det sydvest-alemanniske område (ex. Haseloff 1981:597 ff; 1984:117, Lund Hansen 1992:187). Denne diskussion afspejler først og fremmest, at den nye stils ensartethed i realitetet gør det umuligt at isolere et bestemt "innovationsområde" noget enkelt sted i Europa; dateringen af Stil II's begyndelse til 560/570 er de fleste derimod overens om (undtagelse: Lund Hansen 1992).

Ved at knytte stilene sammen med deres brede historiske kontekst får opkomsten og ophøret af henholdsvis Nydamstilen/Stil I og Stil II en potentiel ny fortolkningsramme. Den tidlige germanske dyrestil (Nydamstilen/Stil I) omfatter i tid perioden mellem hunnernes tilstedeværelse i Europa (ca. 375) og den sidste af de store germanske folkevandringer, nemlig langobardernes erobring af Italien (568). Udviklingen af dyrestilene er således uløseligt forbundet med en historisk periode præget af store socio-politiske forandringer, herunder etableringen af de første germanske middelalderlige kongedømmer og mødet med den hunnisk erobringsmagt. På den ene side demonstrerer dyrestilene en eksisterende ensartethed blandt folkevandringstidens krigerelite, på den anden side markeres også subtile forskelle.

På et overordnet niveau har Stil II, ligesom Nydamstilen/Stil I, et påfaldende ensartet præg, og begge stile har været anvendt på smykker og våben over store dele af Europa. Dyrestilene må derfor på et vist niveau have repræsenteret en fælles symbolsk vokabulartur, der sammenbåndt de mange konkurrerende og stridende grupper i folkevandringstiden og den tidlige middelalder. Disse grupper var forbundet gennem politiske alliancer og ægteskabsbånd, som må være blevet styrket ved at være forankret i et delvist fælles symbolsk univers (Earle 1990:78; cf. Højlund Nielsen 1997a & b). Til trods for denne generelle ensartethed findes alligevel en tydelig forskel mellem den nordiske stiludvikling fra Stil II (Venedelstilene) og den kontinentale/angelsaksiske Stil II. Hvor Stil II ophører på kontinentet, bliver dens detailformer og fundamentale dispositionsprincipper derimod styrende for den skandinaviske stiludviklingen helt frem mod middelalderen (Karlsson 1983:28)

Fra slutningen af 600-tallet, hvor Stil II ophører, er det ikke længere muligt at definere en fælles germansk dyrestil. Fra dette tidspunkt, hvor den katolske kirke endegyldigt har slået rødder på kontinentet og i England, var også den hedenske nordiske oprindelsesmyte dømt til at miste sin officielle politisk-ideologiske betydning, og de gamle myter og symboler mistede dermed en organiserende rolle i etableringen af politisk autoritet. Fra dette tidspunkt blev

de kristne myter og tilhørende symbolsprog kosmologisk konstituerende og dermed legitimerende for samfundets socio-politiske orden. En ny stil udvikledes, nemlig en stil hvor frankiske elementer blandes med insulære, tæt knyttet til den irsk/angel-saksiske missionsvirksomhed, som begyndte i Friesland i 678/79 og nåede det centrale og sydlige Tyskland i løbet af første halvdel af 700-tallet.

Skønt den nye stil var indiskutabelt forbundet med missionsvirksomheden og findes på en lang række kirkelige genstande, er den dog ikke begrænset til udelukkende at være "kirkekunst". En stor variation af sekulære genstande af samme karakter som tidligere blev nu tilføjet denne nye kristne stil: forskellige former for dragttilbehør, våben, hesteudstyr, stigbøjler, sporer, armringe osv., som nu vidnede om ejerens ideologiske forankring. Heller ikke Sydskandinavien var uberørt af den latinske kristendom, som nu blev det ideologiske fundament for den europæiske krigerelite og dens magtfulde regenter. Alligevel videreudvikles den nordiske dyrestil inden for sit eget abstrakte formsprog, og den gør det på en måde, hvor de opløste dyrefigurer til en vis grad genvinder deres zoomorfe karakter og stilen dermed bliver mere tydelig i sit budskab. Planteornamentikke, der siden antikken havde spillet en fremtrædende rolle i eurasiske kulturer under påvirkning af klassisk formtradition, påvirker den nordiske stiludvikling i en ganske kort periode i 700-tallet (Sydskandinavisk stil F efter Ørsnes 1966), men kommer sidenhen ikke til at berøre den nordiske stiludvikling førend med den romanske stil i løbet af 1000-tallet (Karlsson 1983:59). Den insulære, irsk-angel-saksiske missions indflydelse på den kontinentale stiludvikling i 700-tallet medførte et massivt optag af kristne elementer, herunder plantemotivet, som den nordiske kunst og dermed den nordiske elite – sine europæiske kontakter til trods – flirter med i 700-tallet, men derefter fuldstændigt afviser.

I Skandinavien fortsatte en hedensk krigerelite og en fragmenteret statsstruktur, og de hedenske myter og ikonografiske symboler – dyrestilene – fortsatte med at spille en organiserende rolle i disse krigersamfunds kosmologi frem til vikingetidens slutning. Skønt fortsat i brug ophører den nordiske dyrestil med at videreudvikles i løbet af 1000-tallet med Urnesstil, den sidste selvstændige fase af den nordiske dyreornamentik (fig.4), omend elementer af den sene dyreornamentik stadig eksisterer ind i 1200-tallet, f.eks. på kirkeportaler og anden kirkeudsmykning (eks. Hylestad og Lom i Norge, Hørning i Danmark), dåbsfonde (eks. Alnø kirke i Sverige), relikviekors (eks. Orø-korsets kæde, Danmark) og altre (eks. Lisbjerg, Danmark). I en overgangsperiode optog den romanske kunststil med sine utvetydige kristne symboler og plantelementer dele af den hedenske symbolik, ofte således at det kom til at udtrykke et dobbelt budskab – hedensk såvel som kristent. Fra midten af 1000-tallet til midten af 1200-tallet forandres rytmen i ornamentikken ikke væsentligt, som der fremgår af de rigt udsmykkede norske stavkirkers komplicerede træskæringsornamentik. Gradvist erstattes Urnes-dyrenes

ornamentale slyngninger imidlertid af rankestreng og plantemotiver, bl.a. "byzantinske blomster" (Anker 1997:237). Dyrene gøres stadig længere og flettes sammen med lange bladranker, samtidig med, at nye dyreformer introduceres – især synes den vingede drage med fuglekløer at være betydningsfuld (Anker 1997: 136), mens det "store dyr", som karakteriserede Urnesstilen, forsvinder (fig.5).

Med konsolideringen af såvel den kristne kirke som de middelalderlige kongedømmer i Skandinavien i 1200-tallet, reflekteret i den nye "officielle" historie, nedskrevet af bl.a. Saxo og Snorre, ophører også dette tvetydige formsprog. De skandinaviske kongeriger hviler fra da af på en klar kristen kosmologi, som ikke havde plads – eller officielt brug - for de hedenske dyresymboler.

### **Symbolsk repræsentation**

Kristen ikonografi eksisterer samtidig med et skriftsprog og tekster, som gør det muligt i dag at afkode de enkelte symboler selvom meningen med hver enkelt billedfremstilling ikke behøver at være klar (for en omfattende oversigt, se Ferguson 1961). I en før-kristen kontekst derimod, hvor de litterære tekster mangler, er det umuligt at få tilstrækkelig viden for at kunne "læse" ikonografien og dens symbolske repræsentation, dvs. for at forstå det kosmologiske univers, som denne ikonografi er en integreret del af (Hawkes 1997).

På stavkirker, på runesten, på dåbsfonde og andre, på smykker og andre metalarbejder er Urnesstilen det sidste led i udviklingen af et abstrakt nordisk formsprog, som strækker sig fra begyndelsen af 400-tallet til den tidlige middelalder. Denne udvikling er ikke lineær, ligesom den heller ikke følger enkle og klare forlæg. Dyreornamentikken opstår i efterdønningen af det senromerske imperium, og dens symbolsprog er meningsfyldt og brugbart frem til den katolske kirkes konsolidering, hvad enten dette er på kontinentet, i England eller i Skandinavien. Meget tyder således på, at dyreornamentikken var en uadskillelig del af den før-kristen kosmologi, uforenelig med den kristne (katolske) lære, og dyrestilene selv ikke et udslag af tidens mode og tilfældige handelskontakter. Tværtimod. Igennem århundreder forblev dyresymbolikken det bærende element i nordiske ikonografi; trods alle kontakter med - og påvirkninger fra - den kristne verden, optages ingen væsentlige elementer fra den kristne ikonografi førend mod slutningen af 1000-tallet. Den hedenske dyrestil fungerede tilsyneladende på samme måde som den tidlig-kristne – meningsbærende og organiserende, og dette til trods for, at de to religiøse systemer, den kristne og den hedenske, var diametralt forskellige. Mens den før-kristne religion i Norden er en etnisk – kollektiv - religion, baseret på kult og ritualer, er kristendommen en universal – og individuel - frelse-religion, baseret på dogmer og doktriner (Steinsland 1990b:129) .

I tydelig kristen kontekst i den tidlige middelalder havde den visuelle kunst en dobbelt, men komplementær funktion: dels at belyse det væsentlige ved det kristne livssyn, dels at propagandere for dette syn. Den visuelle kunst var således en uadskillelig del af den kristne kosmologi, som vi kender fra Biblens myter og fortællinger. For den, der ikke kender fortællingerne i Det nye Testamente må f.eks. Jesus og apostlene opfattes som et neutral billede af tretten mænd (Hawkes 1997:314). Kristen ikonografi og kristne myter er uadskillelige; de er den visuelle og tekstuelle side af samme sag (cf. Ferguson 1961). Derfor bliver det også umiddelbart forståeligt, at kristen kunst ikke kunne optage før-kristne symboler på noget andet tidspunkt end i en speciel overgangsfase. Hvis vi forudsætter, at den før-kristne visuelle kunst havde samme funktion som den kristne, bliver det også forståeligt, at dyreornamentikkens formsprog ikke kunne optage kristne symboler, fordi den selv var en integreret del af den før-kristne kosmologi.

Selv om dyrestilene ikke udvikles lineært og umiddelbart forståeligt, og selv om folkevandringstidens kunst er meget forskellig fra vikingetidens, så parafraserer alle stilene imidlertid over ét tema, *dyret*. Dyrets betydning som organiserende kraft i de før-kristne samfund - fra folkevandringstiden til vikingetidens slutning - synes således indiskutabel. Hvis hedensk ikonografi og hedenske myter forholder sig til hinanden på tilsvarende måde som kristne myter og kristen ikonografi, så kan der argumenteres for, at centrale mytekredse – ligesom dyresymbolikken – på et strukturelt plan grundlæggende forblev uforandrede, fordi de fungerede som en organiserende kraft i deres eget samfund.

I modsætning til megen kristen ikonografi er dyreornamentikken et stærkt abstraheret formsprog og dens tydning i endnu højere grad skjult for den, der ikke behersker “koden” (Hawkes 1997:314). Hvis det ikonografiske univers imidlertid forudsættes at være uadskilleligt fra det ideologiske/mytologiske univers, således som det med paralleller til den kristne kunst er argumenteret for i det foregående (cf. Ferguson 1961), vil imidlertid den norrøne litteratur med én gang blive aktualiseret som analytisk instrument i forsøget på at “afkode” dyreornamentikkens symbolske repræsentation.

### **Myter og ikonografi**

Historikere, filologer, litteraturhistorikere og religionshistorikere, hvis arbejdsfelt er de nordiske samfund i vikingetiden og den tidlige middelalder, har delt den norrøne litteratur som kildemateriale, omend med forskelligt – og til tider modsætningsfyldt - metodisk udgangspunkt (se bl.a. Gansum 1999). I de senere år har imidlertid også arkæologerne meldt deres interesse, idet et stadig voksende arkæologisk kildemateriale fra den yngre jernalder og vikingetiden på den ene side, og udviklingen af den postprocersuelle, cognitive og historiserende arkeologi på den anden, har bragt det tidlige skriftlige

kildemateriale centralt ind i arkeologiens interessesfære. Dette kan virke både provokerende og udfordrende på den norrøne litteraturs oprindelige "ejere", fordi arkeologernes udgangspunkt er forskelligt fra de traditionelle forskningsfelter og interesseområder ved at have sin forankring i socialanthropologisk teori og diskurs. Det er ikke min hensigt at forsvare en ukritisk anvendelse af den norrøne litteratur til studier af den nordiske jernalder (se Gansum for diskussion, 1999), men derimod at påpege en fundamental forskel – og potentiel modsætning – i teoretisk orientering de enkelte fagdiscipliner imellem, som tildels kan vanskeliggøre en tværvideenskabelige dialog.

Hvis dyreornamentikken forudsættes at være strukturelt afhængig af det ideologiske univers og dets centrale mytekredse, må tidsperspektivet række fra begyndelsen af 400-tallet til kristendommens konsolidering i 1000/1100-tallet, et argument, der understøttes af ensartetheden i deponeringer af ædelmetaldepoter i kulturlandskabet over samme tidsrum (Hedeager 1999). Ligesom de kristne samfund undergik store forandringer igennem århundreder uden at dette ændrede ved de centrale kristne myter, således kan der argumenteres for, at også de før-kristne centrale myter grundlæggende forblev intakte gennem tid. *Den poetiske Edda*, hvis temaer og mytologiske univers delvis genfindes i *Snorres Edda*, er det nærmeste vi i dag kan komme centrale myter i den norrøne litteratur. Skønt nedskrevet i den tidlige kristne middelalder repræsenterer digtene ubetinget en før-kristen kosmologi. Spørgsmålet er naturligvis, hvor langt tilbage i tid disse mytekredse har konstitueret det ideologiske univers. Kan de overhovedet betragtes som autentiske for vikingetidens – og den yngre jernalders – verdensopfattelse, eller må de opfattes som tidlig-middelalderlige gendigtninger i et kristent miljø. Svaret afhænger af forskningstradition og metodik og vil som sådant næppe kunne blive entydigt. Men i stedet for at fortsætte argumentationen om tidsdybden i de nedskrevne tidligmiddelalderlige tekster ud fra teksterne selv, hvilket næppe kan bringe meget nyt, skal jeg i det følgende inddrage jernalderen ikonografi i diskussionen af myternes indhold og alder.

Ved Nydamstilen/Stil I's begyndelse i 400-tallet var dyresymbolerne mere formrige, mere zoomorfe og mindre abstraherede end senere, ligesom ornamentikken også rummede menneskefremstillinger. Alligevel er dyreornamentikkens formsprog generelt så abstraheret, at det snarere udtrykker en overordnet kosmologisk forståelse end det illustrerer specifikke identificerbare mytekredse. Parallelt med den tidlige dyreornamentik findes imidlertid et mere konkretiseret ikonografisk univers knyttet til guldbrakteaterne, og der er grund til at formode, at dyreornamentikken og brakteaternes ikonografi tilhører samme symbolske univers.

De ældste brakteater, A-brakteaterne, har deres tydelige forlæg i senromerske kejsermedailloner fra slutningen af 300-tallet, men rekontekstualiseres og udvikles med et selvstændigt nordiske formsprog i 400-

tallet samtidig med den tidlige dyreornamentik. Ikonografien på de sene brakteater, D-brakteaterne, må opfattes som en abstraktion over dyremetaforen uden at være formaliseret dyrestil (brakteaterne klassificeret efter Marckeprang 1952; for den sidste diskussion om typologi og kronologi, se Axboe 1994, 1998). På B- og C-brakteaterne, dvs. de fuldt udviklede brakteater i 400-tallet, gengives flere motivkredse, som med stor sandsynlighed lader sig identificere som illustration af centrale myter fra den nordiske mytologi, nemlig Balders død (ex. Ellmers 1970:210, Hauck 1978:210, 1994) og Tyr, der mister hånden i Fenrisulvens gab og dermed redder verden fra undergang (Snore Edda kap.24, 33) (Oxenstierna 1956:36, Ellmers 1970:202, 220, Hauck 1978:210) (fig.6 og 7). Selv om disse centrale myter først blev gengivet i skriftlig form i den tidlige middelalder, må de tydeligvis have eksisteret fra 400-tallet, hvor de repræsenterede et nyt ideologisk stratum, der fandt en struktureret form i ikonografien og det materielle udtryk.

Hovedmotivet på den sidste store braktgruppe, C-brakteaterne, er ikke direkte "læsbar" (fig.8). Vi ser manden på hesten, omgivet af runer, fugle og forskellige tegn, og vi slutter, at motivet må have været alment forståeligt overalt i Sydsandinavien, hvor denne brakteattype er udbredt. Men læses ikonografien mere omhyggeligt, ses at rytteren kun har hoved og ingen krop eller ben, at håret er samlet i en hestehale, der ender i et fuglehoved, at hesten har horn, hageskæg og en benstilling, som ingen levende hest kan præstere. Er dette rytteren til hest, med forlæg i de romerske kejsermedailloner og den romerske kejserne til hest, udsat for nordiske guldsmedes frie fantasi og begrænsede evner? Næppe. Motivet på C-brakteaterne har været lige så præcist i sit symbolske budskab som den kristne ikonografi; at Jesus på korset kan fremstilles i alle variationer fra den simpleste symbolske repræsentation af to streger, der udgør et kors, til Giotto's fortolkning af det samme motiv i Arena-kapellet i Padua, er umiddelbart forståeligt. Om Jesus afbildes med tornekrone eller uden spiller ikke den store rolle; budskabet er umiddelbart læseligt. Således også med brakteaterne.

Ikonografien på C-brakteaterne, den mest udbredte af alle brakteatyper, har været umiddelbart forståeligt og det må have kommunikeret et centralt ideologisk tema med et vist fortolkningspotentiale, de mange detaljer og variationer taget i betragtning. Fastholdes parallellen til den tidlig-middelalderlige kirke, må dette motiv kunne tillægges lignende betydning som f.eks. Kristus på korset – som symbolsk repræsentation af en bærende idé i det religiøse kompleks, hvilket bl.a. illustreres gennem en guldrakteat fra Kent, hvis hovedmotiv er Kristus på korset (afb. Speake 1980: Plate 13:o). Den kristne tro er forankret i Kristusfiguren, hvis guddommelige magt ligger i den korsfæstede Jesus' overskridelsen af grænsen mellem livet og døden. Tilsvarende grundmotiv genfindes i den nordiske mytologis centrale tema om Odin, som gennem selvofringen og selvpinsel når frem til at vinde sin fulde kraft, dvs. gøre sig til herre over runernes magi. Han ofre sig selv til sig selv

ved, gennemboret med et spyd, at hænge i verdenstræet, det hellige træ, i ni stormfulde dage og nætter og gennem lidelse vinde visdom, magisk runekunst og stærke tryllesange (*Hávamál* str.138-140). Tilsvarende træk af selvofring rummer historien om Mimers brønd, hvor Odin må ofre sit ene øje for at kunne opnå sin fulde kraft ved at drikke af visdommens kilde, mjødbrønden (*Voluspá* str. 28). Det afgørende med beretningerne er at vise, at Odin gennem lidelse opnår den magt, der gør ham til den største blandt guderne, fordi han bliver i stand til at overskride grænsen mellem liv og død. Ved runernes hjælp kunne han tvinge hængt mands tunge til at tale, dvs. at Odin kunne tale med de døde, og de døde kendte fremtiden og kunne afsløre skjulte ting.

I den norrøne mytologi fremstilles Odinskikkelsen som en særdeles kompliceret og sammensat natur: Odin er herre i dødsriget, han er herre over krig og han er herre over inspiration, magi og visdom. Skjaldedigterne har i alt anvendt 169 forskellige navne for Odin, hvilket indebærer, at han er herre over næsten alting (Holtmark 1992:92). Odin er dog frem for noget den store troldmand, *sejdens* mester. Runerne, bogstavmagien og de store hemmeligheders magi er Odins sag; derfor ved han også mere, end nogen anden i verden (Dumézil 1969:43 f.). I religionshistorisk forskning har Odins shamanistiske karakter længe været bemærket (eks. Brøgger 1951; Eliade 1989: 380; Davidson 1990: 118, 141 ff.; Dumézil 1969: 43; Halvorsen 1967; Buchholz 1971 med litt.; Steinsland 1990a), og ikonografiske studier, især Karls Haucks mange arbejder, har overført denne tolkning til billedsproget på folkevandringstidens guldrakteater (ex. Hauck 1983: 534 ff., 1986: 280 ff.), ligesom bl.a. Helmut Roth (1986) har taget problemet op som et generelt fænomen (se desuden Gaimster 1998: 17 ff. for en oversigt). Ud fra analyser af den norrøne litteraturs omtale af fænomenet *sejd* har Dag Strömbäck (1935) i et grundlæggende arbejde fastslået sejdens sammenhæng med en shamanistisk praksis og idéverden, ligesom Åke Ohlmarks har gjort det på religionshistorisk grundlag (Ohlmarks 1939a,b). Tolkningen af et shamanistisk træk i den før-kristne religion tilbagevises dog ud fra tekstkritiske studier af Edgar Polomé, som imidlertid medgiver, at der er visse shamanistiske træk som kan tillægges den ældste Odinskikkelse og gudfremstillingen på guldrakteaterne fra folkevandringstiden (1992:417). Det shamanistiske element, som flere forskellige tekstbaserede forskningstraditioner således samstemmende har påvist i den sene hedenske religion i Skandinavien, har imidlertid først i de seneste år vundet genklang blandt arkeologer (ex. Magnus 1988, 1992; Kristoffersen 1995; Hedeager 1997a,b, 1999; Solli 1998; Price 2000).

I den ovennævnte litteratur findes en bred enighed om Odins tilknytning til sejden og at sejdens og ekstasen var uadskillelige fra troen på hamskiftet, dvs. at sjælen frigøres fra kroppen i et andet gestalt (en anden ham). Dette andet gestalt var altid i dyreskikkelse, og i denne skikkelse kunne sjælen derefter foretage sin rejse til dødsriget eller til fjerne egne af jorden. Den entydige forbindelse mellem sejd, ekstase og hamskifte er samtidig identisk med

shamanismen som religiøst kompleks (bl.a. Strömbäck 1935, Brøgger 1951, Buchholz 1971, Davidson 1988:162, Eliade 1989:387), og Odinkultens centrale elementer er dermed identiske med de grundlæggende træk ved den shamanistiske praksis: ekstasen, rejsen til en anden verden og en transformations-ideologi (Hedeager 1997 a,b). De norrøne kilder er derimod tavse om det sidste centrale begreb, de zoomorfe hjælpeånder, når der ses bort fra Odins to ravne, Hugin ("Tanke") og Munin ("Hukommelse"), der hver dag – på ægte shamanistisk vis - sendes ud til de fire verdenshjørner, dvs. til de vogtende ånder, og kommer tilbage for at give Odin råd, samt den otte-fodede ganger Sleipner, som Odin anvender for at ride til Hels rige (dødsriget), og som kan kæmpe mod andre heste (Holtsmark 1992:104).

Shamanismen er imidlertid utænklig uden begrebet "hjelpeånder", fordi de var forudsætningen for, at shamanens sjæl kunne foretage sin farlige rejse til den anden verden, idet de beskyttede ham. Hjelpeånderne er zoomorfe, og de har forskellige funktioner: det store dyr (ren/elg/hest/hjort) der som den vigtigste skulle beskytte shamanen på rejsen til den anden verden ved at slå mod andre shamaners fjendtlige ånder, fuglen, der blev sendt ud til de vogtende ånder, så de kunne rådgive shamanen, og fisken eller slangen, der skulle vise vej til underverdenen med de dødes sjæle, ligesom den vogtede shamanens liv under sjælsrejsen. Den frie sjæl var selv i dyreskikkelse, og de tre karakteristiske hovedtyper, fugl, ren/hjort eller bjørn; af disse er fuglen mest almindelig (Eliade 1989:156; desuden f.eks. Hultkrantz 1987). På rejsen til den anden verden vil shamanen oftest være fremstillet ridende på en fugl eller det store hestelignende dyr (om shamanisme, eks. Eliade 1989; Vitebsky 1995; Campbell 1968:156-269; den nordiske shamanisme demonstrere dog ingen tydelige spor efter at omfatten en helbredende praksis).

En bærende ide i den nordiske kosmologi er således troen på hamskiftet og sjælsrejsen som så betydningsfuldt, at Odins magt var utænklig uden disse specielle evner. Derfor er det næppe heller overraskende, når C-brakteaterne kan tolkes som den arketypeiske fremstilling af - hvad der må formodes at være Odins – rejse til den anden verden, dvs. Odins egentlige magt, hvor grænsen mellem liv og død ophæves. Shamanen selv (Odin) er gengivet som et mandshoved, men i fugleham (håret er ofte udformet som et fuglehoved). Han er fulgt af sine hjelpeånder, først og fremmest det store dyr, ofte afbildet med åndetegn ud ad munden. Dyret har ofte tydeligvis både horn og hageskæg, og en benstilling, hvor hovene/klovene vendes opad på en særegen måde. Ingen af disse attributer indikerer, at der er tale om en hest, som Karl Hauck har diskuteret (Hauck 1992). Derimod svarer de enkelte detaljer godt til Skandinaviens største dyr, elgtyren, med horn, hageskæg og denne sære benstilling, som kommer af dens karakteristiske pasgang. Elgen hører til i naturen, den er ikke tæmnet, og dens styrke og temperament gør den til en farlig modstander og dermed også til en kraftfuld beskytter på den farlige rejse til det hinsides. Ud over det store dyr og fuglen, der skal gøre rejsen til

dødsriget mulig, findes i enkelte tilfælde også fiske- eller slangelignende væsener (fig. 9). Som et sidste karakteristisk element findes det specifikke symbol på Odins magt til at overskride grænsen mellem liv og død, nemlig runerne.

Skønt afstande i tid mellem de nedskrevne myter og folkevandringstidens ikonografiske afbildninger, er det næppe for dristigt at tolke brakteaterne som symbolske udtryk for den før-kristne kosmologi, hvori transformationen og kommunikationen med den anden verden var den centrale ide. Den fandt et konkret ikonografisk udtryk i 400-tallets institutionalisering af et nyt ideologisk stratum med Odin som hovedgud og nordisk modvægt til den europæiske Kristus-skikkelse (se desuden Hedeager 2000). Mens afbildningen af de centrale gude-myter alene er knyttet til, hvad der kan opfattes som initieringsfasen, videreudvikles og abstraheres den del af ikonografien derimod, som symbolsk repræsenterer kontakten til den anden verden, i tiden helt frem til den tidlige middelalders ændrede kristne kosmologi – nemlig dyret.

### **At tænke med dyr**

I middelalderens og renaissancens teologi og filosofi, med rod i henholdsvis Biblen og Aristoteles og bekræftet af Descartes, Spinoza og Kant, blev dyr betragtet som underordnet mennesket: naturen var skabt for at tjene menneskets interesse, og om ikke praktisk så i hvert fald moralsk og æstetisk indtog dyrene denne rolle. Mennesket, der var skabt i Guds billede, var fundamentalt forskellig fra alle andre former for levende væsener og var dermed naturen overlegen (Tapper 1994:48). Trods den videnskabelige revolution, hvor mennesket biologisk blev inkluderet i dyreriget, er den vestlige verdens naturopfattelse imidlertid ikke blevet mindre antropocentrisk; dyr er stadig fundamentalt forskellige fra mennesker. Dyr ses som “overudnyttede”, “udrydningstruede”, “beskyttede” eller “bevaringsværdige”, dvs. ubetinget underlagt menneskelig dominans; mennesket selv derimod er et specielt dyr, hvis dominans er en naturlig konsekvens af dets mentale og kulturelle overlegenhed.

Ud fra en rationel vestlig tankegang er det vanskeligt – måske umuligt – at percipere kulturer, hvor mennesket ikke ser sig selv som naturen overordnet, men derimod på linje med, eller endog underordnet, naturen og dens “ikke-mennesker” (dyr). Diametralt modsat den vestlige – kristne – kosmologi er den totemistisk tro og kult, hvor det er dyrene, der har skabt verden og dens orden, herunder rammerne for menneskets sociale eksistens, og hvor de er ultimativt ansvarlige for fortsættelsen (Ingold 1994:12). Den totemistiske kosmologi er dermed uforståelig uden en grundlæggende erkendelse af den rolle, som dyrene spiller. Claude Lévi-Strauss har vist, hvordan mennesker forstår sig selv og verden omkring sig gennem dyremetaforer. Dyrenes betydning er da, ifgl. Lévi-Strauss, ikke blot at mennesker er afhængige af dem

for fysiske overlevelse, men at de er vigtige på et abstrakt plan ved at være "gode at tænke med" (Lévi-Strauss 1969, kap. 2, 1989). Relationen mellem mennesker og dyr er en kulturel konstruktion, hvor dyrene bruges på to diametralt modsatte måder som metaforer i det menneskelige samfund for at moralisere og socialisere. I myter og historie kan skellet mellem dyr og mennesker ophæves; dyrene tillægges menneskelige værdinormer og social ageren, og i idealiseret stil bruges de som rollemodeller for den rette sociale ageren. I andre tilfælde repræsenterer dyret det Andet, uorden, den måde, som ting ikke skal gøres på. I begge tilfælde er dyremetaforen præfekt, fordi dyr har de samme basale funktioner som mennesket, men uden klassifikatorisk at være det. Derfor er dyr gode til at lære med og lære af, især i de centrale områder af tilværelsen som er stærkt tabu-belagte (Tapper 1984:51).

Dyrenes specielle position udspringer af vanskeligheden ved at definere dem. Hvad er et dyr? Spørgsmålet lader sig ikke besvare uden definition af grænser, hvad enten det er mellem menneskelige og ikke-menneskelige individer, mellem dyr og planter, eller det er det mest fundamentale - mellem besjælede og sjæl-løse individer (Ingold 1994:2). Dyr er således både menneskelige og ikke-menneskelige, besjælede og ikke-besjælede, afhængig af definition og derfor potentielt grænseoverskridende. I en totemistisk kosmologi er dyr i stand til at overskride den grænse, som mennesket ikke selv kan overkomme, nemlig grænsen mellem liv og død, grænsen mellem denne verden og den anden, og gennem dyret kan det udødelige hos mennesket komme til udtryk. Når shamanen foretager sin rejse, hvor sjælen gennem ekstase løsrives sig fra kroppen og kan bevæge sig frit, er den i dyreskikkelse; kun gennem transformationen bliver mennesket grænseoverskridende.

Ud fra de norrøne kilder fremgår, at ekstase og sjælsrejse (*sejden*) altid har været uløseligt forbundet med hamskiftet – transformationen af menneskesjælen til dyreskikkelse. Menneskets sjæl transformeres til et dyr, dvs. den *bliver* dette dyr for at færdes i den anden verden og hos de døde hente viden om fortid og fremtid (cf. Kristoffersen 1995 med samme argumentation). Når menneskesjælen i denne proces fik dyreskikkelse, blev dyret selv besjælet. Ifølge norrøne tradition eksisterede sjælen i blod og i ånde (Steinsland 1990b:62ff), og det store dyr på C-brakteaterne, der bringer Odin til den anden verden, har netop ofte åndetegn fra munden. Dyrenes evne til grænseoverskridelse, til kommunikation med den anden verden, forklarer også, hvorfor

f.eks. fuglenes flugt eller hestens vrinsken blev taget til indtægt for spådomme og varsler i de germanske før-kristne samfund (Enright 1996:64).

Det dualistiske forhold mellem mennesker og dyr kommer til udtryk i *dyrefølget*, dvs. et *alter ego* i form af et skyggedyr, der eksisterede i den anden verden, hvorfra det om nødvendigt kunne overskride grænsen til den menneskelige verden. Siv Kristoffersen fremhæver eksempler på dette *følge*, der ofte endog var ukendt af den, som skulle beskyttes, f.eks. som lille Torstein

(fra "Flatöboken"), der snubler over sit *følge*, en isbjørneunge, hvorved hans bedstefar genkender ham. *Følget*, dvs. dyret, er et bestemt menneske, f.eks. som Rolk Krakes *følge*, en stor bjørn, der udkæmpede et slag for ham, mens han selv ligger som livløs (Kristoffersen 1995:13). I den før-kristne ikonografi afbildes også mennesker i dyregestalt, f.eks. på sværdskeden fra Gutenstein i Baden (Steuer 1987:Abb.14 :5), på de to guldhorn fra Gallehus i Sønderjylland og matriserne fra Torslunda på Öland (Gaimster 1998: Fig.12). Vendetidshjelmenes figurplader viser dyrenes centrale rolle i krigerideologien, bl.a. gennem vildsvinets og fuglens dominerende placering på hjelmkammen (Gaimster 1998: Fig.11, 47, 51, 58), og på selve hjelmen ligger slangen som kam hen over hjelmen, mens fuglen ligger foran og beskytter ansigtet, f.eks. hjelmen fra Sutton Hoo (fig.10). Som et sidste eksempel på det dualistiske forhold mellem mennesker og dyr bør den germanske tradition med at bruge dyrenavne som symbolske personnavne eller prefixer til personnavne, og traditionen med at kombinere mere end ét dyrenavn for at danne et personnavn, nævnes. Ofte er navne-kombinationerne ørn-vildsvin, ørn-vildsvin-ulv eller ørn-slange, dvs. dyr, der er genkendelige i den germanske ornamentalkunst (Werner 1968).

Dyret og transformationen var således ikke eksklusivt knyttet til hamskiftet, dvs. til shamaner, sejdmænd eller andre religiøse specialister. Når alle mennesker var afhængige af zoomorfe hjælpeånder eller beskyttende ånder, var verdensordenen også utænkelig uden dyremetaforen. Hermed samstemmer den før-kristne hedenske kosmologi med den samiske, som kendes fra det syttende og attende århundredes kildemateriale, og hvoraf det fremgår, at hjælpeånder og beskyttelsesånder var nødvendige for hvert enkelt menneske, ikke blot shamanen. Disse ånder var rangeret i bestemte hierarkier, nogle var antropomorfe, andre zoomorfe, men fælles for dem var, at de blev overdraget gennem arv eller gave; kun i undtagelsestilfælde kunne en person få en åndelig beskytter ud fra sin egen indsats. Disse ånder indgik i komplicerede arvesystemer, rangeret efter styrke, de kunne overdrages som medgift etc, og de var mere værdifulde end noget jordisk gods (Hultkrantz 1987). Det understreges videre, at enhver same havde tre slags zoomorfe hjælpeånder, en fugl, en fisk og en rentyr, der skulle hjælpe i den shamanistiske praksis; nogle havde kun få, andre havde mange – op til 8, 10, 12 eller 14 hjælpeånder (ibid. 115; refererer Hans Skanke's *Epitomes* fra 1720'erne).

Den før-kristne kosmologi i Sydsandinavien har, ligesom den senere kendte samiske, haft tydelige totemistiske træk, der havde meget lidt til fælles med den antropocentriske kristne verdensopfattelse, gennem hvis briller vi traditionelt forsøger at trænge ind i det hedenske univers. Fundamentalt stod mennesket ikke over dyrene, men var sidestillet – måske endog underordnet – dyrene, fordi dyrene var i stand til at overskride grænsen mellem denne verden og den anden, mellem livet og døden, en grænse, der kunne ophæves ved at mennesket selv blev dyret.

Det er således først gennem indsigten i denne anderledes ritualiserede relation mellem mennesker og dyr i før-kristen kosmologi, at det bliver muligt at trænge dybere ind i fortsåelsen af den hedenske kosmologi og dyrenes centrale placering heri.

### **Afslutning**

Med udgangspunkt i Lévi-Strauss' *Structural Anthropology* (1963) argumenterede Siv Kristoffersen for, at dyreornamentikken fra folkevandringstiden ikke blot gengiver dyrene, men *er* dyrene, eller *skaber* dyrene (Kristoffersen 1995:11). Om vi skal tolke dyreornamentikken som en symbolsk repræsentation eller en symbolsk kreation er for så vidt underordnet for forståelsen af dyrenes organiserende rolle i den nordiske kosmologi i før-kristen tid. Når dyrene, som der er argumenteret for, er forudsætningen for kommunikationen med den anden verden, bliver det umiddelbart forståeligt, hvordan dyrene kunne bevare en organiserende rolle i det før-kristne univers i tiden frem til den tidlige middelalder, og det forklarer, hvorfor dyresymbolikken og den kristne ikonografi ikke var i stand til at befrugte hinanden. Når den tidlige kristne ikonografi alligevel kunne finde vej til runestenene, og for det kontinentale og angel-saksiske område til f.eks. guldbrakteater og pragtfibler, og når den sene dyreornamentik fandt plads på kirker og døbefonde, på altre og liturgiske genstande, så må det skyldes, at dyreornamentikken kommunikerede det samme grundlæggende princip som den kristne ikonografi og således tjente til at "oversætte" det kristne budskab inden for rammerne af et før-kristent symbolsk vokabularium.

*(indleveret uden litt.referencer)*

## Ship grave hall passage – the Oseberg monument as compound meaning

Frands Herschend

Uppsala University

The ship in the grave from Oseberg is 23 metres long (Brøgger et al. 1917; Christensen et al. 1992). It stands next to a river on its keel on the rollers that made its journey on land possible. A mound covers the ship. Some time after the construction of the monument, perhaps a hundred years or so, someone made a an impressive straight cut into the mound, broke through the roof of the grave-chamber, smashed most of the equipment and took out the remains of the two women buried there. It is doubtful whether this disturbance was primarily a matter of plundering the grave or a matter of destroying the grave chamber and moving at least one of the deceased to a more suitable situation (cf. Brøgger 1945; Myhre 1992, pp. 280 ff.; Krogh 1993). During the excavation in 1904, the excavators found several skeletal remains of the older of the two buried women on what must have been the floor of the trench used by those who broke in and removed the deceased. Given the fact that only a few bones remained in the chamber we can conclude that the deceased themselves were among the prime objects for those who first opened the mound. Oseberg is thus not only a burial

and its monument is also an opening.

The ship in Oseberg does not give the impression of a ship sailing the sea—moored, as it is, to its bollard stone—but it *does* give the impression of a ship loaded and ready to take off. The overall installation is organised in a way similar to most boat- and ship-graves. One part consists of slaughtered horses and other animals outside the boat, the other makes up the installation in the ship. This installation too falls into two parts. One part is the old ship itself, made ready to take off. There are fresh oars, anchor, mast, a neat gangway and all kinds of ropes all over the ship. The other part is the representation of the rooms.

The grave chamber is the only room proper, but being set approximately in the middle of the ship, a division into three rooms is easy to detect. The installation in Valsgårde, Grave 8 (Herschend 1999) represented one end of a hall building consisting of a chamber and the upper part of the hall room. It is tempting to compare this layout to that of the hall, e.g. the one in Lejre. Making the connection Valsgårde–Lejre is no doubt a tentative interpretation, inasmuch as we have little exact knowledge about room function in large halls. Nonetheless, there is a point in making the connection since it would seem that we can compare also the design of the Oseberg burial to that of the hall in Lejre. This comparison is even more speculative than the one including the Valsgårde grave. Nonetheless, if one end of the Lejre hall formed a pattern for the Valsgårde grave, the opposite end of the same hall would fit the room sequence of the Oseberg ship: kitchen, chamber and storage, Fig. 1. If we try to imagine the funerals in Valsgårde and Oseberg, it will become apparent that the audiences in front of the boats were situated in what would, metaphorically speaking, have been the lower, public, part of the hall, i.e., the part where the less prominent guests belong.

There is a point, moreover, in my opinion, in seeing the storage as a barrier between a male and a female part of the hall building. Seeing the storage as a barrier, would make it a passage and the kind of room which Hroðgar and Wealhtheow would pass through when they left the hall for her room, i.e. for her *brydbur*. It would also qualify as the room through which the *medostig*, i.e. the one-way mead-path, which they used when they returned to the hall, could have passed. Despite the opinion of most authors, the description in the poem does not make it obvious, from an architectural point of view, that the King and the Queen or their attendants went outdoors to reach the hall by the mead-path (*Beowulf* PART I vv, 920b-927). On the contrary, the mead-path could well be a poetic metaphor for the path running from the kitchen, through chamber and passage, into the hall, i.e. the path upon which the Queen carried the mead into the hall-room. Analysing the Oseberg grave, there is a point, therefore, in starting in the kitchen and proceeding down the path.

THE KITCHEN is the most clearly structured part of the ship, befitting the rationality of that kind of room, although there are objects difficult for us to

interpret. However, the slaughtered cow represents the meat in the diet and the millstone the cereals. The caldrons, the tripod and the chain represent the fireplace and a number of other objects represent the work involved in cooking. In Oseberg, food-preparation is large-scale and that is reasonable inasmuch as managing the kitchen on the large aristocratic or royal farm, takes professional skills. It is the point in the representation of the kitchen in Oseberg that it should be rational and significant. We can see this kitchen as the symbol of a narrow gender role, but also accept the responsibility and accept the powerful role of rationally managing the household, as something positive, and take the simplicity of the room to be a sign of quality.

IN THE DAMAGED CHAMBER, it was still possible for the excavators to realise that the deceased had been lying on beds in a decorated room. The excavators found a few glass beads, but no precious jewellery and they saw the lack of jewellery, together with smashed boxes, as a proof of the plundering of the grave. Other aristocratic or royal graves, like the one from Valsgårde 8, show that if we are laid to rest in a bed then we are dressed accordingly in our night-clothes without our jewellery, which in the Oseberg case may or may not have been in the box. Researchers believe that one of the women had a high social status, the other a low one. If they had different social status, one being a queen the other her maid, only the latter was probably fully and plainly dressed and the few beads found in the chamber were probably hers. She was an old woman and the bones from her corpse were the ones scattered all over trench. The other woman, the younger of the two, was the high-ranking owner of the chamber. Of her skeleton, only a few, albeit significant bones, remained.

Based upon Brøgger (1917a, pp. 21 ff.), and the papers in Christensen et al. (1992), not least Ingstad (1992a, pp. 209 ff.), we can venture to say that the two beds stood with their upper short ends against the northern wall of the chamber. Due to the triangular shape of this wall and the height of the beds, they must have been standing next to each other. Along the southern wall mostly looms and weaving utensils were placed, but between the beds and the looms there would have been an open space where one could stand upright. The beds, the shape of the boat and the tent-like superstructure of the chamber made it difficult to access the equipment placed along the long walls of the chamber, especially in its northern part where the beds stood. On the western side there were a few objects next to the bed, but on the eastern side, not least in the north-eastern corner, next to the head of the young woman's bed, there were several objects. There is an obvious difference between the objects on the western and eastern side of the chamber. On the western side we find the kind of objects a servant would normally occupy herself with, such as cloth for a tent or a sail, buckets, boxes and a larder. These are simple, but good-quality objects. On the eastern side, however, the equipment is markedly lavish and also more personal.

If we imagine ourselves in the position of the intruders, wishing among other things to bring out the skeletal remains of the high-ranking woman, we

face a problem when we jump down on the open space next to the foot of the beds. The young and high-ranking woman is bedded down in the eastern bed, but her bones are difficult to collect. It can hardly be done from the foot of the bed, and due to the western bed standing in our way, it is impossible also from the side. The intruders solved the problem by throwing out the remains of the old woman and her bed, scattering them on the floor of the trench. Then they collected the remains of the young woman from the side of her bed without missing much. They started by throwing most of the bedding into an empty spot along the eastern wall and having collected the bones they proceeded to break down the bed and throw most of it out into the trench. This gave them access to the caskets in the corner behind the bed. They opened them, found the woman's shawl, probably among other things, and took whatever they took.

By and large the intruders seem to have been a mixture of openly smashing and collecting marauders, rather than secret robbers. Especially the fact that they succeeded in collecting and removing almost every bone of the young woman's skeleton gives the impression that she was their prime object—she and perhaps some of her most personal belongings in one of the caskets. Generally speaking, the intruders' pattern of behavior fits the idea of a Christian ritual conquering a pagan queen before reburying her, an interpretation suggested by Knud Krogh (1993). Also Björn Myhre's idea (1992, pp. 282 f.) that we should see a political context behind the opening of the monumental graves, as well as behind the monuments themselves, is fruitful. So fruitful in fact, that it ought to be taken one step further in order to clarify its implications for the transition from a pagan to a Christian society. Myhre suggests that Danish demand upon Vestfold gave rise to political manifestations and struggle for power. This seems so plausible that we ought tentatively to combine the ambition of Harald Bluetooth, and his habit of reburying prominent persons, with the opening of the Oseberg grave. It would fit this champion of Christianity, engineering and personal political ambition to organise the opening of the grave and the reburial of the high-ranking woman as part of launching a campaign of pious oppression.

The organisation of the chamber is visible despite the damage made when the first excavators broke in. It is a woman's chamber and she can choose to sleep or spend her day working in it. The work done in the chamber centres on textiles and this domain seems to be protective and emblematic of emancipated womanhood. The question whether working with textiles indicates a suppressed or emancipated position in life is debated, but the handicraft at least is considered a professional one (cf. Andersson 1999; Arvill-Nordbladh 1998; Einersstam 1997; Gräslund 1998; 1999a; Hjørungdal; 1995 Nordström 1997). In my opinion the Oseberg Grave is an indication of the emancipatory force of textiles inasmuch as it creates a room of one's own.

There is a conspicuous lack of jewellery in the chamber and if we could trust jewellery to have been removed from the casket at the western wall, the

chamber would have been an even more private room. Splendid jewellery is part of the interface between the private and public life of a high-ranking woman and if the woman were buried exposing her jewellery, it would no doubt have created a public expression similar to a *lit de parade*. If, on the other hand, the jewellery were stored away in the casket it would have added to the impression of privacy. The latter is probably the case in Oseberg, while in the male boat-graves, e.g. from Valsgårde, the opposite is demonstrated: visible insignia, sword and drinking vessel, on and next to the bed. Male installation shows us seclusion among objects (eventually icons) signalling notoriety, the installation in Oseberg shows us seclusion among objects signalling anonymity. It is tempting to see the difference as gender-based and to suggest that in their Oseberg privacy high-ranking women pay the price of their emancipation. It is a within-family emancipation—too much a room of one’s own, so to speak. It seems correct to say that the Oseberg chamber expresses the private sphere as that in which a woman can emancipate herself fulfilling a positive role while working. Her interface with the public is no doubt the hall, but in the large hall an essential part of her social life is a matter of managing the household. Kitchen and chamber represent two sides of womanhood and similar to the simple verse on the 11<sup>th</sup> century rune-stone from Hassmyra (VS24) the elaborate installation in Oseberg points out womanhood in relation to the same main aspects. Verse and ship-grave draw attention to the passage, but also to the order and the housewife governing the farm:

kumbr hifrøya til Hasvimyra  
æigi bætri þan byi raðr

To Hasvimyra no better housewife comes than she who rules the farm.

THE PROW is the most complicated of the three rooms. On top of everything, i.e. outside the ship in the first fill of the mound, we find the slaughtered animals. Below them, i.e. inside the ship, there are mainly two kinds of objects: those belonging to the ship and those belonging to the room. Although the function of many things is obscure, most, but not all of the items belonging to the room, are containers of a kind. It is only fair to count all these things among the personal belongings of the high-ranking woman in the chamber and to see them as part of a load of equipment.

The impression of ‘loaded for travel’, typifies the whole of the Oseberg installation. Since the installation surrounds a high-ranking woman, it becomes reasonable to connect the installation with the typical upper-class female journey: the passage from a snowy mountain area, through wilderness, into the cultivated and civilised landscape, up to the farm and into the marriage bed of a spring wedding (cf. Steinsland 1991; Herschend 1998, pp. 94 ff.). The woman in Oseberg seems to have been one of the women who undertook this passage inasmuch as the contents of the room in the prow signify that passage, from wilderness to civilisation, which made her woman and wife rather than child.

There are sledges, for the snow in the mountains, a stretcher possible to sit on when carried down the steep hillsides, a ship for the skerries, a wagon for the roads of the civilised landscape, tents and beds for journey nights and indeed, a marriage bed or a bed of state. It is worth noting that the bride travels with her own marriage bed on the passage. The offered skull of a cow or heifer points out the bed in an over-explicit way. If the storage in the prow signifies her passage, chamber and the kitchen mark out her stationary life as a housewife and possibly a female leader or sovereign. Passage and station — storage, and kitchen and chamber — structure the life of the high-ranking woman. Seen in the hall perspective, i.e., fitting the rooms of the ship-grave into the hall building, the actual passage from the male to the female part of the hall signify the passage performed by the bride as well as the passage performed by the wife. Her walking to and from chamber and hall room, through the prow or storage, amounts to performing the passage as a part of everyday life.

The prow shows what it takes materially to make a passage similar to that of Brunhild in the poem by Venantius Fortunatus (cf. Herschend 1998). The shift in focus from the panegyric to the installation in the Queen's grave is instructive. Venantius, by means of duke Gogo, swept away Brunhild to Sigibert without further ado. In the grave, on the other hand, we see the expedition aspects of the passage and the things it takes to succeed. It takes a caravan and a ship. Analysing the artefacts in the prow, it becomes apparent that the passage is not just travelling. The traditional work of a housewife, such as cooking and textile production, is also part of the journey; hence the bed of state, the house-shaped tent, the loom and the trough. The passage is a civilised journey, which does not set aside any part of womanhood. From Ingstad (1992b, pp. 224ff.), we can conclude that in the chamber alone there were a sufficient number of elements to connect the high-ranking woman with the divine and semi-divine mythological complex of the Late Iron Age aristocracy. Moreover, part of the female passage itself can be present in the tapestries (cf. Hougen 1940, pp. 114 ff.; Ingstad 1992b, pp. 232 f.). In the Oseberg installation, where the complementary concepts, passage and station, are making up womanhood, it would seem natural if in the most stationary there were things to remind us of the passage. The tapestries next to the Queen do so and so does the tent next to the chambermaid.

It is difficult to say which journey the passage equipment in the prow is reflecting. Is it the first, the one from home to her husband's hall? Or is it the second, the one from this hall to a new home? This dichotomy is probably not at all relevant. The passages could well have built upon each other implying that a woman's life consists of stages of civilisation connected by passages. In effect a woman's life is thus one long journey structured as an interaction between passage and station. This makes it tempting to explain the age and character of the ship with reference to its use during the Queen's first passage from childhood to womanhood some 20 years before her death. Be this as it may,

there is little doubt that the Oseberg installation deepens our insights into the passage motif hinted in Eddic poetry and Venantius' panegyrics.

Still moored, but with oars out to enable the ship to swing out in the current of the river, the installation signals a high-ranking woman on the brink of going off to life in an adjoining world. In the Oseberg case, 'on the brink' means going and staying, being present and absent, at the same time or perhaps moving in and out of our world. If, therefore, the intruders took out the high-ranking woman and passed her on to a Christian grave, they would effectively have split the reflexive and complementary character of station and passage, presence and absence, governing the Oseberg installation.

OSEBERG IS A MARKEDLY PAGAN GRAVE. The offerings and the co-burial are obvious signs. So too are the metaphors for female life. But equally significant is the way symbols are mixed in the same installation. Simultaneously, the installation is grave as well as house and boat and at the same time also a mixture of permanent death and seemingly only temporarily interrupted life or sleep. In this way, the grave is an expression of an ontology governed by complementarity rather than by categorisation characterised by sharp definitions. The grave is an expression of the belief that the unseen is present and indeed, part of the present to such a degree that it must be represented.

In this way the installation corresponds to the periphrase termed *kenning*, but contrary to its counterpart in language, it is much more complex. In language, the *kenning* is a compound such as *eskis afspring*, 'the offspring of the box'. The expression is a periphrase for 'food' since in certain situations what we take, i.e. what comes out of the box, is food. We can nest compounds in each other in order to bring about a greater complexity, and construct a *kenning* such as *fens fúr-Rognir*. *Rognir* is a name for Óðinn, *fúr-Rognir*, 'the fire's Óðinn', a *kenning* for leader or sovereign. The whole: 'the sovereign of the water', consists of two nested compounds, which happen to make up a *kenning* for Sigurðr Jarl—in his capacity as the ceremonial cook of the communal offering meal. In language, we can nest only a few compounds in an extended or *rekin*, i.e. 'driven', *kenning*, without losing their context and meaning completely. In installations, such as graves, our freedom is much greater. In real life, compound constructions are not linear and they need not have any specific direction or nesting. Putting an offspring and a box next to each other does not signify 'the offspring of the box' only. We can illustrate the possibilities and the problems of this in the Oseberg Grave.

In the aft there are some gates that could have formed a compartment or box in which the cow could have stood before it was taken out to become, indeed, an offspring of a kind of box, and food. Cow and gates can be said to form a compound. At the same time, the slaughtered cow forms compounds with the rest of the kitchen equipment and that enforces its status as food rather than animal. In the stem, there was a bovine skull in the bed of state. That

reminds us of the purpose of the passage inasmuch as offering the head of an animal is an offer for the sake of reproduction. The compound, head and bed, can therefore symbolise fertility as well as the task of the married woman. The juxtaposed position of the cow as foodstuff in the ordered aft and as offering in the rather disorderly prow, is enough to form a new compound. This new constellation could signify the woman who administrates the food in the kitchen and the woman who remembers that in food there is satisfaction as well as a promise of ability to take care of an 'offspring'. If for a moment, we refrain from seeing life from a personal point of view and expand it to something that continues from one form to another, the compounds of the grave will generate new meanings. The passage from this reality to another one becomes a counterpart to the passage from maidenhood to womanhood, but also a counterpart to the passage performed by the cow when it was slaughtered. We can continue in this way, producing more or less likely or intelligible compounds of the constellations in the grave.

Interpretation is a matter of preference and intellectual satisfaction; more interesting if shared, than not. Interpretation is, nonetheless, of little importance compared to the general structure of the grave, which encourages us to form an understanding based on the complementary character of the compounds that we detect. The boat-graves present us with a universe or a theatre in which a dramatic journey will take place. We understand the main principles, but since the point is to allow a number similar stories to take place in the setting, we would have appreciated some guidance. Not, as it were, to detect the correct story, which is not there, but to see the ones that people saw.

We can think poets or their poems as the missing guides, as well as we could have hoped to talk to those who made the installations. That would of course have been worthwhile, but still not enough, while the job of both was to construct complexity rather than the opinion of the common man. Eddic poems are less complex and more comprehensible than the installation in the grave, but they can never tell the definite story. They are too much an expression of a view upon ontology, rather than an answer to the question: 'What is it I see'? Whether we like it or not, there are no single-minded informants, expressing their immediate feelings, left to do research upon: only sources which will allow us to form a view upon an ontology of complementarity rather than one of categorisation.

THE OSEBERG INSTALLATION can be seen as a piece of literary criticism. Understanding the installation is a matter of fitting items, which may or may not have a symbolic value, into a narrative. To the Late Iron Age upper classes, journeys happen to constitute a suitable narrative space and compound-making a narrative method. This method makes it possible for an item to take part in several complementary stories within the given space. In the Oseberg installation, passage and station make up an overriding complementary pair, which governs the core of the narratives linked to the installation. The items,

therefore, do not support passage and station as topoi signifying either passage or station. On the contrary, they support narrative and complementary narrative as in itself a mind broadening technique. For that reason they are also category-breaking and topos-denying inasmuch as they change partners and take part in several, albeit complementary narratives. The idea of founding a never-ending story based upon items forming and reforming compounds with each other cannot survive medieval Christianity. However, understanding medieval saga and medieval editing of Eddic poetry will lead astray if we are unable to catch the echoes of a narrative technique linked to a once floating notion of reality.

## References

- Andersson Eva, 1999. *The common thread. Textile production during the Late Iron Age – Viking Age*. Lund.
- Arwill-Nordbladh, Elisabeth 1998. *Genuskonstruktioner i nordisk vikingatid: förr och nu*. Göteborg.
- Beowulf. See Klaeber 1950.
- Brøgger, Anton, 1917a. Osebergfunnets historie. In: Brøgger et al. (ed.) *Osebergfunnet* vol 1. Oslo.
- 1945. Oseberghaugen – Haugbrottet. *Viking* vol 9. Oslo.
- Brøgger, Anton et al, 1917. A. W. Brøgger, Hj. Falk and H. Schetelig (ed.) *Osebergfunnet* vol 1. Oslo.
- Christensen, Arne Emil et al. 1992. A. E. Christensen, A. S. Ingstad and B. Myhre (ed.) *Osebergdronningens grav*. Oslo.
- Draiby, Bente, and Komber, Jochen, 1999. Rekonstruktion af kongehallen fra Lejre. In: M. Rasmussen (ed.). *Hal og højsæde i vikingetid. Et forslag til rekonstruktion af kongehallens arkitektur og indretning*. [Technical Reports vol. 5]. Lejre.
- Einerstam, Alexandra, 1997. Varför spann Ariadne? Seminar paper from the department of archaeology Uppsala university. Uppsala.
- Gräslund Anne-Sofie, 1998. Woman in the world of power structure. In: A-C. Andersson, Å. Gillberg, O. W. Jensen, H. Karlsson and M. V. Rolöf (eds.) *The kaleidoscopic past*. Göteborg.
- 1999a. Is there any evidence of powerful women in Late Iron Age Svealand? In: U. v. Freedon, U. Koch and A. Wiczorek (eds.) *Völker an Nord- und Ostsee und die Franken*. Bonn.
- Herschend, Frands. 1998. *The idea of the good in the Late Iron Age*. Uppsala.
- 1999. Halle. In: *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*. Bd. 13. Berlin.
- Hjörungdal, Tove, 1995. Gender-critical archaeology in Sweden. *Current Swedish Archaeology*, vol. 3. Stockholm.
- Hougen, Bjørn, 1940. Osebergfunnets billedvev. *Viking* vol 4. Oslo.
- Ingstad, Anne Stine, 1992a. Hva har tekstilerne vært brukt til? In: A. E. Christensen, A. S. Ingstad and B. Myhre (eds) *Osebergdronningens grav*. Oslo.
- 1992b. Oseberg-dronningen – vem var hun? A. E. Christensen, A. S. Ingstad and B. Myhre (eds) *Osebergdronningens grav*. Oslo.
- Klaeber, Fredrick, (ed.) 1950. *Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg*. London.
- Krogh. Knud, 1993. Gåden om kong Gorms grav. Herning.
- Myhre, Bjørn, 1992. Kildeproblem ved bruk av arkeologisk materiale. In: A. E. Christensen, A. S. Ingstad and B. Myhre (eds) *Osebergdronningens grav*. Oslo.
- Nordström, Karin, 1997. I de fribornas hus vävde Amma i eldens sken. Seminar paper from the department of archaeology Uppsala university. Uppsala.
- Steinsland, Gro, 1991. *Det hellige bryllop og norrøn kongeideologi*. Oslo.
- Vs = Västmanlands runinskrifter. Stockholm.

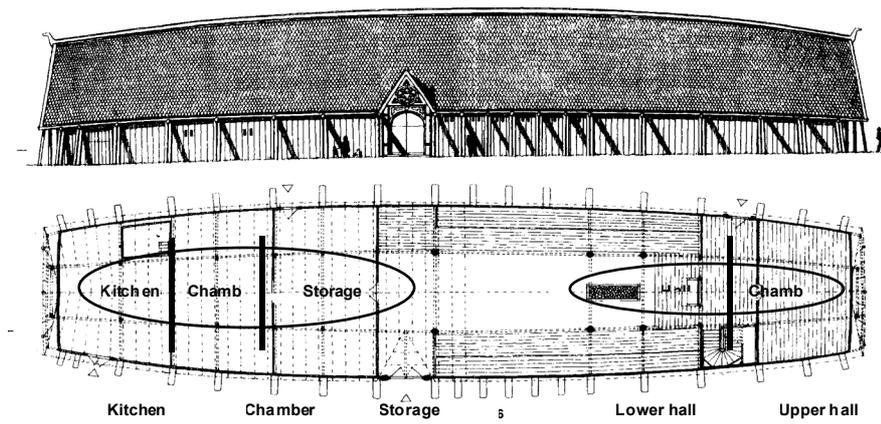


Fig. 1 The lay-out of Oseberg and Valsgårde, boat-grave 8, fitted into the lay-out of the hall in Lejre (Based on Draiby and Komber 1999).

‘Gab mir ein Gott zu sagen, was ich leide’:  
*Sonatorrek* and the myth of skaldic lyric

K. S. Heslop

University of Sydney

‘Und wenn der Mensch in seiner Qual verstummt,/ Gab mir ein Gott zu sagen, was ich leide’. While researching this paper, I was struck by the fact that at least four scholars (Misch 1928, Olrik 1930, Hruby 1932, Reuschel 1961) quote these lines from Goethe’s *Torquato Tasso* (V, 5, 3432-3) in the course of their discussions of *Sonatorrek*. Aside from the obvious thematic similarity between Egill’s poem and this little fragment, what could its persistence in the critical literature suggest?

For one thing, the quotation presents us with a historically particular idea of the poet: as a man who suffers like everyone else, but who, rather than being overpowered by his personal feelings, is gifted with the capacity of expressing them. Surpassing the mute, inward subjectivity of common men, the poet has available to him a transparent means of externalising his inner feelings: he simply speaks what he suffers. This is, I hope, instantly recognisable as a Romantic account of expressive lyricism, one which stresses the expression of the poet’s subjectivity, often facilitated by some kind of ecstatic or mystical inspiration (think, for example, of Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’ or ‘The Aeolian

Harp’). Also, by implicitly invoking a kinship between *Sonatorrek* and a universally acknowledged great of Western literature, the use of this quotation from Goethe positions *Sonatorrek* as a ‘classic’, in the sense of a work that in some way transcends its historical moment, can profitably be compared to other classics, and constitutes a model of excellence for people in other places and times – claims rarely made about other skaldic poetry. *Sonatorrek* is thus emplaced in a New Critical canon of decontextualised ‘verbal icons’.

In this paper, I will survey the influence of this discursive complex on discussions of skaldic poetry in a few literary histories of the first half of this century. After briefly looking at some of the ways in which these ideas can be said to linger on in more recent skaldic scholarship, I will outline another possible approach to the *lausavísur* of the *Íslendinga sögur*, illustrating this with reference to the stanzas known as *Máhlíðingavísur* in *Eyrbyggja saga*.

Turning to the scholarly literature, then, I wish now to examine the implications of the idea of *Sonatorrek* as expressive Romantic lyric. Lest it seem that I am reading too much into a few citations from Goethe, here is a representative sample of what some scholars have had to say about *Sonatorrek*. Many other discussions of the poem exist, of course: as Krömmelbein observes (1983 130), few other skaldic poems have attracted such a degree of attention (a circumstance of no small significance to the argument of this paper).<sup>1</sup>

- ‘it was no brutal pirate manslayer (as the Saga too often depicts him) that could feel and express such grief’ (Vigfússon and Powell 1883 276)
- ‘there is a strong contrast between the peculiar Icelandic method of narrative – so scrupulous in letting the characters speak for themselves, so determined to keep the author’s private sentiments from interfering – and the lyrical grief of Egill’s poem’ (Ker 1904 191)
- ‘Kein andres altnordisches Werk, in Vers oder Prosa, kreist so um das Ich und folgt so zwanglos den Bewegungen der Seele. Es ist die persönlichste Lyrik dieses Schrifttums’ (Heusler 1923 145)
- *Sonatorrek* ‘offenbart sich nun vollends die eigene, von aller antikischen Selbstbesinnung wesensverscheidene Art, in der der kämpfende Mensch hier sich findet, besitzt und weiß’ (Misch 1928 238)
- Egill can ‘express his whole soul in a poem with lyric colouring’ (161); ‘for the first time lyric feeling broke forth in full force, the world-historic point

---

<sup>1</sup> Reasons of space necessitate my passing over much scholarship on *Sonatorrek* (Krommelbein 1983 contains the fullest bibliography of studies published prior to 1980). The most glaring omission, of course, is Sigurður Nordal’s ‘Átrúnaður Egils Skallagrímssonar’ (1924), which inaugurates an important alternative strand of discussion of the poem, focusing on the way it uses myth, and its possible religious or ritual content. This is the liveliest strand of *Sonatorrek* scholarship in recent times (see for example Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999, Harris 1999). The developmental and/or psychologising interests which focused on *Sonatorrek* in the early years of this century have, I suggest, dispersed into other texts, for example, the *skáld* sagas (see below).

had been reached . . . the new element is the strength of feeling which forces him to sing of his inner experience . . . the outburst of individuality in this epoch now makes itself felt in poetry' (Olrik 1930 164-65)

- 'Kein altnordischer Dichter hat uns erlaubt, so tief in seine Seele zu schauen und dort das Wirken elementarer menschlicher Gefühle nachzuerleben' (de Vries 1941 136)
- *Sonatorrek* is 'generally regarded as the first purely subjective lyric in the North' (Hallberg 1962 136)
- 'a deeply personal and most unconventional expression of feeling' (Foote and Wilson 1970 361), which 'gives an even deeper insight into Egill's character' than his *lausavísur* (Turville-Petre 1976 lxxii)

The expressive model of lyric, then, goes unchallenged here; what is perhaps more surprising, however, is way in which the assumption of lyric expressiveness is imbricated with a narrative of cultural development. This is particularly clear in the citations from Misch, Olrik and Hallberg (though it is also a subterranean presence in Heusler's *Die altgermanische Dichtung*).

According to this narrative, the emergence of lyric poetry marks a crucial turning point in the history of Western civilisation – the birth of the individual, no less. Archaic heroic society, it is suggested, fosters in the communal epic its proper literary form, and society and literature develop in tandem into both a more differentiated social organisation, and a personal and subjective poetic, that of the lyric. The idea that epic and lyric manifest successive stages in the development of human consciousness is based originally on a conceptualisation of archaic Greek literary history, which is then taken as a model for cultural development in general.<sup>2</sup> For Romantic theoreticians as disparate as Goethe, Friedrich Schlegel, Hegel, and Hugo, Greek poetry develops historically from epic song concerned with communal myth to a lyricism which expresses an individual, even idiosyncratic, subjectivity (see Goethe 1819, Hegel 1835, Wellek 1967, Miller 1994). In the early years of this century, the developmental model took concrete form, culminating in the works of classicists such as Snell (1953) and Fränkel (1951).<sup>3</sup> A line from Homer to

---

<sup>2</sup> The Greeks, in this theory, lived through the historical development of all the important Western literary forms: as befits an age whose cultural status is classical, Greece contains the germ of all that we now value. 'It is generally agreed nowadays that the various poetic genres that make up the literatures of the West, the epic, lyric poetry, and drama, coexist side by side. Among the Greeks, however, who created the types destined to serve as the vehicles of great poetic inspiration, and through whose influence, direct or indirect, they were spread among the nations of Europe, the genres flourished in chronological succession. . . . In the land of their origin, it seems, the literary types were the result, and the vocal expression, of specific historical situations' (Snell 1953 43).

<sup>3</sup> Fränkel studied under the classical philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, a colleague of Andreas Heusler's at Berlin with whom Heusler maintained a correspondence after his move to Switzerland in 1919 (Kosenina and Zernack 1995).

Archilochus, for these scholars, traces the development of a ‘more precise appreciation of the self and its distinctive qualities’ (Snell 1953 47) and a ‘discovery of individual feeling’ (Snell 1953 61). The validity of this model for archaic and classical Greek poetry has since been extensively and searchingly challenged (see eg. Walker 1998, Miller 1994, Fowler 1987), but what is of interest here is, of course, the influence of such a model in skaldic studies.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps its most straightforward manifestation is in the works of W. P. Ker and Axel Olrik. For Ker, skaldic poetry, ‘later in kind’ (1908 137) than eddic, appears *prematurely* in Old Norse-Icelandic literature and therefore prevents the full development of eddic poetry (1908 136-38, 142). The heroic epic is supplanted by lyric in the mandated way, but the consequences are disastrous, as skaldic verse is bad lyric, insincere, artificial and frigid mannerism (1908 136-38). Olrik is also unimpressed by skaldic poetry in general, for the Romantically-inflected reasons we might expect – skaldic poetry is ‘barbarously dis-integrated’ (1930 157) from real life, merely ‘a play of words’ which does not partake of ‘inspiration’ (158). When writing about *Sonatorrek*, though, he can afford to be a little more positive, and casts his argument, as we have seen above, in terms of a historical development of consciousness paralleled by the shift from impersonal heroic epic (eddic poetry) to lyric (skaldic): ‘the mighty waves that surged through Egil’s soul . . . indicate a turning point in the life of the Scandinavian people’ (Olrik 1930 164).

Georg Misch’s thought-provoking 1928 article on Egill’s poetry is part of a larger project, the *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, a monumental investigation of the representation of the self in Western culture, from classical times on. In the context of this project, Egill is intended to illustrate the mode of being a subject proper to Germanic heroic culture, defined in opposition to both the classical ideal of the gradual development of personality, and the medieval Christian one of the care of the soul (Misch 1928 199-201) – inserting, that is to say, archaic *Germanentum* into the Hegelian narrative by which European Christianity emerges out of the ruins of classical culture (see Wyss 1999). In contrast to Olrik’s condemnation, for Misch the authenticity of all of Egill’s poetry ‘aus einem ursprünglichen, Dichtung und Wirklichkeit verbindenden Lebensverhältnis hervorgeht, das die ganze germanische Kriegergesittung durchwaltet: dem Bunde des Helden und des Sängers’ (202). The kenning, stigmatised by Ker and Olrik as sterile decoration, is also rehabilitated. According to Misch, the kenning aims at the opposite effect to conventional poetic imagery, insofar as it does not particularise the arbitrary generality of the linguistic sign by deployment of idiosyncratic, irreducibly personal imagery, but rather acts as an instrument for the ‘symbolic consecration’ of the everyday, emplacing the particular items of experience (‘dieser schneidende Schwert,

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, this model may suggest a reason for the persistence, noted by Roberta Frank, of the conviction that eddic poetry is older than skaldic (Frank 1985 160).

dieser wikinghafter Sohn') in a communal mythic system (215-6). He also insists upon the characteristic mode of address of the skaldic poem, rejecting the Romantic analogy of music and poetry:

Die Unmittelbarkeit des altertümlichen Lyrikers ist nicht von der subjektiven Art, daß er vor sich hinsänge, so daß das Erlebnis wie von selbst zu Musik würde. Er spricht . . . auch wenn er sein innerstes öffnet, zu andern Menschen oder vor ihnen auftretend, bewußt und in fester Form . . . . Diese Verse sind gebundene *Rede* in dem eigentlichen Sinne des Wortes: Rede, die nicht bloß darstellt, sondern kundgibt, mitteilt und auslöst, Eindruck macht und einwirkt, eingreift in den Gang des Geschehens hier und jetzt'. (Misch 1928 217)

This reading of Egill's poetry licences a historicised version of the 'outburst of individuality', that is, the emergence of a historically distinct heroic Germanic individuality, born in struggle and displaying itself in triumph. 'Nicht um zu sagen, was er leidet, schafft Egill das 'Erblied' [*Sonatorrek*] . . . sondern die Überwindung des Leides spricht er aus: wie er den Druck der Bedrängnis und sich selber zwingt' (238). Romantic self-expression is absent: in its place is self-assertion (217), and Misch rejects the ideology of the poet as demiurge, creating a new world out of his mind, in favour of the poet as speaker of the communal symbolic language given to him by myth. The rhetoric of striving, self-assertion and triumph employed by Misch now seems very much of its time. Nevertheless, his insistence on the social dimension of skaldic poetics, for example, his positive re-evaluation of those conventional aspects of the kenning so distasteful to believers in expressive lyricism, points forward to the recent interest in cultural context and the ways in which discourses such as myth and poetry were active in Old Norse-Icelandic society.

My final example, Andreas Heusler, also makes reference to the developmental model, but in a complex and contested way.<sup>5</sup> As several writers have pointed out (eg. Beck, Clunies Ross), his is a pessimistic account of European history. Influenced by Nietzsche, he sees pre-Christian Scandinavia, particularly Iceland, as the classical age of Germanic culture which declines disastrously into the repressive Church and State of Christian Europe. Iceland thus typifies a middle stage of culture, between savagery ('man kannte Menschenopfer, aber keinen Kannibalismus' 12) and a 'gereifere Kultur' [more ripened culture] of cities, a cash economy, occupational specialisation and ceremonious, orthodox religion (pp. 12-14).<sup>6</sup> In *Die altgermanische Dichtung*

<sup>5</sup> Beck outlines Heusler's rather complex taxonomy of Old Germanic poetry (1998 285-86); Swenson's discussion of Heusler's model in ch. 1 of her *Performing definitions* critiques its developmental implications (1991).

<sup>6</sup> What exemplifies the "lower" end of this cultural ladder is not clear, though the reference to cannibalism suggests long-established European prejudices about the "savages" of Africa and the Pacific; but the upper end is clearly the Christian culture of the western European High Middle Ages. This positioning of pre-Christian Old Norse-Icelandic culture as a 'middle stage' is part of Heusler's investment in the ideology of the classical epoch, always imagined in terms of a centre, moderation, etc.: discussing Winckelmann's formula 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur', Wyss

(1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1923, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. 1941), he polemicises against the Romantic narrative I have been discussing, saying:

Das von der Völkerkunde und der allgemeinen Dichtungslehre erwartete Bild: wie sich aus der tanzenden, singenden Masse gleichsam herauschält die gegliederte Gemeinde, wo der Einzelne etwas gilt und neben dem Gesang das mehr apollinische Sprechen zu Ehren kommt: - wer dieses Bild in anschaulichem Einzelfall bestätigt sehen will, wende sich anderem Stoffe zu als den Dichtresten der alten Germanen. Er wäre denn gewillt, einen hartnäckigen Kampf mit den Quellen zu führen (Heusler 1941 113).

Heusler does not believe that skaldic poetry evolved out of eddic poetry, but he does regard it as more distant from common Germanic roots than eddic, and is inclined to ascribe this to the influence of the Celtic culture of Ireland (28, 242). The model of autochthonous, organic development is thus abandoned in favour of hybridity; skaldic poetry on Heusler's account is a foreign body in *altgermanische Dichtung*. It is important in Old Norse-Icelandic literary history, however, if only because it introduces the subjective impulse which heroic poetry then puts to better use:

Einfluß der skaldischen Lyrik auf die Heldenelegie möchten wir nur in dem mittelbaren Sinne annehmen, daß jene persönliche Ichdichtung mitgearbeitet hat an dem Lockern und Bereichern der Seelenschwingungen . . . obwohl dann die Lyrik im Bande der heroischen Rollen viel strömender, sanglicher wurde, mehr Naturlaut, als es dem Hofton und seinen Genossen vergönnt war! (Heusler 1941 188)

This is, of course, the nub of the problem that skaldic poetry presents to these scholars. According to literary history it *must be* lyric; it appears at the right historical stage, after epic and, in the prescribed manner, seems to supplement the 'objective', 'external' representation of historical events with the subjective representation of personal feelings. On every other criterion which the nineteenth century offered for judging lyric, however, it is at best a very marginal case. Heusler gives as good an account of this circumstance as anyone:

In dem engen, nicht weniger als kunstlosen Rahmen offenbart sich eine entschiedene 'Individualdichtung' . . . Es sind in der Tat keine Naturlaute, kein volksliedhafter Singsang; die eddischen Heldenklagen erreichen mehr an wogendem Gefühlserguß . . . Eine gehaltene, glasspröde Kunst, einem Krystall ähnlicher als einer Blume (Heusler 1941 101-102).

No-one, I presume, will be surprised by this stage that Heusler praises *Sonatorrek* fulsomely. Egill's reckoning with his god bodies forth healthy Germanic paganism, cheerful, worldly, and self-willed. The poem itself is both uniquely personal, and attains to a popular, proverbial wisdom; lyrical, and yet

---

observes, 'noble, yet simple; great but without being loud; classical harmony was a free balance of opposites' (26). A similar emphasis, I would argue, determines the firm delineation of the classical epoch not only from the decadent modernity it reproves, but also primitive 'savagery'.

a product of will and intellect. I wish to make two suggestions concerning this. The first is that Heusler (as do the other scholars I have discussed) makes *Sonatorrek* the crucial exemplar of the version of Old Norse-Icelandic culture given to him by his philosophy of history. The Egill he reads out of *Sonatorrek* is recognisably a personification of the positive virtues associated with the Nietzschean *Herrenethik* which, as Beck observes, ‘Heusler considered a generally prevailing characteristic of Old Germanic civilisation’ (Beck 1998 292). Secondly, I believe that the almost paradoxical turn of phrase Heusler deploys here is an element of his classicising agenda, according to which he regards *Sonatorrek* as a balance of opposing forces: emotion and intellect, personal and public for example.

Considering our position at the far end of the process I have tried to sketch briefly here, I would argue that what is at issue is the formation of a canon. As critiques of the canon of post-medieval English literature over the last couple of decades suggest, canons are formed by ideological ‘pressures and limits’, to use Raymond Williams’ phrase. The formative pressures on the canon of skaldic poetry are exerted by the centrality of the concept of lyric to several disparate cultural endeavours. One, as I have tried to show, is the historicist attempt to map an evolution of consciousness in Western cultures using changes in literary forms. Another is a Romantic commitment to a poetics of subjective expression: by reading *Sonatorrek*, we can see into Egill’s soul. Lyric poems are also, of course, the preferred raw material for the *modus operandi* of close reading leading to ‘literary appreciation’ promulgated by the major literary critical movement of the mid-twentieth century, the New Criticism. Even a comparatively recent study such as that of de Looze (1989), for all its gestures towards deconstruction, still unfolds according to this tradition. *Sonatorrek*’s status as the canonical ‘classic’ of the skaldic lyric, then, seems secure enough. I do not want to suggest, however, that the historicist or psychologising approaches I have been describing are necessarily illegitimate, or to ‘correct’ the scholarship that has been carried out under their banners. Rather, I wish to put the question that has been asked about the canon in post-medieval literature in the last twenty years or so: what does it exclude, and why?

Put in these terms, I think it is possible to see the emphases outlined above, albeit somewhat muted by the materialist turn skaldic scholarship has taken in recent decades, persisting into more recent work in the field. Considerations of space prevent my going into this at any length. Briefly, though, I think that the idea that skaldic *lausavísur* are used by saga-writers to depict subjective states that “cannot” be depicted in saga prose (eg Foote and Wilson 1970 362, Frank 1978 24) is underpinned by the conviction that lyric is mimesis of emotion, ‘an elegant attitudinal display which derives its significance from the implied or given narrative-dramatic frame’ (Walker 1998 37). This then licences a methodology of lifting saga *lausavísur* from their narrative framing and investigating them as isolated artefacts, whether the aim is to critique the

depiction of character in the saga prose, weigh the claims to authenticity of prose and verse, or simply to explicate the expressive resources of the *lausavísa*. This author-centred approach is also reflected in the organisation conventional in editions of skaldic poetry, and the fascination with the personality of the poet evident in much work on the *skálda sögur* (though it must be admitted that the Old Norse-Icelandic sources are themselves pretty interested in authorship when it comes to skaldic poetry). And indeed, the preponderance of studies of *skáld* biographies over readings of the many other *Íslendinga sögur* which contain verses is an example of the way in which skaldic studies are still often driven by Romantic interests in personal expression and inspiration.

In a constructive vein, then, I would like now to give a short account of a somewhat different set of ideas which I am currently trying to apply to some skaldic *lausavísur*; specifically, the 17 *dróttkvætt* stanzas known as the *Máhlíðingavísur*, found in chapters 18 to 22 of *Eyrbyggja saga*, which I am working on at the moment.<sup>7</sup>

The Prologue to *Heimskringla* gives some hints as to the direction of a possible re-contextualisation. In it, Snorri makes a case for the use of poems as historical source-material. Recognising that there is a potential problem with respect to the credibility of skaldic verses, he gives the following justification for his belief that they are reliable witnesses:

Með Haraldi konungi váru skáld, ok kunna menn enn kvæði þeira ok allra konunga kvæði, þeira er síðan hafa verit í Nóregi, ok tókum vér þar mest dæmi af, þat er sagt er í þeim kvæðum, er kveðin váru fyrir sjálfum höfðingjunum eða sonum þeira. Tókum vér þat allt fyrir satt, er í þeim kvæðum finnsk um ferðir þeira eða orrostur. En þat er hátt skálda at lofa þann mest, er þá eru þeir fyrir, en engi myndi þat þora at segja sjálfum honum þau verk hans, er allir þeir, er heyrði, vissi, at hégómi væri ok skrokk, ok svá sjálf hann. Þat væri þá háð, en eigi lof. (ÍF 26: 5)<sup>8</sup>

Snorri adduces in the course of his justification, then, a fictive scene of performance, in which princes, their sons, and retainers hear a skaldic poem at court. The performative situation is what enables the poems to be taken as true ('tókum vér þat allt fyrir satt') and used as *exempla* ('dæmi'). This may seem on the surface to be a comforting guarantee of referential truthfulness (and we

<sup>7</sup> The text of the *Máhlíðingavísur* used in the following discussion is based on the readings of AM 448 4to, a copy by Árni Magnússon and Asgeirr Jónsson from the lost MS Vatnshyrna, with significant variants from AM 442, 309, 445b and 446 4to. The major editions of the poem are *Skjaldedigtning* I A: 111-15, I B: 105-9, and ÍF 4: 38-56. Translations are my own.

<sup>8</sup> 'There were skalds with King Haraldr, and men still know their poems and poems about all the kings there have been since in Norway, and we take examples mostly from what is said in those poems which were recited before the princes themselves or their sons. We take everything to be true that is to be found in these poems about their journeys or battles. Though it is the habit of skalds to praise most the one whose presence they are in, yet no-one would dare to tell a prince himself about deeds of his which all those who heard them would know to be nonsense and invention, as he would himself. For that would be mockery, rather than praise.' (My translation).

should remember at this point that the assumption that poetry is referentially true is just as fundamental to the idea that poetry is mimesis of emotion, as it is to Snorri's enterprise of using poetry to write history). The authenticating characteristics of the discourse type invoked by an appeal to the context of performance, however, become apparent at the end of the extract. Here the relevant terms are not *sannr* [true] or *sannindi* [truth, evidence] (terms which recur elsewhere in the Prologue), but *hégómi* [nonsense, slander], *skrök* [falsehood, invention], *háð* [mockery], and *lof* [praise]. Whether or not what poems say about princes is true depends for Snorri on a prior judgment about generic modality (*háð* or *lof*, for example) and the purposes the poems were intended to serve, that is to say, a literary or (more accurately) rhetorical judgment. And what governs these generic possibilities, according to Snorri, is the social negotiation inherent in the moment of performance, in which the generic norms of skaldic composition ('hátt skalda') intersect with the social ones of the royal audience. This stress on the specific socio-historical context in which the verbal act is performed recalls J. L. Austin's doctrine of the performative utterance. The performative is 'an act which specifically engenders the moment of connection of language with society' (Slinn 1999 65), which in its focus on the *effect* of the verbal act 'free[s] the analysis of the performative from the authority of the truth value, from the true/false opposition . . . [and] substitute[s] for it . . . the value of force' (Derrida 1988 13).

What happens if we apply the idea of performativity to the *Máhlíðingavísur*? Paying attention to the performative status of these stanzas requires, for one, that we take cognisance of the prosimetric form in which the stanzas are conveyed, that is, in a saga-prose setting. I will now briefly outline that setting. The episode begins when Þorbjörn, related by marriage to the powerful Snorri *goði*, attempts to bring a lawsuit of dubious legality (the notorious *duradómr*) against Þórarinn *svarti máhlíðingr*. Þórarinn is a peaceful man, and is initially reluctant to fight Þorbjörn but, after being egged on by his mother, he does so, and kills him. The stanzas are addressed by Þórarinn to various kinsfolk as he travels about seeking support in the ensuing lawsuit. Legal matters are thus a constant presence in the poem, which situates itself in the nexus between poetry, slander and the law so well explored by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen in his study of *níð* (1983 [1980]). Rather than *níð*, though, the *Máhlíðingavísur* are frequently concerned with *frýja*, womanly scorn or whetting, which, as a technique used by a man's female relations to egg him on to some action, is familiar to every reader of the *Íslendinga sögur*. The necessity of defending oneself against attacks on one's reputation in the form of *frýja*, and of giving a favourable account of one's actions so as to persuade people to give their support in a lawsuit, are recurring concerns in the *Máhlíðingavísur*. The poem as a whole has a performative force, I would argue, when viewed in the context of the saga prose (into which it is interwoven more dextrously than the writer of *Eyrbyggja* is often given credit for). It

describes the events which have taken place, but for the purpose of swaying the audiences before which its various parts are presented: rather than an expressive outpouring of Þórarinn's despair at his fate, the poem is a dramatisation of his case, a re-motivation of the words of slander and law, which is intended to intervene in the processes of informal verbal dishonouring and formal legal redress (which will, nonetheless, eventually drive Þórarinn from Iceland).

The first stanza provides a bit of an illustration of what I'm talking about here:

1. Varðak mik þars myrðir	I defend myself – there where the murderer
2. morðfárs vega þorði	of murderous harm [WEAPON->WARRIOR]
3. hlaut orn af ná neyta	dared to attack, the eagle got to eat a fresh
4. nýjum kvinna frýju,	corpse - against women's reproaches. I did
5. barkak vægð at vígi	not bring mercy to the killing there in the stir
6. valnaðrs í styr þaðra	of the carrion-snake [WEAPON->BATTLE]; I
7. mælik hól fyr hœli	seldom speak praise of that before the
8. hjaldrs goðs af því sjaldan. <sup>9</sup>	praisers of the battle-god.

It is addressed to Geirriðr, Þórarinn's mother. Þórarinn has just returned from killing Þorbjörn and Geirriðr asks how things have gone, eliciting this stanza in response. As Þórarinn says in the first *helmingr*, 'Varðak mik . . . kvinna frýju', 'I defend myself . . . against women's reproaches'. On one level, this statement simply enlarges on the parenthetical statement in this *helmingr* ('þars myrðir . . . nýjum'), which informs his mother that he has in fact killed Þorbjörn, and so by the act of killing, defended himself against her earlier accusation of cowardice. When viewed through the lens of the performative, however, it becomes apparent that 'Varðak mik' is also a performative speech act: what Þórarinn is doing in the poem is defending himself, both now and later. This opening stanza is thus an act of generic positioning, often a role of opening stanzas in other skaldic genres.<sup>10</sup>

The question of what the concept of performativity, particularly in its post-Austinian avatars,<sup>11</sup> brings to the understanding of genre calls for extended analysis. At this point I would just like to suggest that this first stanza puts into play a parodic distancing of the *Máhlíðingavísur* from the prestigious model of skaldic poetry, the encomia presented at royal courts on the Scandinavian

<sup>9</sup> MSS: *Snorra Edda* Codex Regius, Codex Trajectinus (ll. 1-2 only); AM 448 4to, fol. 38 l. 20 – fol. 39 l. 27; AM 309 4to, fol. 36r 45-49b; AM 445b 4to, fol. 6v 8-11a.

*Significant variants*: [3] hlaut: hlytr 309, 445; [7] mæleg liod fyr flíode 309.

*Prose word order*: Varðak mik – þars myrðir morðfárs vega þorði, hlaut orn neyta af ná nýjum – kvenna frýju. Barkak vægð þaðra at vígi í valnaðrs styr; mælik sjaldan hól af því fyr hœli hjaldrs goðs.

<sup>10</sup> Cecil Wood (1960) discusses the conventional 'bid for a hearing' in the opening stanzas of skaldic praise poems, for example.

<sup>11</sup> Culler (1999) gives a concise account of the varied theoretical manifestations of the concept of performativity after Austin.

mainland. It proclaims its rejection of the norms of courtly praise poetry, which is to say its audience (warriors, the ‘*hæliir hjaldrs goðs*’), warlike subject matter (the referent of ‘*af því*’) and rhetorical standpoint (praise, or ‘*hól*’). The important generic marker *hól* is also emphasised by the cognate agent-noun *hæliir* in the same line – the repetition of cognate words in this manner seems to be a stylistic feature of the *Máhlíðingavísur*. So in stanza 1, the poet says ‘This poem defends me against *kvinna frýju*’, thus defining himself in opposition to the courtly tradition: his poem is a reactive defence (*varðak*), rather than praise (*hól*), and specifically Icelandic, insofar as the poem intervenes in a dispute whose terms are set by the expectations of honourable behaviour enshrined in Icelandic law, and draws much of its lexis (even in kennings) from the semantic field of that law.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion, then, I have tried in this discussion to suggest some of the ways in which an historically specific account of the true value and meaning of poetry, originally elaborated within the broader cultural contexts of historicism, the Romantic movement, and the adulation of classical Greece, was naturalised in studies of skaldic poetry. Expressive lyricism became established as the standard by which skaldic poems were judged. The popularity of *Sonatorrek* in skaldic studies (especially early this century) is one consequence of this: its subject-matter and narrative framing seem to license an interpretation based on the model of ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’. In the second section of my paper, I suggest an alternative emphasis which could be brought to bear on some other skaldic poems. The concept of performativity, and the idea that lyric poetry may exert a rhetorical force, also rise in currents of thinking which to some extent lie outside Old Norse-Icelandic studies, but their potential usefulness as a means of destabilising the eternal verities of the field is, I believe, no less because of that.

## References

- Beck, Heinrich 1998 ‘Andreas Heusler (1865-1940)’. In H. Damico ed. *Medieval scholarship. Biographical studies on the formation of a discipline. Volume 2: literature and philology*. Garland, New York: pp. 283-96.
- Clunies Ross, M. 1998 *Prolonged echoes: Old Norse myths in medieval Northern society. Volume 2: The reception of Norse myths in medieval Iceland*. Viking Collection 10. Odense University Press, Odense.
- Derrida, Jacques 1988 [1977] ‘Signature event context’. In *Limited Inc.* S. Weber and J. Mehlman tr. Northwestern University Press, Evanston: pp. 1-23.
- Foote, P. and D. Wilson 1970 *The Viking achievement: the society and culture of early medieval Scandinavia*. Sidgwick and Jackson, London.

<sup>12</sup> Reference to myths in the *Máhlíðingavísur* as a whole is also quite limited in comparison to courtly poems of similar length, suggesting that what is going on here cannot be exhausted by the *Heroisierung* model (Wolf 1965), whereby skaldic *lausavísur* in sagas are regarded as generating a heightened atmosphere by drawing comparisons between the events described in the prose and mythic or heroic narratives. See the Introduction to Clunies Ross (1998) for a discussion, with references, of the notion of *Heroisierung*.

- Fowler, R. L. 1987 *The nature of early Greek lyric: three preliminary studies*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.
- Frank, R. 1985 'Skaldic poetry'. In C. Clover and J. Lindow eds. *Old Norse-Icelandic literature: a critical guide*. *Islandica* 45. Cornell University Press, Ithaca: pp. 157-96.
- Frank, R. 1978 *Old Norse court poetry: the dróttkvætt stanza*. *Islandica* 42. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Fränkel, H. 1975 [1951] *Early Greek poetry and philosophy: a history of Greek epic, lyric and prose to the middle of the fifth century*. M. Hadas and J. Willis tr. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Goethe, J. W. von 1985 [1790] *Torquato Tasso: Ein Schauspiel*. Reclam, Stuttgart.
- Goethe, J. W. von 1962 [1819] 'Noten und Abhandlungen zum *Divan*: Naturformen der Dichtung'. *Sämtliche Werke: Jubiläumsausgabe* 5. 40 vols. J. G. Cotta, Stuttgart: pp. 223-25.
- Guðbrandur Vigfússon and F. Y. Powell 1883 *Corpus poeticum boreale* 2. 2 vols. Clarendon, Oxford.
- Hallberg, P. 1975 [1962] *Old Icelandic poetry: eddic lay and skaldic verse*. P. Schach and S. Lindgrenson tr. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.
- Harris, Joseph 1999 ' "Goðsögn sem hjálp til að lifa af" í *Sonatorreki*'. In Haraldur Bessason and Baldur Hafstað eds. *Heiðin minni: Greinar um fornar bókmennir*. Reykjavík: pp. 47-70.
- Hegel, G. W. F. 1975 [1835] *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* 2. T. M. Knox tr. 2 vols. Oxford, Clarendon.
- Heusler, A. 1941 [1923] *Die altgermanische Dichtung*. 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, Potsdam.
- Hruby, A. 1932 Wann sprechen die Personen der isländischen Saga eine Strophe?: Eine Studie zur Technik der Saga. Mänzsche, Vienna.
- Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1999 'Religious ideas in *Sonatorrek*'. *SBVS* 25: 159-78.
- Ker, W. P. 1931 [1908] *Epic and romance: essays on medieval literature*. 2nd ed. Macmillan, London.
- Ker, W. P. 1958 [1904] *The dark ages*. New American Library of World Literature, New York.
- Kosenina, Alexander and Julia Zernack 1995 ' " . . . wie wohl diese wild-germanischen Verse auf Ihr hellenisches Ohr wirken?" Andreas Heuslers Briefwechsel mit Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf'. *Euphorion* 89(2): 205-20.
- Krömmelbein, Thomas 1983 *Skaldische Metaphorik: Studien zur Funktion der Kenningsprache in skaldischen Dichtungen des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts*. Hochschul-Produktionen Germanistik, Linguistik, Literaturwissenschaft Bd. 7. Burg-Verlag, Kirchzarten.
- de Looze, Laurence 1989 'Poet, poem and poetic process in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*'. *ANF* 104: 123-42.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 1983 [1980] *The unmanly man: concepts of sexual defamation in early Northern society*. J. Turville-Petre tr. Viking Collection 1. Odense University Press, Odense.
- Miller, P. A. 1994 *Lyric texts and lyric consciousness: the birth of a genre from archaic Greece to Augustan Rome*. Routledge, London.
- Misch, G. 1928 'Egill Skallagrímsson: Die Selbstdarstellung des Skalden'. *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 6: 199-241.
- Nordal, Sigurður 1944 [1924] 'Átrunaður Egils Skallagrímssonar'. *Áfangar* 2. 2 vols. Helgafellaútgáfan, Reykjavík: pp. 103-128.
- Olrik, Axel 1930 [1927] *Viking civilization*. H. Ellekilde rev. and tr. Allen and Unwin, London.
- Reuschel, H. 1961 'Gedichtreihen und Dichterleben in der isländischen Saga'. *Wirkendes Wort* 11: 266-71.
- Slinn, E. Warwick 1999 'Poetry and culture: performativity and critique'. *New Literary History* 30(1): 57-74.
- Snell, Bruno 1960 [1953] *The discovery of the mind: the Greek origins of European thought*. T. G. Rosenmayer tr. Harper and Row, New York.
- Swenson, Karen 1991 *Performing definitions: two genres of insult in Old Norse literature*. Camden House, Columbia (SC).
- Turville-Petre, G. 1976 *Scaldic poetry*. Clarendon, Oxford.
- de Vries, J. 1941 *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte* 1. 2 vols. Grundriss der germanischen

- Philologie 15. De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Walker, Jeffrey 1998 'The view from Halicarnassus: Aristotelianism and the rhetoric of epideictic song'. In Mark Jeffreys ed. 1998 *New definitions of lyric: theory, technology, and culture*. Garland, New York and London: pp. 17-48.
- Wellek, R. 1970 'Genre theory, the lyric, and *Erlebnis*'. In *Discriminations: further concepts of criticism*. Yale University Press, New Haven: pp. 225-52.
- Wolf, Alois 1965 'Zur Rolle der *vísur* in der altnordischen Prosa'. In O. Menghin and H. M. Ölberg eds. *Festschrift Leonhard C. Franz zum 70. Geburtstag*. Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft vol. 11. Innsbruck: pp. 459-84.
- Wood, C. 1960 'The skald's bid for a hearing'. *JEGP* 59: 240-54.
- Wyss, Beat 1999 [1985] *Hegel's art history and the critique of modernity*. C. D. Salzwedel tr. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

# Myth and Reality: the Contribution of Archaeology

John Hines

School of History and Archaeology, Cardiff University

Myth is not simply a matter of fiction and fantasy — the absolute antithesis of factual reality. An understanding that myth is a type of allegory, springing as a representation of conceived truths, has either been handed down, or reinvented, in sufficiently literate contexts through every age since classical Antiquity. It is reasonable to assume that both the truth which is expressed in mythic form, and the form in which it is embedded, will represent topics that were particularly significant in the myth's native circumstances. Thus (to try to find a relatively simple example) the mythical motif of *Valholl* and the *einherjar* ought to reflect circumstances in which, say, the idea of an afterlife was an important one for at least some part of society, while warfare and the use of a hall as a social central place were significant aspects of the life of that same social group.

As myths are transmitted over time, through different historical and cultural circumstances from those in which they arose, they may gain increasing autonomy: a life of their own. And it is undeniable, then, that realities may be modelled after or constrained by inherited ideology in the form of myth — in simpler terms, that life may imitate art rather than the other way around. Even

without any such markedly determinative role, it would be wrong to assume that a myth is shorn of functional significance when it passes out of its original context. Its very survival ought to imply that it still has some role to play. On the strength of comparative literary analysis, it can in fact be argued that the allegorical technique is an adaptive feature that serves to maintain myth in these circumstances. Where the meaning and function of a tale remain essentially implicit, that tale is more open to re-interpretation and thus to adaptation to different circumstances. A corollary of this is that such a tale's principal signifiers — such as its characters, settings and images — and, perhaps most significantly, the relationships between them, are inherently more likely to be readily identifiable with features in the immediate historical context, as this is perhaps the easiest way to make a connexion between the meaning of the myth and its external circumstances.

There are some very different kinds of myth in medieval Scandinavian literature. Without assuming any categorical position on how accurate a historical view they give, the historiographies of, for instance, ninth- to eleventh-century Iceland and ninth- to eleventh-century Norwegian kingship can properly be described as historical myth. The tales of Vinland and the exploration of the Atlantic likewise provide a body of geographical myth. What I, however, shall concentrate on here, like, I assume, the majority of other studies at this conference, will be the cosmological myths that derive from pre-Christian Scandinavia and which were intimately associated with the pre-Christian Scandinavian 'pagan' religion. These are myths whose roots must lie in prehistoric Scandinavia, and which will have been transmitted — undergoing substantial changes, one must assume — through the threshold phase called 'proto-history' into the historical Middle Ages.

Archaeology — the study of the past through its material remains — is the sole basis for writing prehistory, and is thus the best point of reference for locating the earliest detectable forms of these myths within a concrete culture-historical framework. Archaeology also makes its own special contribution to the study of history. In the case of early or otherwise distant historical periods, quite obviously, there are more likely to be substantial gaps in the documentary record that can be filled by archaeology. But irrespective of the quality and range of written evidence, archaeology can always broaden the range of cultural history by providing a view of the material and technical circumstances of life. Archaeology is thus often better suited to yielding insight into long-term continuities and processes of development in the past than are historical sources. I hope that this paper will provide some convincing examples of how this perspective can produce vital insights into the functional character of some central Norse mythological motifs, both in their conception and their transmission.

### **Society, economics and eddic poetry**

None of the eddic poems attempts to explain the human world more comprehensively than *Völuspá* and *Rígsþula* — unusually, two poems preserved in different sources, but appropriately placed side-by-side by Ursula Dronke at the head of her edition of the mythological poems of the Edda. Both of these poems also take full cognisance of the facts of flux and change over time in human history, and indeed one can suggest that they do this in such a way as constitutes the most fundamental argument for regarding them as essentially non-Christian in structure. This would not, of course, automatically be the same as making a case for the pre-Christian composition of the poems rather than their being antiquarian anachronisms from a medieval Christian context, although I believe that the contextual evidence that will be outlined below substantially justifies a reading of the poems as crucially Viking-age in both form and content.

Neither poem makes any acknowledgement of an eternal deity. The human audience is identified as the [*megir*] *Heimdalar* in the opening invocation of *Völuspá* (st. 1),<sup>1</sup> while Rígr is portrayed as the begetter of the three human social classes in *Rígsþula*. The identification of Rígr with Heimdallr is, of course, made by the prose introduction to *Rígsþula* in the fourteenth-century Codex Wormianus, but the antiquity of this explicit identification does not appear to me to be any more important than a further structural parallel between the two poems. In the noble class, Rígr passes his name on, eventually as a title, first to Rígr jarl (36,5), and then to Jarl's son Konr ungr, who:

*Rígr at heita* *eiga gat* (45,6–7).

This superseding of the father(-creator) figure is silently embodied in *Völuspá* in the disappearance of Heimdallr from the new world after the battle of Ragnarøk. I must admit that I then find it very tempting to see a parallel between the controversial character *inn ríki* in *Völuspá* 65 — the Hauksbók stanza (possibly written by the same scribe as the Codex Wormianus) that seems so easily dismissable as a simple Christian interpolation — and the successive holders of the name/title Rígr. One recognizes that Rígr konungr is portrayed as wresting power from Rígr jarl by his own abilities rather than descending from above as *inn ríki* does. Yet the mid-fourteenth-century written copies of both poems show at most only a very superficial concern to adhere to good Christian doctrine, and it appears simply to be far less reductive to entertain seriously an alternative, non-Christian, explanation for the structural parallel between them.

There is certainly a case to be made that both poems are fundamentally directed less by concerns with religious dogma (be that pagan or Christian) than

---

<sup>1</sup> For reasons of consistency with the arguments put forward here, all quotations are from G. Neckel/H. Kuhn, *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, 4th ed., 1962.

with human social issues to which the introduction of Christianity was only indirectly relevant. *Rígsþula* accounts for a hierarchical class system (I find it misleading to refer to these as ‘three estates’). The practical concerns of this class ideology can be shown to have had early roots, and indeed to have been culturally topical issues from the Viking Age onwards. The perspective in *Rígsþula*, as that in *Völuspá*, is that from the top of the social hierarchy; as Ursula Dronke points out, *Rígsþula* reads well as a truncated version of a royal genealogical panegyric. There are many common elements to, or activities associated with, the aristocratic lifestyle in both poems. Most explicit of these are the responsibilities and distinctions of being concerned with warfare, philosophy and government, and the related, educational pleasures of sport and gaming (*Rígsþula* 32, 35–38, 43–48; *Völuspá*, 6, 8–9, 21).

The endorsement or claiming of these activities for this class is done by association in *Völuspá*, and thus less directly than in *Rígsþula*. Even more indirectly but nonetheless definitely implied as distinctive features of aristocratic behaviour are hunting and gathering rather than agricultural work for subsistence, and a conscious and heightened sexuality. Faðir (of Jarl) is first seen in *Rígsþula* making his bow and arrows (28), items that were treated primarily as hunting equipment, and rarely represented amongst weaponry in burial deposits. Jarl learns these skills (35) and Kong ungr practises them (46). Farming for production is a job for the class of Karl’s descendants (22, 24). In *Völuspá*, likewise, the gods of the golden age do not have to farm their food, and again in the new world after Ragnarøk the gaming pieces with which they formerly *teflðo í túni* (8) are found lying in the grass like seed (61) from which:

*muno ósáñir acrar vaxa* (62,1–2).

Similarly it is with Móðir that sensuous female beauty is first portrayed and appreciated in *Rígsþula*, with a very clear example of the shifting male gaze:

*Keisti fald, kinga var á bringo,  
síðar slýðor, serc bláfán;  
brún biartari, brióst líósara,  
háls hvítari hreinni miðllo.*

In *Völuspá*, the disruptive effect of sexuality in the gods’ lives can be seen as implied first by the sexual element in the arrival of the three *þursa meylar* (8,5–6), and then echoed in the antagonistic roles acted out between the gods and the next characters appearing with the feminine pronouns *hón* and *hana*, Gullveig and Heiðr.

A particular alertness on the reader’s part to what might seem very casual and even accidental allusions to these themes in these poems can be justified by considering the material-historical (i.e. archaeological) context, most clearly so in the case of the economic activities. *Rígsþula* manifestly presents a scheme in which it is the two lower classes which are the working, productive ones. The

class of Þræll is straightforwardly the basal group of agricultural labourers. More specialized agricultural skills of training oxen, making ploughs, constructing barns and carts, and ploughing itself, belong to Karl, one of whose sons is Bónði (22; 24,5). The names of his other sons, meanwhile, imply social and military service (*Halr, Drengr, Hǫlðr, Þegn*), and different productive skills are represented by *Smiðr* (24,3–4). The attitude to the smith here is pejorative only in terms of the role being definitely assigned to a middle class in a poem prioritizing an aristocratic perspective, but its inclusion even in this brief form is enough to evoke a recurrent stigmatization of the smith figure in eddic poetry and other Norse literature. This is most obvious in the persistent identification of dwarfs as craftsmen (and vice versa), e.g. in the character of Reginn. That skilled smiths are viewed as highly valued and respected figures, but nonetheless volcanic and menacing to the good order of society, especially the aristocracy and above all royalty, is perfectly represented by the figures of Vǫlundr and Skalla-Grímr. It is interesting in this regard to note that the poetic diction used in *Vǫlundarkviða* contains no epithets that endorse or value his mechanical skill: rather he is referred to more than once as *veðreygr skyti* (weather-eyed huntsman) and *vísi álfa* (master of elves) — the latter term both times in the speech of Niðuðr (or his wife), although the narrative itself also once refers to Vǫlundr as *álfa lióði*, thus associating itself, one may suggest, with the antagonistic perspective of the royal family.

Such attempts ideologically to circumscribe the figure of the skilled craftsman coincide with a growing economic importance and social potential of such manufacturers, and evidence of attempts by the governing social elite to harness and control those forces. This is not a historical fact that one can properly restrict to any one period between about the seventh century and the present day, but is nonetheless something that appeared as a particularly acute issue of pressure and tension in Viking-age Scandinavian culture. It is no coincidence that much recent discussion in archaeology about the definition and dating of the beginning of the Viking Age has revolved around the site of Ribe on the west coast of Jutland, founded in planned form as Scandinavia's first 'town', presumably by some political and therefore monarchical authority, early in the eighth century as a site for craftsmen to produce and market their wares. The site represents an attempt, apparently successful, by an aristocratic social leadership, previously represented at the neighbouring rural hall site of Dankirke, to exploit a burgeoning new, international trading network. When Ribe was founded this demonstrably involved long-distance trade in both luxury goods (e.g. glass) and basic commodities (cattle, fish), a common North-Sea region coinage (the *sceattas*), and a series of urban sites or *emporia* which were both trading sites and centres for craft production and distribution. The purpose of the site was to attract and control, by offering good conditions for working and trade, seasonal craftsmen-traders. Apart from at the few sites like Ribe, and not long afterwards at Hedeby, the Scandinavian economy was to remain

coinless for some time yet. Exchange must have been mediated by direct barter, or by using worked silver as a currency. By the Viking Age, however, Scandinavia was 'importing' (i.e. acquiring by fair means or foul) valued items of all kinds — precious metals, silk, quernstones — from both east and west. Yet it was also producing the overwhelming majority of the artefacts — weapons, jewellery, utensils — used there itself, and the local imitation and adaptation of important artefact-types point to the essential role of local skilled craftsmen of many kinds in maintaining the Viking-age Scandinavian economy and hierarchy.

One of the most interesting archaeological reflections of this relatively new level of importance of craft production in the Viking Age takes the form of ritual deposition of tools. This presents itself most unambiguously in the form of the deliberate inclusion of tools as markers of the identity and status of the deceased in what are known as smith's graves. There are also several examples of what appears to be the non-funerary, sacrificial deposition of tools and tool-kits as symbolically valuable items in votive hoards. Such hoards are typically collections of items of both real and symbolic value placed in contexts from which retrieval would be difficult — e.g. under water. It is a problem that in any single case — for instance the Mästermyr tool chest from Gotland — it is usually impossible to be sure that deposition was deliberate rather than the loss being accidental. However votive hoarding of this kind had a long and indeed unbroken history in prehistoric Scandinavia down to the Viking Age, and the deposition of the same items predominantly in graves in one area and votive hoards in another is also a familiar pattern from other periods.

The occurrence of graves, and a few hoards, containing metalworking tools starts to become a regular rather than a rare and sporadic feature of Scandinavian archaeology from about the eighth century AD — more or less contemporary with the founding of Ribe. There is approximately a threefold increase in the number of graves found with tools in the Viking Age. Most of these graves contain just one or two tools (a hammer, tongs, or a file), while some fifty or so have a set of three to five tools, and a few contained large tool-kits. The great majority of Viking-age tool graves are from Norway, while hoards, conversely, are more frequent in Denmark and Sweden. In the graves, the tools are often found associated with the weapons that are the normal status symbol of the Viking-age fighting man. This suggests that the status of a recognized craftsman was not different nor necessarily even alternative to that of a warrior (cf. *Rígsþula*, 24; *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, 58: the burial of Skalla-Grímr). The tool deposits are regular enough for us to conclude that they had a recognized cultural function, while the hierarchicization within the smiths' graves implies that smiths could aspire to high social status. Meanwhile the clustering of smiths' graves, for instance around the Møsstrand area of Telemark, indicates that we are looking at real metalworkers' status here, not some purely symbolic appropriation of smiths' attributes by an elite for display

purposes alone.

In the golden age in *Völuspá*, however, the gods do appear as makers: after building their own *horg oc hof*,

*afla lögðo, auð smíðoðo,  
tangir scópo oc tól gorrðo.* (7,7–8)

But this was enough for them to pass over to play as a pastime (8), before the arrival of the giants' daughters, followed immediately by the decision to create the separate order of producers — the dwarfs (9). There is a strong though contrastive echo between this sequence and that of the creation of humankind (17–18), where three Æsir, mighty and loving (*qflgir oc ástgir*) come from their group and beget, or rather vivify, the as yet lifeless Askr and Embla. Since we can be aware of the dwarfs being made for a purpose, the question arises of what humankind was made for. There is an answer in the poem: they are to follow laws, life and fate (20,9–12) — to follow a destiny which can be prophesied (22), which involves performance in battles and rituals for the gods. Productivity, in this cosmological scheme, has been passed on from the gods to the dwarfs, and the model human activities are both more closely in line with the ideals of *Rígsþula* and directly accommodated to the service of the gods. So complete is the congruence between aristocratic and divine interests in this that it seems an inescapable realization that the formula can be read either way. The poem is thus not simply a pious pre-Christian legitimization of a privileged human order but rather seems to express full recognition that the pagan divine order is an idealization of human life. It does indeed appear to be a feature of the late traditional Norse religion to conceive of divinity in humanist rather than transcendental terms.

### Love in a cold climate

As was suggested above, we can supplement the case for reading with such sensitivity to possible allusions to a real struggle to confine the power of the producing groups within society by analysing the aristocratic-mythological treatment of relations between the sexes through various forms of myth and image. Eroticism emerges from the mythological literature as one of the most manifestly serious forms of pleasure. It is dangerous and instructive as well as delightful. The archetype in this respect can be found in the stories of Óðinn's amorous adventures — for instance the seduction of *Billings mær* and *Gunnlǫð* (*Hávamál*, 96–110), yielding experience and the gift of poetry; Óðinn's lying with the seven sisters to gain *geð þeira alt oc gaman* (*Hárbarðsljóð*, 18). The brief invocations of aristocratic sexuality in *Rígsþula* and *Völuspá* thus rest on the background of an idealization of the triumphant and experienced male lover as artist, philosopher and hero. For this reason, one can argue that a further refinement of the socially particular perspective of these

mythological poems is that it represents solely male interests. It has no pretensions to encompass or represent any female perspective as well. Rather, the power of the female, to captivate and outwit the male as well as in her special craft — spinning and weaving yarn and fate — is taken as one of the givens of the dramatic scene: the *qrlog seggia* that the *meyiar margs vitandi* lay down for men (*Völuspá*, 20). The best of men are challenged to exploit and profit from this power — as they do the productivity of craftsmen and farmers — as best they can.

### Textual and physical monuments

One would not suggest that the economic and social tensions thus reflected in the eddic poetry are not in some measure eternal. But they can be shown by archaeology to have developed in a particular way and to a particular prominence in the Viking Age and into the early Christian Middle Ages in such a way as appears plausibly and tellingly to shed light on the background and transmission of the mythological material. In the paper I presented to the last saga conference in Trondheim, I argued that, in respect of another major economic and social process of development over this period, urbanization, a difference in attitude was apparent between the genres of eddic poetry and saga prose, while a late shift from the one attitude to the other could be found in the conventions of skaldic poetry. Although having referred in detail only to eddic poetry in this introductory study, I wish to conclude the present paper by considering, again with the benefit of an archaeologically informed view, the question of whether that sort of difference in attitude between genres attributable to different strata of literary history is simply a matter of chronology and inertia. We can observe sequences of activity displaying a use of the immediate past within two major monumental complexes in Jutland that would appear to offer some valuable insight in this respect.

The first of these sites is that at Jelling. Jelling had a series of tenth-century monuments superimposed upon and consciously aligned with their predecessors: first a massive North-South ship-setting (a set of monoliths forming the outline of a ship); then two mounds raised over this, with the burial, probably, of Queen Þyra and then King Gormr, and Gormr's runestone commemorating Þyra (**kurmR:kunukR:karþi:kubl:þusi:aft:þurui:kunu:sina:tanmarkaR:but** : King Gormr made this monument after Þyra his wife, Denmark's benefit). The chamber grave in the North Mound is dendrochronologically dated to AD 958/9, and the South Mound, which has no burial under it and so may have been constructed as an assembly place, was raised in the 960's. Towards the end of Haraldr Blátǫnn's reign, i.e. after Gormr's body had decomposed sufficiently for the skeleton to be disarticulated, the contents of the grave under the North Mound were apparently translated to another wooden chamber grave within the first wooden church on the site, in

between the two mounds. Associated with this is the famous larger Jelling stone, with a crucifixion image, a new iconographic/heraldic zoomorphic motif of a lion and a serpent, and an inscription commemorating Haraldr as the offspring and successor of Gormr and Pyra, as lord of all Denmark and Norway, and as the king who made the Danes Christian.

The second site is another burial site, at Hørning, further north in Jutland. At a later date, apparently, than the major changes at Jelling, probably around the year 1000, one of the last known of the set of wooden chamber graves characteristic of the final century of the Viking Age was constructed at an existing burial site here and covered with a barrow. This grave housed the body of a woman, buried in clothing adorned with silver thread, within the body of a cart, with many other grave goods, amongst which can be recognized glass beads, fragments possibly from a glass beaker, a knife and whetstone, a weight, a wooden bucket and another wooden vessel, a ceramic bowl, a small wooden table, and a bronze bowl — the latter with finely incised ornament that suggests the date of about AD 1000. The barrow was raised over at least two other earlier burials, both of which were oriented East-West and contained no grave goods. There was further burial at the site between the construction of the barrow and the building of a church here, which can be dated to shortly after AD 1060 on the strength of a dendrochronological date from a plank with Urnes-style decoration from it.

Burial in the body of a cart is a form of ostentatious burial for women which is familiar from southern Scandinavia, especially Jutland, in the tenth century. It was a tradition inherited from the pre-Christian period which was apparently conceptually adapted to the early Christian context of later tenth-century Denmark in such a way as to allow it to survive in use for up to a generation after the demise of its ostensible male equivalents — ‘equestrian’ graves with rich riding equipment, and rich weapon graves. If it is true, as it would appear, that there is a systematic pattern of male-female difference here, then some general cultural explanation must be sought rather than the invocation of sporadic and individual instances of conservatism. The implication would be that the material culture associated with men and women was not accorded the same significance; or more likely, that they were evaluated and interpreted according to crucially different schemes. This is not the place to go into possible characterizations of such schemes. It is sufficient to appreciate that the evidence for a sexually differentiated pair of systems refutes any attempt to reduce the evidence for the adaptation of pre-Christian monuments and traditions in early Christian Denmark to a set of random, *ad hoc*, syncretistic transitions. In material culture as in the mythology, Scandinavians of the early Christian period determinedly laid hold of and came to terms with the differences of their historical context — the immediate past — in order to secure the foundations of the new era.

Closing the circle of inter-relationship between the disparate aspects of

social and historical division and relationship that we have been trying to bring into an integrated perspective in this paper, the Hørning area is also home to two very important, apparently early eleventh-century, runestones. Both were raised by a man named Toki, who identifies himself, unusually, as Toki smiðr. One of these, at Hørning church and decorated with a cross in a prominent place at the end of the inscription, reads:

**tuki:smiþr:riþ:stin:ift:þurki:l:kupmutaR:sun:is:hanum:kaf:kul:  
uk:fríalsi**

(Toki smith raised [the] stone after Þorgils Guðmundarson, who gave him [gold?]/ [coal?] and freedom.)

The other, at Grensten, contains a more explicitly Christian prayer:

**tuki:smiþr:riþ:stin:þisi:aiftiR:Rifla:sun:asgis:bianaR:sunaR:  
kup:hiab:þaRa:salu**

(Toki smith raised this stone after Refli, son of Asgi Bjarnarson. God help their souls.)

Now during his life, the smith is able to take a traditional monumental form, and with it to commemorate both his personal identity and his social relations, as well as his social advancement and his power to pray. There could, I think, be no better encapsulation of how written and material sources together give us a properly complementary insight into the past, and one that is incomparably fuller than any one source taken on its own. In the case of Norse studies, archaeology is not only an accessible and a substantial source, but also an essential basis for understanding what both the factual history and the myths of the Viking Period and the Middle Ages meant in practice.

### **Acknowledgement**

The author's participation in the conference in Sydney is supported by a British Academy Overseas Conference Grant.

## The role of the artist in contemporary society as compared to pre-Christian and early Medieval society in Northern Europe

Peter R. Hupfauf

University of Sydney

When I was about thirteen or fourteen years old, like many kids at that age, I puzzled over the one and many secrets of the world. One particular question kept me intrigued: how is it possible to depict a circle, as viewed from the side. Logically this shape would show up only as a straight line. However, I was never quite satisfied with this solution because the straight line to me did not represent two fundamental elements of the circle: The first being the idea of movement and the second the notion of infinity, both being suggested through the absence of beginning and end.

In my quest to find an answer, in which my parents and teachers could not assist, I consulted a friend of our family who was a commercial artist. I admired this gentleman's artistic skills tremendously. After a brief explanation of my problem he easily came up with an answer: he quickly drew a sketch, adding some body to the profile of the circle. This allowed him to shade the object in. The result was an image, representing a perfect disk, seen from its narrow side -

the profile.

I was deeply disappointed, having invested so much hope in the person whom I regarded so highly, but gaining not much more than a clever trick, an optical illusion.

The artist's sketch was, of course, accepted by everyone as the most appropriate way to solve the problem. But to me this smart sketch did not even attempt to address the 'inner core' qualities of the circle as a concept. I kept trying to find a solution in many drawings and application of different media but was unable to succeed.

I was confronted with a conceptual problem and tried to find an appropriate solution, which I know now, can only be found in the conceptual or philosophical sphere.

Many months later, during a physics-lesson, I came across the symbol for infinity ( $\infty$ ). This unique symbol seemed to come as close as I could imagine of expressing the inherent qualities of a circle. In fact, prior to seeing this sign, I had developed similar shapes in my sketches while trying to symbolise the qualities of the circle.

By now you may ask yourselves what this adolescent experience has to do with the Saga Conference. Quite a lot.

The experience which I made in my search for a solution to the described problem is associated with various aspects which I came across when I investigated in the field of medieval art.

Had I lived prior and during the early Middle Ages, the artistic solution to my problem of depicting the essence of a circle may have been quite different from the result which was executed by the commercial artist. It may have shown less emphasis on illusionist techniques, such as perspective and shading. A medieval artist would probably have achieved a more simplistic and some may say, a more pure and accurate conceptual representation. The fact, however, that I approached a "commercial artist" to help me solve my problem, suggests a parallel with the role of the artist in the Middle Ages.

It is assumed that medieval artists, mainly, produced commissioned work, similar to contemporary commercial artists. The latter are briefed with well-defined parameters by their clients to create certain artwork which closely matches the clients' expectations. Most artistic work created during the Middle Ages was produced in commission from the clergy or the aristocracy. It seems that painters and sculptors were commissioned predominantly for their technical and representational skill. The historian Georges Duby (1998) stated that "not much is known about the position of artists in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century". Duby assumed that detailed, legal contracts were drawn up between customers and artists. Were medieval artists then in a role equivalent to today's commercial artists?

Medieval training in sculpture and painting reflects similarities to contemporary trade-skill and craft training. The contemporary training of fine

artists indicates differences, reflecting the change of the artist's position.

It may be assumed that the position of a sculptor or a painter during the Middle Ages was associated with trademanship, and that young talents were trained in workshops similar to apprentices. In the beginning, the apprentices or trainees were given simple and odd tasks. Gradually they were given more responsibility provided they had proven themselves to be worthy. They learned from observation and by following instructions from their masters. Given that a high proportion of orders were commissions of sacral nature, one can imagine that a strong religious commitment may have been important in developing an ability to create outstanding artwork by demonstrating the passion we can observe now in many examples of medieval artwork.

We know many medieval artifacts as having an inherent 'touching' quality, although they were likely commissioned and produced in a manner comparable to today's commercial works. Some of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century artisans and designers occasionally also produced creations which extend much further than serving a simple application or decoration and express an inner value, which is normally expected from an artistic masterpiece.

Today's fine art training takes place in art colleges and academies. The first European art school was founded in 1494 in Milan; however, the 19<sup>th</sup> century art academy in Paris became a dominant institution. Today's art schools encourage art students to experiment and engage in social and philosophical discourse.

Going back to my adolescent quest, described at the beginning my disappointment clearly related to the lack of any such inner meaning which I intuitively knew to be necessary to represent deeper symbolic aspects.

After the Renaissance qualities of medieval visual art found only minor appreciation. The subsequent Baroque flourished with highly developed perspective and shading techniques as well as excessive patterning on every conceivable surface. Artists created 'pseudo-realities' and the more photographically realistic an artwork appeared, the more the audience appreciated the images.

Almost five hundred years later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a group of artists, including John Dante, Gabriel Rossetti, Holman Hunt and Everett Millais, founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. John Ruskin, who taught aesthetic theory at Oxford, became an associate and public defender of the group. They sought their inspiration in pre-Renaissance artists and appreciated the symbolism and iconography from Gothic artwork. The members of the group felt that a medieval approach, in its representation of reality, applied much more 'honesty' than the art which was produced subsequently. Rossetti worked together with Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris. Morris and Ruskin developed many influential ideas for the English craft movement which originated in the Pre-Raphaelite ideology.

Through the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, medieval visual

representation became one of the founding elements for the 20th Century abstract art. After centuries in which artists tried to gain perfection in the realistic expression of nature, the most dominant direction of the 20th Century's visual art became the experimentation with abstraction - an attempt to depict the essence of things rather than just their external appearance.

The Pre-Raphaelites found in medieval art qualities, such as the expression of inner values and abstract concepts, which they missed in European 19th century art. Several artists on the European continent, such as Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso, tried to find inspiration in African art, which also had strong symbolic qualities, carrying messages. Picasso, best known for the "Primitive" influence in his work, ignored the accepted means for creating the illusions of perspective totally. He applied light and shadow only as boundaries for different colours, so that some of his work came to resemble the design of Gothic stained windows.

In my attempt to define the role of the medieval artist, I have focused strongly on a comparable contemporary position which seems to be that of the commercial artist. Because now, in the present, we have to define two different kinds of artists. One is the commercial artist, who is commissioned, works within a specifically defined brief and contracts out his/her skills for specified income. The fine artist, who works on projects which are developed by him or herself, sometimes in creative co-operation with other practising fine artists, produces work which may appeal to an audience and therefore sell and generate enough income to fund the production of further artwork, or it may not. The artist has complete control over his/her work - at the risk of material survival.

Some artists create pleasing images, such as moody or even kitsch-art to survive, some of them may even be satisfied by this decorative kind of work. Many artists, however, do prefer not to work in a populist manner or refuse to produce series of decorative works. Unless they become famous during their lifetime, these artists may obtain grants or sometimes commissions but normally have other sources of income - ranging from taxi driving, unemployment benefits to social welfare. Some are lucky to be engaged in teaching art, which allows them still to be involved with the subject while earning money for their livelihood.

Relatively few artists can survive solely on the creation of quality artwork.

In my earlier elaborations, I focused predominantly on medieval artists who produced Christian religious art. In order to find examples from earlier medieval and pre-medieval periods I have been curious what the position of those people was, who created runic inscriptions. 'Rune-masters' were consulted in order to create inscriptions and engravings in objects such as bracteates, knives or grave - and memorial-stones. These inscriptions were often considered to have magical powers, for example as oracle, to enhance luck or to protect burial sites against bad spirits or plunder.

Stones with runic inscriptions often include illustrations. It seems, in most

cases, they were arranged to create a composition, a balance of content and form including text, illustration and the shape of the particular rock on which the engravings were executed. Such work suggest that their creators were allowed a certain degree of artistic liberty. From inscriptions we can conclude that rune-masters were not only executive craft/trades people. Quite often they proudly included their name and position as part of their inscriptions, referring to themselves as experts in the realm of magic knowledge. We may thus conclude that they were more than master craftsmen - one may speculate that the rune-masters were completely in charge of the arrangement of their artwork. Cases are known where rune-masters commissioned someone else to execute the engravings. This reminds me of the practice of one particular contemporary artist: Jeff Koons. The internationally recognised American is regarded as controversial for his practice of out-commissioning most of his work to experts in their fields. One of his more recent installations was called 'Puppy'. It was an approximately 12 metre high metal construction, covered with wire-screen which was planted all over with flowers. Koons, as the conceptual creator, was only involved with the execution as an "art-director" (a professional position in today's advertising industry), the actual physical work was executed by metal workers and gardeners.

I am assuming that rune-masters would have been multi-skilled. One who was able to engrave runes may also have been able to cast metal or carve wood. However, it is equally likely that at least some of the work was out-commissioned. The runic horn of Gallehus might be seen as such an example. The horn indicates a highly elaborated artistic composition and complex symbolism which does not necessarily coincide with a goldsmith's craftsmanship.

I am also speculating that a parallel exists between contemporary (non-commercial) artists and artists from the Middle Ages, in the desire to communicate predominantly with the 'soul' rather than the intellect. This is not to be misunderstood. The intellectual process does take place. In fact comprehensive knowledge is necessary to succeed in this kind of communication. The artist has to know his/her audience, has to be aware of perceptual concepts as well as social and psychological aspects. Otherwise the artist's message might be misunderstood or might be seen as meaningless. Illusionist trickery, as described at the beginning, is a technique to express surface qualities, it is only a secondary element to express comprehensive concepts. In order to find ways, to connect as directly as possible with the mind and soul of the audience, an artist has to experiment. An artist also needs to know about historical and contemporary sociopsychological dimensions, in order to provide a glimpse of the future. It is necessary that ethics and morals are established, challenged and - if necessary - renewed. It is the responsibility of avantgarde-artists to undertake, sometimes unpopular, challenges. Society has often rejected revolutionary concepts initially, only to later elevate them to

prestigious (and valuable) status.

I am wondering about their role in pre-Christian times. Were they the guardians of accepted morals and standards, were they subject to changes in the taste and style of their audiences' preferences, were they revolutionaries and visionaries who challenged accepted norms?

This is the question underlying my current work. Yet still underneath all that is the niggling thought: how would a medieval artist have shown a circle in profile? - May be not at all.

# Bergr Sökkason och Arngrímur Brandsson – översättare och författare i samma miljö

Karl G. Johansson

Institutionen för humaniora, Växjö universitet

## 1. Inledning

I mitt bidrag till den 10. internationella sagakonferensen i Trondheim 1997 diskuterade jag möjligheten att i en grupp av handskrifter avgränsa ett skriptorium på norra Island (Johansson 1997b). Med exempel från forskningen kring *Clárus saga*, och då framför allt den version som föreligger i manuskriptet AM 657 a–b 4to, argumenterade jag för att studier av denna grupp av manuskript kunde ge nya insikter i ett skriptoriums arbete under 1300-talet. Jag kom i detta föredrag även in på författarskapet till *Clárus saga* och argumenterade med utgångspunkt i Peter Hallbergs (1968 m.fl.) och Stefán Karlssons (1973) arbeten för att sagan producerats i den benediktinska miljön på norra Island, alltså i något av de två klostren Þingeyrar eller Munkaþverá. Därmed blev det intressant att diskutera möjligheten att utifrån de bevarade manuskripten inte enbart avgränsa en skriftproducerande miljö, utan även kunna avgränsa och belysa textproduktionen i denna. I det här föredraget skall dessa linjer utvecklas. Jag kommer härvid att diskutera dels de texter som ingår i de i

gruppen bevarade manuskripten för att därefter även belysa de texter som attribuerats till personer med anknytning till de två klostren under den aktuella perioden, men som föreligger i handskrifter som knutits till andra avskrivningsmiljöer. Därmed framkommer en bild av en stor lärdomsmiljö med omfattande text- och skriftproduktion. Vidare skall jag preliminärt diskutera de genrer som representeras i materialet. Det rör sig både om texter översatta från latin och originalproducerade texter, vilket torde få effekter på olika språkliga nivåer. Dessutom är texterna genomgående kopierade i ett eller flera led från originalversionen och i samband med denna kopiering kan man vänta sig att de redigerats och att språkliga drag ändrats utifrån en rådande normuppfattning. Detta diskuteras i anslutning till tidigare forskning om ordförråd, florissant stil och prosarytm och till den än så länge sparsamma forskningen kring översättning i Norden under medeltiden.

## 2. Skriptoriet och manuskripten

Hur kan ett isländskt skriptorium under 1300-talet avgränsas med någon större säkerhet? De allra flesta manuskript som finns bevarade från tiden har ingen explicit attribution till en skrivare eller till den miljö där de tillkommit, och det saknas i regel uppgifter som kan ge oss en säker datering av det enskilda manuskriptet. I sin studie över handskrifter som kan knytas till klostret Helgafell sammanställer Ólafur Halldórsson ett antal manuskript med utgångspunkt i skrivarattribution och anser sig kunna utöka sitt material genom att avgöra när skrivarhänder representerade i det ursprungliga materialet varit verksamma i andra handskrifter eller finna exempel där skrivarhänder i andra manuskript uppvisar liknande drag som dessa (Ólafur Halldórsson 1967:47ff.). En liknande metod använder jag mig av när jag i min avhandling sammanställer de manuskript som kan knytas till skrivaren i Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.) och de skrivare som antingen varit verksamma i samma manuskript som denne skrivare, eller, i nästa steg, i manuskript där de senare medverkat i produktionen (Johansson 1997a:66ff.). Härmed kan jag sammanställa sju skrivare som tillsammans producerat tretton nu helt eller fragmentariskt bevarade handskrifter. Dessutom kan det göras troligt att skrivaren från Codex Wormianus även har infogat en avskrift av *Vqluspá* i Hauksbók (AM 544 4to), men inte att han samarbetat med Haukr eller någon av de många skrivare som finns representerade i detta manuskript.

De tre skrivare som jag ägnade störst uppmärksamhet i min avhandling kan alltså knytas till varandra genom sin produktion. I två avskrifter av *Stiörn* (AM 227 fol. och AM 229 fol.) har skrivaren från Codex Wormianus arbetat tillsammans med en skrivare som även finns representerad i ett fragment av ett tredje *Stiörn*-manuskript (NRA 60A). Dessutom har han producerat två avskrifter av *Jónsbók* (AM 127 4to och Gl. Kgl. Sml. 3269a 4to). I det förstnämnda av dessa har han samarbetat med den skrivare som även står för

avskriften av *Rómverjasaga* i manuskriptet AM 595 a–b 4to. De tre skrivarnas produktion kan ställas upp så här:

Skrivare W	Skrivare S2	Skrivare R1
AM 162a fol.	AM 227 fol.	AM 127 4to.
AM 227 fol.	AM 229 fol.	AM 595 a–b 4to
AM 229 fol.	NRA 60A	
AM 240 IV fol.		
AM 242 fol.		
AM 127 4to		
AM 544 4to ( <i>Völuspá</i> )		
AM 657 a–b 4to		
AM 667 IX 4to		
Gl. Kgl. Sml. 3269a 4to		
NRA 62		
Cod. fragm. Ps. 24		

Dessutom har tre skrivare utfört stora avsnitt i manuskriptet AM 657 a–b 4to, sannolikt i samarbete med skrivaren från Codex Wormianus. Det är emellertid inte ställt helt utom tvivel att de fyra skrivarpartierna i detta manuskript inte kan ha producerats vid olika tillfällen och kanske rentav i olika miljöer, något som jag återkommer till i ett senare arbete.<sup>1</sup> Slutligen har en troligen yngre hand skrivit knappt två handskriftssidor i AM 595 a–b 4to. Även detta avsnitt av text kan ha tillfogats senare och utan direkt kontakt mellan de båda skrivarna.

Därmed har alltså sju skrivare kunnat knytas samman i denna grupp, tre av dem entydigt medan det för de återstående händerna ännu inte entydigt går att avgöra sambandet. Redan nu går det dock att göra troligt att det rör sig om en stor avskriftsmiljö. I ett kommande arbete räknar jag med att kunna presentera studier av dessa skrivarehänder och de manuskript där de förekommer, och därvid upprätta en relativ kronologi för såväl skrivarehänderna som för de aktuella manuskripten. Därmed räknar jag med att kunna argumentera entydigt för att de sju skrivarna varit verksamma inom samma skrivarmiljö under en avgränsad tidsperiod.

Men gruppen av skrivare är intressant inte enbart för att belysa arbetet med att kopiera manuskript inom miljön. De sammanställda manuskripten innehåller ett stort antal texter av olika ursprung och representerande olika genrer, och kanske med olika avnämare i sikte. En del av texterna har kopierats flera gånger av samme skrivare. Detta gäller för Stjórn där två manuskript producerats av två skrivare och ett tredje, nu fragmentariskt bevarat i NRA 60A, har knutits till den ene av de två skrivarna, och för Jónsbók där samme skrivare ensam producerat det ena (Gl. Kgl. Sml. 3269a 4to) och tillsammans med en annan skrivare producerat det andra (AM 127 4to). Dessa manuskript antyder alltså en avskriftsverksamhet på beställning eller för försäljning utanför klostermiljön.

<sup>1</sup> Se för övrigt redogörelsen för detta manuskripts sammansättning och händernas fördelning i Johansson 1997b.

Som Stefán Karlsson har visat tycks produktion av denna typ dessutom i viss mån ha varit inriktad på export till Norge (Stefán Karlsson 1978 och 1979). De manuskript från gruppen som kan ha skrivits för export och alltså funnits i Norge och Sverige under medeltiden är fragmentet av *Stjórn* (NRA 60A), ett fragment av *Karlamagnúss saga* (NRA 62) och det latinspråkiga psalteriet (Cod. Fragm. Ps.24).

Det föreligger i det avgränsade materialet flera exempel på texter med direkt religiöst innehåll och med funktioner inom den kyrkliga verksamheten, vilket torde indikera en kyrklig avskrivningsmiljö. De redan nämnda avskrifterna av *Stjórn* är goda exempel på detta, dessutom sannolikt producerade för att spridas utanför skriptoriet. Andra texter med direkt religiöst innehåll är *Maria-mirakler* (AM 240 IV fol.) och *Jóns saga baptista* (AM 667 IX 4to).

Det är emellertid tydligt att skriptoriet varit inriktat inte enbart på produktionen av texter inom de religiösa genrererna, utan även producerat texter av mer världslig karaktär. De två avskrifterna av *Jónsbók* utgör ett redan omtalat exempel på detta. Men man har även arbetat med kopiering av andra typer av världslig litteratur. Pseudohistoriska verk i översättning som *Rómverjasaga* (AM 595 a–b 4to) och *Karlamagnúss saga* (NRA 62) har kopierats i samma miljö som producerat avskrifter av *Stjórn* och *Jónsbók*. Dessutom föreligger ett antal översatta exempelsagor i samlingen AM 657 a–b 4to. Slutligen finns det i gruppen av manuskript ett fragment av en avskrift av *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (AM 162 A fol. β) som visar att även originalverk av icke-religiös natur kopierats i miljön. Här kan man givetvis spekulera kring avnämaren för en sådan avskrift.

### 3. Översättare och skribenter

Klostren Þingeyrar och Munkaþverá har alltså tidigt framstått som kulturinstitutioner på norra Island. Skribenter och översättare som Nikolás Bergsson, Gunnlaugr Leifsson och Oddr Snorrason har under andra hälften av 1100-talet arbetat i en miljö där text- och skriftproduktion varit högt prioriterade. I de två klostermiljöerna kan vid mitten av 1300-talet en liknande verksamhet studeras. De namngivna skribenterna och översättarna är nu Bergr Sökkason, Arngrímr Brandsson och Árni Lárentíusson. Liksom sina föregångare har de arbetat i en kontext där text- och skriftproduktionen har varit viktig. Denna verksamhet kan i dag studeras i de texter som attribuerats till de namngivna författarna och i de bevarade manuskript som jag diskuterat ovan. I det följande skall dessa personer och deras produktion presenteras närmare för att ytterligare utveckla bilden av miljön.

Bergr Sökkason blev munk vid Þingeyrar 1317 och prior vid Munkaþverá 1322, för att därefter 1325 bli abbot vid det sistnämnda klostret. 1334 lämnade han detta ämbete men återinsattes 1345. *Michaels saga hofuðengils* och en

version av *Nikolás saga* erkibyskups tillskrivs explicit Bergr i de bevarade handskrifterna, attributioner som de flesta forskare tycks ha accepterat. Peter Hallberg har dessutom i en serie undersökningar av ordförrådet i ett flertal verk som dateras till samma period som Bergr hävdade att dennes produktion har varit betydligt större (Hallberg 1968 m.fl.; se uppställning nedan). En grundlig diskussion av Bergers arbetsmetoder presenteras av Christine Fell (1962–65). Hon konstaterar att Bergr framför allt har arbetat om äldre översättningar eller kompulerat äldre texter och ger goda exempel på detta (Fell 1962–65:357ff.).

Arngrímr Brandsson har också diskuterats i detta sammanhang, framför allt av Stefán Karlsson (1973). Stefán är i princip överens med Peter Hallberg om att de texter som denne attribuerat till Bergr uppvisar gemensamma drag. Han anser emellertid att dessa drag pekar på en stilistisk skolbildning snarare än en individ. Stefán föreslår för ett par av de texter som Peter tillskrivit Bergr i stället Arngrímr Brandsson som ansvarig. Arngrímr började, så vitt detta kan klarläggas av källorna, sin bana inom kyrkan som präst vid domkyrkan i Skálholt. Det kan påpekas att han där arbetade med biskopen Jón Halldórsson, som i en inledning till *Clárus saga* omtalas som den som berättat sagan efter en latinsk förlaga som han funnit i Frankrike. Arngrímr blev präst på Oddi 1334–1341 och 1341 inträdde han som munk, sannolikt vid klostret Þingeyrar. Under tiden 1347–1351 verkade han som ansvarig (officialis) under biskopen Ormr Áslákssons utlandsvistelse och från 1351 och fram till sin död 1361 eller 1362 var han abbot vid Þingeyrar. Enligt Stefán Karlsson skrev Arngrímr sin *Guðmundar saga byskups* efter 1343, troligen med utgångspunkt i en tidigare latinsk text om biskopen som skall ha författats av Bergr Sökkason och som nu inte finns bevarad (Stefán Karlsson 1973:228). Denna yngsta norröna version av *Guðmundar saga byskups* finns endast bevarad i betydligt yngre pappershandskrifter (Papp. 4to nr 4; AM 395 4to). Stefán Karlsson framför även argument för att *Thomas saga erkibyskups* II skulle vara Arngríms verk. Slutligen förslår Stefán att författaren till *Clárus saga* och vissa ävintýri i AM 657 a–b 4to kan vara Arngrímr (Stefán Karlsson 1973:227ff.).<sup>2</sup>

De texter som tillskrivs Bergr Sökkason och Arngrímr Brandsson kan därmed sammanställas enligt följande.

---

<sup>2</sup> Det skall nämnas att Alfred Jakobsen följer attributionen i Holm perg 6 4to att Jón Halldórsson skall vara den som skrev *Clárus saga* och ett antal ävintýri (Jakobsen 1964:116). Jón Halldórsson var norrman. Efter studier i Frankrike blev han biskop vid domkyrkan i Skálholt under perioden 1322–1339. Detta har emellertid med starka argument avisats av framför allt Stefán Karlsson (1973). Sambandet mellan biskopen Jón Halldórsson och Arngrímr kan emellertid vara intressant i relation till attributionen av *Clárus saga* till den förre, något som jag hoppas kunna återkomma till.

**Bergr Sökkason**

*Nikulás saga erkibyskups II*  
*Michaels saga hofuðengils*  
*Af Runzivals bardaga* (PH)  
*Karlamagnúss saga B:*  
*Af Agulando konungi* (PH)  
*Um kraptaverk ok jartegnir* (PH)

*Jóns saga postola IV* (PH)  
*Tveggja saga postola Jóns ok Jacobs* (PH)  
*Af Diocletiano keisara* (PH)  
*Drauma-Jóns saga* (PH)  
*Thomas saga erkibyskups II* (PH)  
*Ævinýri* i AM 657a 4to (PH)  
*Maria-mirakler* (PH)  
*Guðmundar saga byskups* (PH)  
*Magnúss saga helga* (PH)  
*Stjórn* (PH)  
*Jóns saga byskups B* (PH)

(PH) Peter Hallberg  
 (SK) Stefán Karlsson

**Arngrímr Brandsson**

*Thomas saga erkibyskups II* (SK)  
*Guðmundar saga byskups* (SK)  
*Ævinýri* i AM 657 a–b 4to (SK)

Árni Lárentíusson föddes sannolikt 1304 och inträdde som munk vid Þingeyrar tillsammans med sin far Lárentíus Kálfsson och Bergr Sökkason 1317. Han tycks ha samarbetat nära med Bergr, vilket enligt Peter Hallberg kan förklara likheten i ordförråd och stil mellan de texter som Peter attribuerat till Bergr och *Dunstanus saga* som entydigt attribueras till Árni (Hallberg 1970–73:346). Christine Fell har slutligen visat på likheter mellan *Dunstanus saga* och *Jóns saga byskups* utan att därmed hävda att de är en mans verk (Fell 1963:xliiff.).

Slutligen skall nämnas prästen Einar Hafliðason, ytterligare en skribent som knyts till miljön på norra Island, men som inte var munk vid något av klostren. Einar fick emellertid sin utbildning vid klostret Þingeyrar och vid biskopssätet Hólar (Fell 1962–65:354). Han var senare präst på Breiðabólstaður från 1344. Vid flera tillfällen var han officialis för biskopen på Hólar, Lárentíus Kálfsson. Han anses vara författare till *Lárentíus saga byskups*. Einar arbetade alltså i nära anslutning till Lárentíus, och ingick i den kontext där Bergr Sökkason, Arngrímr Brandsson och Árni Lárentíusson var verksamma. I Lárentíus saga finns också de flesta uppgifter vi har om dessa skribenter.

**Árni Lárentíusson**

*Dunstanus saga*  
*Jóns saga helga* (CF)

(CF) Christine Fell

**Einarr Hafliðason**

*Lárentíus saga byskups*

**4. Texter och manuskript**

I den tidigare presenterade gruppen av handskrifter ingår många av de texter som attribuerats till dessa skribenter. Det föreligger bevarade fragment av *Karlamagnúss saga* och *Maria-mirakler*, och *Michaels saga hofuðengils*, *Clárus saga*, *Drauma-Jóns saga* och *ævintýri* föreligger i AM 657 a–b 4to. Dessutom har alltså åtminstone tre avskrifter av *Stjórn* utförts inom skriptoriet, varav den som föreligger i närmast fullständigt skick (AM 227 fol.) innehåller den del som Peter Hallberg tillskrev Bergr Sökkason. Det torde framstå som sannolikt att även de två fragmentariskt bevarade handskrifterna AM 229 I fol. och NRA 60A innehållit samma version av bibelparafrasen. Det blir enligt min mening därmed relevant att försöka klarlägga förhållandet mellan texter och avskrifter liksom mellan författare/översättare och skrivare. Har dessa varit knutna till samma kloster och arbetat inom ett skriptorium eller har de tillhört flera skriptorier och kyrkskolor som tillsammans utvecklat en omfattande textproduktion och avskrivningsverksamhet? Det senare ser för tillfället ut att vara det mest sannolika. Bergr och Árni var verksamma i klostret Munkaþverá medan Arngrímr var abbot vid klostret Þingeyrar. Einar Hafliðason var däremot präst på Breiðabólstaður, men också knuten till biskopskyrkan i Hólar. En gemensam tradition skulle därmed alltså snarare vara regional, och omfatta Hólar med omgivande kloster och kyrkor, än lokal, knuten till ett enskilt kloster.

Många av de texter som attribuerats till de ovan presenterade skribenterna och översättarna föreligger inte i den avgränsade gruppen av manuskript. De finns dels i ett antal i det närmaste samtida manuskript som i många fall knutits till andra skrivarmiljöer än den aktuella, dels i senare avskrifter som inte med någon säkerhet kan knytas till någon skrivarmiljö. Ett problem med Peter Hallbergs attribueringar kan därmed vara att avgöra hur olika versioner av dessa texter förhåller sig till den tänkte upphovsmannen. Detta har påpekats av Foster Blaisdell i samband med Hallbergs diskussion av en annan textgrupp.

When we talk about "Xs saga" – as we frequently do – what do we really mean? This is an important, basic question and one which Hallberg does not answer. Or if he does, the answer is: whatever happens to be found in Y's edition. If it is the *Ívens saga*, for example, it is the text of Kölbings 1872 edition (Hallberg, p. 117). Perhaps that answer is satisfactory when we are dealing with themes and the like. It is not, however, when we are trying to do detailed syntactic-stylistic analysis. (Blaisdell 1974:134f.)

Blaisdell visar därefter med exempel att olika handskriftsversioner på syntaktisk-stilistisk nivå kan vara starkt avvikande från varandra och att utgåvor ofta inte ger relevant information för den som vill studera denna typ av fenomen. Även variation på ordförråds- och stilnivå förekommer mellan olika versioner, vilket i viss mån kan försvaga Peter Hallbergs resonemang kring de av honom avgränsade "Bergr-texterna" (Blaisdell 1974:135).<sup>3</sup> För att få en

---

<sup>3</sup> Det skall emellertid påpekas att Hallberg i det aktuella fallet oberoende av Blaisdell hade upptäckt problemet och justerade sina statistiska beräkningar i en senare artikel (Hallberg 1973).

helhetsbild av en text- och skriftproducerande miljö är det alltså viktigt att klargöra vad som är relevanta fenomen för den aktuella miljön och vad som kan vara senare redaktionella ändringar, exempelvis på syntaktisk eller stilistisk nivå, i de aktuella texterna. Hur förhåller sig till exempel de två versionerna av *Clárus saga* till Hallbergs resultat? Den ena handskriften knyts här till den ovan diskuterade gruppen av handskrifter (AM 657 a–b 4to), medan den andra (Holm perg 6 4to) är åtminstone ett halvt sekel yngre och inte säkert har kunnat föras till någon skriftmiljö (se t.ex. Stefán Karlsson 1967). Det kan här vara av ett visst intresse att samme skrivare som kopierat *Clárus saga* i Holm. Perg. 6 4to även kopierat en version av *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* i Holm Perg 1 fol. som inleds med en attribution till Bergr Sökkason. I versionen av *Clárus saga* föreligger en liknande attribution, den ovan nämnda till Jón Halldórsson. Dessa attributioner, vilka formellt liknar varandra och kanske kan föras till skrivaren, är inte allmänt accepterade av forskningen. De kan emellertid eventuellt antyda en tendens att vilja ge de traderade texterna ökad auktoritet.

## 5. Den lingvistiska miljön

Med utgångspunkt i ovanstående sammanställning måste man alltså kunna räkna med att en text- och skrifttradition med rötter i 1100-talets klosterekriptorier utvecklades på norra Island under 1300-talets första hälft. Det visar sig omöjligt att säkert avgränsa ett enskilt skriptorium, då de olika grupper av skrivare som etablerats för perioden ofta knyts till olika kloster, samtidigt som det finns en stor överlappning vad gäller kopierade texter och även för skriftdrag. I genomgångar av skrivargrupper ser man också ofta att forskaren låter sig nöja med att peka på ett par olika kloster eller något av de två biskopssätena som möjliga upphovsorter (se t.ex. Jón Helgason 1950 eller Stefán Karlsson 1967b). Gemensamt för många av de här diskuterade namngivna författarna och översättarna är emellertid en anknytning till biskopssätet i Hólar på norra Island. Det kan därför vara rimligt att i utgångsläget se denna huvudort för kyrkans organisation på nordlandet som central för utvecklingen av text- och skriftkulturen i området. För de olika skrivargrupper som har etablerats inom tidigare forskning kan det med detta synsätt hävdas att de samtliga arbetat inom en gemensam regional skrifttradition och att den korpus av texter som etablerats inom denna torde uppvisa för hela regionen gemensamma tendenser. I det följande skall jag diskutera några av de nivåer där den regionala traditionen kan tänkas komma till synes. Härvid utgår jag från tidigare forskning kring fenomen på olika språkliga nivåer.

### 5.1 Florissant stil

I en artikel från 1896 gör Marius Nygaard ett första försök att indela medeltida norrön prosa i kategorier. Han gör skillnad på folklig stil och lärd stil (Nygaard 1896). Den folkliga stilen representeras enligt Nygaard framför allt i

islänningasagorna som anses vara nedskrivna efter muntliga berättelser, medan den lärda stilen utgår från utländsk, framför allt latinsk påverkan (Nygaard 1896).

Det som brukar betecknas hövisk stil utvecklades framför allt i samband med översättningarna av fransk hövisk litteratur i Norge under 1200-talet. Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen delar in den höviska stilen i tre undergrupper. Det är dels en översättningsprosa som starkt påverkats av sina förlagor, dels en prosa som förhåller sig friare och mer "muntlig" i förhållande till sitt källspråk. Den tredje undergruppen som blir vanlig mot slutet av 1200-talet eller början av 1300-talet utmärker sig genom sitt extrema bruk av latinpåverkad syntax och latinska stilistiska verkkningsmedel (Halvorsen 1959:9f). Denna stiltradition kallar Ole Widding för den florissanta stilen, en stil som han, till skillnad från Halvorsen, anser vara en utveckling av den lärda stilen (Widding 1965:134). Under 1960-talet genomfördes ingående studier av två verk som anses skrivna med den lärda stilen i sin florissanta utformning, nämligen *Clárus saga* och *Vitæ Patrum* (Jakobsen 1964 och Tveitane 1968). De verk som diskuterades i dessa studier framställs av Halvorsen som extrema exempel på hur texten ibland blir mycket svårläst i de verk som driver den florissanta stilen längst (Halvorsen 1959:10). Halvorsens slutsats att den florissanta stilen utgör ett försök att skriva norrönt språk efter samma mönster som man på kontinenten skrev latin (Halvorsen 1959:9ff.) har så vitt jag kunnat finna stått oemotsagt av senare forskning.

Jónas Kristjánsson har pekat på att den florissanta stilen på Island även föreligger i originaltexter. Ett gott exempel på detta är enligt Jónas just Bergr Sökkasons *Nikolás saga*. Han nämner också att man ibland har talat om en särskild 'Bergsstíll' (Jónas Kristjánsson 1982:438). Denna avgränsning av ett särskilt författarskap ifrågasätts emellertid av Reidar Astås som, med stöd i Jónas Kristjánssons redovisning, påpekar att många av de riddarasögur som produceras på Island under 1300-talets första hälft har en florissant stil. Dessutom pekar han, återigen med utgångspunkt i Jónas Kristjánssons artikel, på att många revisioner av norröna översättningar från den här tiden uppvisar en mer florissant stil än originalversionerna (Astås 1987:36; se Jónas Kristjánsson 1982:438).

För att bättre förstå bruket av och utbredningen av den florissanta stilen på Island under 1300-talets första hälft blir det därmed av intresse att försöka klarlägga dels i vilken kontext de isländska texter som Jónas Kristjánsson pekar på har tillkommit, dels i vilka manuskript äldre översättningar bearbetats och givits en mer florissant stil. En regional stilutveckling, det som kallas 'Bergsstíll', skulle därvid kunna knytas, inte till en enskild person, utan snarare till en regional text- och skriftkultur. Ett rimligt antagande tycks då vara att denna skall sökas på norra Island.

## 5.2 Cursus

I tre artiklar diskuterar Jakob Benediktsson (1968, 1974 och 1984) latinsk prosarytm, *cursus*, i en rad isländska texter.<sup>4</sup> I texter som tillskrivits Bergr Sökkason anser han sig kunna spåra denna latinska påverkan på prosarytmen (Jakob Benediktsson 1984). Jakob undersöker avsnitt ur *Nikolás saga* och kommer fram till betydligt högre förekomst av rytmisk accentuering för denna version av texten än för de islänningasagor som utgör kontrollgrupp. Liknande siffror får han för vissa avsnitt av *Michaels saga* (Jakob Benediktsson 1984:35f.). Han konstaterar:

I begge de nævnte sagaer forekommer hyppig brug af alliteration, deriblandt ofte i cursus-formler, både i sætningsslutning og i enkelte sætningsled. (Jakob Benediktsson 1984:36)

Jakob visar vidare att det inom texter som attribuerats till Bergr Sökkason av Hallberg finns skillnader i bruket av prosarytm. Det är i det här sammanhanget relevant att citera Jakobs kommentar till detta:

Den for Bergr Sökkason karakteristiske stil viser sig først og fremmest i de afsnit der stammer fra den latinske tekst, selv om der også er foretaget en vis bearbejdelse af stykkene fra *Orkneyinga saga*. Cursus-påvirkningen optræder da også helt forskelligt i de to dele af teksten. I stykkerne fra Roðberts vita udgør cursus-typerne I–III 43,5%, enstavelsesordene 11,5%, mens de tilsvarende tal i stykkerne fra *Orkneyinga saga* er godt 26% og knap 20%, dvs. det normale for en saga-tekst. Dette mønster stemmer således ganske med det ovenfor omtalte fra *Michaels saga*, hvor en benyttet ældre tekst ikke viste nogen påvirkning af cursus. Denne forskel i brugen af cursus-reglerne støtter derfor Hallbergs argumentation for at Bergr Sökkason har skrevet MSL [*Magnúss saga lengri*] og bearbejdet sine kilder ud fra principper som vi kender fra andre af hans skrifter. (Jakob Benediktsson 1984:37)

*Thomas saga erkibyskups* II och den yngsta versionen av *Guðmundar saga byskups*, liksom de ævintýri som av Peter Hallberg attribuerats till Bergr Sökkason (Hallberg 1968:150, 159 resp. 179ff.), men som av Stefán Karlsson har tillskrivits Arngrímr Brandsson (Stefán Karlsson 1973:227ff.), uppvisar emellertid enligt Jakob inte samma bruk av prosarytm som de övriga. Detta kan, hävdar han, ge stöd åt Stefán Karlssons åsikt att "Berg-texterna" snarast skall föras till en textproducerande miljö (Jakob Benediktsson 1984:37f.). För Maria-miraklerna uttrycker Jakob sig mycket försiktigt, men konstaterar att:

[i] Maria-miraklerne er der mange steder tydelige spor af cursus-påvirkning, hvad der kunne tyde på en sammenhæng med kredsen omkring Bergr Sökkason, men en grundig undersøgelse af forholdet mellem håndskrifterne af Maria-miraklerne er nødvendig for at kunne udtale sig nærmere om det spørgsmål. (Jakob Benediktsson 1984:38)

För *Jóns saga byskups* uppmäter Jakob slutligen höga värden för prosarytm, visserligen med variation inom texten som tycks bero på bruket av äldre källor. Han konstaterar:

<sup>4</sup> För en introduktion till cursus och en diskussion om det klassiska bruket av prosarytm hänvisar jag till inledningen av Kirsten M. Bergs artikel om *cursus* i norrönt med referenser (1999).

Selve fremgangsmåden i *Jóns saga helga* stemmer iøvrigt med Bergr Sökkasons metode, som vi tidligere har konstateret i andre tilfælde: at undlade omarbejdelse til sin egen stil i visse indskud som er taget direkte fra ældre kilder, jfr. hvad der er bemærket ovenfor om *Magnúss saga lengri*. Så meget synes sikker at denne bearbejdelse af *Jóns saga helga* hører til i det samme stilmilieu som andre "Bergr-tekster", og cursus-påvirkningen støtter Hallbergs placering af den i denne gruppe. (Jakob Benediktsson 1984:38f.)

I sin inledning till faksimilutgåvan av Helgastaðabók (Holm perg 16 4to) diskuterar Sverrir Tómasson de retoriska stilmedel som används i Bergrs version av *Nikolás saga*. Han utgår härvid från Jakobs diskussion om cursus och med hänvisning till privat kommunikation med Jakob när han beskriver Bergrs bruk av detta stilmedel. Sverrir hävdar med hänvisning till Jakob att Bergr medvetet använt sig av cursus som stilistiskt verktygsmedel (Sverrir Tómasson 1982:34f och fotnot 38). Han konstaterar om Bergr Sökkasons retoriskt präglade språk:

Í þessu viðfangi má minna á lofsyrðin um Berg í *Lárentíus sögu*, þar sem orðið málsnilld lýtur ugglaut að færni Bergs í mælskulist. Í *Lárentíus sögu* er heldur ekki dregið úr kunnáttu Lárentíus sjálfs í þeim fræðum og hefur hann þá kennt Bergi að 'dikta'. (Sverrir Tómasson 1982:34)

Jakob Benediktssons diskussion av cursus eller prosarytm i det norröna materialet har nyligen mött kritik. Kirsten Berg (1999) har flera invändningar mot Jakobs slutsatser, framför allt av metodisk art. Bergs kritik riktar sig först mot den eller de definitioner av begreppet *cursus* som framkommer vid läsningen av Jakobs arbeten. Hon hävdar att Jakob arbetar med en alltför öppen definition av begreppet och att det dessutom ofta är svårt att från hans framställning avgöra i vilka positioner prosarytmen förekommer. Ofta är exemplen t.ex. hämtade från ommarkerade positioner, alltså inte från period- eller kolonlut (Berg 1999:166f.). Detta har även påpekats av David McDougall i en opublicerad PhD-avhandling (1983:129).

Berg konstaterar i sin metoddiskussion att *cursus*-påverkan kan vara mycket svår att skilja från prosarytmer som naturligt förekommer i det skrivna språket, och alltså inte används medvetet.

Et sentralt problem for den som skal analysere cursusbruken i en tekst, må følgelig være å kunne skille mellom en bevisst distribusjon og rytmiske mønstre som automatisk oppstår i tekster med et visst ordforråd og en viss syntaktisk struktur. (Berg 1999:169)

Hon visar hur en genres ordförråd och stilmivå påverkar rytmen så att den ofta kommer att likna *cursus*.

Den type parallellismer og allittererende uttrykk som karakteriserer høvisk stil og hagiografi, faller også ofte i cursusliknende rytmer (f.eks. mattugr ok mikill óo|o|óo, JB 1984:264), uten at vi dermed bør konkludere med at det foreligger cursuspåvirkning. (Berg 1999:169)

För att kunna skilja *cursus*-påverkan krävs det därmed en klar definition av

begreppet och en metod som gör det möjligt att avgränsa relevanta förekomster av prosarytm, samtidigt som man även kan urskilja olika traditioner inom bruket av *cursus*. Berg presenterar i sin artikel en sådan modell (Berg 1999:170ff.).

I sin diskussion av de texter som tillskrivs Bergr Sökkason, alltså *Nikólás saga* och *Michaels saga*, kommer Kirsten Berg till något annorlunda slutsatser än Jakob Benediktsson. Hon kan inledningsvis redovisa resultat som visar att bruket av prosarytm i dessa texter är mycket styrt av genre och stilnivå. I avsnitt av de undersökta texterna med epideiktisk stil uppvisar t.ex. periodslut högre tal för trestaviga ord än för kolonslut, medan frekvensen för de klassiska typerna av kadenser har högre frekvens i kolonslut (Berg 1999:179).

Berg gör även nedslag i verk som tillskrivits Bergr Sökkason av Peter Hallberg och konstaterar att bruket av prosarytm är så styrt av stilnivå och genre att det knappast kan användas för författarbestämning (Berg 1999:181). Vissa delar av *Tveggja postola saga Jóns ok Jakobs* uppvisar högre frekvenser av de klassiska kadenserna, medan avsnitt som uppvisar låga tal för dessa har ett ökat bruk av trestaviga ord, ofta presens particip, framför allt i periodslut (Berg 1999:180). För *Jóns saga postola IV* konstaterar Berg att den i hög grad består av dialog och indirekt anföring, och att den inte uppvisar några tecken på medvetet bruk av *cursus* (180). Därmed kommer hon till slutsatsen att bruket av trestaviga presens particip utgör en del av Bergers florissanta stil och att kadensrytmer baserade på ordlängd är ett medvetet stildrag i denna (Berg 1999:180f.). Hon konstaterar avslutningsvis:

En ganske annen tradisjon har kunnet påvises i utdrag fra verk som er tilskrevet Bergr Sökkason. I brevstil og epideiktisk stil ser Bergr ut til å foretrekke kadenser som ender på trestavingsord i p1. En grundigere undersøkelse av tekster fra skrivemiljøet omkring Bergr Sökkason kan kanskje vise at det har eksistert en tradisjon på Island i første halvdel av 1300-talet (og tidligere?) som har foretrukket kadenser på trestavingsord og at denne kan ha vært influert av liknende europeiske tradisjoner. Muligens er kadenser på trestavingsord karakteristisk nettopp for florissant stil, men det må en større undersøkelse enn denne til for å fastslå dette. (182)

*Cursus*, liksom den florissanta stilen, knyts alltså av åtskilliga forskare till personen Bergr Sökkason, men många har även varit inne på att det snarare rör sig om en miljö av författare och översättare som utvecklat en mer eller mindre enhetlig stiluppfattning. Det framgår emellertid redan av ovanstående översikt över forskningen att frågor om genrer och texttyper måste ingå i ett resonemang kring denna miljö. Dessutom måste relationen mellan ett verk och de textversioner som föreligger i det bevarade materialet diskuteras. Hur förändras texterna t.ex. vid redigering och kopiering? Detta återkommer jag till inom kort.

### 5.3 Översättningar och original

Översättning och översättare under medeltiden har under senare år blivit allt mer uppmärksammade. Man diskuterar medeltida principer för översättning (se

t.ex. Beer 1989) och översättningens del i den kulturella utvecklingen i Europa (se t.ex. Beer & Lloyd-Jones 1995). I det nordiska sammanhanget har översättningsgenrer under de senaste åren studerats närmare av bland annat Jonas Carlquist (1996) och Stefanie Würth (1998). Men även tidigare har forskare inom det nordiska området intresserat sig för principerna för översättning under medeltiden. Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen diskuterar t.ex. förhållandet mellan översättning, adaptation och imitation i de medeltida texterna. Han konstaterar att gränserna mellan dessa nivåer är svåra att dra för den nutida forskaren och att det därmed blir svårt att klarlägga vilka principer som styr den medeltida översättarens arbete (Halvorsen 1974:57). Halvorsen kommer i detta sammanhang in på Bergr Sökkasons produktion och konstaterar angående dennes arbete:

Some translators of the later thirteenth century, for instance, were clearly quite independent of their originals, even critical of them. Though by then traditions of translating had certainly developed, vernacular writers like Bergr Sökkason in the fourteenth century were not rigorously bound either by those traditions or by the expression of the text they were translating: they were creating their own style and made both the older vernacular they re-wrote and their own new translations from Latin fit to their patterns. (Halvorsen 1974:59)

Liknande iakttagelser redovisas av Reidar Astås som betonar att principerna tycks variera kraftigt i förhållande till vilken text som översätts. För *Clárus saga* konstaterar han:

Vi har florissante oversettelser som følger den latinske teksten så nær at gjengivelsen blir forskrudd og enkelte ganger vanskelig å lese, som i Klarus saga. (Astås 1987:31)

För bruket av exempel i den fjärde grammatiska avhandlingen visar det sig att författaren använder sig av flera latinska källor, men förhåller sig mycket fritt vid översättningen, närmast som om källspråket varit av helt underordnad betydelse vid val av exempel (Johansson 1998). Detta stämmer alltså väl med de iakttagelser som redovisats av Halvorsen och Astås. Liknande resultat presenterar Christine Fell från sin studie av Bergr Sökkasons *Michaels saga* (Fell 1962–65). Stefanie Würth uttrycker det så här:

Trotz der weitgehend Überlieferung der Texte bringen die Autoren das Bewußtsein ihrer schöpferischen Tätigkeit zum Ausdruck, das sich in Bemerkungen zum literarischen Schaffensprozeß zeigt. Es existierte keine Hierarchie, die wertend zwischen der Arbeit von Autoren, Übersetzern und Bearbeitern unterschieden hätte, sondern jeder, der an der Überlieferung eines literarischen Werkes beteiligt war, konnte selbst in den Produktionsprozeß eingreifen. (Würth 1998:184)

I sin bok om översättning av så kallade pseudo-historiska sagor studerar Würth en genre under utveckling (Würth 1998). Hon visar bland annat att äldre översättningar reviderades för att möta nya stilistiska och innehållsliga önskemål (Würth 1998:136ff.). Slutligen konstaterar Würth att det i dag är omöjligt att närmare avgränsa redaktörers och kompilorers arbete på olika

steg i ett verks trädning (1998:139).

Översättarens arbete måste alltså i det medeltida materialet vanligtvis urskiljas i de lager av förändringar som föreligger i de versioner av hans verk som finns bevarade. Genom att avgränsa de olika rollerna eller funktionerna i denna trädning av texter, som t.ex. översättarens, redaktörens och skrivarens funktioner, torde det emellertid gå att närmare studera utvecklingslinjer och tendenser. I det stora material som skisserats ovan kan man alltså se så väl språkliga som innehållsliga drag vilka i en samlad analys skulle kunna belysa en text- och skrifttradition och dess utveckling.

## **6. Sammanfattning: lokala och regionala skolbildningar?**

Den grupp av manuskript som presenterades inledningsvis har alltså många beröringspunkter med flera namngivna översättare och skribenter från samma period och samma region på norra Island. Flera texter som knutits till de senare föreligger i den här diskuterade gruppen av manuskript. Men åtskilliga av de sammanställda texterna finns i handskrifter som knutits till skrivare eller grupper av skrivare utanför de här sammanställda manuskripten. Det framstår därmed som säkert att de namngivna skribenternas textproduktion förts vidare i handskriftstraditionen, inte inom ett skriptorium, utan snarare inom en större, regional avskriftstradition. Det framgår från tidigare forskning att flera av de språkliga drag som utmärker de aktuella skribenterna även förekommer inom detta handskriftsmaterial, dels i versioner av äldre texter, dels i nya kompilationsverk. Härmed blir det relevant att försöka samla de språkliga och innehållsliga drag som utvecklas dels inom textproduktionen, dels i samband med redigering och avskrivning. Den bild som framträder torde då spegla utvecklingen av en regional språklig tradition. liksom dess inflytande på olika genrer inom materialet.

Om vi börjar med textproduktionen kan vi konstatera att de namngivna skribenter och översättare som presenterats ovan har knutits med relativt stor säkerhet till ett stort antal texter, dels i översättning, dels i original. Flera forskare som studerat enskilda texter eller delar av denna textproduktion har pekat på gemensamma drag på flera språkliga nivåer, samtidigt som det även påvisats innehållsliga samband mellan de aktuella texterna. En kartläggning av denna textproduktion kan inledas med att skilja mellan översatta verk och texter som producerats direkt på norrönt språk. I vissa fall kommer denna gränsdragning, som flera forskare visat (se t.ex. Fell 1962–65), att vara problematisk. Det visar sig dessutom ofta vara svårt att skilja ut originaltext från kompilerad text i exempelvis de verk som attribuerats till Bergr Sökkason (se t.ex. Jakob Benediktsson 1984 och Fell 1962–65). Inom textproduktionen är det vidare relevant att avgränsa texter från olika genrer. Tidigare forskning har visat att vissa drag som tillskrivits Bergr Sökkason, och som använts för att attribuera texter till honom, inte alltid samvarierar med andra iakttagelser (se

t.ex Berg 1999). Det blir därmed av vikt att avgränsa genretypiska drag inom den aktuella textkorpusen. Här skall inledningsvis Peter Hallbergs ordförrådsstudier sammanställas och utvecklas för att ge underlag för den vidare studien av dessa texter. Prosarytm och florissant stil har därefter framställts som typiska stildrag för Bergr Sökkason, eller kanske snarare för den miljö där han var verksam. När senare forskning visar att dessa stildrag inte är genomgående blir det alltså relevant att studera bruket av dem i förhållande till genre och typ av text; här kan man, förutom genretypisk variation, förvänta sig att det finns skillnader mellan översatt text och originalproducerad text, men även att äldre texter som inarbetats i en kompilation uppvisar avvikande bruk.

I det bevarade handskriftsmaterialet har det under de senaste decennierna etablerats ett antal stora grupperingar av handskrifter som kunnat knytas till enskilda skrivare eller grupper av skrivare. En viktig grupp härvidlag är den som bland annat innehåller Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.) och som har diskuterats ovan. Från samma period och sannolikt från samma område stammar, som endast antytts ovan, ett antal grupper av manuskript. Gemensamt för samtliga manuskript inom dessa grupper är att de innehåller verk som attribuerats till de aktuella skribenterna. Det föreligger även andra paralleller mellan handskriftsgrupperna som gör att de tycks utgöra delar av en större avskriftskultur.

En inledande kartläggning av relationerna mellan dessa grupper av manuskript skulle därmed kunna ge inblickar i den avskriftsverksamhet som utvecklats i en relativt väl avgränsad region under perioden 1320–1400. Studier av de enskilda versionerna av de texter som föreligger i dessa manuskript kunde även sättas i relation till de språkliga studier av författare och översättare som skisserats ovan. Hur förhåller sig enskilda skrivare till exempelvis ordförrådet? I den mån de uppvisar ändringar i förhållande till andra versioner av ett verk torde dessa kunna relateras till Hallbergs ordförrådsstudier. Även stildrag kan ändras vid avskrivningen av texter. Exempelvis finns det antydningar i tidigare forskning, att skrivare i det aktuella materialet har givit de texter de kopierat fler florissanta drag än andra versioner uppvisar. Detta kan jämföras med de tendenser som man anser sig kunna spåra hos Bergr Sökkason att i sitt kompilationsarbete göra stilförändringar i vissa texter.

När relationerna mellan dels enskilda manuskript och skrivare, dels grupper av skrivare kartlagts närmare blir det intressant att närmare studera relationen mellan avskriftsmiljön och de aktuella författarna och översättarna. Gemensamma tendenser i språkligt avseende liksom i förhållningssätt till innehållet torde nu kunna ge en tydligare bild av text- och skriftproduktionen i den regionala miljö som framträder i handskriftsmaterialet från norra Island under perioden.

## Litteratur

Astås, Reidar 1987. Lærd stil, høvisk stil og florissant stil i norrøn prosa. *Maal og minne*, s.

- 24–38.
- Beer, Jeanette & Lloyd-Jones, Kenneth (red.). 1995. *Translation and the Transmission of Culture between 1300 and 1600*. Kalamazoo.
- Beer, Jeanette (red.). 1989. *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*. Kalamazoo.
- Berg, Kirsten M. 1999. Cursus i norrønt? – en metoddiskusjon med eksempler. *Maal og minne*, s. 165–186.
- Blaisdell, Foster W. 1974. The So-Called "Tristram-Group" of the Riddarasögur. *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 46 No. 2, s. 134–139.
- Bruns, Gerald L. 1980. The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture. *Comparative Literature* 32, s. 113–129.
- Carlquist, Jonas 1996. De fornsvenska helgonlegenderna. Källor, stil och skriftmiljö. *Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskriftsällskapet*. Häfte 262, Bd 81. Stockholm.
- Fell, Christine (utg.) 1963. *Dunstanus saga*. (Editiones Arnarnæ. Series B, vol 5.) København.
- Fell, Christine 1962–65. Bergr Sökkason's Michaels saga and its Sources. *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XVI. S. 354–371.
- Foot, Peter 1959. *The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle in Iceland. A Contribution to the Study of the Karlamagnús Saga*. London.
- Foot, Peter (utg.) 1962. *Lives of Saints. Perg. Fol. Nr. 2 in the Royal Library, Stockholm*. Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile, Volume IV. Copenhagen.
- Hallberg, Peter. 1968. *Stilsignalement och författarskap i norrön sagalitteratur. Synpunkter och exempel*. Acta Nordistica Gothoburgensia 3. Göteborg.
- Hallberg, Peter 1969a. Jóns saga helga. I: Jakob Benediktsson et al. (red.), *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar 30. júní 1969*. Reykjavík. S. 59–79.
- Hallberg, Peter 1969b. Om Magnús saga helga. I: Bjarni Guðnason et al. (red.), *Einarsbók. Afmælisrit til Einars Ól. Sveinssonar 12. desember 1969*. Reykjavík. S. 59–70.
- Hallberg, Peter 1970–73. 'Some Observations on the Language of *Dunstanus saga*, with an Appendix on the Bible Compilation *Stjórn*.' *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XVIII. S. 324–353.
- Hallberg, Peter 1973. Broder Robert, Tristrams saga och Duggals leizla. Anteckningar till norska översättningar. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 88, s. 55–71.
- Hallberg, Peter 1977. Några språkdrag i Alexanders saga och Gyðinga saga - med en utblick på *Stjórn*. I: Einar G. Pétursson & Jónas Kristjánsson (red.), *Sjöttu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktsyni 20. júlí 1977*. Reykjavík. S. 234–250.
- Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld 1962. Høvisk stil. I: *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid från vikingatid till reformationstid* 7. Malmö. S. 315–318.
- Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld 1974. Translation – Adaption – Imitation. *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 7, s. 56–60.
- Jakob Benediktsson 1968. Traces of Latin Prose-Rhythm in Old Norse Literature. I: Niclasen, Bjarni (red.), *The Fifth Viking Congress*, Tórshavn, July 1965. Tórshavn. S. 17–24. [Omtryckt i: Jakob Benediktsson. *Lærdómslistir. Afmælisrit 20. júlí 1987*. Reykjavík 1987. S. 153–160]
- Jakob Benediktsson 1974. Cursus in Old Norse Literature. *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 7, s. 15–21. [Omtryckt i: Jakob Benediktsson. *Lærdómslistir. Afmælisrit 20. júlí 1987*. Reykjavík 1987. S. 175–182]
- Jakob Benediktsson 1984. Cursus hos Bergr Sökkason. I: Fidjestøl, Bjarne et al. (red.), *Festskrift til Ludvig Holm-Olsen*. Øvre Ervik. S. 34–40. [Omtryckt i: Jakob Benediktsson. *Lærdómslistir. Afmælisrit 20. júlí 1987*. Reykjavík. S. 262–69]
- Johansson, Karl G. 1997a. *Studier i Codex Wormianus. Skriftradition och avskriftsverksamhet vid ett isländskt skriptorium under 1300-talet*. Göteborg.
- Johansson, Karl G. 1997b. A Scriptorium in Northern Iceland. *Clárus saga* (AM 657 a–b 4to) revisited. I: *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience – Sagaene og Noreg. Preprints från the 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim 3.–9. August 1997*. Trondheim 1997. S. 323–331.
- Johansson, Karl G. 1998. Retoriker och översättare. Den fjärde grammatiska avhandlingen och medeltida översättningsprinciper. I: Lundquist, Aina et al. (red.), *Form – innehåll – effekt. Stilistiska och retoriska studier tillägnade Peter Cassirer på 65-årsdagen*. Göteborg. S.

121–131.

- Jón Helgason (utg.) 1950. *Byskupa Sögur. MS Perg. fol. No. 5 in the Royal Library of Stockholm. Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Aevi*, Vol. XIX. Copenhagen.
- Jónas Kristjánsson 1982. The Court Style. i Boyer, Regis (red.), *Les sagas de chevaliers. Actes de la Ve Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas*. Toulon. S. 431–440.
- Lindblad, Gustav (utg.) 1963. *Bergsbók. Perg. Fol. Nr. 1 in the Royal Library, Stockholm*. Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile, Volume 5. Copenhagen.
- McDougall, David 1983. *Studies in the Prose Style of the Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian Homily Books*. (Opublicerad PhD-avhandling) University College London.
- Nygaard, Marius 1896. Den lærde stil i den norrøne prosa. I: *Sproglig-historiske studier tilegnede professor C. R. Unger*. Kristiania. S. 158–170.
- Selma Jónsdóttir, Stefán Karlsson & Sverrir Tómasson (utg.) 1982. *Helgastaðabók. Nikulás saga. Perg. 4to Nr. 16 Konungsbókhlöðu í Stokkhólmi*. Íslensk Miðaldahandrit. Manuscripta Islandica Medii Aevi II. Reykjavík.
- Selma Jónsdóttir 1982. Lýsingar Helgastaðabókar. I: Selma Jónsdóttir et al. (utg.), *Helgastaðabók. Nikulás saga. Perg. 4to Nr. 16 Konungsbókhlöðu í Stokkhólmi*. Íslensk Miðaldahandrit. Manuscripta Islandica Medii Aevi II. Reykjavík. S. 90–124.
- Stefán Karlsson 1967. Perg. fol. nr. 1 (Bergsbók) og Perg. 4to nr. 6 í Stokkhólmi. *Opuscula III*. København. S. 74–82.
- Stefán Karlsson (utg.) 1967b. *Sagas of Icelandic Bishops. Fragments of Eight Manuscripts*. Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile, Volume VII. Copenhagen.
- Stefán Karlsson 1973. Icelandic Lives of Thomas á Becket: Questions of Authorship. I: Peter Foote et al. (red.), *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference*. University of Edinburgh 1971. London. S. 212–243.
- Stefán Karlsson 1978. Om norvågismer i islandske håndskrifter. *Maal og minne*, s. 87–101.
- Stefán Karlsson 1979. Islandsk bokeksport til Norge i middelalderen. *Maal og minne*, s. 1–17.
- Stefán Karlsson 1982. Uppruni og ferill Helgastaðabókar. I: Selma Jónsdóttir et al. (utg.), *Helgastaðabók. Nikulás saga. Perg. 4to Nr. 16 Konungsbókhlöðu í Stokkhólmi*. Íslensk Miðaldahandrit. Manuscripta Islandica Medii Aevi II. Reykjavík. S. 42–89.
- Sverrir Tómasson 1982. Íslenskar Nikulás sögur. I: Selma Jónsdóttir et al. (utg.), *Helgastaðabók. Nikulás saga. Perg. 4to Nr. 16 Konungsbókhlöðu í Stokkhólmi*. Íslensk Miðaldahandrit. Manuscripta Islandica Medii Aevi II. Reykjavík. S. 11–41.
- Widding, Ole 1965. Jærtegn og Mariu saga. Eventyr. I: Bekker-Nielsen, Hans et al. (red.), *Norrøn fortællekunst. Kapitler af den norsk-islandske middelalderlitteraturs historie*. København. S. 127–136.
- Würth, Stefanie. 1998. *Der "Antikenroman" in der isländischen Literatur des Mittelalters. Eine Untersuchung zur Übersetzung und Rezeption lateinischer Literatur im Norden*. (Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 26) Basel und Frankfurt am Main.

## Translations Of Old Norse Prose 1950-2000

John Kennedy

Charles Sturt University

What follows is an attempt to list in chronological order the publications which in the half century 1950-2000 have provided new or previously unpublished English language translations of medieval prose texts written in what is often termed Old Norse. In most cases the original texts are sagas and *þættir* from Iceland, so the language might more accurately be described as Old Icelandic, but a few of the texts translated are possibly or probably of Norwegian origin, while *Seyðarbrævið* stems from the Faroe Islands and *Guta saga* from Sweden.

The listing records only the first publication of each translation, and does not include reprints of translations published before 1950. Recording reprints and new impressions would greatly have expanded the length of the list, often with details of little general interest. Only compositions that are unambiguously translations are included: works better regarded as retellings or summaries are omitted, though arguably there is in reality a continuum from close translations through free translations to paraphrases and modern retellings of old narratives. Brief passages of translation, such as often appear in works of literary criticism, history, or anthropology, are omitted, though a number of anthologies of extracts from Old Norse sources are included.

The major bibliographical works documenting English translations of Old

Norse prose are undoubtedly Donald K. Fry's *Norse sagas translated into English: A bibliography* (New York: AMS, 1980) and Paul Acker's "Norse sagas translated into English: A supplement", published in *Scandinavian Studies* 65 (1993): 66-102. The following listing is indebted to both of these for much information about translations, though in all but a handful of cases (indicated with an asterisk at the beginning of the entry) the translations listed were examined first hand. It has been possible to include a few translations from 1950-1990 not mentioned by Fry or Acker, and to offer some minor corrections to their work. An attempt is made to record translations which appeared too late to be included in Acker's supplement, but there are almost certain to be omissions because of the time delay in including publications in indexes, library catalogues, national bibliographies, etc. Works announced but apparently still awaiting publication in May 2000, such as the second part of the *Laws of early Iceland* from University of Manitoba Press (first volume 1980) are not listed.

### 1950

Haugen, Einar. *First grammatical treatise: The earliest Germanic phonology. An edition, translation and commentary* (Baltimore: Linguistic Society of America). [*Fyrsta málfræðiritgerðin*]

Scargill, H. M. and Schlauch, Margaret. *Three Icelandic sagas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). [*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* translated Scargill, *Bandamanna saga* and *Droplaugarsona saga* translated Schlauch.]

### 1951

Tjomslund, Anne. *The saga of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarsonar: The life of an Icelandic physician of the thirteenth century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press). [*Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*]

### 1952

Jackson, Jess H. *Melkólfs saga ok Salomons konungs*. *Studies in honor of Albert Moray Sturtevant* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press): 108-111. [Partial translation of *Melkólfs saga ok Salomons konungs*]

### 1953

\*Anonymous (Gathorne-Hardy, Robert) *The story of Thithrandi* (Stanford Dingley, Berkshire: Mill House Press). [*Piðranda þátr Síðu-Hallssonar*]

\*Youngquist, Eric V. *Chicken Thori's saga* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Department of Scandinavian). [*Hænsa-Póris saga*]

### 1954

Young, Jean I. *The prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson: Tales from Norse Mythology* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes). [Partial translation of the *Prose Edda*]

### 1955

- Allen, Ralph B. Sturla's meeting with the king. *University of Kansas City Review* 21: 270-274. [Excerpt from *Sturlu saga* ]
- Bayerschmidt, Carl F. and Hollander, Lee M. *Njal's saga* (New York: Twayne and the American-Scandinavian Foundation). [*Brennu-Njál's saga*]
- Hollander, Lee M. *The saga of the Jómsvikings* (Austin: University of Texas Press). [*Jómsvíkinga saga*]
- Whitelock, Dorothy. From the Saga of Egil Skalla-Grímsson *English historical documents: Volume 1 c500-1042* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode): 298-304. [Excerpts from *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*]

### 1956

- \*McGalliard, John C. In *World Masterpieces I*, ed. Maynard Mack (New York: Norton): 512-532. [*Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*]

### 1957

- Quirk, Randolph. In *The saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue*, ed. Peter Foote (London and Edinburgh: Nelson) [*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*]

### 1959

- Ashdown, Margaret. An Icelandic account of the survival of Harold Godwinson *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in some aspects of their history and culture presented to Bruce Dickins* (London: Bowes and Bowes):122-125. [Extract from *Hemings þáttur Áslakssonar*]
- Schlauch, Paul and Hollander, Lee M. *Eyrbyggja saga* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press) [*Eyrbyggja saga* ]

### 1960

- Jones, Gwyn. *Egil's saga* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press and the American-Scandinavian Foundation). [*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*]
- Magnusson, Magnus and Pálsson, Hermann. *Njal's saga* (Harmondsworth: Penguin). [*Brennu-Njál's saga*]
- Tolkien, Christopher. *The saga of King Heidrek the Wise* (London: Nelson) [*Heiðreks saga vitra*. Also known as *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*]
- Turville-Petre, G. The story of Audunn and the bear. *Seven Icelandic short stories*, ed. Ásgeir Pétursson and Steingrímur J. Þorsteinsson (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation): 37-49. [*Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka*]
- Wood, Cecil. The saga of Thorstein Prod-Head. *Fat Abbot* Winter: 5-14. [*Þorsteins þáttur stangarhöggs*]

### 1961

- Jones, Gwyn. *Eirik the Red and other Icelandic sagas* (London: OUP). [*Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka, Eiríks saga rauða, Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu, Hænsa-Póris saga, Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða, Hrólfs saga kraka, Þiðrandi þáttur Síðu-Hallssonar Þorsteins þáttur stangarhöggs, Vápnfirðinga saga.*]

### 1962

- \*Anonymous (Gathorne-Hardy, Robert) *The story of Thorstein the Scared* ([Stanford Dingley, Berkshire]: Millhouse Press). [*Þorsteins þáttur skelks*]
- Blake, Norman F. *The saga of the Jomsvikings* (London: Nelson) [*Jómsvíkinga saga*]

### 1963

Johnston, George: *The sags of Gislí* (London: Dent). [*Gísla saga Súrssonar*]

## 1964

Arent, A. Margaret: *The Laxdoela saga* (Seattle: University of Washington Press). [*Laxdæla saga*]

Hollander, Lee M. *Heimskringla: History of the kings of Norway* (Austin: American-Scandinavian Foundation). [*Heimskringla*]

Jones, Gwyn. *The Norse Atlantic saga* (London: OUP). [*Einars þáttir Sokkasonar, Eiríks saga rauða, Grænlandinga saga, Íslendingabók*, extracts from *Landnámabók*]

## 1965

Blaisdell, Foster W. *Erex saga Artuskappa* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard). [*Erex saga Artuskappa*]

Hallmundsson, Hallberg. The lovelorn skald (pp. 193-196) and Without a brother your back is exposed (pp. 197-207). *An anthology of Scandinavian literature from the Viking period to the twentieth century*, ed. Hallberg Hallmundsson (New York: Collier). [*Vars þáttir Ingimundssonar*, fragment of *Brennu-Njáls saga*]

Magnusson, Magnus and Pálsson, Hermann. *The Vinland sagas: The Norse discovery of America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin). [*Eiríks saga rauða, Grænlandinga saga*]

\*Ruth, Roy. H. *The Vinland sagas* (Winnipeg: Columbia) [*Eiríks saga rauða, Grænlandinga saga*, part of *Íslendingabók*]

Simpson, Jacqueline. *The Northmen talk* (London: Phoenix House). [Part of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar saga berserkjabana*, part of *Gautreks saga*, part of *Gests þáttir Bárðarsonar*, part of *Guðmundar saga dýra*, *Helga þáttir Þórissonar*, part of *Hemings þáttir Áslakssonar*, *Hreiðars þáttir heimiska*, *Hrómundar þáttir halta*, *Íslendinga þáttir sögufroða*, part of *Jóns saga helga*, part of *Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar*, *Ottars þáttir svarta*, part of *Páls saga biskups*, part of *Sturlu saga*, part of *Þorláks saga hin yngri*, part of *Þorleifs þáttir jarlsskálds*, *Þorsteins þáttir bæjarmagns*, *Þorsteins þáttir skelks*, part of *Þorsteins þáttir uxafóts*, part of *Þorsteins þáttir skelks*,. part of *Qrvar-Odds saga*]

## 1966

\*Blindheim, Joan Tindale. *Vinland the Good* (Oslo: Tanum). [*Eiríks saga rauða, Grænlandinga saga*]

Magnusson, Magnus and Pálsson, Hermann. *King Harald's saga: Harald Hardradi of Norway* (Harmondsworth: Penguin). [*Haralds saga harðráða*]

## 1968

Finch, R. G. *The saga of the Volsungs* (London: Nelson). [*Volsunga saga*]

Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Gautreks' saga and other medieval tales* (London: University of London Press). [*Bósa saga ok Herrauðs, Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar saga berserkjabana, Gautreks saga, Helga þáttir Þórissonar, Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar, Þorsteins þáttir bæjarmagns*]

Simpson, Jacqueline in Garmonsway, G. N. and Simpson, Jacqueline. *Beowulf and its analogues* (London: Dent). [Parts of *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, Gull-Þóris saga, Heimskringla, Hrólf's saga kraka, Orms þáttir Stórolfssonar, Ragnars saga loðbrókar, Samsons saga fagra, Sǫrla þáttir, Þiðreks saga af Bern, Þorsteins þáttir uxafóts, Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar, Volsunga saga*]

Turville-Petre, E. O. G. An Icelandic version of the *Somnium Danielis*. In *Nordica et Anglica. Studies in honor of Stefán Einarsson*, ed. Allan H. Orrick (The Hague: Mouton): 34-36. [*Somnium Danielis*]

## 1969

- Friis, Erik J. in Helge Ingstad *Westward to Vinland* (London: Jonathan Cape<). [*Eiríks saga rauða, Grænlandinga saga*]  
 Magnusson, Magnus and Pálsson, Hermann. *Laxdæla saga* (Harmondsworth: Penguin) [*Laxdæla saga*]  
 \*Zitzelsberger, Otto J. *The two versions of Sturlaugs saga starfsama* (Dusseldorf: Tritsch). [*Sturlaugs saga starfsama* ]

### 1970

- Edwards, Paul and Pálsson, Hermann. *Arrow-Odd: A medieval novel*. (London: University of London Press) [*Qrvar-Odds saga*]  
 Morris, William and Magnússon, Eiríkr. *The story of Kormak the son of Ogmund* (London: William Morris Society). [*Kormáks saga*]

### 1970-74

- McGrew, Julia and Thomas, R. G. *Sturlunga saga*. 2 vols. (New York: Twayne and The American-Scandinavian Foundation). [*Sturlunga saga*]

### 1971

- Barnes, Michael and Margolin, David R. In *Seyðarbrævið* (Tórshavn: Føroya Fróðskaparfelag). [*Seyðarbrævið*]  
 Pálsson, Hermann. *Hrafnkel's saga and other Icelandic stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin). [*Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka, Halldórs þáttur Snorrasonar, Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða, Hreiðars saga heimiska, Ívars þáttur Ingimunarssonar, Þorsteins þáttur stangarhöggs, Ólkofra þáttur*]

### 1972

- Benediktsson, Hreinn. *The first grammatical treatise* (Reykjavík: Institute for Nordic Linguistics). [*Fyrsta málfræðiritgerðin*]  
 Chappel, Allen H. *Saga of Victor ok Blavus: A fifteenth century Icelandic lygisaga* (The Hague: Mouton). [*Viktors saga ok Blávus*]  
 Hollander, Lee M. *Víga-Glúms saga and the story of Qgmund dytt* (New York: Twayne and The American-Scandinavian Foundation). [*Víga-Glúms saga, Qgmundar þáttur dytts ok Gunnars helmings* ]  
 Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Hrolf Gautreksson: A Viking romance* (Edinburgh: Southside). [*Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar*]  
 Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *The book of settlements: Landnámabók* ([Winnipeg]: University of Manitoba Press). [*Landnámabók* ]  
 Pohl, Frederick J. *The viking settlements of North America* (New York: Potter). [*Eiríks saga rauða, Grænlandinga saga*]  
 Ringler, Richard. The saga of the men of Svínafell: An episode from the age of the Sturlungs *Saga og sprak: Studies in language and literature*, ed. John M. Weinstock (Austin: Jenkins): 9-30. [*Svínfellinga saga*]

### 1973

- Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Eyrbyggja saga* (Edinburgh: Southside ). [*Eyrbyggja saga*]  
 Schauch, Paul. *The saga of Tristram and Ísönd* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press). [*Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* ]  
 \*Young, G. C. V. and Clewer, Cynthia R. *The Faroese Saga* (Belfast: Century). [*Færeyinga saga*]

### 1974

Fox, Denton and Pálsson, Hermann. *Grettir's saga* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press). [*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*]

### 1975

Fell, Christine and Lucas, John. *Egil's saga* (London: Dent). [*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*]  
 Johnston, George. *The Faroe Islanders' saga* (Ottawa: Oberon Press). [*Færeyinga saga*. Note: Excerpt appeared 1973 in *Humanities Association Review* : 32-37]  
 \*Marchand, James W. The allegories in the Old Norse *Veraldar saga*. *Michigan Germanic Studies* 1: 112-116. [Partial translation of *Veraldar saga*]  
 Pálsson, Hermann. *The confederates and Hen-Thorir* (Edinburgh: Southside). [*Bandamanna saga, Haensa-Póris saga*, portion of *Landnámabók* ]  
 Porter, John. *Aron's saga* (London: Pirate Press and Writers Forum). [*Árons saga Hjörleifssonar*]

### 1975-1980

Hieatt, Constance B. *Karlamagnús saga: The saga of Charlemagne and his heroes*. 3 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies). [*Karlamagnús saga*]

### 1976

\*Johnston, George. *The Greenlanders' saga* (Ottawa: Oberon Press). [*Grœnlendinga saga*]  
 Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Egil's saga* (Harmondsworth: Penguin). [*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*]

### 1977

Blaisdell Jr., Foster W. and Kalinke, Marianne E. *Erex saga and Ívens saga* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press). [*Erex saga Artuskappa, Ívens saga*]  
 Bradley, S. A. J. The Norwegian Prose Lay of the Honeysuckle. *The Tristan legend: Texts from Northern and Eastern Europe in modern English translation*, ed. Joyce Hill ([Leeds] University of Leeds Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies): 39-40. [*Geitarlauf* from *Strengleikar*]  
 Hill, Joyce. The Icelandic saga of Tristram and Isolt. *The Tristan legend: Texts from Northern and Eastern Europe in modern English translation*, ed. Joyce Hill ([Leeds] University of Leeds Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies): 6-28. [*Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar*]

### 1978

Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Orkneyinga saga: The history of the earls of Orkney* (London: Hogarth). [*Orkneyinga saga*]

### 1978-79

Kedar, Benjamin Z. and Westergard-Nielsen, Chr. Icelanders in the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem: A twelfth-century account *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11: 203-211. [Excerpts from *Kirialax saga* and *Leiðarvísir*]

### 1979

Blaisdell, Foster W. *Ívens saga* (Copenhagen: Reitzel). [*Ívens saga*]  
 Cook, Robert in Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane. *Strengleikar: An Old Norse translation of twenty-one Old French lais* (Oslo: Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-Institutt). [*Strengleikar*]  
 Lowe, Jr., Pardee. *King Harald and the Icelanders* (Lincoln, Mass. Penmaen Press). [*Auðunar þátr vestfirzka, Brands þátr orva, Íslendinga þátr sögufróða, Odds þátr Ófeigssonar,*

*Stúfs þátr*]

Pálsson, Hermann. Early Icelandic imaginative literature. *Medieval narrative: A symposium*, ed. Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote, Andreas Haarder, and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Odense: Odense University Press): 24-27. [*Þorsteins þátr austfirðings*]

### 1980

Boucher, Alan. *A tale of Icelanders* (Reykjavík: Iceland Review). [*Auðunar saga vestfirzka, Brands þátr orva, Einars þátr Skúlasonar, Halldórs þátr Snorrasonar, Hreiðars þátr heimiska*, part of *Íslendingabók, Ívars þátr Ingimundarsonar, Kumlbúa þátr, Odds þátr Ófeigssonar, Olkofra þátr, Stúfs þátr, Þorvalds þátr viðförla*]

Dennis, Andrew, Foote, Peter, and Perkins, Richard. *Laws of early Iceland*. Vol. 1 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press). [*Grágás*]

Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Gongu-Hrólfs saga* (Edinburgh: Canongate). [*Göngu-Hrólfs saga*]

Zitzelsberger, Otto. *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*. *Seminar of Germanic Philology Yearbook*: 38-65. [*Konráðs saga keisarasonar*]

### 1981

Boucher, Alan. *The saga of Hallfred the troublesome skald* (Reykjavík: Iceland Review). [*Hallfredar saga*, fragment of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, Þorvalds þátr tasalda*]

Boucher, Alan. *Tales from the Eastfirths* (Reykjavík: Iceland Review). [*Gunnars þátr Þiðrandabana, Vápnfirðinga saga, Þorsteins saga hvíta, Þorsteins þátr stangarhöggs*]

\*Hannah, Robert. The saga of Halfdan, foster-son of Brana *Seminar for Germanic Philology Yearbook* 4: 9-27. [*Hálfðanar saga Brönufostra*]  
1982

Anderson, George K. *The saga of the Völsungs, together with excerpts from the Nornagestháttur and three chapters from the Prose Edda* (Newark: University of Delaware Press). [Part of *Norna-Gests þátr*, part of *Prose Edda, Völsunga saga*]

Cahill, Peter in Selma Jónsdóttir et al. *Helgastaðabók. Nikulás saga* (Reykjavík: Lögbergbókaforlag): 229-232. [Part of *Nikulás saga*]

Raschella', Fabrizio D. *The so-called second grammatical treatise: an orthographic pattern of late thirteenth-century Icelandic* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier). [*Qnnur málfræðiritgerðin*]

### 1983

Boucher, Alan. *The saga of Gunnlaug Snake-tongue together with the Tale of Scald-Helgi* (Reykjavík: Iceland Review). [*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*]

Boucher, Alan. *The saga of Hord and the holm-dwellers* (Reykjavík: Iceland Review). [*Harðar saga*]

Blaisdell, Forster W. In Lise Præstgaard-Andersen, ed., *Partalopa saga* (Copenhagen: Reitzel). [*Partalopa saga*]

Cahill, Peter. *Duggals leiðsla* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar). [*Duggals leiðsla*]

Hill, Joyce. From Rome to Jerusalem: An Icelandic itinerary of the mid-twelfth century *Harvard Theological Review* 76: 178-181. [*Leiðarvísir*]

### 1984

Skaptason, Jón and Pulsiano, Phillip. *Bárðar saga* (New York: Garland). [*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*]

### 1985

Bachman, Jr., W. Bryant. *Four Old Icelandic sagas and other tales* (Lanham: University Press of America). [*Bandamanna saga, Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa, Gísls þátr Illugasonar, Gull-*

*Ása-Þórðar saga, Króka-Refs saga, Sneglu-Halla þátr, Valla-Ljóts saga, Þorsteins þátr austfirðings, Þorvarðar saga krakunefs* ]

\*Cook, Robert *Kirialax saga: a bookish romance Les sagas de chevaliers (Riddarasögur)* ed. Régis Boyer (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne). [*Kirialax saga*]

Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Seven Viking romances.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin). [*Bósa saga ok Herrauðs, Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar saga berserkjabana, Gautreks saga, Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar, Helga þátr Þórissonar, Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns, Örvar-Odds saga.* Apart from the version of *Hálfðarnar saga Eysteinnssonar* these are revised versions of translations published by the authors in 1968 and 1970).

## 1986

Boucher, Alan. *The saga of Havard the Halt together with the saga of Hen-Thorir* (Reykjavík: Iceland Review). [*Havarðar saga Ísfirðings, Hænsa-Þóris saga*]

Boucher, Alan. *The saga of Víga Glum* (Reykjavík: Iceland Review). [*Víga-Glúms saga* ]

Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Knytlinga saga: The history of the kings of Denmark* (Odense: Odense University Press). [*Kny:tlínga saga*]

## 1987

Andersson, Theodore M. *A preface to the Nibelungenlied* (Stanford: Stanford University Press): 169-208, 214-251. [Parts of *Þiðreks saga af Bern*]

Faulkes, Anthony. *Snorri Sturluson. Edda.* (London: Dent). [*Prose Edda* ]

Johnston, George. Excerpts from *Víga-Glúms saga: The Malahat Review* 78: 78-82 [Parts of *Víga-Glúms saga*]

Kalinke, Marianne E. *Mottuls saga, with an edition of Le Lai du court mantel* (Copenhagen: Reitzel). [*Mottuls saga*]

McKinnell, John. *Víga-Glums saga with the tales of Ogmund Bash and Thorvald Chatterbox* (Edinburgh: Canongate/UNESCO). [*Víga-Glúms saga, Þorvalds þátr tasalda, Ogmundar þátr dyttis* ]

Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Magnus' saga: The life of St Magnus Earl of Orkney 1075-1116* (Oxford: Perpetua Press). [*Magnús saga Eyjarls*]

## 1988

Acker, Paul. *Valla-Ljot's saga.* Translated with an introduction and notes *Comparative Criticism* 10: 215-232. [*Valla-Ljóts saga*]

Haymes, Edward R. *The saga of Thidrek of Bern* (New York: Garland). [*Þiðreks saga af Bern*]

Kalinke, Marianne E. in James J. Wilhelm, ed., *The Romance of Arthur III: Works from Russia to Spain, Norway to Italy* (New York: Garland): 56-68. [*Mottuls saga*]

## 1989

Andersson, Theodore M. and Miller, William Ian. *Law and literature in medieval Iceland. Ljósvefninga saga and Valla-Ljóts saga* (Stanford: Stanford University Press). [*Ljósvefninga saga, Valla-Ljóts saga* ]

Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Eyrbyggja saga* (London: Penguin). [*Eyrbyggja saga.* Translation significantly revised from their 1973 version.]

Pálsson, Hermann and Edwards, Paul. *Vikings in Russia: Yngvars's saga and Eymund's saga* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press). [*Eymundar saga Hringssonar, Yngvars saga víðfjrla* ]

## 1990

Bachman, Jr., W. Bryant, and Erlingsson, Guðmundur. *The saga of Finnbogi the Strong* (Lanham: University Press of America). [*Finnboga saga ramma*]

- Byock, Jesse L. *The saga of the Volsungs: The Norse epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press). [*Völsunga saga* ]
- Miller, William Ian. *Bloodtaking and peacemaking: Feud, law, and society in saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 52-58. [*Þorsteins þátr stangarhöggs* ]
- Young, Jean and Haworth, Eleanor. *The Fljótsdale saga and The Droplaugarsons* (London: Dent). [*Droplaugarsona saga, Fljótsdæla saga* ]

### 1991

- Bachman Jr., W. Bryant and Erlingsson, Guðmundur. *The sagas of King Half and King Hrolf* (Lanham: University Press of America). [*Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka, Hrólf's saga kraka, Tóka þátr* ]
- Cormick, Craig. *Kormak's saga* (Page, ACT, Australia: Merino Press). [Partial translation of *Kormáks saga*, incorporated into a retelling of the saga.]
- Jorgensen, Peter A. *Valla-Ljóts saga: The saga of Valla-Ljot* (Saarbrücken: AQ-Verlag). [*Valla-Ljóts saga* ]

### 1992

- Bachman Jr., W. Bryant. *Forty Old Icelandic tales* (Lanham: University Press of America). [Largely *þættir* from *Konungasögur* manuscripts. Includes an extract from *Hrólf's saga kraka* and the following *þættir*: : *Auðunar þátr vestfirzka, Brandkrossa þátr, Brands þátr orva, Einars þátr Skúlasonar, Einriða þátr ilbreiðs, Eindriða þátr ok Erlings, Gísls þátr Illugasonar, Gull-Ása-Pórðar þátr, Halldórs þættir Snorrasonar, Helga þátr ok Úlfs, Hrafn þátr Guðrúnarsonar, Hreiðars þátr, Hrómundar þátr halta, Ívars þátr Ingimundarsonar, Jökuls þátr Búasonar, Mána þátr skálds, Odds þátr Ófeigssonar, Rauðs þátr ramma, Sneglu-Halla þátr, Stu:fs þátr, Tóka þátr* (revised from 1991 version), *Völsa þátr, Þátr Þormóðar, Þorarins þátr stutfeldar, Þorgríms þátr Hallasonar, Þorleifs þátr jarlsskálds, Þorsteins þátr austfirðings, Þorsteins þátr skelks, Þorsteins þátr stangarhöggs, Þorsteins þátr sögufróða, Þorvalds þátr tasalda, Þorvarðar þátr krákunefs, Þormundar þátr dytts, Þlko:fra þátr* ]
- Durrenberger, E. Paul and Durrenberger, Dorothy. *The saga of Gunnlaugur Snake's Tongue, together with an essay on the structure and translation of the saga* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press). [*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* ]
- Firchow, Evelyn Scherabon. *The Old Norse Elucidarius: Original text and English translation* (Columbia, SC: Camden Press). [*Elucidarius* ]
- Stitt, J. Michael. *Beowulf and the bear's son: Epic, saga and fairytale in Northern Germanic tradition* (New York: Garland). [Partial translations of *Bardar saga Snæfellsáss, Bósa saga ok Herrauðs, Fljótsdæla saga, Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans, Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, Gríms saga loðinkinna, Hálfðanar saga Brönufostra, Harðar saga, Hjálmpés saga ok Qlvis, Hrómundar saga Gripssonar, Jökuls þátr Búasonar, Ketils saga hængs, Orms þátr Stórolfssonar, Samsons saga fagra, Sörla saga sterka, Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar, Þorsteins þátr uxafóts, Þrvar-Odds saga*. ]

### 1993

- Bachman Jr., W. Bryant, and Erlingsson, Guðmundur. *Six Old Icelandic sagas* (Lanham: University Press of America). [*Ála flekks saga, Ásmundar saga kappabana, Hrómundar saga Gripssonar, Illuga sag Gríðarfóstra, Sörla þátr sterka, Yngvars saga víðforla* ]

### 1994

- Bachman Jr., W. Bryant and Erlingsson, Guðmundur. *Svarfdale saga and other tales* (Lanham: University Press of America). [*Svarfdæla saga, Valla-Ljóts saga, Þorleifs þátr jarlsskálds* ]
- Johnston, George. *Thrand of Gotu: Two Icelandic sagas from the Flat Island Book* (Erin, Ontario: Porcupine's Quill). [Revised translations of *Færeyinga saga and Grænlandinga*

saga]

Porter, John. *Bandamanna saga* (Felinfach: Llanerch). [*Bandamanna saga*]

## 1995

Bachman Jr., W. Bryant and Erlingsson, Guðmundur. *Heidarvíga saga* (Lanham: University Press of America). [*Heidarvíga saga*]

Driscoll, M. J. *Ágrip af Norégskonungasögum: A twelfth-century synoptic history of the kings of Norway* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research). [*Ágrip af Norégskonunga sögum*]

Larson, Willard. *The saga of Aun the Bow-bender: A medieval Norse tale* (Baltimore: Gateway Press). [*Áns saga bogsveigis*]

Page, R. I. *Chronicles of the Vikings: Records, memorials and myths* (London: British Museum Press). [Extracts from *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Flateyjarbók*, *Frostapingslög*, *Heimskringla*, *Íslendingabók*, *Knýtlinga saga*, *Landnámabók*, *Norégskonunga tal*, *Orkneyinga saga*, *Prose Edda*, *Völsunga saga*]

## 1996

Durrenberger, E. Paul and Durrenberger, Dorothy. *The saga of Hávarður of Ísafjörður* (Enfield Lock, Middlesex: Hisarlik Press). [*Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*]

## 1997

Hreinsson, Viðar et al. *The complete sagas of Icelanders including 49 tales*. 5 vols. (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson) [Forty *Íslendingasögur* and forty-nine *þættir* ]

## 1998

Byock, Jesse L. *The saga of King Hrolf kraki* (London: Penguin). [*Hrólf's saga kraka*]

Tucker, John. *Plácidus saga* (Copenhagen: Reitzel). [*Plácidus saga*]

## 1999

Johnston, George. *The schemers & Víga-Glum: Bandamanna saga & Víga-Glúms saga* (Erin, Ontario: Porcupine's Quill). [*Bandamanna saga, Víga-Glúms saga*]

Jorgensen, Peter. *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*. Norse romances I: The Tristan legend, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer): 29-223. [*Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*]

Kalinke, Marianne E. *Erex saga*. Norse romances II: *The knights of the round table*, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer): 223-259. [*Erex saga Artuskappa*]

Kalinke, Marianne E. *Ívens saga*. Norse romances II: *The knights of the round table*, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer): 39-99. [*Ívens saga*]

Maclean, Helen. *Parcevals saga*. Norse romances II: *The knights of the round table*, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer): 109-183. [*Parcevals saga*]

Maclean, Helen. *Valvens þátr*. Norse romances II: *The knights of the round table*, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer): 185-205. [*Valvens þátr*]

The Orðhenglar. A new translation of *Svínfellinga saga - The saga of the Svínafell men*. *Fótarkefli rist Peter Foote 26.v.99* (London: n.p.): 15-31. [*Svínfellinga saga* translated by a group associated with the University of London.]

Peel, Christine. *Guta saga: The history of the Gotlanders* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research). [*Guta saga*]

## 2000

Andersson, Theodore M. & Gade, Kari Ellen. *Morkinskinna: The earliest chronicle of the Norwegian kings (1030-1157)*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press). [*Morkinskinna*]

# The Reception of Old Norse Myth in Germany 1760-1820: Enthusiasm, Rejection and Recovery

Thomas Krömmelbein

During the second half of the 18th century, a phase of literary reception took place that had decisive consequences in its repercussions on Northern mythology and literature. The person substantially responsible for its initiation was Paul Henri Mallet (1730-1807) with his *L'Historie de Dannemarc* (Geneva 1763). To true German writers rediscovering the Northern world belonged above all Heinrich Wilhelm Gerstenberg (1737-1823), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) and Friedrich David Gräter (1768-1830). Their achievements as poets and scholars will be portrayed in my presentation, as they were not only responsible for translating the transmitted texts, but also for the study of their cultural-historical background. Their work proved to be essential for the poetic adaptation of Northern mythology and literature in the 19th century by people such as Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué and Richard Wagner. They thus laid the foundation of a reception that ultimately leads to our present times.

## Greek gods in Northern costumes: Visual representations of Norse mythology in 19th century Scandinavia

Hans Kuhn

Australian National University

Northern mythology, long the province of antiquarians and scholars, was in the 19th century claimed as a regional heritage in the Scandinavian countries, and the rising tide of nationalism and an eagerness to extend education to all classes combined to make it a focus not only of literary efforts but also of pictorial representation. This was not easy, for the academies in Copenhagen and Stockholm, where artists were trained, had their own entrenched traditions deriving from the period of the Renaissance. Figure painting and sculpture were the most valued genres, and the subject matter was to be taken, in academies all over Europe, either from the Bible (or, in Catholic countries, saints' lives) or from Classical history and mythology. In the second half of the 18th century, Winckelmann's writings and the excavations at Pompei and Herculaneum strengthened the Greco-Roman connection and led to Neoclassicism becoming the dominant style for a few decades into the 19th century.

The lucid rationality and practicality of the Enlightenment period produced cravings for things ancient, dark and mysterious, as the success of Bishop Percy's *Reliques* and Macpherson's *Ossian* showed; Celtic and Nordic were seen as part of the same misty Northern world. The Dane Abildgaard and the Swiss Füssli/Fusely, friends in Rome in the 1770s, painted a number of scenes from *Ossian* but occasionally also from Nordic mythology. Abildgaard's scene from Snorri's account of the creation of the world shows a Michelangelesque giant Ýmir suckled by Auðhumla, a Brahmin-type cow licking a salty rock from which the first human being, Bure, will emerge (1). With its energetic diagonals, it has a freedom and dynamism sadly lacking in a lot of the 19th century pictures we are going to see. For comparison, a Fusely painted about 15 years later, in 1790, a vigorous naked Þórr battling the Miðgarð Serpent (2). And as a contrast, a one-eyed Óðinn with sword and spear and the two rather pigeon-like ravens Hugin and Munin from an Edda ms. written by the priest Ólafur Brynjúlfsson in Iceland around 1760 (3). His very remoteness from the academies and a lack of proper training gave the amateur draughtsman the innocence to rely on his own imagination and ignore accepted canons of beauty.

Subjects from Northern mythology also began to appear in the theatre. In 1778 Johannes Ewald's singspiel *Balders Død* was performed in Copenhagen, and this inspired the sculptor Wiedewelt to make a series of 72 sketches, among which this one of Freyja seated on a chariot drawn by cats - a subject not often attempted since cats are hard to present convincingly as draught animals (4). The he-goats pulling Þórr's carriage, too, look rather modest in size, too, but this was probably intended to make the god's stature the more impressive (5). He is clad in a fancy knight's armour, and the slender hammer Mj[olnir] looks more like an anchor; bolts of lightning seem to issue from an insufficiently lubricated axle. In Sweden, none less than King Gustav III wrote *Frigga*, performed as a comedy in 1783 and as an opera from 1787. The Frenchman Desprez was responsible for the stage sets, and here is what Frigga's temple in the sacred grove in Gamla Uppsala looked like (6). With the flanking lions, it seems to anticipate the Greek dream the Bavarian king Maximilian I was to build in Munich. It was hard in the 18th century to conceive of any but Greek temples; the absence of visual knowledge about Nordic places of worship made artists inevitably fall back on other traditions. This 'Torshov' from 1815 by the Norwegian Joh. Flintoe (7) might be called massive Early Gothic, and Egron Lundgren's 'Balderstemplet' from 1839 (8) is just another medieval castle. Joh. Ludv. Lund was well advised to leave off any man-made structure in his 'Sacrificial scene from the time of Óðinn' in a sylvan setting (9). This is a sketch for the first of a series of four frescoes in Christiansborg, later destroyed by fire, depicting the history of religion in Denmark; the beech and tree placid lake call to mind a picture of Northern Zealand.

The question whether Northern mythology could provide an alternative to

Classical mythology in literature and art had been raised already by Scandinavian humanist scholars of the Renaissance but got renewed actuality towards the end of the 18th century. Herder discussed it in dialogue form in 1795 in Schiller's journal *Die Horen*, and in 1800 the University of Copenhagen made it the subject of a competition. Oehlenschläger and Jens Möller, later Professor of Theology, were among those who took part. Oehlenschläger was in favour of Northern mythology because it was native, was not worn out by overuse and was morally superior to Greek mythology, an argument used time and again in subsequent discussions. Möller's attitude was positive, too, but he claimed that art was more sensitive to unnatural and ugly elements than literature and had to be guided by Winckelmann's ideal of noble simplicity and quiet grandeur. The following two decades saw a lively debate on the topic, with Torkel Baden, secretary of the Copenhagen Academy of Art, rejecting Nordic mythology as barbaric, misshapen and repulsive, and a spate of handbooks on Northern mythology appeared such as Rasmus Nyerup's edition of the Prose Edda in 1808 and his *Wörterbuch der skandinavischen Mythologie* of 1810, or Grundtvig's *Nordens Mytologi* of 1808, while Oehlenschläger sought to familiarise the public with it by making it the subject-matter of epic poems (*Nordiske Digte*, 1807; *Nordens Guder*, 1819). And in 1819, when Thorvaldsen, already then the most celebrated Scandinavian artist of his time, came to Copenhagen on his one home visit before his triumphal return almost twenty years later, Oehlenschläger implored him at a feast given in his honour to switch his attention to Northern gods and heroes.

To no avail, in Thorvaldsen's case. He was too experienced and practical an artist to turn to characters and stories which were, quite literally, imageless. However, the idea was there, and in the same year, 1819, the Danish Academy of Art invited Finnur Magnússon, who a few years later was to publish a four-volume work *Eddalåren og dens Oprindelse*, to provide lectures on Old Norse literature and mythology to its students. In 1821 a competition was announced in Copenhagen for drawings with subjects taken from Northern mythology. The prize was won by the sculptor Hermann Ernst Freund, and this gave him the idea for a frieze depicting all the important Nordic gods. Through the good offices of Jonas Collin, known as H. C. Andersen's patron, he got a commission to do such a thing in Christiansborg Castle, although on a smaller scale than he had envisaged. The theme had to be confined to *Ragnarök*, or rather to the *Ásir* and their enemies mobilising for that fatal battle. He did not manage to finish it by the time he died, in 1840; some students and his colleague H. W. Bissen completed it. In 1884 it was destroyed when Christiansborg burned down, and all we have is this drawing made of the frieze by Henrik Olrik (10). But a few sculptures of Freund's have survived. A fairly youthful Óðinn of modest size from 1832, with a sceptre and a head band, is now in Glyptoteket (11). In attitude and appearance, this Óðinn is unmistakably a cousin of Zeus's. The one-eyedness is not ignored but played down - it was headache for all 19th

century artists as an ‘ugly’ element. One does not quite know whether the animals at his feet are real or ornamental, the wolves thriving on the flesh and blood of the fallen or, as part of the throne, a symbol of power. Another Freund sculpture in Glyptoteket, even smaller, is his ‘Loki’ (12). Loki was less likely to be sucked into the trap of Classical models because there is simply no Greco-Roman equivalent to that shifty intriguer and facilitator. Something rat or bat-like in his appearance is certainly striking, but I feel hesitant about the combination of heavy overclothes and wings, the overemphatic gesturing (‘Now, *what* nasty thing could I think up next’), the saucy colour and the lumpy effect of the whole shape. Yet it was undeniably a new and original image.

In Sweden, the discussion about the use of Northern mythology in art mostly took place among a group of young litterati known as *Götiska förbundet*. Geijer, later a professor of history, urged caution in an article published in 1818, while P.H. Ling, who had given lectures on the topic in *Sällskapet för konststudium* in 1814-17, was its advocate. One of his students was Bengt Erland Fogelberg, and when *Götiska förbundet* announced a competition for subjects from Northern mythology in 1817, he participated with plaster sketches of Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr. Óðinn was shown sitting on a simple throne, his uplifted right hand resting on the spear Gungnir. But King Carl XIV Johan, who commissioned Fogelberg to execute the gods in marble, thought a sitting Óðinn not warlike enough; he wanted him standing, holding a shield in his left hand. Fogelberg obliged, but it took some time before he felt ready to do more-than-lifesize statues in marble. He had settled in Rome in 1821 and spent practically all his remaining years in Italy. The full-size version of Óðinn (13) was completed in 1830 and owes a considerable debt to statues of Mars, the Roman god of war, especially the one in the Museo Capitolino. Óðinn is shown as an older man than Mars, but posture, attributes and even parts of the attire are identical, while the face resembles a bust of Aesculapius in the Museo Nazionale. Þórr, also a royal commission, was completed fourteen years later, in 1844 (14). Here, the iconological ancestry leads to Hercules; the muscular, half-naked body, the challenging pose, the hammer Mjöl/nir corresponding to Hercules’ club, the goat-skin taking the place of Hercules’ lion-skin. Despite these attributes, the overall impression is still that of a classical middle-aged athlete. In the same year, Fogelberg completed his third Northern god, the gentle Baldr, who appealed more to 19th century sensibility than Freyr, the fertility god, whose well-known phallic statuette is one of the few genuine pieces of Northern imagery that have survived from pre-Christian times (15). Baldr is the peaceful, the good, the innocent god, and in Fogelberg’s statute (16) he looks like a cross between the Emperor Augustus in the Vatican Museum and Thorvaldsen’s Christ in Vor Frue Kirke in Copenhagen (17). For many decades, these three figures were located in the entrance hall of Statens historiska museum in Stockholm. In 1988, they were moved to the new sculpture museum in the orangerie of Ulriksdal.

Neoclassicism aimed at symmetry, harmony, and what Winckelmann had called ‘noble simplicity’; hence pictures from this period tend to look static and arranged. This became obvious when Christoffer Eckersberg, maybe the most influential teacher at the Copenhagen Academy of Arts in the first half of the 19th century, took up Nordic subjects. He had studied in Paris with David and later became best known for his marines. Here is a picture from 1810, Sigyn capturing the poison that drips on her husband Loki who, Prometheus-like, is fettered to a rock (18). The diagonal of her body and the horizontal of Loki’s body cross in the centre of the picture, which is stressed additionally by the framing rocks and the light falling on it; despite the dramatic situation, there is no real tension, it is a tableau. There is a little more drama in a sketch of the same subject from 1833 by the Swede Carl Wahlbom, maybe because he catches the scene at a moment where Sigyn is emptying her cup and Loki therefore writhing under the dripping poison (19). But it is still a very consciously symmetrical arrangement, with the tree and the dangling snake providing the central vertical and the rocks the base of the triangle. Sigyn and Loki constitute parallel diagonals while the lower part of Loki’s left leg completes the triangle. The Neoclassicist aesthetics also shows in Sigyn’s ‘Greek’ profile and her being naked, too, for only the naked human form was thought to be beautiful. For comparison, Mårten Eskil Winge’s picture, 30 years later (20). Unfortunately, I do not have a slide of the original, only of the a trifle lifeless engraving appearing in a lavishly illustrated Swedish Edda translation of 1893. Here, the structural element is a succession of concentric flat curves centered on the lower right-hand corner, like layers weighing down on the Michelangelesque hapless Loki.

Back to Eckersberg in the heyday of Neoclassicism! Before an artist became a member of the Copenhagen Academy, he had to produce a so-called *medlemsstykke* on a given topic. The one Eckersberg got in 1817 was another dramatic event from Norse mythology, ‘Baldr’s death’ (21). Eckersberg had heard Finnur Magnússon’s lectures on the Elder Edda, so he had the requisite background. Baldr has just fallen to the ground, struck in the heart by Høðr’s mistletoe arrow; as the protagonist of the scene, he holds the foreground and provides the base horizontal, paralleled by the horizontal of the horizon in the upper third of the picture. The central vertical divide is provided by the ash Yggdrasill, the three norns and the sitting Óðinn, filling the centre as the presiding god. The helmeted figure to the right of him is the warriorlike Þórr; Høðr, on the left, marks his blindness by gropingly stretching out his arms. The Jewish-looking Loki, at the left margin, tries to hide a triumphant smile, while the rest of the party is caught in attitudes of consternation, indignation or sorrow. Despite all these telling gestures and expressions, the whole has a static, frozen quality.

The same could be said of the pictures of one of his students who carried the Neoclassicist tradition well into the second half of the century, Constantin

Hansen (22). This pleasant *Empire* hall is the place where the sea giant Ågir entertained the Åsir and Loki created a scandal by bringing all their disreputable actions into the open, as told in *Lokasenna*. The painting was produced at the request of a friend, the National Liberal politician Orla Lehmann, who developed a plan for four connected pictures from Nordic mythology, of which only Aegir's Feast was executed. Þórr (who has some resemblance with Thorvaldsen's Jason (23), although he is rather middle-aged and wearing clothes) has just returned from a journey and threatens the malicious Loki, who may have been inspired by Thorvaldsen's Achilles. The sitting elderly man on the extreme right is Óðinn, the standing man with the drinking horn on the extreme left is Ågir, the host. The composition and the individual attributes had been discussed at length between Hansen and Lehmann, but the total impression is tame, a theatrical arrangement in the manner of the Nazarenes. Hansen had learned Old Norse and read the Eddas and the sagas, but in one of his more insightful moments he said that however hard he tried, his gods always ended up looking like good-natured middle-class people ('skikkelige borgerfolk'). Four years later, Hansen painted Heimdallr, the watchman and warner of the gods with his horn Gjallarhorn (24). It was said that Heimdallr could hear the grass and the wool on sheep grow; Hansen, striving to make his function clear, pictured him as a man listening so hard that he seems to have to strain his ears. European art since the High Middle Ages had been *mimetic*, in the course of the 19th century, it became more and more *literal*. Freely invented scenes were not so much a product of fantasy as an assemblage of verifiable details, human or animal figures or objects copied from models and rendered with an ambition to be historically accurate. The same was true of theatrical productions, and it is no wonder that so many 19th century historical pictures look as if they were copied from stage sets or costume parties. We can be sure that Hansen not only used a male model raising his left arm to his ear but that every detail of costume and equipment was painstakingly copied. - For a last taste of mythological Hansen, Iðunn with the apples of youth (25) painted two years later on the ceiling of the Great Hall in the new house of the Student Association in Copenhagen - levitated in mid-air, it would seem, rather than flying, and properly dressed and shoed, to mark her as a chaste Germanic, rather than a frivolous Greek, goddess.

Some of the worthies present at the inauguration of that building must have been student activists in the 1840s when Scandinavianism, the belief - despite centuries of warfare between the realms of Sweden and Denmark - in a brotherhood of Nordic nations and a desire to bring about a political union, reached its peak, fired by frequent visits between students from Copenhagen, Christiania, Uppsala and Lund made possible by steamship travel. In January 1842, students in Norway had celebrated their Nordic heritage with a feast called 'Fådrenes Minde', and they suggested that a similar 'nordisk høitid' should be held in other universities. In Copenhagen, Skandinavisk Selskab,

founded in 1843 after a Scandinavian student meeting in Uppsala, was the forum for political and cultural Scandinavianism, and three young artists were commissioned to produce, in a hurry, cartons of Nordic gods for such a celebration on 13 January 1845. Lundbye, Frølich and Skovgaard did ten individual gods plus a carton depicting three legendary heroes, Oðrvar-Oddr, Starkaðr and Holger Danske. The original are lost but we know what they looked like thanks to a memorial folder of lithographs. Most of the figures were Frølich's while the frames were done by Lundbye. It is probably the frames with their genuine Viking-art elements - snakes and parts of gripping beasts in an ornamental arrangement - that give the pictures a measure of credibility as depictions of Old Norse mythology. One remnant of Viking-age art that *was* known at the time was the carvings on the early stave churches like the ones at Urnes in Norway (26). That all the gods in this series are *sitting* figures goes well with the phlegmatic ('magelig') Danish temperament - Oehlenschläger's ancient champions, too, in the national anthem 'Der er et yndigt land', mostly sit and rest. I will show four of these gods. First, Þórr who, with this industrial helmet in Frølich's rendering, rather looks like a sturdy miner taking a rest (27). Freyr has the appearance of a tired young warrior, but a sheaf of corn is inserted to indicate his connection with fertility and harvests (28). Skovgaard's Loki is a pensive man in fancy Renaissance gear (29). The animal that looks like the otter he kills in *Reginismál* is in fact they young Fenrisúlfr. Heimdallr (30) is pictured well dressed like a night-watchman for the chilly temperatures to be expected in the sky, with a rooster as the embodiment of watchfulness on his helmet.

The Swede Nils Blommér, who was to die in Rome in his thirties, was a contemporary of the three Danes, but the Nordic gods he depicted belong to a different tradition, that of the Nazarenes. In 1846, the Swedish academy of art for the first time set a Nordic mythology topic for its annual competition, namely Heimdallr returning Brísingamen, which had been stolen by Loki, to its owner, Freyja (31). Heimdallr is shown here as a youthful warrior with naked trunk and a Greek helmet while Freyja is dressed like a Renaissance lady, attended by similarly civilised and domesticated servants. Wallander, another competitor, chose an outdoor setting, a rocky beach, where Heimdallr stands like a Byronesque theatre hero, holding up the necklace while the defeated Loki is seen lying on the ground (32). Freyja, descending on a cloud, has a long ancestry of Christian saints and angels behind her. - Blommér returned to Freyja six years later when he painted her looking for her husband, riding on the clouds in her cat-drawn carriage (33). The cats have been given a fancy harness, but what is most striking is the crowd of Raphaelesque putti, with which Blommér had fallen in love in the Villa Farnesina. On the staff she is holding there is an inscription in runes saying 'Blommér målade detta i Rom'.

Once the 19th century had abandoned belief in a timeless Classical art, it acquired the more recent past in chronological succession. Neogothicism gave

way to Neorenaissance, and that to Neobaroque before we arrive at the eclecticism of the last couple of decades. Winge spent almost four years in Rome in the early 1860s and responded to the dramatic qualities of the Baroque art he saw around him. His 'Þórr battling the giants' from 1872 (34) is the most dramatic representation of that subject I know, with the aggressive he-goat and the raised hands of a defeated giant in the foreground having the effect of propelling the action on to the onlooker (34). Þórr's body language was inspired by Michelangelo's Christ in the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel but is sufficiently transformed to look plausible in this context.

Lithographs and illustrated books were probably the most influential media for spreading images of the Nordic past, which increasingly came to be seen as part of national history. Hugo Hamilton, a nobleman and public servant and friend of King Oscar I, published 'Drawings from Early Scandinavian history' in 1830-31, and some were re-used in a series 'Drawings from Swedish history', which started appearing in 1839. Here two samples, 'Óðinn introducing the runes' (35), where a rune stone serves as a blackboard for a class of eager mature-age students, and a *fornaldar saga* subject, 'Ragnarr Loðbrók in the snake pit' (36), a Laocoon fallen backwards. For a contrast, the same scene as treated by Louis Moe at the end of the century in a Danish translation of Saxo (37); here, the prototype is not Laocoon but the dead Christ in Depositions from the cross. In Denmark, Adam Fabricius's *Illustreret Danmarkshistorie for Folket* started appearing in 1854 and remained popular well into the 20th century; among the illustrators were both Frølich and Hansen, whose Óðinn I show you (38), here less stiffly neoclassical, clad in something resembling Byzantine dress, with his spear Gungnir and flanked by the two wolves in different attitudes and with Hugin and Munin, one perched, one flying. As the god is shown in profile, the embarrassing missing eye does not surface.

Nordiska museet in Stockholm was opened in 1873, though its present monumental building was not completed until 1907. Djurgårdsbron, the bridge leading to the site, came to be decorated with four Nordic gods, done by Rolf Adlersparre in the 1880s. His Þórr (39) is a scantily clad athlete (in boots, though) with a hammer for identification. His Freyja (40) is an elegant society lady in evening dress; I am not sure where in mythology the bird on her hand belongs. His Heimdallr (41) is recognisable by his horn; he is a tough weather-beaten soldier type with a helmet reminiscent of Hermes' winged cap. The nobleman Adlersparre later gave up art and made a career in business.

The 1890s saw a number of illustrated editions of translations, with Sander's *Edda*, to which prominent artists were commissioned to contribute, as the most ambitious; I will show a few more examples from it. Georg von Rosen, one of the leading realist painters of his day, tried to invest Óðinn with the demonic, enigmatic quality of a god who loves disguises and assumed personalities (42). He shows him *en face* but gets around the one-eye quandary by pulling the hood so far down over his face that only one eye is clearly

visible. *Harbarðsljóð* was illustrated with a print made from Winge's painting of Þórr and his companions on the way to Útgarða-Loki (43). Old Norse sources are not explicit about the technology of Ásgarðr, and Winge, in his desire to make Þórr's chariot look archaic, has given it a billy-cart appearance; but it is possible that the etching does not do justice to the original, the location of which is unknown. Anders Zorn, today still the most popular Swedish artist of that generation apart from Carl Larsson, did a 'Brynhildr and Guðrún' to illustrate *Grípisspá* (44). He was famous for his pictures of sturdy young Dalecarlia women enjoying the water and the sun; and this mythological scene is simply another arrangement of bathing nudes. To document the female gaze, Jenny Nyström, now mostly remembered for her cute Christmas scenes and illustrations for children's books, did the three valkyries or swan maidens from *Völundarkviða* (45). The arrangement owes something to the classical Three Graces, the landscape is Romantic. These are indeed very human young women, with no trace of the supernatural except for the shed swan skins in a corner of the picture. The same is true of her illustration of *Helreið Brynhildar* (46): a strangely bourgeois funeral procession, despite the fantasy archaism of the carriage wheels, while the fur-clad giant woman emerging from the cave looks like a somewhat distracted young urban lady fresh from an aerobics class. Her 'Óðinn and Saga', happily drinking from golden cups as described in *Grímnismál*, are fully clad (47). Spear, ravens and wolf serve as identification tags; Óðinn here sports the cowhorn helmet which has become the hallmark of Vikings in comics and has his breeches tied to his calves - definitely, we are now a long way from Classical models. The profile view again takes care of the lost second eye.

Goethe once said that the most remarkable thing about Northern mythology was its humorous quality. One of the few Scandinavian artists who had an eye for the humorous potential of these tales was Lorens Frølich, who during most of the century proved not only the most prolific, but also the most original illustrator of Norse mythology. Examples can be found in Karl Gjellerup's Danish translation of the *Edda* published in 1895. Here are Loki and Þórr dressed up as a bride on the way to the giant Þrymr in order to recover the hammer Mjǫlnir (48). Frølich enters well into the spirit of this farcical fancy-dress deception. The frame, as in the Nordisk Højtids cartoons, serves to remove the figures from present-day reality; Frølich, however, makes here no conscious attempt to give it an 'Old Norse' character. In the somewhat burlesque *Hárbarðsljóð*, Óðinn, taking the shape of an old ferryman, refuses to ferry Þórr across the water and instead teases and insults him in every possible way (49). Frølich catches well the helplessness of the muscleman in the background and the obscene arrogance of Óðinn in a playful mood, and here he attempted to give the frame a more genuinely Old Norse character.

In his 1988 Tegnér lecture Bo Grandien, Professor of Fine Art at the University of Stockholm, said that, generally speaking, the attempts to bring to

life the remote Northern past in fine art were one long story of failure or, as he put it more expressively, 'en enda lång lidandets historia'. The reason may well be what the great Danish Latinist Johan Nicolai Madvig mentioned in 1844 when the art politician Niels Laurits Høyen postulated a national art based on the study of Danish folklore and Old Norse mythology and literature. Greek art, he said in effect, was what it was because Greek mythology and religion were a living reality when and where Greek art was created, and it had remained at least a visible reality ever since, being adapted for different needs and ends. Northern mythology was imageless, and it could only take the shape individuals could give it with the power of their imagination. In the 1890s, when a succession of secessions had broken down the stranglehold of the academies and the literalness they taught, individual artists dared to use their fantasy creatively, as documented by my last few slides, the illustrations for a Norwegian *Heimskringla* translation by Egedius (50), Werenskjold (51) and Munthe (52), or those by Albert Edelfelt for Runeberg's Norse epic *Kung Fjalar* (53), or drawings such as 'Óðinn's arrival in Sweden' by Ernst Josephson (54), then locked away in a mental institution but later hailed as a pioneer of modern art.

### Sources of pictures

- Allzen, Brita, *Tid för vikingar: Vikingatid lanseras i nordisk konst*, Malmö Museers årsbok 1990: 4, 5, 6, 31, 54.
- Aubert, Anreas, *Die Norwegische Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig 1910: 50-52.
- Båksted, Anders, *Guder og helte i Norden*, Kbh 1974: 3, 48, 49.
- Bergman-Hals, Anna-Stina, *Joseph Wilhelm Wallander*, Malmö 1947: 32.
- Dansk kunsthistorie* 3, Kbh 1972: 1, 11, 17, 22, 23, 27.
- loos, viggo, *Carl Wahlbom*, Sth 1949: 19.
- Hannover, Emil, *Maleren Constantin Hansen*, Kbh 1901: 24, 25, 38.
- Henrikson, Alf, *Nordens historier i bilder och beläten*, Sth n.d. (1970): 39-41.
- Madsen, Herman, *En Billedrække af J. Th. Lundbye, Lorenz Frølich og P. C. Skovgaard fra Nordisk Højtid 1845*, Odense n.d. (1937): 28-30.
- Madsen, Herman, & Niels th. mortensen, *Dansk skulptur*, Odense n.d.: 28, 29.
- Mellem guder og helte: Historiemaleriet i Rom, Paris og København 1770-1820*, Kbh 1990: 2, 9, 18, 21.
- Mjöberg, Jöran, *Drömmen om sagatiden* Sth, I, 1967: 7, 8; II, 1968: 37.
- Den svenska historien* 1, Sth 1966: 15.
- Runeberg, Johan Ludvig, *Kung Fjalar*. Med teckningar af Albert Edelfelt, Sth 1896: 53.
- Sander, Fredrik, *Såmund den vises Edda*. Skaldeverk af fornordiska myt- och hjältesånger om de gotiska eller germanska folkens gamla gudatro, sagominnen och vandringar. Med bilder af nordiska konstnärer. Sth 1893. Illustrations reprinted with Erik Brate's translation n.d.&pl. (Sth 1978): 20, 42-47.
- Signums svenska konsthistoria: Konsten 1845-1890*, Malmö 2000: 33, 34.
- Thordeman, Bengt, *Göternas gudar i Fogelbergs gestaltning*, Sth 1961: 13-16.
- Wilson, David m. (ed.), *The Northern World*, London 1980: 26.

### Artists and Works

- Nicolai Abildgaard (DK, 1743-1809): Ymir dier koen Ødhumble, ca 1777.
- Rolf Adlersparre (S, 1859-1943): Tor, Freja, Heimdall, 1880s.
- N. J. Blommér (S, 1816-1853): Heimdal öfverlämnar till Freja smycket Bryfing (sic), 1846; Freya

- sökande sin maka, 1852.
- L. J. Desprez (F/S, 1743-1804): Helig lund med Friggas tempel i Gamla Uppsala, 1780s.
- Christoffer Eckersberg (DK, 1783-1853): Loke og Sigyn, 1810; Balders Død, 1817.
- Albert Edelfelt (SF, 1864-1905): Illustration till *Kung Fjalar*, 1896.
- Halfdan Egedius (N, 1877-99): Illustrasjon til *Heimskringla*, 1897.
- Joh. Flintoe (N, 1786-1870): Torshov, 1818.
- B. E. Fogelberg (S, 1786-1854): Oden, 1830; Tor, 1844; Balder, 1844.
- H. E. Freund (D/DK, 1786-1840): Odin, 1822; Loke, 1822; Ragnarøksfrise, completed by Bissen 1841, sketch by H. Olrik ca 1870.
- Lorenz Frölich (DK, 1820-1908): Thor, Heimdal, Freir, 1845 (figures); Tor og Loke paa Vej til Jotunheim, 1895; Tor og Fårgekarlen Graaskeg, 1895.
- J. H. Füssli/Fusely (CH/GB, 1741-1825): Thor's battle with the Midgard Serpent, 1790.
- Hugo Hamilton (S, 1802-1871), Oden inför Runeläran, ca 1830; Ragnar Lodbrok i ormgropen, 1839.
- Constantin Hansen (DK, 1804-1880): Odin, 1854; Ågirs Gåstebud, 1857; Hejmdal lyttende ved Bifrøst, 1861; Idun, 1863.
- Ernst Josephson (S, 1851-1906): Odens intåg i Sverige, 1890s.
- J. L. Lund (DK, 1777-1867): Offerscene fra Odinsk tid, ca 1827.
- J. Th. Lundbye (DK, 1818-1848): Thor, Loke, Heimdal, Freir, 1845 (frames).
- Egron Lundgren (S, 1815-1875): Balderstemplet, 1839.
- Louis Moe (N/DK, 1859-1945), Ragnar i Ormegaarden, 1890s.
- Gerhard Munthe (N, 1849-1929): Illustrasjon til *Heimskringla*, 1897.
- Jenny Nyström (S, 1857-1946): De tre valkyriorna vid Ulvsjön, Brynhilds färd till Hel, Oden hos Saga, 1893.
- Ólafur Brynjúlfsson (ISL, 18th century): Óðinn, ca 1760.
- Georg von Rosen (S, 1842-1923): Oden, 1893.
- P. C. Skovgaard (DK, 1817-1875): Loke, 1845 (figure).
- Carl Wahlbom (S, 1810-1858): Loke och Sigyn, 1833.
- J. W. Wallander (1821-1888): Heimdal öfverlemnar till Freja smycket Bryfing (sic), 1846.
- Erik Werenskiöld (N, 1855-1938): Illustrasjon til *Heimskringla*, 1897.
- Johannes Wiedewelt (DK, 1731-1802): Freya, ca 1780; Thor, ca 1780.
- M. E. Winge (S, 1825-1896): Loke och Sigyn, 1863; Tors strid med jättarna, 1882; Tors färd till Utgarda-Loki, 1886/93.
- Anders Zorn, (S, 1860-1920): Brynhild och Gudrun, 1893.

## Høðr's Blindness and the Pledging of Óðinn's Eye: A Study of the Symbolic Value of the Eyes of Høðr, Óðinn and Þórr

Annette Lassen

The Arnamagnæan Institute, University of Copenhagen

The idea of studying the symbolic value of eyes and blindness derives from my desire to reach an understanding of Høðr's mythological role. It goes without saying that in Old Norse literature a person's physiognomy reveals his characteristics. It is, therefore, a priori not improbable that Høðr's blindness may reveal something about his mythological role. His blindness is, of course, not the only instance in the Eddas where eyes or blindness seem significant. The supreme god of the Old Norse pantheon, Óðinn, is one-eyed, and Þórr is described as having particularly sharp eyes. Accordingly, I shall also devote attention in my paper to Óðinn's one-eyedness and Þórr's sharp gaze.

As far as I know, there exist a couple of studies of eyes in Old Norse literature by Riti Kroesen and Edith Marold. In their articles we find a great deal of useful examples of how eyes are used as a token of royalty and strength. Considering this symbolic value, it is clear that blindness cannot be, simply, a physical handicap. In the same way as emphasizing eyes connotes superiority

and strength, blindness may connote inferiority and weakness. When the eye symbolizes a person's strength, blinding connotes the symbolic and literal removal of that strength. A medieval king suffering from a physical handicap could be a *rex inutilis*. The expression, found in juridical papal documents from mid-thirteenth century, refers to a king, who causes a disaster in his kingdom, due to weakness or incompetence.<sup>1</sup> Saxo Grammaticus uses blindness several times in his *Gesta Danorum* as a sign of decrepitude and old age, and thereby indicates that the blind king cannot sustain power in his own kingdom.<sup>2</sup> In medieval sources, blindness also frequently connotes a lack of insight and judgement.

An example of deliberate blinding occurs in the *konungasögur*. King Magnús the Good was to share power with his brother, but soon a struggle arose between them, and Magnús was captured, and the decision was made:

to deprive Magnús of his kingdom in such a way that he could not be called king from that time on. Then he was given to the royal thralls, and they maimed him. They put out his eyes, chopped off one of his legs and finally he was castrated.<sup>3</sup>

Blinding as a punishment is not exclusively a Norse phenomenon. It is known from Byzantium, for example. The blinded Byzantine kings also lost their political power and their kingdoms.<sup>4</sup> In Old Norse literature contemporary with Snorri's *Edda* and Codex Regius of *The Poetic Edda* the punishment of blinding is often followed by castration, as in the example of King Magnús. In *Sturlunga saga*, Gizurr decides to mutilate his enemy either by blinding him or castrating him.<sup>5</sup> In the power struggle among the Sturlungar, these two forms of mutilation seem to be used together or interchangeably.<sup>6</sup> Through blinding and castration the victim is deprived of his social position, exactly as Magnús the Good. Power and masculine sexuality are thus linked.

In Old Norse culture, as in other traditional cultures, kin ranks higher than the individual. It was common to marry for tactical reasons. It is therefore not surprising that power and sexuality are linked in the sagas, since they were in fact inextricably linked in Old Norse culture. Accordingly, the most severe accusations towards a man's honour and position in society were of a sexual character. The Old Norse notion of invective, *níð*, is based on accusations of

<sup>1</sup> This political type was defined juridically by Innocent IV in 1245, but it has existed back to the year 700. Edward Peters: *The Shadow King*, 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. in the story about Wermundus and Uffo in the fourth book of *Gesta Danorum*.

<sup>3</sup> "taka Magnús svá frá ríki, at hann mætti eigi kallask konungr þaðan í frá. Var hann þá seldr í hendr konungs þrælum, en þeir veittu honum meizlur, stungu út augu hans ok hjoggu af annann fót en síðarst var hann gelldr." *Heimskringla* III, p. 327.

<sup>4</sup> John Julius Norwich: *Byzantium. The Decline and Fall*, pp. 337; Edward Peters: *The Shadow King*, p. 185. According to Edward Peters only one king did not lose his kingdom when blinded, namely Louis the Blind. Edward Peters: *The Shadow King*, 185.

<sup>5</sup> *Sturlunga saga* II, p. 217.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Sturlunga saga* I, p. 485.

sexual misconduct. However, even though sexuality is targeted in such accusations, the kernel of the *níðingskapr* is not sexual. For this reason the physical punishment of castration, with its obvious sexual overtones, also has implications beyond sexuality. The *níðings*-mark further pointed to the immorality of the *níðingr* and thereby to the danger of lacking ability, or will, to live up to the demands of civilisation.

The question then arises whether blinding also has sexual implications and is thus connected to *níð*. Several examples where blinding and castration are linked point to a connection between blinding and *níð*. In a number of examples, both blinding and castration are used as a punishment for sexual offences, but there are also examples where blinding is used exclusively.<sup>7</sup> These examples show a connection between blinding and castration, and show furthermore that blinding could function as a symbolic castration. In *Grágás* we find blinding, castration and *klámhogg* (a stroke on the buttocks) in juxtaposition.<sup>8</sup>

As an example of the sexual connotations of blinding, I refer to a passage in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* where the masculinity of Egill and his men is tested. They have spent the night at a place, where the host has continually served strong beer, even after Egill's men have become sick. In the end, Egill has to drink also what his men cannot drink. The morning after Egill goes to the host in his bed and cuts off his beard and pokes out one of his eyes. To understand Egill's motives, we should remember, that it was a sign of masculinity to be able to drink a lot without getting too drunk.<sup>9</sup> When the host forces Egill and his men to drink in this way, he is putting their masculinity to the test. Only Egill passes the test. Egill's revenge is carefully thought out. To cut off a man's beard is *níð*. Accusations of beardlessness were accusations of femininity.<sup>10</sup> At the same time Egill pokes an eye out, that is, he symbolically castrates his host. Egill responds to the attack on his own masculinity by marking his attacker with physical signs, that, in the language of *níð*, would equal accusations of effeminacy.

Despite the debilitating symbolic value of blinding, in mythology one often finds the blind associated with wisdom and prophecy. The one-eyed Óðinn is wise above all. Nevertheless, Hqðr's blindness does not seem to suggest any supernatural powers. We only know Hqðr from the myth of Baldr's death. In *Snorri's Edda* and *Vqluspá*, Baldr's death is the tragic event that leads to Ragnarok.<sup>11</sup> In these sources Hqðr's only accomplishment is fratricide. A very

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Heimskringla* III, p. 383; *Sigrarðs saga ok Valbrands*, 185-186.

<sup>8</sup> *Grágás* I, pp. 147-8.

<sup>9</sup> In *Hávamál* 19, one is advised not to get too drunk, and when Þórr goes to see Útgarðaloki, one of the tests is how much he is able to drink. *Snorra Edda*, *Gylfaginning* 31.

<sup>10</sup> In *Njáls saga* *níðvísur* are composed about Njáll, where he is called beardless. *Njáls saga*, p. 113.

<sup>11</sup> In the Hauksbók-edition of *Vqluspá* Baldr's death is not mentioned at all. When, in the

different account of Hǫðr, in the role of a human hero, is found in the third book of *Gesta Danorum*. Considering the scholarly attention paid to the Baldr-myth, surprisingly little has been said about Hǫðr.

In 1881, Sophus Bugge argued that the presentation of the myth in *Gylfaginning* was mainly inspired by legends about Jesus. He argued that Hǫðr's blindness was an outward sign of his inner blindness. In Bugge's opinion, his blindness was not a feature of the original myth, but instead borrowed from Christ's crucifixion. Hǫðr would thus correspond to the blind Longinus who pierced Jesus in the side with a spear. By touching the blood of Jesus, Longinus regained his sight and upon discovering what he had done, grieved the deed.<sup>12</sup> If, with Sophus Bugge, we read Christian symbolism into the myth, Hǫðr takes on a somewhat benign if naive character. In Christian texts, blindness commonly symbolises spiritual darkness or disbelief, which can be healed by exposure to Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Hǫðr's blindness would point to his ignorance and lack of insight into his action. However, in the context of *Gylfaginning*, if Hǫðr acts exclusively out of ignorance, it becomes difficult to explain, why his and Baldr's reunion after Ragnarøk is stressed, since if Hǫðr did not have any ill will towards Baldr, their reconciliation would be rather pointless.

I therefore prefer to read Hǫðr's blindness in the context of the complex system of meaning associated with eyes and blindness in Old Norse literature. In that context Hǫðr's blindness is a symbol of his *níðingsskapr*. As *níðingr* Hǫðr is susceptible to accusations of sexual depravity, effeminacy and unmanliness in the form of *níð*, despite the fact that we know from Snorri, that Hǫðr possesses great physical strength.<sup>14</sup> By killing his brother, he commits a *níðingsverk*. Hǫðr's blindness is the sign, not of his physical weakness, but of his moral blindness, which is the precondition for his crime. In Snorri's version of the Baldr-myth, Loki is the one who orchestrates the killing. Loki acts on ill will, and the fact that Hǫðr, without consideration, lets himself be used by this ill will, shows Hǫðr's moral depravity. Hǫðr is blind, as it were, to the fact that he aims the missile at his brother. He is blind to his fraternal feelings and has no appreciation for the foundational principle of the family. Symbolically, the blind Hǫðr stands outside the divine community as he stands outside the ring of the gods in *Gylfaginning*. When he is finally given the opportunity to participate in the joint game of the gods, this has fatal consequences. By killing his own brother, he destroys his possibility of entering the community, because fratricide violates its most sacred principle. This brings the world of the gods to its ruin. The blind Hǫðr, an easy prey to the forces of chaos, is strong enough to

---

following, referring to Baldr's death in connection with *Völuspá*, I am referring to the Codex Regius of *The Poetic Edda*.

<sup>12</sup> Sophus Bugge: *Studier over de Nordiske Gude- og Heltesagn*, 34-39.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Heimskringla* III, 230; *Postala sögur*, 581 and *Mariu saga*, 965.

<sup>14</sup> "Hǫðr heitir einj assnj; ærit er hann sterkr [...]". *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, Gylfaginning*, 15, 33.

bring the world to its ruin.

Contrary to Høðr, Óðinn is no outsider in the community of the gods. He is the supreme god, he is wise and possesses second-sight, and he is, as is well-known, one-eyed. The pledging of Óðinn's eye is mentioned in *Völuspá*, stanzas 27-28, and *Gylfaginning* in Snorri's *Edda*.<sup>15</sup> According to *Gylfaginning*, Mímir's well is under the root of Yggdrasill which points in the direction of the realm of the rímpursar. Here wisdom and reason are hidden. It is furthermore told, that Mímir is wise, because he drinks from the well every morning. Moreover, we hear that Óðinn once asked for a drink from the well, but did not receive anything until he pledged his eye.<sup>16</sup> Snorri's words about Óðinn's eye do not appear in our manuscripts of *Völuspá*.

Most scholars agree that Óðinn, by the pledging of his eye, receives access to Mímir's knowledge. Several things indicate that Mímir may be a giant or at least connected to the giants.<sup>17</sup> The giants pose a threat against civilisation, while the gods most often try to sustain order. Due to their geographical placement in the mythical world, the giants are connected to the uncivilised: they live far away from the centres of civilisation, Ásgarðr and Miðgarðr, and they are associated with cold and frost.<sup>18</sup> Being connected to the realm of the giants, Mímir would thereby be connected to this concept of the uncivilised.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Mímir is dead: in *Ynglinga saga* we are told, that the Vanir decapitated him and sent the head to Óðinn. There is, therefore, no doubt that Mímir is, in some way, connected to the underworld. The water in Mímir's well is thus also connected to the underworld. In fact the element of water in Old Norse mythology is generally a symbol of forces that cannot be confined.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, water is connected to the female deities: Frigg lives in Fensalir, Sága lives in Sökkvabekkr and Urðr lives in Urðarbrunnr. In addition sacrifices made in water are made to the Vanir.<sup>21</sup> The associations of water therefore relate well to the chthonic character of the Vanir.<sup>22</sup> Mímir is, accordingly, of the

<sup>15</sup> *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, Gylfaginning* 8, 22.

<sup>16</sup> There is remarkable difference between the wording of *Völuspá* in Codex Regius of *The Poetic Edda* and the manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda*. The Hauksbók-version of *Völuspá* only has stanza 27. The allusive stanzas are obscure, and this is why all scholars do not believe that the stanzas revolve around a pledge. Cf. Jan de Vries: "Ginnungagap", 47-48; Jere Fleck: "Óðinn's Self-Sacrifice - A new Interpretation. II: The Ritual Landscape", 400. I agree with Sigurður Nordal and Margaret Clunies Ross, that the meaning of the stanzas of *Völuspá* seems to be that Valfaðir's pledge is Óðinn's eye. Sigurður Nordal: *Völuspá*, 66; Margaret Clunies Ross: *Prolonged Echoes* I, 221.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Finnur Jónsson: 1912, A I, 654-655; 1910, B I, 658-659; M. Ciklamini: "Óðinn and the giants", 152.

<sup>18</sup> H. A. Molenaar: "Concentric Dualism in Scandinavian Mythology", 34.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Jens Peter Schjødt: "Horizontale und vertikale Achsen in der vorchristlichen skandinavischen Kosmologie", 48.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross: *Prolonged Echoes* I, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Britt-Mari Näsström: "Stucken, hängd och dränkt", 95.

<sup>22</sup> Jens Peter Schjødt: "Aser og vaner: Historie eller struktur", 62.

same nature, and so is the wisdom in his well.

In one of the two versions of how Óðinn came in possession of Mímir's knowledge, Mímir is decapitated, which can be read as his removal from his chthonic origin.<sup>23</sup> But in the other version, which is the focus of this study, Óðinn pledges his eye to get possession of Mímir's knowledge. Thus an act of approaching takes place in both versions of the myth, either Mímir must approach Óðinn symbolically or vice versa, in order that Óðinn achieve access to Mímir's knowledge. We must assume that Óðinn, in the pledging version, wishes to get possession of knowledge connected to the Vanir, the feminine and the chthonic. In her study, *Prolonged Echoes*, volume I, Margaret Clunies Ross shows that qualities such as intellectual creativity, civilisation, and life are connected to the realm of the masculine in Old Norse mythology, while disorder, death and sexuality are connected to the realm of the feminine.<sup>24</sup> The knowledge that Óðinn wishes to achieve would thus be connected to the feminine realm. This agrees with Jens Peter Schjødt's interpretation of the myth of Óðinn's conquest of the skaldic mead: the wisdom, represented by the skaldic mead, does not become fruitful for Óðinn until it has been in the possession of a woman in the underworld.<sup>25</sup>

To achieve this specific knowledge, Óðinn sacrifices an eye. Given the symbolic value of eyes (masculine strength and status), it seems that Óðinn indeed surrenders a part of his masculinity to achieve a share in the chthonic and feminine knowledge hidden in Mímir's well. In general it seems that civilisation, which is associated with the Æsir and the masculine, is represented in Old Norse mythology as being superior to the earthly and watery elements of the uncivilised, associated with the Vanir and the feminine. But surprisingly enough the myth also shows that Óðinn, by sacrificing a part of his masculinity, achieves supreme wisdom from a feminine source. The numinous wisdom is, therefore, created by uniting the feminine and the masculine. Óðinn's connection to the feminine realm cannot be read as an indication of weakness. Else Mundal has interpreted the alliance with the forces of chaos as a way to release the creative potential of these forces.<sup>26</sup> The transgression of taboo contributes to the constitution of Óðinn as the supreme god of the Old Norse pantheon.

Nevertheless, despite the sacrifice of one of his eyes, one of Óðinn's heiti is Báleygr, the fire-eyed. The eye, that Óðinn still has, is powerful: with his gaze Óðinn can frighten his enemies, blind or deafen them in the struggle, and stop weapons in the air.<sup>27</sup> Thus Óðinn's missing eye symbolises his femininity, his

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross: *Prolonged Echoes* I, 215.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross: *Prolonged Echoes* I, 187-188.

<sup>25</sup> Jens Peter Schjødt: "Livsdrik og vidensdrik", 94-95.

<sup>26</sup> Else Mundal: "Androgony as an Image of Chaos", 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Völuspá* 28; *Hávamál* 148 og 150; *Ynglinga saga*, *Heimskringla* I, 17.

connection to the feminine realm, while his remaining eye symbolises the connection to the masculine realm. The one-eyedness is a symbol of Óðinn's duality and thereby of his indisputable position as the utterly invincible, supreme god.

Óðinn's two-sided knowledge contrasts with Þórr's one-sided masculinity. Even though Óðinn is called the fire-eyed, his one eye is not stressed in the myths in the same way as are Þórr's eyes. We meet the strong eyes of Þórr several times: in the myth of Þórr's fishing trip,<sup>28</sup> in the myth of his journey to Útgarðaloki, and finally in the myth of how he got his stolen hammer back. It is common in these descriptions to emphasise the terrifying aspect of his gaze. The assumption that Þórr's sharp eyes are an important feature of his physiognomy is supported by findings of Þórr's hammers, from about AD 1000, with distinct eyes depicted on the hammer itself.<sup>29</sup>

In *Þrymskviða* Þórr awakes one morning and lacks his hammer, Mjöllnir. It has been stolen by the giant Þrymr, who demands to marry Freyja before he returns the hammer. Freyja for her part refuses categorically, because by marrying a giant she would be considered *vergjörn* or oversexed. In the end, the supermasculine Þórr has to dress up and impersonate Freyja as bride to regain his Mjöllnir. This, of course, causes him to fear that the other Æsir will accuse him of *ergi* or effeminacy. When Þórr is finally sitting in Jötunheimar in his bridal costume, the giant lifts the veil to kiss the bride, but jumps back frightened:

‘Hví ero ondótt  
augo Freyio?  
icci mér ór augom  
eldr of brenna.’ *Þrymskviða* 27

[Why are Freyja's eyes foul? Me thinks a fire burns from her eyes.]

Since the strong gaze was a sign of masculine strength, the giant does not expect such a gaze from his bride. Even though Þórr is forced to act in an unmanly manner by dressing in the bridal costume, he never jeopardises his masculinity. In contrast to both Loki and Óðinn, Þórr never willingly impersonates a woman. Add to this his uninhibited behaviour in Jötunheimar: Þórr eats and drinks like a real man and his gaze alone is enough to make the giant jump back in fright. When the hammer finally is within Þórr's reach, he does not hesitate to take revenge for his humiliation as well as the theft of the hammer, by fiercely killing the giant and his family.

<sup>28</sup> This myth plays a part in three skaldic poems (*Ragnarsdrápa*, *Húsdrápa* and apparently in a fragment of a poem by Gamli Gnævaðarskáld), but Þórr's gaze is only mentioned in *Húsdrápa* and in Snorri's Edda.

<sup>29</sup> John Lindow: *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods*, 15; cf. illustration no. 17 in E. O. G. Turville-Petre: *Myth and Religion of the North*. In addition to this, we also have mention of Þórr's sharp gaze in *Heimskringla*; *Heimskringla* II, 234.

Þórr is not as complex a character as Óðinn. Physically he represents strength but mentally he is somewhat naive.<sup>30</sup> He functions as the protector of humans and gods, as is demonstrated by a number of kennings (e.g. *Hrungnis haussprengir*, *Fjall-Gauts fellir*, *Miðgarðs véurr* and *jǫtna ótti*).<sup>31</sup> In Þórr's temples oaths were sworn by a ring,<sup>32</sup> which leads to the assumption that Þórr may have guaranteed the observance of these oaths. His hammer was used in the ritual of marriage, as in *Þrymskviða*. By his guaranteeing the observance of oaths and marriage contracts, Þórr obviously has a role to play in maintaining order and civilisation among gods and men.

By struggling against giants and giantesses, Þórr struggles against the chthonic forces of chaos that threaten civilisation. Contrary to Óðinn, Þórr's relationship and connection to this realm is unambiguously antagonistic. If we view the myths in the light of the opposition between the masculine and feminine realm, Þórr is without reservations located in the masculine realm. The myth of Þórr's journey to Geirrþøðr contains a good example of the overwhelming destructiveness of the feminine as represented in the mythology. As you will recall, in this myth the giantess Gjalp almost drowns Þórr with her unrestrained urinating.

Þórr's fierce gaze is therefore in full harmony with his one-sided connection with the masculine realm, and the repetitive emphasis on his two strong eyes is not surprising: Þórr is after all the chief representative of masculine values in the Old Norse pantheon.

The one-sided relationship to only one realm does not give supernatural creative powers. Høðr and Þórr are respectively connected to the feminine and the masculine realm, and none of them ever approaches possessing anything reminding of Óðinn's numinous wisdom and superiority. Only Óðinn of the three gods in this study is connected to both the feminine and the masculine realm. Óðinn's one-eyedness shows his crossing the limits, his connection to both realms, as Høðr's blindness and Þórr's sharp eyes respectively show their relationship to the feminine and masculine realm.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

- Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. 1912-1914. Ed. Finnur Jónsson. Bd. I-II A (Tekst efter håndskrifterne) [Skj A I/II] og I-II B (Rettet tekst med tolkning) [Skj B I/II]. København.
- Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. 1962. Eds. Gustav Neckel og Hans Kuhn. Heidelberg.
- Edda Snorra Sturlusonar. Udgivet efter håndskrifterne*. 1931. Ed. Finnur Jónsson. København.
- Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. 1886-1888. Ed. Finnur Jónsson. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 17. København.
- Grágás* I-II. 1852. Ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen. København.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Hárbarðsljóð*, where Þórr cannot compete with Óðinn's knowledge, and on the journey to Útgarðaloki he spends the night in a glove, which Loki mentions as shameful in *Lokasenna* 60.

<sup>31</sup> For further examples, cf.: Rudolf Meissner: *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, 254.

<sup>32</sup> H. R. Ellis Davidson: *Gods and Myths of the Viking Age*, 76-77.

- Hauksbók*. 1892-1896. Ed. Finnur Jónsson. Det kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab. København.
- Heimskringla* I-IV. 1893-1900. Ed. Finnur Jónsson. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 23. København.
- Mariu saga*. 1871. Ed. C. R. Unger. Det norske oldskriftselskabs samlinger, 11-16. Christiania.
- Njáls saga*. 1954. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit XII. Hið íslenska fornritafélag. Reykjavík.
- Postola sögur*. 1874. Ed. C. R. Unger. Christiania.
- Saxonis Gesta Danorum* I-II. 1931. Ed. J. Olrik og H. Ræder. København.
- Stjrgarðs saga ok Valbrands*. 1965, in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* V, ed. Agnete Loth, Editiones Arnarnæ, Series B, vol. 24. København, 109-94.
- Sturlunga saga* I-II. 1906-1911. Ed. Kr. Kälund. Det kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab. København.

#### Secondary sources

- Bugge, Sophus. 1881-1889. *Studier over de nordiske gude- og heltesagns oprindelse*, Christiania.
- Ciklamini, M. 1962. "Óðinn and the Giants" in *Neophilologus* 46, 145-157.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1981. "An Interpretation of the Myth of Þórr's Encounter with Geirrøðr and his Daughters" in *Specvlm Norroenvm. Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke et. al. 370-391.
- 1994. *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse Myths in Medieval Society*, Vol. 1: The Myths. Odense.
- Derek Coltman, Chicago and London, 171-191.
- Fleck, Jere. 1971. "Óðinn's Self-Sacrifice - a New Interpretation. II: The Ritual Landscape" in *Scandinavian Studies* 43, 385-413.
- Fritzner, Johan. 1954 [1883-1896]. *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog* I-III. Nytt uforandret opptrykk av 2. utgave. Oslo.
- Kroesen, Riti. 1985. "Hvessir augu sem hildingar. The awe-inspiring eyes of the King" in *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 100, 41-58.
- Lindow, John. 1997. *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods. Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology* in *FF Communications* 262, Helsinki.
- 1988. "Addressing Thor" in *Scandinavian Studies* 60, 119-136.
- Marold, Edith. 1998. "Die Augen des Herrschers" in *Beretning fra syttende tværfaglige vikingesymposium*, ed. Dietrich Meier. Aarhus universitet Moesgård.
- Meissner, Rudolf. 1921. *Die Kenningar der Skalden. Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*. Bonn und Leipzig.
- Molenaar, H.A. 1982. "Concentric Dualism in Scandinavian Mythology" in *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land-en volkenkunde*, 29-53.
- Mundal, Else. 1990. "Forholdet mellom gudar og jotnar" in *Studia anthroponymica scandinavica. Tidskrift för nordisk personnamnsforskning*, 8, 5-18.
- 1998. "Androgyny as an Image of Chaos" in *Maal og minne*, 1-10.
- Norwich, John Julius. 1996 [1995]. *Byzantium. The Decline and Fall*. 3. oplag. New York.
- Näsström, Britt-Mari. 1997. "Stucken hängd och dränkt. Rituelle mönster i norrön litteratur och i Adam av Bremens notiser om Uppsalakulten" in *Uppsala och Adam av Bremen*, ed. Anders Hultgård. Falun, 75-99.
- Peters, Edwards. 1970. *The Shadow King. Rex Inutilis in Medieval Law and Literature, 751-1327*. New Haven and London.
- Schjødt, Jens Peter. 1983. "Livsdrik og vidensdrik. Et problem-komplex i nordisk mytologi" in *Religionsvidenskabeligt tidsskrift* 2, 85-102.
- 1984. "Aser og vaner: Historie eller struktur" in *Fallos*. Aarhus, 48-70.
- 1990. "Horizontale und vertikale Achsen in der vorchristlichen skandinavischen Kosmologie" in *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names. Based on Papers Read at the Symposium Encounters between Religions in Old Nordic Times and on Cultic Place-Names held at Åbo, Finland, on the 19th-21st of August, 1987*, ed. Tore Ahlbäck. Åbo, 35-57.
- Sigurður Nordal. 1927 [1923]. *Völuspá. Vølvens spádom*. Oversat fra islandsk af Hans Albrechtsen. København.
- Turville-Petre, E.O.G. 1964. *Myth and Religion of the North. The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. New York, Chicago, San Fransisco.
- Vries, Jan de. 1930-1931. "Ginnungagap" in *Acta philologica scandinavica* 5, 41-66.
- 1961. *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Leiden.

# Andrew Ramsay's and Olof Dalin's influence on the Romantic Interpretation of Old Norse Mythology

Lars Lönnroth

Gothenburg University

It is well known that the interpretation of Old Norse myth in the Romantic era was to a large extent determined by the idea that the mythology of *Snorra Edda* somehow contained the same sacred symbols and the same religious philosophy as Christianity. This idea, which is anticipated in Snorri's Prologus, permeates such theoretical works as N.F.S. Grundtvig's *Nordens Mytologi* (1808 and 1832) and a large number of Romantic poems based on Norse myth and written in Denmark, Sweden, or Germany during the first half of the 19th century.

In this paper I intend to show that the Romantic interpretation of Norse myth was influenced by a work on mythology in French, *Discours sur la mythologie*, published in Paris in 1727 as an appendix to *Les Voyages de Cyrus*, a novel by a nowadays forgotten but in his own time well-known though somewhat controversial Scottish writer by the name of Andrew Ramsay.<sup>1</sup> Let

---

<sup>1</sup> I have so far not been able to get hold of the original version of 1727 but have used a later French edition printed in Sweden: *La Nouvelle CYROPÉDIE ou Les Voyages de CYRUS*,

us first take a look at the author and then at his work and then, finally, see how its ideas were received and transmitted to the Swedish historian Olof Dalin and from him to other scholars and poets interested in the Norse myths of *Snorra Edda*.

Andrew Michel Ramsay, also known as “Chevalier Ramsay” or “Zoroaster”, was born in 1686 and grew up in Ayr, Scotland, as the son of a baker and studied for priesthood at the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. After having become increasingly dissatisfied with the Protestant sectarianism prevailing in his native country, however, young Ramsay gave up the idea of priesthood and moved to London and later to Holland and France, where he settled in 1710 and stayed until his death in 1743. He started his somewhat adventurous intellectual career abroad as an ardent follower of the famous French Archbishop Fénelon, whose enlightened form of Catholicism strongly appealed to him. Most of Ramsay’s published works, including *Les Voyages de Cyrus*, are in some way or other influenced by Fénelon’s thinking. His own achievement as a prolific writer in the field of educational fiction, philosophy and theology made Ramsay well known both in France and in Britain, securing him eventually a doctorate at Oxford and a certificate of nobility in French from James Stuart, the Old Pretender. In Paris, where Ramsay lived most of his life, he made the acquaintance of many prominent writers and intellectual visitors from abroad, some of whom despised him intensely while others enthusiastically assisted him in spreading Fénelon’s and his own ideas to the enlightened reading public of Europe.<sup>2</sup>

*Les Voyages de Cyrus* is an “educational novel” of the kind introduced by Fénelon in his for 18th century readers immensely attractive but for most modern readers immensely boring piece of fiction, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699). The basic idea of such educational novels is to teach young people the right way to Truth and Good Customs by describing the upbringing and experience of some famous young prince, in Fénelon’s case the son of Ulysses, Telemachus, in Ramsay’s case the great Persian ruler, Cyrus, whose education had previously been described by Xenophon in his classic work *Cyropaedia* (early 4th century B.C.).<sup>3</sup> What distinguishes Ramsay’s *Les Voyages de Cyrus* from both *Les Aventures de Télémaque* and *Cyropaedia*, however, is its interest in comparative religion and mythology. The hero of the novel, Cyrus, is shown

---

*Histoire Morale, Suivie d'un Discours sur la THÉOLOGIE & la MYTHOLOGIE des Anciens, par Mr. le Chevalier A.M. De Ramsay, Docteur de l'Université d'Oxford* (Calmar, 1833). I have also consulted a Swedish 18th century translation, *Anders Ramsays REGENTE LÅRDOM, Uti CYRI Fordom Persisk Prints och omsider en stor Monarchs UNGDOMS ÖFNINGAR Och RESOR, Efter Fransyska och Engelska Originalerne På Swenska UTGIFWEN Af Andreas Wilde* (Stockholm, 1749).

<sup>2</sup> On Ramsay’s biography, see G.D. Henderson, *Chevalier Ramsay* (London & Edinburgh, 1952) and Albert Cherel, *Un aventurier religieux au XVIIIe siècle, André Michel Ramsay* (Paris, 1926).

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Grandroute, *Le roman pédagogique de Fénelon à Rousseau I-II* (Berne, 1983), particularly its chapter on Ramsay’s *Les Voyages de Cyrus*, I, 227-300.

travelling from country to country of Early Antiquity - Persia, Greece, Egypt, Palestine, etc. - and meeting with representatives of their various religions, whose advantages and disadvantages he is then able to compare from a philosophical and religious point of view. In the end Cyrus concludes that all religions contain an element of Truth and should thus be respected, even though the religion of the Hebrews - which anticipates the great religion of the future, Christianity - should be regarded as the best available faith. By reaching this conclusion Cyrus becomes a wise and tolerant ruler of Persia.

This view of the ancient religions is further developed in Ramsay's theoretical appendix, *Discours sur la mythologie*, which is partly dependent on the ideas of Fénelon but also on a much earlier theological work, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, by the English 17th century Platonist Ralph Cudworth.<sup>4</sup> In his *Discours*, Ramsay attempts to show that even though the poets of antiquity have celebrated many different gods, the "philosophers" of all cultures have been conscious of the fact that there is really only one true god, whose essence consists of the three basic properties of Power (*puissance*), Wisdom (*intelligence*), and Love (*amour*). This trinity is, according to Ramsay, sacred in several ancient pagan religions, and Ramsay therefore suggests, although with some hesitation, that they may all, at least to some extent, anticipate Christianity.<sup>5</sup> He argues, furthermore, that most ancient religions presuppose the existence of a Divine Mediator (*Dieu mitoyen*), corresponding to Christ, who lovingly intervenes in the eternal struggle between Good and Evil: thus Mithras in Persia, Orus in Egypt and various other pagan gods should be understood as such mediators.<sup>6</sup> Such similarities between the various mythologies of the world indicate, according to Ramsay, that they are all rooted in the same original Divine Revelation, although they have not all preserved it as well as the Jews and the Christians have.

This ecumenical and tolerant view of pagan religion was considered deistic and hence unchristian by some 18th century readers, but Ramsay himself renounced such an interpretation of his work. He insisted that his intention in writing *Les Voyages de Cyrus* was to "make the atheist a deist, the deist a Christian, and the Christian a Catholic."<sup>7</sup> And it is certainly correct that his book does favor Catholic Christianity before other religions. Yet he never presents his favorite religion as one that has a monopoly on truth, and to that

<sup>4</sup> This work was published in London in 1678. Its influence on Ramsay is demonstrated by Chérel (1926) and Henderson (1952).

<sup>5</sup> "Il serait téméraire de soutenir, que les Payens aient jamais en aucune connaissance d'une Trinité de Personnes distinctes dans l'unité indivisible de la Nature Divine; mais il est constant, que les Chaldéens & les Egyptiens croyaient que tous les attributs de la Divinité pouvaient se réduire à trois: *puissance, intelligence & amour*. [...] C'est pour cela que les anciens Philosophes regardaient le nombre de trois comme mystérieux." *Discours sur la mythologie* (1833), 8.

<sup>6</sup> *op.cit.*, 57, 64.

<sup>7</sup> "le dessein de mon ouvrage est de rendre l'athée déiste, le déiste chrétien et le chrétien catholique", quoted from Grandroute (1983), I:263.

extent his ideas fitted in very well with the secular spirit of the Enlightenment.

Ramsay's ideas had a strong influence on the Swedish poet and historian Olof Dalin (1708-63), who was one of the major Scandinavian representatives of the Enlightenment and, for a long period, the leading Swedish authority on Old Norse and Early Medieval culture. Like Ludvig Holberg in Denmark, Dalin was a witty and merciless critic of the strict Lutheran orthodoxy and the pompous nationalism that had been characteristic of Scandinavian letters in the 17th century.<sup>8</sup> He wrote satires against the clergy and against chauvinistic historians who believed that Swedish and Norse culture was older and more venerable than that of Greece or Egypt. In his own historical works, Dalin broke radically with tradition by introducing a more realistic perspective on Sweden's past and a somewhat more critical way of dealing with Old Norse sources.<sup>9</sup> When in 1739 he visited Paris, he made the personal acquaintance of Andrew Ramsay, who not only seems to have taken good care of the Swedish visitor but also inspired him to see Norse mythology in a new theological light.<sup>10</sup>

Ramsay's influence became evident when Dalin in 1747 published the first volume of a new History of Sweden, which had been commissioned by the Swedish parliament.<sup>11</sup> In this volume Dalin devotes much space to the beliefs and customs of pagan Sweden, basing his information particularly on Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and *Prose Edda*. The way in which Dalin presents the Norse myths, however, is clearly derived from Ramsay's *Discours*, as can be seen even in the first paragraph of the chapter about religion:

Sveriges äldste Invånares Guda-lära har gådt äfven så högt i lius och sanning som de gamle Egyptiers, Chaldéers och Persers, fast hon ej varit utprälad med så mycken wältalighet. Jag talar ej om den Poëtiska, som ej bestod af annat än dikt; ty Skalderne gjorde Gudomligheter efter behag af alt det de sågo i Naturen och den enfaldiga werlden trodde dem på orden [---] Jag menar allenast den Lära, som deras Drottare eller Philosopher förkunnade, hvilken alltid så wäl hos oss, som hos Græker och Romare, bör skiljas från den Poëtiska.<sup>12</sup>

(The mythology of Sweden's oldest inhabitants has reached as high a level of enlightenment and truth as that of the ancient Egyptians, Chaldeans and Persians, even

<sup>8</sup> For general information about Dalin's life and letters see Karl Warburg, *Olof Dalin. Hans lif och gerning* (Sthlm 1884); Martin Lamm, *Olof Dalin. En litteraturhistorisk undersökning af hans verk* (Stockholm, 1908), and *Olof von Dalin. Samhällsdebattör, historiker, språkförnyare*, utgiven av Dalinsällskapet (Varberg 1997).

<sup>9</sup> On Dalin's historiography see in particular Nils Eriksson, *Dalin-Botin-Lagerbring. Historieforskning och historieskrivning i Sverige 1747-1787* (Göteborg, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Concerning Dalin's contact with Ramsay in Paris see Warburg (1984), 270 f. Henderson (1952) mentions Ramsay's "ready hospitality and kindly reception of visitors, and his helpful concern as he sped them on their way" (236).

<sup>11</sup> *Svea Rikes Historia ifrån des begynnelse til våra tider. Efter Hans Kongl. Maj:ts nådiga behag på Rikens Höglofliga Ständers Åstundan författad af Olof Dalin. Förste Delen, Som innehåller Hela Hedniska Tiden* (Stockholm, 1747).

<sup>12</sup> *Svea Rikes Historia* I (1747), 116-117.

though it has not been adorned with as much eloquence. I do not speak of the poetic mythology which consisted of nothing but fiction; for the poets made Deities after their own desire and the stupid world believed their words [---] I am referring only to that doctrine which was taught by their Drottar or philosophers and which should always, in our case as well as that of the Greeks and the Romans, be separated from that of the poets.)

The distinction which Dalin makes here between the mythology of poets and the mythology of philosophers is obviously derived from Ramsay's *Discours* - to which he also refers in a marginal note - and the same thing may be said about his reference to "Egyptians" and "Chaldeans" (Cf. the quotation from Ramsay in note 5). It is much less obvious what Dalin means by "Drottar eller Philosopher", since no such category of religious thinkers is known from Old Norse sources. He may be thinking, however, of learned men such as Snorri Sturluson or of noble heathens like the ones mentioned in the Prologus of the *Prose Edda* as archaic believers in some unknown "controller of the heavenly bodies" (*stjórnari himintunglanna*). At any rate it appears likely that Dalin has found a confirmation of Ramsay's theories in what Snorri says in Prologus about the original faith of the heathens and its later development into various pagan religions:

Þá vissu þeir eigi, hvar ríki hans var. En því trúðu þeir, at hann réð öllum hlutum á jörðu ok í lopti, himins ok himintunglum, sævarins ok veðranna. En til þess at heldr mætti frá segja eða í minni festa, þá gáfu þeir nöfn með sjálfum sér öllum hlutum, ok hefir þessi átrúnaðr á marga lund breytzk, svá sem þjóðarnir skiptusk ok tungunnar greindusk.<sup>13</sup>

(But they did not know where his kingdom was. And so they believed that he ruled all things on earth and in the sky, of heaven and the heavenly bodies, of the sea and the weathers. But so as to be better able to give an account of this and fix it in memory, they then gave a name among themselves to everything, and this religion has changed in many ways as nations became distinct and languages branched)<sup>14</sup>

As one can see from this quotation, there are close similarities between Snorri's thinking about pagan mythology and Ramsay's, a fact which makes it easy to understand why Dalin decided to combine the two. He continues his own presentation of Old Swedish religion - in its early and "philosophical" form - as follows:

Denna [lära] hade sin upprinnelse af Noachs och Stamfädernes rena kundskap om Gud; men med tiden, antingen af vårdslöshet eller människors tilsatser, wansläktade hon liksom andra från sin första menlöshet; hon underhölls dock temmeligen deruti hos de äldste Scandianer af den urgamla och stora Sedo-lära, som kallades *Volu-Spa* eller den första *Edda* [---] Denna Lära utspäddes och bortskiämdes mycket så wäl af Odens och Asarnes som derefter af Skaldernas Dikter, så at hon blef sig grufveligen olik: dock kan

<sup>13</sup> Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, "Prologus", ch. 1. Cf. Lars Lönnroth, "The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas," *Scandinavian Studies* 41 (1969) and Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's ars poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (Odense 1987)

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Faulkes's translation (Everyman Classics, 1987).

ännu ganska mycket godt hämtas af det lilla, som ej blifvit förloradt (117-118).

(This [creed] was based on the pure knowledge of God possessed by Noah and the tribal ancestors; but eventually it was, like the other [creeds], corrupted from its first innocence, either because of carelessness or because of human additions to it; yet it was reasonably well kept up among the oldest Scandinavians by the ancient and great ethical doctrine called *Volu-Spa* or the first *Edda* [---] This doctrine was diluted and corrupted first by Odin and the Aesir and later by the the poetry of the skalds, so that it changed miserably: yet much good can still be derived from the small portion that did not get lost).

This description of the religious development among the early Scandinavians is in good accordance with Snorri and also with Ramsay, since both of them maintain that the original revelation was corrupted at a later stage among the pagans. According to Snorri's *Edda*, the most important corruption took place when Odin made King Gylfi and his Swedes believe that the *Æsir* were gods and should be worshipped as such. Both Snorri and Dalin see the skalds as Odin's direct followers and hence as principal transmitters of pagan myths and delusions. It should be noted, however, that Dalin does not see *Völuspá* and other mythical lays of the *Edda* as poetic creations of the skalds but as parts of an ancient philosophical *Sedo-Lära*, or ethical doctrine, in which God's divine revelation has been better preserved than in skaldic poetry. This view is further elaborated in one of Dalin's long footnotes, in which he describes the oldest *Edda* as an extremely archaic and valuable collection of religious texts from the pagan era, later in part destroyed by Christian monks but again collected and partly restored around 1114 by Sæmundr Sigfússon and then again around 1215 by Snorri Sturluson, who is credited with the noble deed of having saved the last remaining fragments of the *Edda* before it was completely lost to posterity.<sup>15</sup> Although Dalin's way of referring to the destructive activities of Christian monks is clearly influenced by the anticlerical spirit of the Enlightenment, his views about the preservation of the *Edda* are mainly derived from earlier antiquarians such as Brynjólfur Sveinsson, who regarded both *Sæmundar Edda* and *Snorra Edda* as late redactions of a much older mythological work from prehistoric times.<sup>16</sup>

Dalin then proceeds to describe the original monotheism of the early Swedes and their belief in a Trinity similar to that of Christianity:

En enda Alsmäktig Gud tilbad vår äldsta Svenska werld under namn af Oden och tillade

<sup>15</sup> "Med den gamla förlorade *Edda* war det så fatt: Wid Christendomens början war hon af Munkarne mäst utrotad, när den witre Isländaren Sæmund Sigfusson, kallad den *Frode* eller *Wise*, sammanhämtade alt hvad som kunde igenfinnas wid pass A. 1114. och blef hans samling en *Skatt af hela menniskliga Wisheten*, säger Brynolfus Svenon. Episc. Scalholt. in Epist. ad Stephanium. Men denna Skatt blef äfven förlorad af samma orsak som förr, tilö dess den kloke Isländaren Snorre Sturleson räddade hvad han kunde och utgaf åtminstone en skugga deraf, i det han hopskref *Edda* och *Scalda* wid pass A. 1215" Dalin (1747), 118, note f.

<sup>16</sup> See Margaret Clunies Ross & Lars Lönnroth, "The Norse Muse: Report from an International Research Project", *alvissmál* 9 (1999), 10.

honom sådana namn och egenskaper, at de hos oss må upväcka förundran: Han kallades *Altings Fader* och *Begynnare*, den *Alrahögste*, den *Evige* [---] Liksom de gamle Chaldéer och Egyptier begripit alla Guds egenskaper under *Makt*, *Kärlek* och *Wishet*, hvarföre ock Tre-talet varit i så stor wördnad hos de äldste Philosopher; så hafva äfven de gamle Svenske inneslutit Gudomligheten under tre på Kungelige throner sittande personer, *Har*, *Jafn-Har* och *Tridi*, det är, den *Store*, den *Lika-Store* och den *Tredie*, hvarmed de förstådt samma Gudomeliga egenskaper *Makt*, *Kärlek* och *Wishet* (119-123)

(Our oldest Swedish community worshipped one almighty God under the name of Odin and gave him such names and attributed to him such properties that they should make us amazed: He was called *Father of All* and *Beginner*, the *Highest of All*, the *Eternal* [---] In the same manner as the old Chaldeans and Egyptians understood all God's properties as functions of *Power*, *Love*, and *Wisdom*, thus making the number three greatly venerated among the oldest philosophers, so the old Swedes subsumed under the Godhead three persons sitting on royal thrones, *Hárr*, *Jafn-Hárr*, and *Priði*, i.e., the Great, the Just-as-Great and the Third, by which they referred to those same Divine properties *Power*, *Love* and *Wisdom*).

The trinity of *Hárr*, *Jafn-Hárr*, and *Priði*, which confronts King Gylfi in *Gylfaginning*, is thus interpreted according to Ramsay's theory. Further on, however, Dalin explains that Odin represents Power, Thor Love and Frigga Wisdom (140). The various *heiti* for Odin listed by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* are interpreted as referring to the properties of the Allmighty God of Christianity.

Thor is characterized as the "middle god" (*Medel-Gud*) of the Scandinavians just as Orus, according to Ramsay, is the middle god of the Egyptians, Mithras of the Persians, Adonis of the Syrians, etc. The Norse Thunderer is described by Dalin as a "son or designated hero of the Allmighty, the one mentioned by all ancient poets as the one who should come to the world in order to reconcile Good and Evil, strike down everything that is harmful and raise the downtrodden."<sup>17</sup> Thor is thus, in spite of his tough exterior and brutal treatment of the giants, an example of Ramsay's Christ-like *Dieu mitoyen*. It is his task to bring back the innocent and happy Golden Age (*Gylldende Álder*) which preceded the Fall. He reigns in "Bil-Skermer" (i.e., Old Norse *Bilskirnir*), which Dalin interprets as meaning "Protector of Innocence" and "Shield of the Unhappy" (132). His enemy is the Midgard Serpent, who according to Dalin is the symbol of Sin, finally defeated at Ragnarök or Judgment Day (134-135).

Frigga is, correspondingly, said to be originally related to various other similar pagan goddesses such as Pallas of Greece and Isis of Egypt (135), but she is also claimed to be the same as "Urania or the Queen of Heaven", She is also said to be worshipped under the name of Astarte or Astarot - names which in Dalin's opinion are related to Old Norse *Ástar-godð* or "god of love" (138). She is, furthermore, described as the equivalent of the Finnish Jumala and the

<sup>17</sup> "Son eller utskickad Hiälte af den Alrahögste, som alle gamle Poëter omtala, hwilken skulle komma i werlden att förlika det Goda och det Onda, nederslå alt skadeligt och uprätta alt förfallit", Dalin (1747), 124-125.

Ephesian Diana, who in the New Testament (Acts 19:26) is said to be worshipped “in Asia and the whole world” (139 f).

Quoting *Völuspá* and *Snorra-Edda*, Dalin also tries to show that the early Swedes originally believed in the immortality of the soul and an afterlife in either Heaven or Hell (151-154). But this knowledge of the eternal truth is maintained to have been corrupted, in much the same way as in Palestine, when the original monotheism was replaced in the North by the polytheism encouraged by skalds and pagan priests (157 f). The main responsibility for this deterioration Dalin attributes to the immigrant from Asia who called himself Odin, even though his real name was Sigge Fridulfson (100 f). Through the deceptions and poetic art of this man the old religion of Sweden is supposed to have been transformed almost beyond recognition, even though it continued to preserve some fragments of the original truth (11 f, 157 f).

Such is then, in broad outline, Dalin’s view of Old Norse mythology - a view that seemed modern and reasonable enough in its time, even though it does not very well fit the facts as we now know them. Dalin had presented his and Ramsay’s opinions in an attractive way that was easy to understand, and they were soon echoed by other scholars as well as by laymen. The first volume of *Svea Rikes Historia* was translated into German and evidently read by quite a few people outside Sweden.<sup>18</sup> The most influential of his immediate followers was probably Paul-Henri Mallet, the Swiss intellectual who for a while was a professor at the University of Copenhagen and later became the international prophet of the “Nordic Renaissance” in Europe.<sup>19</sup> In the preface of his *Introduction à l’histoire de Dannemarc* (1755) Mallet enthusiastically praises Dalin’s *Svea Rikes Historia*, which he has read in Swedish, especially its chapters on the religion, laws and customs of the early Swedes.<sup>20</sup> And it is indeed obvious that Mallet was influenced by Dalin’s and Ramsay’s method of dealing with the pagan myths. Like them he stresses the importance of separating the religion of philosophers from the mythology of poets. Like them he maintains that the earliest pagans were monotheists who believed in a divine trinity. Like Dalin he presents the god Thor as a mediating, Christ-like figure, “une divinité mitoyenne, un médiateur entre dieu et les hommes,” with close parallels in Asian and Near-Eastern mythologies.

From Mallet and Dalin these thoughts were passed on to people like Thomas Percy in England and Johann Gottfried Herder in Germany,<sup>21</sup> and

<sup>18</sup> *Geschichte des Reiches Schweden* I (Greifswald 1756). Cf. Wahrburg (1884), 360.

<sup>19</sup> See in particular Anton Blanck, *Den nordiska renässansen i 1700-talets litteratur* (Stockholm 1911); Margaret Clunies Ross & Lars Lönnroth, “The Norse Muse: Report from an International Research Project”, *alvissmál* 9 (1999).

<sup>20</sup> *Introduction à l’histoire de Dannemarc, ou l’on traite de la religion, des loix, des mœurs et des usages des anciens Danois* (Copenhague, 1755), 10.

<sup>21</sup> On the reception history see in particular Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain, 1750-1820* (Hesperides, Letterature e culture occidentali, vol. 9, Trieste, 1998); François-Xavier

further on to early Romantic poets in Scandinavia and Germany, who eagerly accepted the idea that Old Norse mythology is not just a barbaric superstition but essentially a Scandinavian or Germanic variety of a universal religion ultimately based on divine revelation and hence a sublime reflection of Absolute Truth. This made it possible for the poets to use the Norse myths as symbols of Christian and Romantic metaphysics, and this was in fact what many of them did.

In an early review of Mallet's Danish history, published in *Königsberger Gelehrten und Politischen Zeitungen* on the 12th of August 1765, Johann Gottfried Herder not only praises Mallet and, incidentally, "der vortreflichen Schwedischen Reichsgeschichte des Olof Dalins" for having presented Old Norse mythology and culture so well to modern readers, but he also anticipates the later poetic development when he writes the following about the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson and its possibilities as a treasure chest for modern poets:

Es kann dies Buch eine Rüstkammer eines neuen Deutschen Genies seyn, das sich auf den Flügeln der Celtischen Einbildungskraft in neue Wolken erhebt und Gedichte schafft, die uns immer angemessener wären, als die Mythologie der Römer. Vielleicht fängt sich eine neue Poetische Periode unter uns an, da die Edda, der Fingal und die Arabische Chrestomathie des Herrn Prof. Michaelis den Weg dazu öffnen.<sup>22</sup>

(This book could be a treasure chest for a new German genius rising on the wings of Celtic imagination to new skies, creating poems that would suit us better than the mythology of the Romans. Perhaps a new era of poetry will begin, when the Edda, the [Songs of] Fingal, and the Arabic anthology of Professor Michaelis will open the road to it)

It should be noted here that Herder at this early stage in his career follows Mallet in making no distinction between "Celtic" and "Germanic" culture; to him they are one and the same. Furthermore, Herder evidently regards the Old Norse Edda, the Scottish "Fingal" or "Songs of Ossian," and the Arabic texts collected by one of his German colleagues, Professor Michaelis, as variants of the same universal patterns which could - and should - inspire the imagination of poets in the days to come. The thinking is here reminiscent of Ramsay's *Discours*, even though Ramsay is not mentioned and perhaps not even known by Herder.

In later years Herder returned to the idea of using Old Norse myth in modern poetry, most particularly in the dialogue called "Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngerung" (Iduna, or the Apples of Rejuvenation), which he published in Schiller's journal *Die Horen* in 1796. From Herder such thoughts passed on

---

Dillmann, "Frankrig og den nordiske fortid - de første etaper af genopdagelsen", in *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture*, ed. E. Roesdahl & P. Meulengracht Sørensen (Aarhus 1996), 13-26; Thomas Krömmelbein, "Mallet in Deutschland: Zur Wirkungsgeschichte der nordischen Poesie und Mythologie", *Aus dem Antiquariat*, 1995.12 (Beilage zum *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel* no 103-4, 28 December 1995), A449-56;

<sup>22</sup> Herder, *Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, vol. 1 (Berlin 1877), 74-75.

to Scandinavian poets such as Oehlenschläger and Grundtvig in Denmark, or Geijer and Atterbom in Sweden. The most consistent application of these thoughts can be found in Atterbom's large allegorical poem *Skaldar-mal* (1811), in which the Old Norse myths are given a philosophical interpretation which is obviously borrowed in part from Olof Dalin's *Svea Rikes Historia*.<sup>23</sup> Thus in his own commentary to the poem, Atterbom explains that his poem is based on "the original Nordic doctrines about God's trinity as Allfather (unity, the center and ring of Eternity), Middle God (Reason, Light, Λογος) and World Soul (Nature, Matter, Object)."<sup>24</sup> Although several of the philosophical concepts in this quotation are not exactly those of Dalin and Ramsay but more reminiscent of contemporary German philosophers such as Schelling, there is hardly any doubt that the whole theoretical construction has its ultimate roots in Ramsay's *Discours*.

So we may indeed ask ourselves if the Romantic poets would have used the Old Norse myths at all as vehicles for their religious and philosophical imagination, unless a certain Swedish poet by the name of Olof Dalin during his visit to Paris in 1739 had happened to meet a somewhat obscure Scottish emigré commonly known as Chevalier Ramsay and been inspired by this meeting to read *Les Voyages de Cyrus*. It seems likely, at any rate, that the study of Old Norse mythology would have taken a somewhat different course.

---

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lars Lönnroth, "Atterbom och den fornnordiska mytologin", *Kritik och teater. En vänbok till Bertil Nolin* (Göteborg 1992).

<sup>24</sup> "de ursprungliga Nordiska lärorna om Guds trefaldighet såsom Allfader (enhet, Evighetens medelpunkt och ring), Medelgud (Förstånd, Ljus, Λογος) och Verldssjäl (Natur, Materia, Objekt)", *Phosphoros* jan-feb 1811, 8. The quotation is further commented by Lönnroth (1992), 14.

## Encounters with *Völur*

John McKinnell

University of Durham

Among the various kinds of encounter between gods or men on the one hand and female representatives of the Other World on the other, episodes involving *völur* occupy a rather problematic place. It is true that *völur* possess supernatural powers, and that those we meet in *Völuspá* and *Baldurs draumar* are associated with giants and the dead, but one might ask whether this is not merely a mythic version of a familiar social phenomenon, that of the human prophetess who travels from farm to farm offering prophecy about the seasons and the fates of individuals in return for food, lodging and gifts. Such figures are, after all, fairly common in *fornaldarsögur* and family sagas.

However, when we turn to contemporary sagas, there is a striking absence of women who might be considered to be *völur*. In *Sturlunga saga* there are no explicit references to them (or to *spákonur*, *seiðkonur* or *vísindakonur*), and only two episodes, so far as I have found, which might be considered to involve them. One is in *Íslendinga saga* ch. 190,<sup>1</sup> where the dead Guðrún Gjúkadóttir (who is explicitly said to be heathen) repeatedly appears in the dreams of the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, 519-522; trans. McGrew - Thomas I, 431-4.

sixteen-year-old Jóreiðr to give information about the fates of important political figures; this is said to have happened in 1255. However, Jóreiðr is not herself a prophetess, and the whole account is contained within a dream. The other appears incidentally in *Sturlu saga* ch. 7,<sup>2</sup> where the mid-twelfth-century farmer Þóroddr Grettiðsson is said to have fathered a son (who turns out to be a criminal) on a *göngukona* ‘female vagrant’ called Þórdís *ina lygna* ‘Þórdís the Liar’<sup>3</sup> - but it is not said that she acted as a *völva*, and if she did it is clear that her prophecy commanded no respect.

This suggests that the concept of the *völva* may have been less familiar in the period when our prose texts were written than is usually assumed, and in fact there are at least four instances where they are introduced with an explanation of what a *völva* is. *Orms þáttr Stórólfssonar* ch. 5 provides a good example:

Pat var þá tízka í þær mundir, at konur þær fóru yfir land, er vödur váru kallaðar, ok sögðu mönnum fyrir örlög sín, árferð ok aðra hluti, þá er menn vildu vísir verða.<sup>4</sup>

Another may be found in *Norna-Gests þáttr* ch. 11:

Þar fóru þá um landit vödur, er kallaðar váru spákonur ok spáðu mönnum aldr. Því buðu menn þeim ok gerðu þeim veizlur ok gáfu þeim gjafir at skilnaði.<sup>5</sup>

These authors clearly thought it necessary to explain what a *völva* was - and since no two of these passages closely resemble each other in expression, they are probably independent of each other.

The distribution of the word *völva* in Old Norse verse also suggests that it was regarded as archaic and used chiefly in mythological contexts. There are nine surviving instances of it in eddic poems of mythological content: five in *Baldrs draumar* (stt. 4, 8, 10, 12, 13), and one each in *Völuspá* (st. 22), *Hávamál* (st. 87), *Lokasenna* (st. 24) and *Hyndluljóð* (st. 33).<sup>6</sup> To this we may add only one in a heroic legendary poem - in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, st. 37, and this clearly belongs to the same tradition of mythological *senna* as *Lokasenna* 24, where Loki alleges that Óðinn has practised *seiðr* on Samsey

<sup>2</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, 69; trans. McGrew - Thomas I, 66.

<sup>3</sup> McGrew - Thomas I 453 gloss the nickname as ‘cool liar’, ‘cool customer’.

<sup>4</sup> Íslenzk fornrit XIII, 405.

<sup>5</sup> FSN I, 186. These are merely the two clearest examples - see also the embedded definitions in *Örvar-Odds saga* ch. 2 (FSN I, 286): Hún var völvu ok seiðkona ok vissi fyrir óorðna hluti af fróðleik sínum. Hún fór á veizlur ok sagði mönnum fyrir um vetrfar ok forlög sín. Similarly, *Vilmundar saga viðutan* ch. 1 (ed. Loth, 140): en kona ein uar þar su er mest uar tignud af uisenda monnum. og letu rikar konur jafnan sækia hana at mæla jodmælvu yfer baurnum sinum. þuiat þat geck jafnan epter sem hun sagdj fyrir. after this, the woman is once called *uisenda kona* and then consistently *uöluu*.

<sup>6</sup> See Neckel- Kuhn for all citations of poems in the *Poetic Edda*, and for *Baldrs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð*; for *Svipdagsmál*, see Sijmons -Gering.

and beaten on the drum as *völur* do. There are two instances in eddic verses embedded in *fornaldarsögur* (*Örvar-Odds saga* ch. 32, st. 4, *Orms þáttr Stórolfssonar* ch. 6, st. 2, see below - both may be older than the prose narratives round them); and three in skaldic verses attributed to the tenth or early eleventh centuries: Kormákr, *lausavísa* 48;<sup>7</sup> the anonymous *lausavísa* II B 6 (in a stanza defining a giantess);<sup>8</sup> and Höfgarða-Refr's travel verses 2 (where *Gymis völvu* refers to Rán).<sup>9</sup>

Other words for magic-working women show a similarly restricted currency. *Seiðkona* does not appear in verse at all, and *spákona* and *spámær* occur once each, both in allegedly tenth-century verses (Kormákr, *lausavísa* 53; Þorarin málhlíðingr, *lausavísa* 7;<sup>10</sup> the second is part of a kenning for spears, which are said to 'sing', in a metaphor which suggests knowledge of the sort of inspired verse utterance often attributed to *völur*). The noun *seiðr* and the verb *síða* or *seiða* are also rather rare. The noun appears six times: twice in its literal sense (*Völuspá* 22, *Orms þáttr*), and four times in kennings for 'battle' - which may represent a fossilised usage;<sup>11</sup> two of these date from the twelfth century, but one of them is a direct echo from Egill Skallagrímsson and the other is by the noted antiquarian Sturla Þórðarson. The verb *síða* or *seiða* appears six times: twice in mythological eddic poems (*Völuspá* 22, *Lokasenna* 24), three times in early skaldic verses (Kormákr Ögmundarson, *Sigurðardrápa* 3, alluding to the myth of Óðinn and Rindr;<sup>12</sup> and twice in Vitgeirr seiðimaðr's verse on Rögnvaldr réttilbeini<sup>13</sup>), and once in a verse attributed to a giantess in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* ch. 1.<sup>14</sup>

We have too little evidence to be able to tell whether *völur* were a fact of social life in the heathen period, but so far as the surviving texts are concerned, they look more like a literary feature which is particularly associated with mythological sources and with stories about giants or the dead. It seems more likely that the quasi-realistic presentations of *völur* in some sagas of Icelanders are naturalised versions of mythological tales, rather than that the mythological and legendary *völur* are derived from real-life fortune-tellers. It is therefore worth asking whether the stories in which they appear use them as a free-

<sup>7</sup> See Kock, I, 48, Íslenzk fornrit VIII, 284; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson lists this verse among those which include linguistic evidence of early date ('Kormákr the Poet and his Verses', 35).

<sup>8</sup> Kock I, 92

<sup>9</sup> Kock I, 151.

<sup>10</sup> Kock I, 49, 61.

<sup>11</sup> *Fjölnis seiðr*, Eiríkr viðsjá, *lausavísa* 6 (Kock I, 105); *sverða seiðr*, Sturla Þórðarson, *Hákonarkviða* 12 (Kock II, 64); *vigra seiðr*, Egill Skallagrímsson, *lausavísa* 6 (Kock I, 28) and Guthormr Helgason kórtr, *lausavísa* (Kock II, 59).

<sup>12</sup> Kock I, 42; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson lists this among the verses which he considers to be 'old' on linguistic grounds ('Kormákr the Poet and his Verses', 35).

<sup>13</sup> Kock I, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Kock II, 164; *FSN* I, 271

standing motif, or whether they typically feature within patterns which have something in common that is not dictated by the mere presence of the *völva* and her predictions or magic.

The term *völva* is not used consistently to refer only to those who predict a pre-determined future, nor are all such women called *völur*. The word is used of workers of effective magic (e.g. curses or antidotes to them) in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 14<sup>15</sup> and *Gull-Þóris saga* chs. 18-19.<sup>16</sup> Women who make magical predictions but are not called *völur* appear in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 50 in *Flateyjarbók*,<sup>17</sup> *Hauks þátr hábrókar*<sup>18</sup> and *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 12.<sup>19</sup>

The term *völva* often seems to be synonymous with *spákona* and *vísindakona*, and all three terms are sometimes used of the same woman (*Óláfs saga Helga* ch. 25 in *Flateyjarbók*,<sup>20</sup> *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4<sup>21</sup>). However, the same woman is also sometimes referred to indiscriminately as *völva* and *seiðkona*, which implies that prediction and effective magic were not regarded as clearly distinct abilities (see Hulð in *Ynglinga saga* chs. 13-14,<sup>22</sup> Heiðr in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 3,<sup>23</sup> Heiðr in *Örvar-Odds saga* ch. 2<sup>24</sup>); and in legendary sources a *völva* is sometimes also referred to by terms which imply non-human origins (Hulð is also *vitta vétr* ‘creature of spells’ and *trollkund liðs grím-Hildir* ‘the people’s troll-born woman of night’ in *Ynglingatal* 3; Busla in *Bósa saga* is not called *völva*, but is both *kerling* ‘old woman’ and *vánd vætr* ‘evil creature’;<sup>25</sup> Heiðr in *Hauks þátr* is both *kerling* and *hin mikla tröll*).

As in the verse sources, the term *völva* is used in prose mainly of women from the far past, and many sagas of Icelanders seem to avoid it - thus Oddbjörg in *Víga-Glúms saga* is simply *kona...fróð ok framsýn* ‘a wise woman who could see the future’; Gríma in *Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 9 attracts the muted comment *þat tóluðu menn, at hon væri fjölkunnig* ‘people reckoned that she was skilled in magic’, though her enemy Bersi later calls her a troll;<sup>26</sup> her namesake in *Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 23 is *nökkut fornfróð* ‘rather skilled in ancient things’;<sup>27</sup> Þórdís in *Kormáks saga* ch. 22 is called *spákona* in the prose, but *völva* in

<sup>15</sup> Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Íslenzk fornrit XIII, 220-222.

<sup>17</sup> Flateyjarbók I, 81-2.

<sup>18</sup> Flateyjarbók II, 66-9.

<sup>19</sup> Íslenzk fornrit IX, 40-41.

<sup>20</sup> Flateyjarbók II, 98-9.

<sup>21</sup> Íslenzk fornrit IV, 206-9.

<sup>22</sup> Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 28-31.

<sup>23</sup> FSN II, 9-11.

<sup>24</sup> FSN I, 286-9.

<sup>25</sup> FSN II, 472-5.

<sup>26</sup> Íslenzk fornrit VI, 161, 165.

<sup>27</sup> Íslenzk fornrit VI, 242.

Kormákr's (probably much older) skaldic verse (see st. 69).<sup>28</sup>

The easiest way of categorising the many accounts of *völur* is according to the nature of those affected by their prophecies or magic, and when this is done they fall into five types:

1. The unjust patriarch.
2. The hostile young man.
3. The young protégé of the *völva*.<sup>29</sup>
4. The female opponent.<sup>30</sup>
5. The new-born infant.<sup>31</sup>

The new-born infant stories form a separate group of the 'good and bad fairy' type, but are not relevant to my concerns here. The examples I have found of the 'protégé' and 'female opponent' types are so various that the *völva* in these tales is probably best regarded as a motif that could be inserted into stories that otherwise have little or nothing in common.<sup>32</sup> But the surviving examples of the 'unjust patriarch' and 'hostile youth' types do seem to share some features which are not dictated by the mere presence of the *völva*, and they may each reflect a common story-pattern. For the moment, I shall not include *Völuspá* or *Baldur's draumar* in either group.

### A. The Unjust Patriarch

I would place the following narratives in this group:

<sup>28</sup> Íslenzk fornrit VIII, 284.

<sup>29</sup> See *Svipdagsmál* 1-16 (= *Gróugaldur*) (Sijmons and Gering I, 196-200); *Gull-Þóris saga* (also called *Þorskfirðinga saga*) chs. 18-19 (Íslenzk fornrit XIII, 220-2); *Fóstbræðra saga* chs. 9-10 (Íslenzk fornrit VI, 161-9); *Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 23 (Íslenzk fornrit VI, 242-8); *Hauks þátr hábrókar* (in *Flateyjarbók, Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* chs. 467-8, *Flateyjarbók* II, 66-9); Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* I.vi.4-6 (Olrík - Ræder I, 22-3; Fisher-Davidson I, 23-4). Other stories which might more generally be included in this group appear in *Kormáks saga* chs. 9, 22 (Íslenzk fornrit VIII, 233, 282-5) and *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4 (Íslenzk fornrit IV, 206-9).

<sup>30</sup> See *Hyndluljóð*; *Helreið Brynhildar*, perhaps also *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 12 (Íslenzk fornrit IX, 40-41); and possibly *Laxdæla saga* ch. 76 (Íslenzk fornrit V, 223-4) and *Vilmundar saga viðutan* ch. 1 (*Late Medieval Icelandic Romances IV*, ed. Loth, 140-1).

<sup>31</sup> See *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, 2-4, and the same story in *Völsunga saga* ch. 8 (*FSN* I, 19); *Nornagests þátr* ch. 11 (*FSN* I, 186-7); Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* VI.iv.12 (Olrík - Ræder I, 150; Fisher - Davidson I, 169); and perhaps *Vilmundar saga viðutan* ch. 1 (ed. Loth, 141). However, in the majority of these, the prophetess figures are called norns.

<sup>32</sup> For the protégé stories, this may be best illustrated by the sheer variety of magical tasks accomplished by the *völva* on the protagonist's behalf: informing him of the magical spells he needs (*Svipdagsmál*), or of his opponent's movements (*Gull-Þóris saga*); raising a storm to make the opponent vulnerable to the hero (*Gull-Þóris saga*); making her protégé invulnerable to weapons (*Fóstbræðra saga* 9-10); making him invisible to pursuers after he has carried out a wounding (*Fóstbræðra saga* 9-10) or a killing (*Fóstbræðra saga* 23); reciting a poem to give him a fair wind (*Fóstbræðra saga* 10); healing his wounds (*Fóstbræðra saga* 23, *Hauks þátr*); travelling with *gandar* in her sleep in order to discover a danger threatening him (*Fóstbræðra saga* 23); supplying him with a magic weapon (*Hauks þátr*); raising up a dead man to discover the future (Saxo).

*Ynglinga saga* ch. 13 (and *Ynglingatal* 3, narrative verse, fornyrðislag).<sup>33</sup>

*Ynglinga saga* ch. 14 (and *Ynglingatal* 4, narrative verse, fornyrðislag, though this does not mention the *völva*).<sup>34</sup>

*Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 3 (including 4 short stanzas of monologue verse, part of an underlying fornyrðislag poem).<sup>35</sup>

Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* V.xvi.1-2 (no verse).<sup>36</sup>

*Bósa saga* ch. 5 (including 9 stanzas of monologue verse, apparently part of an older fornyrðislag poem).<sup>37</sup>

The main features of the pattern are as follows:

1. The *völva* (so-called except in *Bósa saga*: [*kerling*] and Saxo [*matrona magicæ rei perita*]) is either nameless or has a traditional single-element name (*Hulð* in *Ynglinga saga* 13, 14; *Heiðr* in *Hrólfs saga*, *Busla* in *Bósa saga*). In *Ynglinga saga* she lives in Finnmark.

2. The patriarch is a king descended from a god (Vanlandi, Vísburr in *Ynglingatal*, *Ynglinga saga*, both descended from Freyr; Hringr in *Bósa saga*, the grandson of Óðinn, but with a name suggesting links with the Vanir), or a king with a traditionally ‘Vanir’ name (Fróði in *Hrólfs saga*, Frotho in Saxo).

3. The patriarch does something unjust (breaks his promise, *Ynglinga saga* 13; denies his ex-wife the gold necklace which is her *mund*, *Ynglinga saga* 14; kills his brother, usurps his kingdom and seeks to kill his brother’s sons, *Hrólfs saga*; wants to exile his son and kill his son’s foster-brother, *Bósa saga*). Saxo reacts against this, making Frotho conspicuous as an upholder of justice.<sup>38</sup>

4. The patriarch has two sons (*Ynglinga saga* 14), nephews (*Hrólfs saga*), or a son with a foster-brother (*Bósa saga*), with whom he is in conflict; in Saxo there is only one son, who becomes that of the *matrona* (perhaps it would have undermined his view of Frotho’s idealised *imperium* to present treachery and murder within the royal family).

5. The *völva* is provoked by the patriarch’s injustice (*Ynglinga saga* 14, *Bósa saga*), or is paid to act against him (*Ynglinga saga* 13, *Hrólfs saga*), or is paid to prophesy for him, but does so in a hostile manner (*Hrólfs saga*), or is inspired by greed to act against him (Saxo).

6. A gold ring or necklace is involved, either in the quarrel with the son (*Ynglinga saga* 14, Saxo), or in a payment (in *Hrólfs saga*, a payment to break off the prophecy). In *Bósa saga* the king is called Hringr, and the quarrel involves two chests of gold.

7. The *völva* directs her attack against the patriarch and/or his family (*Ynglinga saga* 14). It may be either a curse (*Ynglinga saga* 13, 14, *Bósa saga*),

<sup>33</sup> Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 28-9; Kock, I, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 30-1; Kock, I, 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> *FSN* II, 9-11.

<sup>36</sup> Olrik - Ræder I, 142; Fisher-Davidson I, 157.

<sup>37</sup> *FSN* II, 472-5.

<sup>38</sup> See Friis-Jensen (especially p. 74) for the importance of the *imperium Frothonis*, and of Frotho as the idealised law-giver, to Saxo’s overall view of the Danish kingdom.

or a prophecy (*Hrólfs saga*, *Völuspá*, *Baldurs draumar*), but the distinction between the two is weak, for in *Ynglinga saga* 13 and *Bósa saga* the curse is a conditional prophecy - this *will* happen if the patriarch does not act as the *völva* wishes him to. In Saxo this is changed: the *matrona* changes herself into a sea-cow and gores Frotho in a direct attack.

8. The *völva*'s curse or prophecy includes the death of the patriarch (*Ynglinga saga* 13, 14, *Hrólfs saga*, *Bósa saga*); in *Ynglinga saga* 14 she adds that members of the family will always kill each other.

9. The *völva* may speak in fornyrðislag of her own role and the reliability of what she says (*Bósa saga*; in *Hrólfs saga* this is only preserved in the prose, but may have been in the lost parts of the poem on which the story seems to be based). She may refer to herself in the first person (*Hrólfs saga*) or in first and third persons (*Bósa saga*). Prophetic verse may come to her from elsewhere ('*ok varð henni þá ljóð á munni*'), and she may refer to 'seeing' in a vatic way (*Hrólfs saga*).

10. The patriarch dies, or will die, sometimes by fire (killed by the curse and then cremated, *Ynglinga saga* 13; burned in his hall by his sons or nephews, *Ynglinga saga* 14, *Hrólfs saga*; in *Bósa saga* he is threatened with having his hall burned, but is eventually killed in battle by two other brothers.<sup>39</sup> Again, Saxo may have reacted against this, possibly because of the Christian prejudice against cremation for a figure who is otherwise idealised - Frotho is gored to death, his courtiers try to conceal his death by parading his body in his waggon, but eventually bury him when the body rots.

This story type can be summarised as follows:

The *völva* has a traditional name (in the case of Heiðr, it is one associated with giants); she may come from the far north. The protagonist is a king descended from a god (usually from Freyr). The protagonist commits an injustice against his two sons/nephews/son and son's foster-brother, and the *völva* takes their side against him; either the injustice or the magic involves the payment of a gold ring. The *völva* curses the king or prophesies against him, and her words, expressed in fornyrðislag, come to her from elsewhere. The sons kill their father, possibly by burning. (Saxo's version differs from the others in a number of respects, but all of these can be explained by his political need to idealise King Frotho).

## B. The Hostile Young Man

This group includes the following:

*Örvar-Odds saga* ch. 2 (including 3 stanzas of monologue, fornyrðislag, apparently part of a pre-existing poem.<sup>40</sup> At the end of the saga (ch. 32), the dying Oddr recites what is probably a

<sup>39</sup> See *Bósa saga* ch. 10, *FSN* II, 484.

<sup>40</sup> *FSN* I, 286-9; for ch. 32, v. 4, see I, 391.

separate poem of 71 stanzas, in st. 4 of which he acknowledges the truth of the *völva*'s prophecy).

*Orms þátr Stórolfssonar* ch. 5 (including one stanza of monologue, fornyrðislag, apparently part of a pre-existing poem.<sup>41</sup> In chs. 6-7 there are 11 further stanzas recited by Ásmundr, all but the first when he is dying; in st. 2 he refers to the *völva* and his intention to defy her prophecy).

*Vatnsdæla saga* ch. 10, and the same story in *Landnámabók*, S179, H145 (no verse).<sup>42</sup>

Two other narratives look like Christian adaptations of the same pattern:

Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar* ch. 6, and the same story in *Flateyjarbók*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 50 (which I shall call *Flateyjarbók I*).<sup>43</sup>

*Flateyjarbók*, *Óláfs saga Helga* ch. 25 (which I shall call *Flateyjarbók II*).<sup>44</sup>

The main features of this pattern are:

1. The *völva* (so-called except in Oddr [*spákona*], *Flateyjarbók I* [*kerling... framsýn af fítonsanda*]), is either nameless or is called *Heiðr* (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Landnámabók*). She is Lappish (*Vatnsdæla saga*), is so decrepit with age that she has to be carried on a bed, and is the patriarch's mother (Oddr and *Flateyjarbók I*).

2. The patriarch is usually the head of a household (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Landnámabók*, *Orms þátr*); in Oddr and *Flateyjarbók I* he is King Valdimarr of Garðaríki (Russia); in *Flateyjarbók II* there is no patriarch figure, and the *völva* is consulted by St. Óláfr's men.

3. The patriarch does nothing unjust except to invite the *völva* to prophesy, but this causes disapproval from the young protagonist (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Orms þátr*, *Vatnsdæla saga*, *Flateyjarbók II*) or from the patriarch's wife (Oddr and *Flateyjarbók I*).

4. The patriarch has a son, who is the foster-brother of the hero (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Orms þátr*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Landnámabók*, where there are two sons), or the patriarch later becomes foster-father to the hero (Oddr and *Flateyjarbók I*). The relationship between patriarch and hero is good, but is strained by the patriarch's invitation to the *völva* (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Orms þátr*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Landnámabók*; in Oddr and *Flateyjarbók I* the king's heathen practices cause tension between him and his queen).

5-6. The *völva* is sometimes paid for her prophecies (with gifts, *Örvar-Odds saga*, *Orms þátr*).

7. The *völva* prophesies that the patriarch will live successfully in the same place *til elli* (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Orms þátr*; that nothing will threaten his kingdom - Oddr and *Flateyjarbók I*); she may also make a favourable prophecy for the hero's foster-brother(s) (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*). She insists

<sup>41</sup> Íslenzk fornrit XIII, 404-6.

<sup>42</sup> Íslenzk fornrit VIII, 28-30; Íslenzk fornrit I, 217.

<sup>43</sup> ed. Finnur Jónsson, 20-1; *Flateyjarbók I*, 81-2.

<sup>44</sup> *Flateyjarbók II*, 98-9.

on making a prophecy about the hero, despite his reluctance to listen to it (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Landnámabók*; in *Orms þáttr* the whole episode is about the foster-brother Ásbjörn, who becomes its protagonist; in *Flateyjarbók* II the prophecy is made with the permission but disapproval of Óláfr helgi, who is not present). The *völva* says that the prophecy will come true whether the hero likes it or not (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Orms þáttr*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Landnámabók*).

8. The prophecy predicts glory for the hero, but also his death (he will live gloriously for three hundred years, but will die on this farm - *Örvar-Odds saga*; he will live gloriously and die of old age, provided he does not go to Norð-Mœrr - *Orms þáttr*; he will rule Norway gloriously, but not for long - Oddr and *Flateyjarbók* I; his brightness makes it difficult for the *völva* to see clearly, but he will make one slip of the tongue in his whole life, and will die that same day - *Flateyjarbók* II).

9. In *Örvar-Odds saga* and *Orms þáttr*, the *völva* speaks in fornyrðislag; she refers to her own reliability, and uses both the first and the third person (*Örvar-Odds saga* only); the verse comes to her from elsewhere (*‘Þá / ok varð henni þá ljóð á munni’* introduces it in both, and in *Örvar-Odds saga* she claims: *Öll veit hún manna / örlög fyrir*).<sup>45</sup>

9a. The hero reacts with resentment (*Örvar-Odds saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*, *Orms þáttr*); in *Örvar-Odds saga* he attacks the *völva* with a *sproti* which he has ready.<sup>46</sup> In *Vatnsdæla saga* Ingimundr would attack the *völva* were it not for his obligation to his foster-father. In *Örvar-Odds saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga*, the hero takes measures to thwart the prediction; in *Orms þáttr* he tempts its fulfillment in an attempt to prove the *völva* wrong.

10. All the prophecies are fulfilled. Oddr is killed by the bite of a snake which crawls out of the skull of a horse killed in an attempt to prevent the fulfillment of the prophecy. Ásbjörn goes to Norð-Mœrr and is tortured to death by the giant Brúsi. Ingimundr and his foster-brothers settle in Iceland (though here no death has been predicted).<sup>47</sup> Óláfr Tryggvason returns to Garðaríki and converts King Valdimarr and his queen,<sup>48</sup> but his reign in Norway is short. Óláfr inn helgi makes a slip of the tongue just before the Battle of Stiklastaðir, in which he is killed.<sup>49</sup>

The story-type can be summarise as follows:

<sup>45</sup> The formula *þá varð henni/honum/Oddi/Hjálmari ljóð á munni* also introduces a number of non-prophetic verses later in *Örvar-Odds saga* (see *FSN* I, 314, 316, 317,324, 326, 330, 370, 382), but these may be copied from its first use, for the verses given to the *völva*.

<sup>46</sup> Is it a symbolic spear? cf. *Gautreks saga* ch. 7, *FSN* III, 25-8, where Starkaðr uses a *sproti* which suddenly becomes a spear, in the sacrifice of King Víkarr to Óðinn.

<sup>47</sup> *Vatnsdæla saga* ch. 15, *Íslenzk fornrit* VIII, 42; *Landnámabók*, *Íslenzk fornrit* I, 217. This story also involves the hero losing his silver miniature idol of Freyr, and not regaining it until the moment when the prophecy has been fulfilled.

<sup>48</sup> *Flateyjarbók* ch. 90, I, 126-9.

<sup>49</sup> see the end of ch. 277, *Flateyjarbók* II, 458.

The *völva* is called *Heiðr* (a name with giant associations); she may come from the far north, or be extremely old. The patriarch is the sympathetic head of a household. He has a son and a foster-son, the latter being usually the protagonist. There is antipathy between patriarch and foster-son, but it is caused only by the presence of the *völva*. The protagonist resents the *völva*'s prophecy and sometimes also her presence, and he may attack her physically. The *völva* prophesies glory for the hero, but also his death; when she uses verse, it is fornyrðislag, and she is mysteriously inspired with it. The prophecy is usually absolute (not in *Orms þáttr*), and always comes true.

### C. *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar*

Most of the stories on which I have based the reconstruction of these two story-patterns are, of course, much later in date than *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar*, in which *völur* also play a central part. However, there is one clear exception, in *Ynglingatal* stt. 3 and 4, which show that some features of the 'unjust patriarch' story already existed by c.900 - certainly the confrontation between a king descended from Freyr and a prophetic of giant- or troll- origins (st. 3), the consequent death of the king (both stanzas), and in st. 4 his destruction by fire; it is not explicitly stated that his sons kill him, but there is no reason to suppose that the underlying stories known to Þjóðólfr differed from those told in *Ynglinga saga*. There is even a coincidence between two similar fire-kennings in *Ynglingatal* 4 (*meiþjóf markar* 'harmful thief of woodland') and *Völuspá* 52 (*með sviga lævi* 'with the harm of brushwood'), though this might be pure coincidence. At all events, it seems probable that some version of the 'unjust patriarch' pattern already existed by the time *Völuspá* was composed.

It is fairly obvious that the narratives in *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar* resemble these two patterns in some respects, but that they do not altogether fit into them. In *Völuspá* st. 22 we encounter another *völva* called *Heiðr*, who is usually supposed to be a transformation of a figure called *Gullveig* (apparently one of the *Vanir*). I think this is a mistaken interpretation, and that *Heiðr* is more probably the narrating *völva* of the poem. The name also appears at the end of *Hyndluljóð* 32, among a list of giants of both sexes, where it is immediately followed by a line about the mythological ancestry of *völur*. This poem (or at least this section of it) is referred to by *Snorri* as *Völuspá in skamma*, and it shows clear textual echoes of the longer *Völuspá*; for its poet, *Heiðr* was clearly a giantess (like the narrating *völva* of *Völuspá*) whose name prompted a line about *völur* in general.

Whether we give the narrator of *Völuspá* a name or not, she was brought up (or brought forth) by giants and remembers nine worlds (st. 2) - probably the nine worlds of the dead, into which human beings die out of *Hel*, according to *Vafþrúðnismál* 43. She is paid for her prophecy with *hringa ok men* (st. 29). Her magic is performed in a trance (*leikin*, st. 22) and her prophecy is delivered in

vatic fornyrðislag verse to a patriarchal figure, in this case Óðinn; it represents a truth which she ‘sees’ (the verb is also used by the *völur* called Heiðr in *Hrólfs saga* and *Örvar Odds saga*), and one of her refrains - *vituð ér enn, eða hvat?* - is echoed several times by the giantess Heiðr in *Hyndluljóð* (*viltu enn lengra?*)<sup>50</sup> and once by the enchantress Busla in *Bósa saga* (*eða viltu þulu lengri?*). The patriarch has three sons (by different mothers, so that they are half-brothers to each other) who figure in a central episode of the action (the killing of Baldr and the revenge for it). The *völva*’s prophecy includes the death of the patriarch figure (though not at the hands of his sons), and fire is involved, although it is not the actual cause of his death.

On the other hand, there are several features of the ‘unjust patriarch’ pattern which are contradicted in *Völuspá*. Most importantly, there is no hostility between the patriarch and his sons, and they do not kill him (though they do kill each other). The deity with whom the unjust patriarch figures are associated is usually Freyr rather than Óðinn (Hringr in *Bósa saga* is the only exception, since he is said to be the grandson of Óðinn, but his name is easier to connect with the Freyr tradition). Nor is it clear that Óðinn is to be regarded as unjust in the same specific way as in the other stories, though he is the head of a family of gods who are presented by the poet as guilty of oathbreaking and murder (in the killing of the Giant Builder, st. 26) and probably of absorbing the sexual immorality of the Vanir - vices which they then appear to punish in human beings in a futile attempt to arrest the moral decline of the world (st. 39). But most importantly, the prophesied death of the patriarch is not the main point either of the prophecy or of the poem as a whole - the *Völuspá* poet has a larger vision than that, and although the ‘unjust patriarch’ story-type may have been used to construct the narrative framework of the poem, the purpose for which this has been done is strikingly new.

*Baldrs draumar* shows some features in common with the ‘hostile young man’ pattern. The *völva* has been long dead (st. 5), and in her final confrontation with Óðinn is said to be *þriggia þursa móðir* (st. 13). She is summoned and required to prophesy by the patriarch (Óðinn), whose three sons (Baldr, Höðr and Váli) are the subject of the prophecies; the prophecy includes the death of the implied protagonist (Baldr), though in this case at the hands of his brother.<sup>51</sup> A powerful hostility remains between the *völva* and her questioner, though in this case he is the patriarch rather than the young man, he compels the prophecy rather than trying to refuse it, and there is no mention of any payment for the prophecy. If the poet of *Baldrs draumar* used a traditional story-pattern, it was, again, probably adopted in a strongly modified form, and the near-identity of text between *Baldrs draumar* 11,3-8 and *Völuspá* 32,7-8

<sup>50</sup> *Hyndluljóð* stt. 17, 18, 34, 36, 39.

<sup>51</sup> This is, however, another ancient story-pattern, see *Ynglinga saga*, chs. 20, 21 and *Ynglingatal* 11-13.

and 33,1-4 suggests a close relationship between the two poems. This influence could have been in either direction or from a third source which is now lost, but it seems to me more likely that *Völuspá* influenced *Baldurs draumar* than vice-versa.

I should like to finish with a few tentative and provisional conclusions:

1. The many stories about *völur* in Old Norse literature more probably reflect a literary type than a social fact of the authors' own times, and their most likely origin is in mythological tales about prophetesses connected with giants and/or the dead.

2. The stories in which *völur* confront unjust patriarchs or hostile young men show narrative patterns in common that are not required by the mere presence and function of the *völva*; they probably reflect traditional story patterns, and at least some features of one of these can be seen as early as Þjóðólfr's *Ynglingatal* (c. 900).

3. Most of these stories of *völur* have nothing to do with Óðinn; the two exceptions, *Völuspá* and *Baldurs draumar*, probably represent an original re-working of the traditional patterns, and the *Völuspá* poet may be responsible for this development. Certainly, a traditional assumption of an element of injustice in the figure who questions the *völva* would fit the moral scheme of that poem, which uses it to introduce a new world-view, one which was influenced but not dominated by Christian ideas. I hope this study may have contributed towards the understanding of this startling and profound achievement.

### Abbreviations and Bibliography

- Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 'Kormákr the Poet and his Verses', *Saga-Book XVII*:1 (1966), 18-60.
- Fisher - Davidson: *Saxo Grammaticus. The History of the Danes*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson, trans. Peter Fisher, 2 vols., Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979-80.
- Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and others, 4 vols., Akranes: Flateyjarútgáfan, 1944-5.
- Friis-Jensen, Karsten, 'Saxo Grammaticus's Study of the Roman Historiographers and his Vision of History', in *Saxo Grammaticus. Tra storiografia e letteratura*, ed. Carlo Santini, Rome: Il Calamo, 61-81.
- FSN: Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 3 vols., Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1943-4.
- Íslensk fornrit I: *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, 2 vols., Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1968.
- Íslensk fornrit IV: *Eyrbyggja saga, Grænlendinga sögur*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935 (revised ed., with *Skálholtsbók* text of *Eiríks saga rauða* by Ólafur Halldórsson, 1985).
- Íslensk fornrit V: *Laxdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1934.
- Íslensk fornrit VI: *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1943.
- Íslensk fornrit VIII: *Vatnsdæla saga, Hallfredar saga, Kormáks saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1939.
- Íslensk fornrit IX: *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1956.
- Íslensk fornrit XIII: *Harðar saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1991.

- Íslenzk fornrit XXVI: *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla I*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka fornritafélag, 1941.
- Kock: *Den Norsk-Islandske Skaldediktningen*, ed. Ernst A. Kock, 2 vols., Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1946-9.
- McGrew - Thomas: *Sturlunga saga*, trans. Julia H. McGrew and R. George Thomas, 2 vols., New York: Twayne and American Scandinavian Foundation, 1970-74.
- Neckel - Kuhn: *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, ed. Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, 2 vols., Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1962-68. (Vol. 2, *Kurzes Wörterbuch*, replaced by Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992).
- Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1932.
- Olrik - Ræder: *Saxo: Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, ed. J. Olrik and H. Ræder, 2 vols., Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard, 1931-7.
- Sijmons - Gering: *Die Lieder der Edda*, ed. B. Sijmons and H. Gering, 3 vols., Halle: Waisenhauses, 1924-31.
- Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn, 2 vols., Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946.
- Vilmundar saga víðutan*, in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances IV*, ed. Agnete Loth, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ B vol. 23, Copenhagen, 1964.

## *Bandrúnir* in Icelandic Sagas

Mindy Macleod

Institutionen för språk och kultur, Högskolan i Kalmar

Runic echoes permeate saga literature; the runes of divine origin, *rúnar reginkunnar*, of the Sparlösa and Noleby stones recur in *Hávamál*, while the evocative Swedish Skarpåker runestone (*Jörð skal rifna ok upphiminn*) or the Danish Ribe stick (*Jörð bið ek uarða ok upphiminn*) are strongly reminiscent of Germanic poetry (cf. Jansson 1987: 140f.). References to elves and trolls, and even invocations to pagan deities occur in medieval runic inscriptions, attesting to a continuing appreciation of Norse legends (Liestøl 1964: 37; Hagland 1994: 132), while runic poetry in the metres of dróttkvætt, hrynhenda, ljóðaháttir and galdralag testify to the continuance of the scaldic and eddic literary tradition. There are several runic inscriptions reminiscent of poems known from the Edda or other Norse literature (Liestøl 1964: 29ff.) and, more significantly, fragments of identifiable Norse poetry recur among the medieval runic inscriptions.<sup>1</sup> The runic corroboration of saga verse is an important historical record of the survival of this literary tradition. From Trondheim comes a rune-stick (A 142)

---

<sup>1</sup> These include B 249, containing part of a *lausavísa* in dróttkvætt, *Gamanvísur*, known from three manuscripts and attributed to the Norwegian king Haraldr Harðráði (cf. Seim 1986: 30f). The opening three words are found on a further Bergen stick, N 606.

bearing a paraphrase of a verse by the greatest of all Icelandic skalds, the incomparable Egill Skallagrímsson. This text closely resembles Egill's poetic tirade against incompetent rune-carvers (Knirk 1994).

In some respects, the Trondheim stick is hardly unique in containing the runic approximation of a poem known from other sources: the same kind of familiarity is demonstrated by the close correspondence between some runestones and manuscript texts. Nevertheless, snatches of poetry familiar from the sagas and also recorded in runic inscriptions provide a sort of evidence very different to the use of runes in saga literature.<sup>2</sup>

Two parallel texts known from runic records as well as manuscript sources are of particular interest to my talk today. The runes of the recurrent *mistil* curse featured in the saga of Bósi and Herrauð, and the *launstafir* deprecated by the ubiquitous Egill in his saga came to my attention through my interest in runic ligatures or bind-runes, which have often been regarded as runes of magical property (MacLeod 1999: 38; 122f.; 225f.). My doctoral thesis disputes this assertion, which rests on flimsy evidence from different runic periods, primarily the modern one. Nevertheless, saga evidence is also sometimes invoked to equate bind-runes or monograms with the practice of runic sorcery, and it is this material which I should like to consider today. Is there any evidence from the sagas of the practice of using *galdrastafir* or any kinds of magical runic monograms?

The magical rune-like glyphs attested in late medieval Icelandic charms are often termed *galdrastafir* or *bandrúnir*.<sup>3</sup> Their use is sometimes traced back to early runic monograms or simple bind-runes,<sup>4</sup> but this is tenuous in the extreme, as is any real connection with runic writing. Nevertheless, there are at least three instances sometimes adduced as written evidence of the magical manipulation of bind-runes. These are found in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, the saga of the warrior-poet Egill Skallagrímsson, *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, the saga of the foster-brothers Bósi and Herrauð, and from the eddic poem *Skírnismál*.

I do not intend to consider this last here, as it is neatly excluded by my title, 'Runes in Sagas'.<sup>5</sup> The idea that runic monograms were employed for magical

<sup>2</sup> They may show the recording of verses transcribed hundreds of years after their original composition (cf. Seim 1986: 35f.) or nearly contemporary with the saga in which they are found but probably based on sources older than the familiar saga composition (cf. Knirk 1994: 418f.).

<sup>3</sup> examples in Magnúsen (1841: 164); Árnason (1862: 445ff.); Davíðsson (1903: 279ff.); Kålund (1907: 367f.); Olrik (1918: 32ff.), Lindqvist (1921: 4ff.).

<sup>4</sup> refs in MacLeod (1999: 38, 123, 399).

<sup>5</sup> A wealth of runic erudition has nevertheless been expended upon *Skírnismál* verse XXXVI, the meaning of whose *Þurs rist ek þér ok þrjá stafí, ergi ok æði ok óþola* will probably never be resolved to general satisfaction. Suffice it to say, the interpretation of the *þrjá stafí* as complicated bind-runes is somewhat far-fetched, and the connection of this passage with runes has even been cast into doubt by Bæksted (1952: 75f.). Early runic scholars (e.g. Magnúsen 1841: 138; Lüning 1859: 237, n. 26) believed that Þurs referred to the rune þ (named Þurs in the Scandinavian rune

purposes seems then to find most support in the short saga of *Bósi* and *Herrauð*. In the fifth chapter of this romantic tale which probably dates from the fourteenth century, *Bósi*'s foster-mother *Busla* utters a long curse upon King *Hringr* of East *Götaland*, culminating in the powerful *syrpuvers* which may not be recited after sunset.<sup>6</sup> This ends with the exhortation to interpret the names of six men (*seggir sex*): *Seg þú mér nöfn þeira öll óbundin*, 'Tell me all their names unbound'. The thirty-six runes which occur in the three medieval manuscripts of the tale<sup>7</sup> are simple runes, not bind-runes, viz

R. Ʀ. Þ. Ʒ. Ƴ. Ɔ. ⅃⅃⅃⅃. ǫǫǫǫǫ: 111111: ⅃⅃⅃⅃: ⅃⅃⅃⅃⅃⅃:

which might be interpreted as the confused beginning of a *fupark* (Jónsson 1910: 289; Moltke 1936-7: 256, DR col. 814; Bæksted 1942: 218) or as the runic *rað þú mik* (both discounted by Thompson 1978: 51). In any case, the opening runes are clearly followed by an encoded 'istil' (see Thompson 1978: 51ff., who reads a rhyming formula of 'sonorous nonsense': *ristil*, *oistil*, *þistil*, *kistil*, *mistil*, and *uistil*), paralleled by the 'tistill, mistill' formula known from several earlier runic inscriptions (see appendix). As is clear from the context, it is the words formed by the runes rather than the characters themselves which must be unbound or deciphered and the formulation originally has no association with bind-runes. Comparison with the runic monograms of other medieval inscriptions is not justified;<sup>8</sup> only in one post-Reformation paper manuscript from the eighteenth century (Lbs 423 fol. x, cf. Heizmann 1998: 519) do we find actual runic monograms illustrating six names (mainly *Óðinsheiti*, e.g. *Fiðlner*, *Feingur*, *Þúndur*, *Peckur*, as well as *Freyr* and *Þrúmur* etc., which do not occur in the original text). This text is anomalous in many respects, not least because it renders the entire *Buslabæn* in runes and

---

poems), and that the three staves must refer to three (or one) similarly threatening bind-rune(s) encoding the following words, but there is no compelling reason to follow their reasoning here. The three staves could equally well refer to three single staves, i.e. standard runes. The significance of the whole phrase remains uncertain, but there is no support for any suggestion that the three staves must refer to a runic monogram or bind, or the tripled **þ** found mainly in unintelligible medieval inscriptions. In modern academic parlance, if the runes mentioned in the eddic poetry do not 'disconfirm' the idea of bind-runes of magical property, they can hardly be said to confirm it either. A runic parallel to the phrase occurs on a stick from Bergen: *ek sendi þér, ek sé á þer, ylgjar ergi ok ópola* (Liestøl 1964: 41ff.).

<sup>6</sup> Whether the essentials of the saga are derived from Norse tradition (Jiriczek 1893), French romance (cf. Schröder 1928) or High German epic poetry (Haggerty Krappe 1928), the motif of the step-mother threatening with runes remains unparalleled.

<sup>7</sup> AM. 510 4:o; AM. 577 4:o; AM. 586 4:o, from the fifteenth and sixteenth century (cf. Moltke 1936-7: 255; Bæksted 1942: 217; Heizmann 1998: 519).

<sup>8</sup> Olsen (NIyR 3: 58) compares the task of the saga reader with that faced by the decipherer of a runic cryptogram in Storhedder, Norway: "Han skulde jo vikle de tre 'bundne' runer ut av binderunen og vise dem frem 'alle ubundne'".

complements it with several other curse formulae (Heizmann 1998: 520).

Thus this example of ‘magical bind-runes’ finds no support in the actual texts; instead, runic monograms were added at a later date, presumably to illustrate the text when it was no longer understood that the unbinding referred to a transposition of runes. The modern idea of ‘unbinding the runes’ seems to be based on a conflation of the original idea of unbinding the runic anagram, and the much later puzzle requiring the resolving of runic monograms. The original story contained no reference to bind-runes whatsoever.<sup>9</sup>

The ‘istil’ formula encoded here and on several runic inscriptions throughout mainland Scandinavia has been fully dealt with elsewhere (Thompson 1978). The hag Busla’s lengthy curse, the so-called ‘Buslabæn’ might be compared with that of Freyr’s emissary Skírnir in the afore-mentioned *Skírnismál*, which also climaxes with a somewhat obscure runic threat which has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Ellis (1943: 180) has pointed out that the form of the two curses is similar, invoking physical misery, mental anguish, sterility, an appeal to supernatural powers and finally runes. With the production of the ultimate runic trump-card, both of these threats become effective: the king agrees to spare the life of Busla’s step-son Bósi, and Gerðr also yields to Skírnir’s entreaties and curses, agreeing to surrender her love to the god Freyr. Clunies Ross (1994: 139, n. 34) suggests that Skírnir’s curse (comprising bribe, threat and imprecation, here involving sorcery) shows what may be a conventional tri-partite structure, and suggests parallels in Saxo’s work. Also obvious are syntactical similarities with a fourteenth-century Bergen runic verse with echoes of several Eddic poems (cf. Liestøl 1964: 41ff.). Busla’s curse is menacing and effective, but it certainly does not evidence any use of *galdrastafir* or *bandrúnir*.

The next instance of bind-rune enchantment is sometimes supposed to be found in Egill Skallagrímsson’s saga. This monumental work is set in the tenth century, although it was written down in early thirteenth-century Iceland, in all likelihood by the indefatigable Snorri Sturluson. The pagan hero Egill is a rather unlikeable, but undeniably heroic, saga prototype, often identified with an ‘Óðinn figure’, and his runic powers can be linked to this connection, as can his military and poetic ability.

There are several examples of runic magic in Egill’s saga, but I shall begin by examining the one that is often regarded as evidencing magical manipulation of bind-runes. In this episode in chapter LXXII of the saga, Egill arrives at the sick bed of Helga, a Värmland peasant girl who is suffering from *vanmátt* and

<sup>9</sup> Similarly metaphoric descriptions of ‘unbinding’ runes can be found in *Beowulf* 501, where Unferð is said to have ‘unbound’ the runes of war (*onband beadurune*). Bede also, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (IV: 22), refers to ‘loosening runes’ (*litteræ solutoriae, alysendlecan rune*): here also the context makes it clear that it is not bind-runes in the sense of runic ligatures which are being referred to but runes or magic spells which cause fetters to fall off (cf. also *Grógaldr* st. 10 and *Hávamál* st. 149 for bond-breaking magic).

has lost her mind, bewitched by misapplied runic spells. A local lad, trying to win the love of the maiden, had carved runes to this effect on a piece of whale-bone placed in the girl's bed, but erroneously, so that they instead cause the girl's illness to worsen. Egill quickly grasps the situation and realises that the runes have been written wrongly. He burns the bone and lays a new, beneficial inscription under her pillow. In other words, he fixes the spell, and the grateful girl recovers swiftly.

In this instance, Egill rails against runic incompetents, describing ten secret staves carved on the runic spell on the bone:

Skalat maðr rúnar rísta,  
nema ráða vel kunni,  
þat verðr mörgum manni,  
es of myrkvan staf villisk;  
sák á telgðu talkni,  
tíu launstafi ristna,  
þat hefr lauka lindi  
langs ofirtrega fengit.<sup>10</sup>

The compound *launstafir* used to describe the runes does not, to the best of my knowledge, recur in saga literature. Its meaning thus remains somewhat obscure, although 'secret runes' need hardly imply monogram runes.<sup>11</sup> The expression *launstafir* is in all likelihood a poetic compound spontaneously coined to alliterate with *lauka*, *lindi* and *langs* in the following lines. Nor have the several other compounds with *-stafir* in Norse literature (*líknstafir*, *herstafir*, *blundstafir*, *feiknstafir*, *bölstafir*, *helstafir*, *flærðarstafir*, *lastastafir*, *meinstafir*, *leiðstafir*, *kveinstafir*, refs in Bæksted 1952: 70) been singled out as evidencing magical monograms. In any case, the importance of this incident is unlikely to be a preoccupation with runic imprecation. Rather, it shows Egill in his familiar guise of rune-master, i.e. ingenious conquering hero. The 'secret' of runic writing is something mastered by few of Egill's contemporaries; those with limited competence are usually not sufficiently skilled to avoid botching the message. It seems that in the saga society, few are *fullrýninn*.

There is simply no need to associate the nonce word *launstafir* with magical bind-runes: it is clear that the view of Egill's healing powers as evidencing the magical manipulation of bind-runes rests on no solid foundations whatsoever. The runes or staves are necessarily 'secret' if most do not understand how to carve them, and, as Dillman (1996: 55) points out, the masculine *stafr*, 'stave' could also signify 'word' or even 'lore', so the expression could in fact apply to

<sup>10</sup> Knirk (1994: 418f.) argues that the second half-stanza of this poem was created by the saga writer while the first half is a re-working of an older poem.

<sup>11</sup> Magnusen (1841: 166f.) associates the *launstafir* with runic monograms: "Af denne Art vare da uden Tvivl de i det hedenske Norden saakaldte *hemmelige eller lønlige Stave*, (*Launstafir*), der ikke forstodes saa almindelig (eller af de fleste) som de simple Runer, og derfor gjerne anvendtes til Hexerie", cf. Bæksted (1952: 81): "Om her er tale om eller tænkt på egentlige trylletegn eller på en skreven formel eller et trylleord kan ikke ses".

ten secret words.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the significance of the number 10 in erotic rune-magic promoted by Olsen (1909) is discredited by Bæksted (1952: 195ff.).

The Värmland expedition is commonly regarded as an incredible adventure thought up by the saga writer who was probably influenced by similar romantic tales or motifs (e.g. de Vries 1967: 344; 347 note 26; Einarson 1975: 265). Einarson (1975: 259f.) points out some inconsistencies in the runic episode,<sup>13</sup> and also finds some rather forced similarities between this incident and the evangelists' description of Jesus' healing of the daughter of the synagogue ruler Jairus (Mark V, 21-43; Luke VIII, 41-56).

If the other celebrated examples of rune-magic in this saga are examined, it becomes clear that Egill's author has used runes as a kind of literary motif, an attribute appropriate to a conquering hero. The fantastic practices of rune-magic encountered in the saga serve more to illuminate the imagined qualities of the warrior protagonist, who can extract himself and others from seemingly impossible situations, rather than to cast any light on traditional practices involving secret rune-staves.

The most vivid description of runic sorcery is Egill's discovery of poison in a drink intended for him, by carving runes reddened with his own blood:

Egill brá þá knífi sínum ok stakk í lófa sér; hann tók við horninu ok reist á rúnar ok reið á blóðinu. Hann kvað:

Rístum rún á horni,  
rjóðum spjöll í dreyra,  
þau velk orð til eyrna  
óðs dýrs viðar róta;  
drekkingum veig sem viljum  
vel glýjaðra þýja,  
vitum, hvé oss of eiri  
öl, þats Bárðr signdi.

Hornit sprakk í sundr, en drykrinn fór niðr í hálm. (Egill XLIV).

The 'magic' runes cause the drinking vessel to shatter and the poison to escape. The episode is clearly fictitious, unless one imagines a prosaic, and somewhat far-fetched, explanation whereby the actual carving of runes caused the horn to break and spill the drink contained therein. Dramatic as the incident is, it would

<sup>12</sup> These are sometimes further compared (e.g. Magnúsen 1841: 166f.; Thorsen 1877: 34; Jónsson 1910: 298) with the indecipherable *stafkarlalettr* encountered by Snorri in *Sturlunga Saga* (II, 241); here, as with Egill's *launstafr*, the supposition seems to have arisen from the uncertainty surrounding the interpretation of the word *stafkarla-lettr*, cf. Cleasby-Vigfusson (1857: 586), 'a kind of Runic letters'. The term is applied to various types of coded runes from a much later period (Thorsen 1877: 35, n. 37; Snædal 1998: 27).

<sup>13</sup> Einarson (1975: 259f.) believes that the runic episode illustrates a change of mind by the saga writer in the meaning of the runes written by the local. On Egill's return, he is informed that the whalebone runes were carved by the boy to make the girl fall in love with him rather than to effect her recovery (chap LXXXVI). Einarson (1975: 260) also points out the inconsistency in having a girl described as 'hamstoli' talk with Egill (in a reasonable manner, presumably) before his erasure of the offending runes, whereupon 'henni þótti sem hon vaknaði ór svefni'.

be far more exciting if Egill's runic exploits involved carving a tombstone for a fallen kinsman, or scribbling down an order for salt – something (anything!) which could not so easily be dismissed as a literary fraud. The modern reader who does not subscribe to the school of thought which regards runes as small pebbles for solving life's dilemmas and forecasting the future will appreciate that carving runes on a drinking horn (a use that is only attested with thoroughly mundane owner inscriptions from the medieval period) would hardly lead to the shattering effects described above.

The motif of colouring runes with one's own blood recurs in other early Norse literature (cf. Dillman 1996: 66f.), and the Eddic *Guðrúnarkviða II* even mentions a horn with 'reddened' runes.<sup>14</sup> It is also worth noting that many episodes and characters from Egill's saga find close parallels in contemporary Icelandic literature (see especially Einarsson 1975, *passim*). Einarsson (1975: 174ff.) notes several correspondences between this hostile drinking competition and a similar set of circumstances encountered by *Orkneyinga saga's* Sveinn Ásleifarsun when he attends a royal feast.<sup>15</sup> But even outside the Scandinavian spectrum parallels may be found. Boyer (1973: 18f.) suggests that Egill's rune-carving on the horn is borrowed from a similar story in the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great, one of the most influential authors of the Middle Ages and certainly known in Iceland (Turville-Petre 1975: 135f.). Several motives taken from these moral tales were re-used in Norse literature, and Boyer regards the situation where Egill engraves runes on the fateful horn as a conscious imitation of the miraculous tale of St. Benedict in Gregory's dialogues (II: 3): upon being offered a bottle of poisoned wine, Benedict makes the sign of the cross, whereupon the bottle shatters into pieces.<sup>16</sup> The resemblance between the stories is clear and it does indeed seem as if runes have replaced the cross in the Icelandic version of the tale.<sup>17</sup>

The other instances of runic imprecation in Egill's saga can be covered more swiftly. *Níð*, i.e. "gross insults of a symbolic kind" (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983: 32), was proscribed by Icelandic law, and in the celebrated incident in chapter LVII of Egill's saga, Egill defiantly sets up a hazel pole topped with a decapitated horse head and pronounces a curse, which he subsequently records in runes on the pole, on Eiríkr blóðøx and his wife

<sup>14</sup> These also occur epigraphically. 'Ölrúnar' and other magic runes associated with drinking-horns are also mentioned in *Sigrdrífomál* (cf. Bæksted 1952: 64ff.).

<sup>15</sup> Einarsson (1975: 176, n. 7) notes a further analogy in *Flateyjarbók* (III, 272) where King Magús góði escapes death from Queen Alfífa's poisoned drink by first offering it to the unlucky King Knútr.

<sup>16</sup> A further similarity between a later episode involving Egill and saint Benedict is noted by Nordal (ÍF II 183, n. 1).

<sup>17</sup> Much as the *ægishjalmr* replaced the cross in certain Icelandic spells (cf. Lindqvist 1921: 46, n. 4).

Gunnhildr.<sup>18</sup> Egill's raising of a rune-inscribed *níð* pole with a defamatory message is another standard literary device, closely paralleled in at least one other saga (*Vatnsdælasaga* XXXIV), while timber *níð* of a somewhat different kind, without verse or runes, is also a feature of several other sagas.<sup>19</sup>

The most credible use of runes seems to occur in chapter LXXVIII of Egill's saga with the recording by Egill's daughter Þorgerðr of the celebrated poem *Sonatorrek* on a rune-stick, as a palliative remedy to alleviate Egill's despair at the death of his son Böðvarr: "svá at þú mættir yrkja erfikvæði eptir Böðvar, en ek mun rísta á kefli". Such use of runes is often regarded as anachronistic (e.g. Jónsson 1910: 292) and although it used to be thought that the runic descriptions prominent in the sagas predated the actual using of runes by Icelanders, this thesis, with the recent discovery of the tenth or eleventh century runic tablet from Viðey, has been disproved (Snædal 1998: 17f.). The act of writing poetry on rune-sticks is also recorded in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (chap LXII) of the hero Grettir and the half-giant Hallmundr; this last, like Egill, dictates his poem to his daughter who records it on a rune-stick.<sup>20</sup>

It seems most likely that Egill's saga employs runes primarily as literary devices, regarding them as attributes fit for heroes. They have the stamp of the unfamiliar, the exotic, which is hardly unexpected when they were probably not widely used in Iceland at this time. Egill, it may be noted, is not described using runes to mark his possessions or to order wares, but to deal with well-nigh impossible situations. Runes here function in much the same way as the magic spider-webs or bat-mobiles employed by modern comic-book super-heroes to defeat seemingly impossible odds.<sup>21</sup> It is also notable that Busla's curse similarly invokes runes only as a last recourse, after she has threatened elves, trolls, goblins, giants etc.; the same situation is manifested in *Skírnismál*.

It is perhaps worth remembering Barnes' 'runological health warning' pertaining to the reliability of runic tradition deriving from Iceland.<sup>22</sup> It is also noteworthy that the most celebrated runic events of Egill's saga take place

<sup>18</sup> On speculations concerning this runic curse, cf. ÍF II: xviii f.

<sup>19</sup> cf. ÍF p. 171, n. 1; Bæksted (1952: 207, who makes a further comparison with Saxo). Nordal (loc. cit.) also compares Egill's curse to *Hávamál* 155 while Meulengracht Sørensen (1983: 30f.) compares the runic *níð*-formula on the *Vatnsdæla* pole to verbal ritual challenges occurring in other sagas. For further references to *níð*-poles, see Dillman (1996: 60, n. 28) or Meulengracht Sørensen (1983: 51ff.).

<sup>20</sup> Other saga parallels are discussed by Bæksted (1952: 94ff.) and Dillman (1996: 60f.).

<sup>21</sup> On the tendency of Norse authors to credit the poets or socially elite with runic skills, see Dillman (1996: 82f.).

<sup>22</sup> Barnes (1991: 229): "A virtually runeless society is the most likely one, in my view, to have spawned notions about rune magic, gifts from Óðinn and similar objects of wonder. It is hard to imagine that the people of medieval Bergen, for example, with their two-script culture, would have taken such ideas seriously enough even to use them as literary motifs."

outside of Iceland, where the runic tradition, as far as it existed at that time, was presumably far more prosaic. Egill's healing of a sick girl belongs to the Swedish peasant culture of Värmland; his shattering of the poisoned horn to the court of Norway; likewise his raising of a taunting pole against King Eiríkr Bloodaxe. The sagas, which often deal comfortably and plausibly with episodes located within their home boundaries, were not averse to detailing lovesick princesses, ugly monsters and incredible events which usually took place in other Scandinavian territories (cf. Turville-Petre 1975: 230; Pálsson & Edwards 1985: 8). Egill is an Icelandic hero, but much of the saga describes his exploits abroad where his adventures are often highly unrealistic.

In any case, most of the fantastic runic episodes from Egill's saga find parallels in other literary sources, and may be regarded as literary borrowings rather than as records of actual historical events. As literature, Egill's saga may be a masterpiece; as a historical document it is often at variance with other written sources and, while remarkably accurate in some of its descriptions, is demonstrably false in several places (de Vries 1967: 342ff.). The runic episodes often have the air of anachronistic and unrealistic interpolations designed to enhance the hero's prestige. The (rune-inscribed) taunting pole is a saga commonplace; the shattering of the virago's horn is reminiscent of a foreign (Christian) miracle motif, and the healing of the damsel in distress is a further heroic embellishment, which may be modelled on a gospel story. Nor is Busla's runic curse unique: the same runic formula recurs on runic inscriptions all through Scandinavia.

The runic episodes described in these Icelandic sagas are of literary rather than historical interest and of little help in uncovering the extent of medieval runic practices. There seems in any case little cause to regard the saga evidence as supporting any notion of the 'magical' properties of runic monograms. Not one concrete reference to a runic monogram or bind-rune is found in the literature. This accords well with the epigraphic evidence, where few bind-runes can be supposed to have occult significance.<sup>23</sup> 'Magical' runic episodes and runic imprecations occur in the two sagas examined here, but these are not linked to magical monograms, and are in any case of such a generally outlandish nature, with runes employed as an exotic weapon, that little credence can be attached to the descriptions, which can hardly have been believed by the saga authors themselves, or their audiences.

Saga runic episodes are often patently artificial, often adapted from foreign literary motifs and describe romanticized applications of runic sorcery. Yet despite this pre-disposition towards the irrational, fantastical employment of runes, the 'runologiske bisarrerier' of the sagas do not involve the magical monogram binds so beloved of latter-day runologists. Neither in the literary evidence discussed here, nor in the epigraphic evidence investigated in my

---

<sup>23</sup> cf. MacLeod (1999, *passim*).

thesis, is there any definite suggestion of the magical manipulation of bind-runes for occult purposes.

### References:

- Árnason, Jón, 1862: *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* I. Leipzig.
- Barnes, Michael P., 1991: 'New Runic Studies', *Scandinavica* 30, pp. 223-32.
- Boyer, Régis, 1973: 'The Influence of Pope Gregory's Dialogues on Old Icelandic Literature', in *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference*, ed. Peter G Foote, Hermann Pálsson, Desmond Slay. London, pp. 1-27.
- Bæksted, Anders, 1942: *Islands runeindskrifter*. Bibliotheca arnamagnæana II. København.
- 1952: *Målruner og trolldruner: Runemagiske studier*. Nationalmuseets skrifter, Arkæologisk-Historisk Række, IV. København.
- Cleasby, Richard & Gudbrand Vigfusson, 1957 [1874]: *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford.
- Daviðsson, Ólafur, 1903: 'Isländische Zauberzeichen und Zauberbücher', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 13, pp. 150-67, 267-79.
- Dillmann, François-Xavier, 1996: 'Les runes dans la littérature norroise. Á propos d'une découverte archéologique en Islande', *Proxima Thule* 2, p. 51-89.
- DR = *Danmarks runeindskrifter*. Lis Jacobsen, Erik Moltke et al. København, 1942.
- Einarson, Bjarni, 1975: *Litterære forudsætninger for Egils saga*. Reykjavík.
- Ellis (Davidson), Hilda, 1943: *The Road to Hel*. Cambridge.
- Flowers, Stephen E., 1986: *Runes and Magic. Magical Formulaic Elements in the Older Runic Tradition*. New York.
- Hagland, Jan Ragnar, 1994: 'Les découvertes d'inscriptions runiques de Bergen et Trondheim. Marques de propriété, relations commerciales et croyances magico-religieuses', *Proxima Thule* 1, p. 123-34.
- Heizmann, Wilhelm, 1998: 'Runica manuscripta: Die isländische Überlieferung', in *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung* (Eingänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, Band 15), ed. Klaus Düwel. Berlin, New York, pp. 513-535.
- Jiriczek, Otto, 1893: *Die Bósa-Saga in zwei Fassungen nebst Proben aus den Bósa-Rímur*. Strassburg.
- 1893: *Zur Geschichte der Bósa-Saga*. Breslau.
- Jónsson, Finnur, 1910: 'Runerne i den norsk-islandske digtning og litteratur', *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, pp. 283-308.
- Jónsson, Guðæni (ed.), 1936: *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. Íslenzk fornrit VII. Reykjavík.
- Knirk, James E., 1988: 'The Corpus of Old Norse Metrical Texts in Runes from Bergen', in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages. Preprints from The Seventh International Saga Conference, Spoleto, 4-10 September 1988*. Spoleto, pp. 173-8.
- 1994: 'Runes from Trondheim and a Stanza by Egill Skalla-Grímsson', in *Studien zum Altgermanischen. Festschrift für Henrich Beck* (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, Vol 11), ed. Heiko Uecker. Berlin, New York, pp. 411-20.
- Krappe, Alex H., 1928: 'The sources of the *Saga af Herraúði ok Bósa*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 29, pp. 250-56.
- Kálund, Kristian, 1882: 'Islands fortidslævninger', *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, pp. 57-124.
- Liestøl, Aslak, 1964: *Runer fra Bryggen*. Bergen: Bryggens Museum.
- Lindqvist, Natan, 1921: *En isländsk Svartkonstbok från 1500-talet*. Uppsala.
- Lüning, Hermann (ed.), 1859: *Die Edda. Eine Sammlung altnordischer Götter- und Heldernliedern*. Zürich.
- MacLeod, Mindy, 1999: *Runic Ligatures. An Investigation of Bind-Runes in Runic Epigraphy* (diss.). University of Melbourne.
- Magnusen, Finn, 1841: *Runamo og runerne. En committeeberetning til det kongelige danske videnskabers selskab, samt trede afhandling angaaende rune-literaturen, Runamo og*

- forskjellige særegne (tildeels nylig opdagede) oldtidsminder. København.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben, 1983: *The Unmanly Man. Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*. Trans. Joan Turville-Petre. Odense.
- Moltke, Erik, 1936-7: 'Runologiske Bidrag', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 11, pp. 252-262.
- Neckel, Gustav & Hans Kuhn (eds), 1962: *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. Heidelberg.
- NlYR = *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*. 6 vols., ed. Magnus Olsen et al. Oslo, 1941-1990.
- Nordal, Sigurður (ed.), 1933: *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. Íslenzk fornrit II. Reykjavík.
- Olrik, Axel, 1918: 'Gudfremstillinger på Guldhornene og andre ældre mindesmærker', *Danske studier* 15, pp. 1-35.
- Olsen, Magnus, 1909: 'Fløksand-inskriften', *Bergens Museums Aarbog*, pp. 15-44.
- 1917: *Om Trolldrøner* (Fordomtíma II, Skriftserie utg. av Oskar Lundberg). Uppsala.
- Pálsson, Hermann & Paul Edwards (eds), 1985: *Seven Viking Romances*. London.
- Ross, Margaret Clunies, 1994: *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse Myths in medieval Northern society*. Volume 1: The myths. Odense.
- Schröder, Franz Rolf, 1928: 'Motivwanderungen im Mittelalter', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* XVI, pp. 7-13.
- Seim, Karin Fjellhammer, 1986: 'Fragment av Harald Hardrådes Gamanvísur Overlevert i Runer på Bryggen i Bergen', *Maal og minne*, pp. 30-41.
- Snædal, Þórgunnur, 1998: 'Íslenskar rúnir í norrænu ljósi', *Árbók hins íslenska fornleifafélags*, pp. 5-33.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur (ed.), 1939: *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit VIII. Reykjavík.
- Thompson, Claiborne, 1978: 'The Runes in Bosi saga ok Herrauds', *Scandinavian Studies* 50, pp. 50-6.
- Thorsen, P. G., 1877: 'Om Runernes Brug til Skrift udenfor det monumentale', Tillæg till Codex Runicus - Det Arnemagnæanske Haandskrift No 28, 8vo, udgivet i fotolitografisk Aftryk af Kommissionen for det Arnemagnæanske Legat, Kjøbenhavn.
- Turville-Petre, Gabriel 1975 [1953]: *Origins of Icelandic Literature*. Oxford.
- de Vries, Jan, 1967: *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, Band II. (Grundriss der germanischen Philologie). 2nd ed. Berlin.

**Appendix: Possible references to runic monograms in saga texts**

From *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs (Buslabæn)*:

Komi hér seggir sex,  
seg þú mér nöfn þeira  
öll óbundin,  
ek mun þér sýna:  
getr þú eigi ráðit,  
svá at mér rétt þykki,  
þá skulu þik hundar  
í hel gnaga,  
en sál þín  
sökki í víti.

r.o.þ.k.m.u iiiiii:sssssttttt:iiiiii:lllll:

Some parallel runic texts (cf. Liestøl 1964: 18f.; Thompson 1978; Heizmann 1998: 519):

Gørlev, Denmark (DR 239): Þjóðvé reisti stein þenna ept Óðinkár,  
**fuporkhniastbmlR**, njót vel kumls! **þmkiiisssttiiiilll** ek setta rúnar rétt. Gunni,  
Arnmundr.

Ledberg, Sweden (Ög 181): Vísi/Risi setti stein þenna ept Þorgaut 1, föður  
sinn ok þau Gunna bæði **þmk:iii:sss:ttt:iii:lll**

Lomen, Norway (NIyR 75): r:þ:k:iiisssttiiiilll

Bergen, Norway: mtpkrbiiiiiissssttttttiiiilllllll

Borgund, Norway (NIyR 364): **tistilmistilok-nþiriþipistil** (= *Tistill, mistill*  
*ok, hinn þriði, þistill*).

\*

From *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (chap. LXXII):

Skalat maðr rúnar rísta,  
nema ráða vel kunni,  
þat verðr mörgum manni,  
es of myrkvan staf villisk;  
sák á telgðu talkni,  
tú launstafi ristna,  
þat hefr lauka lindi  
langs ofrtrega fengit.

cf. rune-stick A 142:

Sá skyli rúnar rísta,  
er ráða (?) vel kunni;  
þat verðr mörgum manni,  
at ...

# Chaucer and Old Norse Mythology

Rory McTurk

School of English, University of Leeds

In a paper currently awaiting publication<sup>1</sup> I have argued that the story in *Skáldskaparmál* of Óðinn's theft of the poetic mead is an analogue to the story told in Chaucer's *House of Fame*, for three main reasons. First, both stories may be said to involve an eagle as a mediator between different kinds of poetry: in Snorri's account Óðinn in the form of an eagle expels, apparently from the front and back ends of its body, two portions of the mead, which represent poetry and poetastery respectively, while Chaucer's poem, which takes the form of an account by the narrator of a dream he has experienced, deals largely with two different places visited in the dream: the Temple of Venus in the first of the poem's three books, and the House of Fame in the third, at which literary and oral poetry, respectively, are given prominence; and it is an eagle, moreover, that conveys the narrator (himself a poet) from one place to the other. Secondly, Snorri's account hints at excretion in this context (Óðinn apparently excretes some of the mead: 'sendi aprt suman mjöðinn', I, p. 5, l. 4),<sup>2</sup> while Chaucer's

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper, 'Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* and Chaucer's *House of Fame*' is at the time of writing still awaiting publication in the Proceedings of a conference entitled 'Ancient and modern: Old Norse myths and mythological poetry then and now', and held at Edinburgh University in September 1997.

<sup>2</sup> References to Snorri's account are to Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by A. Faulkes, 2 vols

hints at flatulence (the eagle speaks of ‘eyr ybroken’, l. 765, which may be an allusion to broken wind);<sup>3</sup> these two phenomena are not identical, of course, but are closely interrelated. Thirdly and finally, Snorri’s account presents Óðinn as collecting the mead from a mountain called Hnitbjörg, one meaning of which is apparently ‘clashing rocks’,<sup>4</sup> whereas in Book III of Chaucer’s poem the eagle and the narrator enter the House of Rumour by a window in a whirling wall; both types of entrance are typical of the other world as this has been presented in different mythological traditions.

In another paper, published in *Leeds studies in English* in 1998,<sup>5</sup> I have argued that the *Topographia Hibernie* (c.1188) of Giraldus Cambrensis was a source for Chaucer’s *House of Fame*. The main argument here involved the fact that, in his portrayal in the *Topographia* of eagles flying dangerously near the sun, Giraldus compares the eagle not just with contemplatives who can gaze without flinching at the nature of the divine majesty, but also with people who meddle in what they do not fully understand, and thus come to grief in a manner comparable to that in which the eagle’s wings are burnt by the sun’s rays. Giraldus, it seems to me, is here giving a rather less respectful picture of the eagle than emerges from the other writings which have been pointed out as possible sources for Chaucer’s presentation of this bird in *The House of Fame*: the Bible; certain works of classical literature; the works of Dante; and the bestiary tradition. In all of these, the eagle is an august and serious figure, clearly meant to be treated with respect, whereas the eagle in *The House of Fame* is predominantly a comic figure — not least in making the unwarranted boast of having flown close to the sun. This, as I have indicated above, was my main argument for suggesting that Chaucer, who is believed to have been acquainted with other works by Giraldus, might have been influenced by the *Topographia Hibernie* in his portrayal of the eagle in *The House of Fame*.

In the same paper of 1998 I also suggested, however, that additional evidence for the influence of the *Topographia* on *The House of Fame* could be found in certain further similarities between the two works, emerging when Chaucer’s account of the Houses of Fame and of Rumour is compared with the description in the *Topographia* of the fire of St Brigid in Kildare. This occurs considerably further on in the *Topographia* (in chs 67-72; 77) than the chapter (9) about eagles, but is linked to it by the fact that a falcon features in it (in ch. 70), and that Giraldus immediately precedes his chapter about eagles with one

---

(London, 1998). At the conference referred to in note 1, above, Hermann Pálsson cast doubt on the ‘excretion’ interpretation of this passage. Vésteinn Ólason, however, at the same conference, defended it.

<sup>3</sup> See *Oxford guides to Chaucer: the shorter poems*, by A.J. Minnis *et al.* (Oxford, 1995), 223-27. References to *The House of Fame* are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., general editor L.D. Benson (Oxford, 1988), 347-73. The eagle is here explaining that sound, which is really broken air, travels by a natural process upwards from its place of occurrence to the House of Fame, which all sounds eventually reach.

<sup>4</sup> See Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, *Íslensk orðsifjabók* (Reykjavík, 1989), 349.

<sup>5</sup> R. McTurk, ‘Chaucer and Giraldus Cambrensis’, *LeedsSE*, n.s. 29 (1998), 173-83.

about hawks, falcons and sparrowhawks (ch. 8).<sup>6</sup> These further similarities, some of which are more striking than others, are five in number. I give them here in the order in which they occur in the *Topographia*: first, the fact that in the *Topographia* (ch. 67) St Brigid's fire is described as reputedly (though not in fact) inextinguishable, and that in *The House of Fame* (ll. 2075-80) the power of rumour is compared in a simile to that of a fire beginning as a spark but increasing until it is large enough to burn a city; secondly, the fact that in the *Topographia* (ch. 69) St Brigid's fire is surrounded by a circular hedge of withies, and that in *The House of Fame* (ll. 1935-40; 1985) the House of Rumour, which is shaped like a cage, is made of twigs; thirdly, the fact that in the *Topographia* (ch. 70) a falcon perches frequently on the top of a church tower near St Brigid's fire (until it is eventually killed by a rustic with a staff), and that in *The House of Fame* the eagle perches 'faste by [...], hye upon a stoon' (ll. 1986-92), before lifting the narrator into the House of Rumour by a window (ll. 2027-30); fourthly, the fact that in the *Topographia* (ch. 71) there is said to be a miraculous book at Kildare containing illustrations of the four creatures representing the Evangelists, and depicting them in such a way as to make their wings appear to change in number, and that in *The House of Fame* (ll. 1368-92), when the goddess Fame is described as appearing to change in size, she is said to have as many eyes as there were feathers on the four beasts that honoured God's throne in the Book of Revelation; and fifthly and finally, the fact that in the *Topographia* (ch. 77) the archer who went mad as a result of blowing on St Brigid's fire is described as blowing upon every person he meets by way of demonstrating how he did so, and that in *The House of Fame* (ll. 1615-88) good and bad reputations are described as spreading as a result of the god Aeolus blowing one or the other of his trumpets.

None of these five similarities (with the possible exception of the second and fourth) is particularly striking on its own, but if they are viewed together, and in combination with the one involving the eagle, discussed above, they have a certain cumulative quality which suggests, to me at least, that Chaucer did indeed have the fire of St Brigid in Kildare in mind when he wrote *The House of Fame*. The similarities are perhaps not so great, however, as to suggest, as I did in 1998, that Giraldus's *Topographia Hibernie* was itself a source for Chaucer's poem. In the present paper I should like to modify that view, and to suggest instead that both Giraldus's account of St Brigid and Snorri's account of the theft of the poetic mead reflect a story that became known to Chaucer most probably in oral rather than written form, and influenced his composition of *The House of Fame*. It was probably in oral form also that this same story influenced both Snorri's and Giraldus's accounts, though it has clearly done so in different ways. Since its influence on Snorri's account and on Chaucer's

<sup>6</sup> References by chapter number to the *Topographia* are to Gerald of Wales, *The history and topography of Ireland*, trans. by J.J. O'Meara (Harmondsworth, 1982). References to the Latin text are to O'Meara's edition of the *Topographia* in *PRIA* 52C (1948-50), 113-78.

poem is in my view more readily apparent than its influence on Giraldus's account, I shall argue my case, for the sake of clarity, in three main stages, as follows: first, I shall identify and briefly describe the story as it is preserved in ancient Indian texts; secondly, I shall argue for its influence on Snorri's account of the theft of the poetic mead and on Chaucer's *House of Fame*; and thirdly, I shall argue for its influence on Giraldus's account of the fire of St Brigid in Kildare. Then, in a brief conclusion, I shall deal with the question of the form in which this story is most likely to have become known to Chaucer.

In his portrayal of the eagle in *The House of Fame* Chaucer differs from the four categories of writings most often adduced as sources for this aspect of the poem, and listed above, not only in presenting the eagle as a comic figure, as already indicated, but also in associating the eagle with poetry. As well as conveying the narrator of the poem, Geoffrey (whose name is of course the same as Chaucer's) from one poetic environment to another, as shown above, the eagle presents himself as something of an authority on poetry, accusing Geoffrey, for example, of composing poems on the subject of love while lacking in personal experience of it (see *The House of Fame*, ll. 614-28). The association of an eagle with poetry is in fact a very ancient one, even though it may be hard to find parallels for it in the works most often cited as likely sources for the eagle in *The House of Fame*. Writers on Snorri's story of the theft of the poetic mead have in fact shown more awareness of this association than have writers on Chaucer's poem. It has long been recognised, for example, that there is a relationship of some kind between this story of Snorri's and a story which may be pieced together from various ancient Indian texts — the dating of which is a complex and difficult business, but which clearly preserve traditions dating from well before the time of Christ<sup>7</sup> — about how a winged figure, identifiable as an eagle in some of the texts, brings from heaven to earth the drink known as Soma, believed to confer, among other things, the gift of poetry.<sup>8</sup> The Soma is well protected and hard to obtain, which means that, according to the *Mahabharata*, the winged messenger has to slip through a wheel of flame, as bright as the sun, in order to reach it;<sup>9</sup> in another version of the story, told in the *Satapatha Brahmana*, it has to fly between two gilded razor-sharp leaves, which may suddenly snap together.<sup>10</sup> In the *Rig Veda*, moreover (cf. also the *Satapatha Brahmana*), it is told that, as the eagle flew off with the Soma, an archer shot an arrow after it with the result that it lost one of

<sup>7</sup> See J. Puhvel, *Comparative mythology* (Baltimore, Md, 1989), 68-69.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, A.A. Macdonell, *Vedic mythology* (Strassburg, 1897), 104-15, esp. pp. 109, 111-12, and 114; A. Olrik, 'Skjaldemjoden', *Edda* 24 (1925), 236-41; E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and religion of the North* (London, 1964), 40-41; Svava Jakobsdóttir, 'Gunnlöð og hinn dýri mjöður', *Skírnir* 162 (1988), 215-45. Laurence K. Shook, writing on *The House of Fame* in *Companion to Chaucer studies*, ed. by Beryl Rowland, rev. ed. (New York, 1979), 414-27, p. 420, recognises the antiquity of the association of the eagle with poetry, but does not mention India in this context.

<sup>9</sup> See Svava Jakobsdóttir, 238-39 and cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy, 'Symplegades', in *Studies and essays[...] offered in homage to George Sarton[...]*, ed. by M.F. Ashley Montagu (New York, 1944), 463-88, p. 481.

<sup>10</sup> See Svava Jakobsdóttir, 239, and Coomaraswamy, 466-67.

its wing-feathers.<sup>11</sup>

As indicated above, I shall argue here that the story thus represented in Indian texts is reflected in different ways in Snorri's account of Óðinn's theft of the poetic mead, in Chaucer's *House of Fame*, and in Giraldus's account of the fire of St Brigid in Kildare. Before doing so, however, I should like to abstract from the various manifestations of the Indian story, very cursorily reviewed above, a sequence of four topics which may be used as headings under which to conduct the argument. These are: poetry; the bird as messenger; the perilous entrance; and the penalty of loss. To these four topics a sub-topic, the archer, may be added under the heading of the fourth, since in the Indian story, as we have seen, the penalty suffered by the eagle for taking the Soma is the loss of a feather, caused by an archer's arrow.

These four topics (though not the archer) are, I believe, all present in both Snorri's story of the theft of the poetic mead and the story told in Chaucer's *House of Fame*. Both stories are about poetry, as has already been shown; in both a bird (in fact an eagle) functions as a messenger, as has also been shown; and in both a perilous entrance is involved. In Snorri's account, as we have seen, the name of the mountain from which Óðinn collects the mead is very possibly to be interpreted as 'clashing rocks' (compare the snapping leaves of the Indian story); and entry into the mountain is in any case made difficult and dangerous for Óðinn by the giant Baugi, who, after finally, under pressure from Óðinn, boring a hole for him in the mountain, tries unsuccessfully, once Óðinn has entered the hole, to stab him with the auger he had used to bore it. It should be noted, incidentally, that Óðinn at this stage of the story is not yet in eagle form; before entering the hole he changes into serpent form, a point which serves to underline the narrowness of the hole and the difficulty of entry; it is not until the return journey that he adopts the form of an eagle.<sup>12</sup> In Book II of *The House of Fame* (ll. 904-59) the eagle in the course of carrying the narrator from the Temple of Venus to Fame's house boasts of having brought him on this journey closer than Icarus came to the sun on his ill-fated flight with wax wings; the eagle refers also the myth of Phaeton borrowing and failing to control the chariot of the sun god, his father. This may recall the wheel as bright as the sun through which the winged messenger has to pass in the Indian story summarised above. This wheel, according to Coomaraswamy, who refers to it as the Wheel of the Sun, symbolises the sun itself, thought of as a door in the sky through which it is possible to enter the other world, though entry is made difficult by the revolving of the wheel and the danger of being cut to pieces by its spokes, which represent the sun's burning rays. The sun thought of in this way is just one example of what Coomaraswamy calls the Active Door, by which entry to the other world is possible, but made difficult by the door's

<sup>11</sup> See *The Rig Veda: an anthology*, [...] trans.[...] by W. D. O'Flaherty (London 1981), 128-31, and cf. Svava Jakobsdóttir, 239.

<sup>12</sup> See Snorri Sturluson, ed. Faulkes (as cited in note 2, above), I, pp. 4-5.

active quality; it may, for example, suddenly slam shut or move away, so that the moment of passing through it has to be carefully judged in advance. The Clashing Rocks, or Symplegades, of Greek mythology are another example.<sup>13</sup> It is in Book III of *The House of Fame*, however, that the idea of the perilous entrance in the form of an active door is approached most closely, at the point where the eagle, after perching nearby on a stone, carries the narrator by a window into the rapidly revolving, sixty-mile long, wickerwork House of Rumour, which, as soon as they have entered it, stops revolving. Coomaraswamy does not mention *The House of Fame*, but gives other examples of revolving barriers with doors or windows in them, in which, he claims, the barrier symbolises the sky, and the door or window symbolises the sun.<sup>14</sup>

As for the fourth topic, the penalty of loss, this is more clearly evident in Snorri's account than in Chaucer's poem. In Snorri's account, Óðinn loses a portion of the poetic mead by apparently excreting it in his nervousness at being closely pursued in his eagle form by the giant Suttungr, also in the form of an eagle. In *The House of Fame* the loss in question is the loss of intestinal wind, and this, it must be emphasised, is hinted at rather than explicitly mentioned; it should also be noted that whereas in Snorri's account and the Indian story the loss takes place after the messenger has passed both in and out through the perilous entrance, in Chaucer's poem the hints at flatulence occur before the eagle has entered the House of Rumour, and partly also before it has entered the House of Fame; there is in any case no account of a return journey in the poem, which may have been left unfinished.<sup>15</sup> A further point is that the idea of flatulence, if it can be accepted that it is indeed present in *The House of Fame*, is associated there not exclusively with the eagle, whose reference to broken air (at l. 765) occurs relatively early on in its conversation with the narrator (before its talk of flying close to the sun), but also — at least arguably — with the wind god Aeolus: A.J. Minnis has recently suggested that the description of the trumpet used by Aeolus to blow slander throughout the world from Fame's house (see ll. 1623-56) is strongly suggestive of the alimentary canal.<sup>16</sup> For these reasons, and also because the eagle in *The House of Fame* is not actually stated to have broken wind, the poem's hints at flatulence cannot be said to exemplify the penalty of loss in the same obvious way as the aquiline Óðinn's predicament seems to do in Snorri's account — unless it can be argued that the irony at the expense of Chaucer's eagle arising from its apparently unconscious hint at farting can be seen as a kind of penalty for its subsequent boast of having flown close to the sun. It is possible, indeed, that the loss of dignity to the eagle in the Indian story that is perhaps implied by its loss of a wing-feather

<sup>13</sup> See Coomaraswamy, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> See Coomaraswamy, 479-80. Cf. note 27, below.

<sup>15</sup> See *The Riverside Chaucer* (1988), 990.

<sup>16</sup> See *Oxford guides to Chaucer: the shorter poems* (1995), 224.

represents an early stage in the development of the presentation of the eagle as a comic figure that distinguishes Chaucer's *House of Fame*, as already indicated, from the works most often adduced as sources for his portrayal of the eagle in that poem; Óðinn in his role as an eagle in Snorri's account is of course also something of a comic figure. It must be acknowledged that the loss of a wing-feather (or even a tail-feather) is not the same phenomenon as excretion; and that excretion and flatulence, albeit closely interrelated, are not identical phenomena either. Nevertheless there are, I suggest, sufficient similarities involving these phenomena between the Indian story on the one hand and Snorri's and Chaucer's accounts on the other to support the argument I am offering here under the heading of the penalty of loss; and even if this is not accepted, the argument is, as I believe I have shown, well enough supported under the headings of the first three topics in the sequence of four, given above, namely: poetry, the bird as messenger, and the perilous entrance.

In turning now, with all four topics in mind, to Giraldus's account of the fire of St Brigid in Kildare, I must acknowledge at once that there is (as far as I can discover) no explicit reference to poetry anywhere in this account. It is likely, however, that the name of Brigid carried associations of poetry, if not for Giraldus himself, then for those who preserved the traditions he records. As will become increasingly clear below, traditions of St Brigid, about whom as a historical figure very little is known, tended to combine with and be influenced by traditions of her pagan namesake, the Celtic goddess Brigid, who was believed to be, among other things, a patroness of poetry. She is also the Irish counterpart of the Gaulish Minerva, who was regarded as a patroness of arts and crafts.<sup>17</sup> Brigid's association with poetry is strongly emphasised in Cormac's *Glossary* (c.900), where she is described as 'a poetess, daughter of the Dagda', and as 'the goddess whom poets adored' to the extent of calling her 'goddess of poets'; and where she is also said to have had two sisters and namesakes, associated with healing and the smith's craft respectively.<sup>18</sup> It is not without interest in the context of the goddess Brigid's association with the arts to note that Giraldus, in his account of St Brigid in the *Topographia Hibernie*, devotes two chapters (71 and 72) to the miraculous book at Kildare, paying particular attention to the artistry of its illustrations, and telling how the scribe responsible for these was assisted in his work by an angel who appeared to him in dreams on successive nights, producing drawings for him to copy, and in the first dream successfully exhorted him to obtain the help of St Brigid's prayers. This may recall the dream setting of *The House of Fame*, in which a heavenly messenger, the eagle, who claims to have been sent by Jupiter (ll. 605-13), advises the dreamer-narrator, as we have seen, on poetic composition. The Dagda, of whom Brigid is said to be the daughter in Cormac's *Glossary*, is known from other

<sup>17</sup> See P. Mac Cana, *Celtic mythology* (London, 1970), 34-35.

<sup>18</sup> See *Sanas Chormaic: Cormac's glossary*, trans. [...] by J. O' Donovan; ed. [...] by W. Stokes (Calcutta, 1868), 23.

sources as the father god of the Túatha Dé Danann, or ‘people of the goddess Danu’, a divine people who were believed to have lived in Ireland before the ancestors of the Irish, the Milesians or Sons of Míl, arrived there and drove them into the subterranean otherworld of the *síde*, or fairy mounds, from which, it was believed, they continued to exert their influence.<sup>19</sup> The very name of Kildare, *Cill Dara*, ‘the church of the oak’, specifies the kind of tree which, the Celts believed, provided access to the invisible world.<sup>20</sup> With these various considerations in mind, we may venture to suggest that, both before and after the time of Giraldus, St Brigid’s shrine at Kildare was associated with traditions of poetic knowledge gained as a result of entry to the other world.

With regard to our second topic, the bird as messenger, it has already been noted that Giraldus (in ch. 70) gives an account of how a falcon perched on the top of a church tower at Kildare. This falcon, known as ‘Brigid’s bird’, was used by people in the neighbourhood to hunt other birds, which it did expertly, just as if it had been tamed and trained for the purpose; it also showed a tyrannical superiority to lesser birds. During the mating season it chose to mate near Glendalough rather than in the precincts of the church at Kildare, thus showing respect for the local ecclesiastics. After a long life it was eventually killed by a rustic with a staff. Giraldus sees its death as a lesson in the dangers of over-confidence; his tone here is reminiscent of that in which he had earlier (in ch. 9) compared the scorching of the eagle’s wings when it flies close to the sun with the dangers of trying to acquire knowledge that is beyond one’s grasp. This falcon, as will be evident, suffers in death a worse fate than the eagles described by Giraldus or the ones that figure in the Indian story and in Snorri’s and Chaucer’s stories; nor is it sent on such a specific errand as the eagles in those three last-named stories seem to be. Nevertheless, what is said about it in Giraldus’s account is enough, I suggest, to support the idea of a relationship between that account and those same three stories, provided that other features of the account can be found to do so as well.

The third topic, the perilous entrance, is well illustrated by St Brigid’s fire itself, which is described in three brief chapters (67-69) immediately preceding the relatively lengthy one about the falcon, and which also features again in ch. 77. In chs 67-69, Giraldus describes how in St Brigid’s time twenty nuns, of whom she herself was one, kept the fire perpetually burning, and how since her death only nineteen have done so. No male is allowed to cross the circular hedge of withies which surrounds the fire, though some have rashly tried to do so. Only women are allowed to blow the fire, and then not with their mouths, but only with bellows or fans. A curse of the saint means that goats never have young in the area; on the other hand, the grass in the nearby pastures is miraculously restored overnight after grazing animals have consumed it. In ch.

---

<sup>19</sup> See Puhvel, 176-78.

<sup>20</sup> See S. “Catháin, *The festival of Brígit: Celtic goddess and holy woman* (Dublin, 1995), 16, 26 (note 140).

77, Giraldus gives two examples of what has happened to males who have attempted to cross the hedge round the fire. One of these is the archer, mentioned above, who, after crossing the hedge, blew on the fire, and at once went mad, and then went around blowing on everyone he met, saying that this was how he had blown on Brigid's fire; he also blew on every fire that he encountered. In the end he drank so much water in his desperate need for it that he burst and died. Another person (*alius*; presumably also an archer), who was restrained by his companions before he had crossed the hedge completely, nevertheless lost the foot and shank that did cross it, and was lame ever afterwards.

St Brigid's fire, which, since the hedge around it is circular (*orbicularis*), is presumably itself circular in shape, is surely reminiscent of the Wheel of the Sun, discussed above. Celtic scholars seem reluctant to describe the pagan goddess Brigid as a sun-goddess, but they readily acknowledge her association with fire and also, though perhaps rather more cautiously, with fertility;<sup>21</sup> and Giraldus's account of her Christian namesake, just summarised, clearly links her with both. It was in the light of a consideration of this account, among others, that Mac Cana maintained that 'no clear distinction can be made between the goddess and the saint';<sup>22</sup> in other words, traditions of the saint have been so heavily influenced by traditions of the goddess that it is hard to disentangle one set of traditions from the other. St Brigid's feast-day, February 1, coincides with *Imbolc*, the pagan Celtic festival of spring, which celebrated the promise of the return of the sun's brightness after the darkness of winter, and Mac Cana and others have drawn attention to a number of sources which associate St Brigid with fire and brightness, not least the brightness of the sun.<sup>23</sup> One of these is the anonymous *Vita prima Sanctae Brigitae* (known as *Vita I*), dating most probably from the mid-eighth century at the earliest, according to which St Brigid, who it was foretold would shine in the world like the sun in the vault of heaven, was born just after sunrise neither within nor outside a house (a borderline location which perhaps parallels the temporal borderline between winter and spring that her feast-day represents). It also relates that, on different occasions when she was a child, a house in which she was sleeping appeared to be ablaze; a piece of cloth touching her head was seen to glow with a fiery flame; and a column of fire was seen rising from the house in which she slept.<sup>24</sup> Another source, Cogitosus's *Vita Brigitae* (known as *Vita II*), dating most probably from early in the second half of the seventh century, tells how she

<sup>21</sup> See "Catháin, 2; cf. also Mac Cana, 34-35, 94-95, and D. "h"gáin, *The hero in Irish folk history* (Dublin, 1985), 16-26.

<sup>22</sup> See Mac Cana, 35.

<sup>23</sup> See Mac Cana, 34-35; "h"gáin, 19-23; and the references given under 'fire' and 'sun' in the Index to "Catháin.

<sup>24</sup> See S. Connolly 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae: background and historical value', *JRSAI* 119 (1989), 5-49, pp. 6, 14-15.

hung her wet clothes on a sunbeam to dry.<sup>25</sup> Many more examples could be given, but I shall content myself here with quoting from a statement by another Celtic scholar, Miranda Jane Green, which is particularly useful for the purposes of this part of my argument: according to Green, the Celts acknowledged fire as ‘the terrestrial counterpart of the sun in the sky.’<sup>26</sup>

If, as I suggest, St Brigid’s fire as described by Giraldus may be taken as an example of the Wheel of the Sun, this would help to explain *why* people were so rash as to attempt to enter it by crossing the hedge surrounding it. Giraldus himself gives no explanation for this. What he seems to be recording here, apparently without fully understanding it, is a tradition comparable to that preserved in the Indian story discussed above (and I believe also in Chaucer’s *House of Fame*), according to which the other world could be entered by way of the sun. In the Indian story, as we have seen, it is a bird who enters (cf. *The House of Fame*) and returns from the other world, though not without difficulty; and a recollection of the bird’s part in the story may lie behind Giraldus’s account of the falcon (perched on high at first and later falling to its death), reminiscent as this is of his previous account of eagles flying dangerously near the sun, and close as it also is to his account of St Brigid’s fire. The purpose of entering the other world in the tradition he preserves may well have been the acquiring of poetic knowledge, as the Indian and Chaucerian accounts, as well as Snorri’s, all suggest in different ways. Alternatively, or additionally, it may have been the reconciliation of opposites, which Coomaraswamy sees as the fundamental purpose of visits to the other world as these have been represented in different mythological traditions; the other world, according to him, is believed to lack the oppositions such as Fear and Hope, North and South, Night and Day, etc., which trouble us in this world, and the purpose of visiting the other world is to find a way of negating or neutralising these contrasts. Linked with this belief is the notion that the ideal time for entering the other world is at a temporal borderline, such as that between winter and spring, with which, as we have seen, St Brigid is associated. He refers to the account in the Old Irish saga *Fled Bricrend* (probably originally from the eighth century) of how the chieftain Cú Ruí possessed a stronghold over which he sang a spell each night, whereupon it started revolving as swiftly as a mill-wheel, so that its entrance could never be found after sunset. Behind this, according to Coomaraswamy, lies the idea of the sun as the Active Door.<sup>27</sup> It is surely not unreasonable to suppose, in any case, that a house which starts revolving at sunset would stop doing so at sunrise. Here it may be pointed out that the narrator of *The House of Fame* twice mentions (at ll. 63 and 111) that his dream befell him on December 10; and it may be recalled that when, in the course of his dream, the narrator

<sup>25</sup> See S. Connolly and J.-M. Picard, ‘Cogitosus’s *Life of St Brigit*: content and value’, *JRSAI* 117 (1987), 5-27, pp. 5, 15.

<sup>26</sup> See M. J. Green, *Celtic myths* (London, 1998), 46.

<sup>27</sup> See Coomaraswamy, 480. Cf. note 14, above.

enters the House of Rumour with the eagle's help, this house, which had been revolving, stops doing so. *The House of Fame* is thought to have been composed very soon after 1376, a year in which, according to the Julian Calendar, the winter solstice fell on December 11.<sup>28</sup> It may thus be suggested that the eagle and the narrator of *The House of Fame* enter the House of Rumour at sunrise on the morning of the winter solstice of 1376, December 11, that is, on the borderlines between night and day and between the shortening and lengthening of the days of the year, at the time when the first hint of spring comes in the middle of winter — a highly suitable time, as Coomaraswamy would surely accept, for visiting the other world.<sup>29</sup> However this may be, enough has been said here, I trust, to establish the presence in Giraldus's account of the topic of the perilous entrance.

Enough has probably also been said above to indicate how the fourth topic, the penalty of loss, manifests itself in Giraldus's account. The falcon suffers the penalty of loss of life — not, it is true, for attempting to enter St Brigid's fire, but rather, as Giraldus puts it, for 'having occupied itself without sufficient caution with the prey which it had caught, and having too little feared the approaches of men'<sup>30</sup> — in other words, for becoming over-confident; and the penalties suffered by the two men who attempt to cross the hedge surrounding the fire involve loss of wits and of a foot respectively. 'The archer' was mentioned above as a sub-topic under this heading, and it is of some interest to note that of these two men the first to be mentioned is certainly an archer (*sagittarius*), and the second (*alius*) very possibly is as well. It is true that the archer in the Indian story has the opposite function from that of the archer in Giraldus's account; in the former it is the archer who inflicts the penalty of loss, whereas in the latter it is the archer who suffers it. The loss of wits and/or of a foot in Giraldus's account corresponds to the bird's loss of a feather in the Indian story. It is nevertheless noteworthy that an archer is specified in both Giraldus's account and the Indian story; and if it can indeed be claimed that the second of the two human sufferers in Giraldus's account, the one who loses his foot, is, like the first, an archer, it is also of interest to note that Krsanu, as the archer in the Indian story is called in the *Rig Veda*, is apparently also known as 'the footless archer' in Indian sources.<sup>31</sup> The similarities and differences between Giraldus's account and the Indian story in this and other respects may be compared with those that have been pointed out between, on the one hand, Giraldus's account, also in the *Topographia Hibernie* (ch. 102), of a horse sacrifice, and, on the other, ancient Indian traditions of such a sacrifice. Ritual intercourse is involved in both cases, but in Giraldus the coition is between a

<sup>28</sup> See *The Riverside Chaucer* (1988), xxiv-xxv, and [Geoffrey] Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, ed. by N.R. Havely (Durham, 1994), 10, 137 (note to l. 63).

<sup>29</sup> See Coomaraswamy, 470 (note 13).

<sup>30</sup> Quoted from O'Meara's translation (1982) as cited in note 6, above, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> See R. Calasso, *Ka*, trans. by T. Parks (London, 1999), 14, 419. Svava Jakobsdóttir, 239, implies that the guardian of the Soma, who shoots an arrow after the eagle, is a snake. Cf. Calasso, 14-16.

man and a mare, whereas in the Indian traditions it is between a woman and a stallion.<sup>32</sup>

In concluding this paper I shall need to rearrange to some extent the order and emphases of the foregoing remarks. The accounts by Snorri and Giraldus preserve two somewhat different versions of a story in which a bird seeks to bring knowledge of poetry from the other world. I shall call these two versions the Norse and the Irish versions respectively. Since this story is also preserved in ancient Indian texts, it must be of great antiquity. Chaucer, I am arguing, made use in *The House of Fame* of a version of the story falling somewhere between the Norse and the Irish versions, the latter of which, as I hope I have produced sufficient evidence to show, had become combined with traditions relating to (St) Brigid well before the time of Giraldus (d.1223), who in turn was writing well before the time of Chaucer (d.1400). The Norse version of the story is relatively close to Chaucer's in having both an explicit concern with poetry and (apparently)<sup>33</sup> a scatological element; on the other hand, it differs from Chaucer's in reflecting the idea of the entrance to the other world as a narrow opening between rocks in a mountain. The Irish version is relatively close to Chaucer's in reflecting the idea of the sun as the entrance to the other world, and in linking this idea to the concept of an enclosure of withies or twigs; on the other hand, there is no mention of poetry in the Irish version of the story in its preserved form. The goddess Brigid's association with poetry nevertheless makes it likely that this, too, was an element in the Irish version. On balance, it seems to me that Chaucer's poem, with its references to the sun and to a house of twigs, reflects a version of the story marginally closer to the Irish than to the Norse version. There is moreover one particular similarity between Giraldus's account and *The House of Fame* that strongly suggests to me that Chaucer knew the story in question in a version that was linked to traditions of the shrine of St Brigid in Kildare. This is the reference to the mystical representations (as composite beings) of the four evangelists, which in Giraldus's account (ch. 71) occurs in connection with the miraculous book at Kildare, with its depiction of the beings in question as having wings that appear to change in number, and which in Chaucer's poem (ll. 1368-85) occurs in connection with the goddess Fame's apparent ability to change in size: just after saying that Fame at first looked no taller than a cubit's length but subsequently seemed to stretch from earth to heaven, the narrator says she had as many eyes as there were feathers on these same four beings, as described in the Book of Revelation.<sup>34</sup> The reference thus occurs in both accounts in a context of what the onlooker in each case — the peruser of the book in Giraldus, and the

---

<sup>32</sup> See Puhvel, 273-76.

<sup>33</sup> I add 'apparently' mainly because of the difference of opinion recorded in note 2, above, but also because of the doubt as to whether there really is a scatological element in *The House of Fame*. See the reference given in note 16, above.

<sup>34</sup> See Revelation, 4: 6-11, and cf. Ezekiel, 1: 4-28.

narrator in Chaucer — perceives as miraculous physical change, and together with the motif of the enclosure of twigs is a relatively specific similarity between the two accounts, as indicated above. While I do not now believe, as also indicated above, that it is so specific as to justify my earlier expressed view that Chaucer was indebted to Giraldus's account itself in composing *The House of Fame*, it may, I suggest, be used as evidence, along with the other similarities and possible connections that have been pointed out here, that Chaucer in writing that poem was influenced by oral traditions relating to the shrine of St Brigid in Kildare.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> I am grateful to Guðni Elísson for reading through this paper and suggesting a number of changes, most of which I have implemented. Needless to say, the paper as it now stands is entirely my responsibility.

## Baldrs draumar: literally and literarily

Mats Malm

Department of Literature, Gothenburg University

*Baldrs draumar* has more than once provoked scholars trying to use the poem as a source of Old Norse mythology. It has often been considered not only self-contradictory but also ‘a bad poem’ although such evaluations will be rare nowadays.<sup>1</sup> Modern and systematical examinations involving the poem have been made primarily by John Lindow in his book on the Baldr myth, and by Judy Quinn in her studies on prophetic poetry and the vǫlva character.<sup>2</sup>

In only 14 stanzas the poem presents events concerning the death of Baldr, but in a condensed and puzzling way. Óðinn asks a vǫlva in Hel about the future of Baldr, i.e. the future of the gods, but the reasons for Óðinn’s asking are obscure. Because of Baldr’s bad dreams Óðinn’s first question is who will die, but he obviously knows the answer since he journeys to Hel. There, he does

---

<sup>1</sup>E.g. Schröder 1964, 337: “sicher ist jedenfalls, daß es ein schwaches Lied der isländischen Spätzeit des ausgehenden 12. Jahrhunderts ist”. As a recent contrast, see the positive evaluation on ethical grounds given by Pàroli 1992.

This paper is a result of my attending the fruitful and inspiring meetings of the Frankfurt Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda on *Baldrs draumar*—which should not be held responsible for my propositions. For a fundamental commentary, I refer to its forthcoming part 1.

<sup>2</sup>Lindow 1997; Quinn (forthc.); cf. Quinn 1990; 1998.

not visit Hel herself, but a vǫlva, who first answers his questions in her capacity of being present in the realm of the dead but then in her capacity of seeress. The vǫlva seems particularly dead: she not only resides in Hel but is also buried in a grave within the realm of the dead, and still she is exposed to snow, dew and rain. The rather abrupt ending further underlines the elusiveness of the poem, which thus may appear not only less useful as a source of mythology but also less valuable aesthetically.

If read literally—with the intention of bringing order to the events and identities within the poem and thus finding ‘facts’ of Northern mythology—the poem seems too enigmatic or possibly too confused to provide clear information. On the other hand *Baldrs draumar* exploits exactly these ‘disadvantages’ to its own advantage. Its poetic effect is based precisely on scantiness and obscurity, to enhance the receivers’ associations and stimulate attempts at interpretation. The situation is one of oral delivery or at least one of transmission and impact on the receiver. What I will try to elaborate in the following is the means by which this work of art uses tradition and expectations precisely by suggesting without pronouncing.

The notion of Óðinn descending to Hel in order to ask about Baldr’s dreams is unknown elsewhere, but the poem in several respects corresponds to *Vǫluspá* 31–35 (the Codex Regius version<sup>3</sup>): *Baldrs draumar* 11 is practically identical to *Vǫluspá* 32.5–33.4.<sup>4</sup> The dating of the poems is complicated,<sup>5</sup> and there may have been other poems treating the death of Baldr.<sup>6</sup> The only assumption I will make here, is that *Baldrs draumar* and *Vǫluspá* reflect a more or less common tradition. The reminiscent description of Hermóðr, not Óðinn, attempting to bring Baldr back to life in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49 is not necessarily younger than *Baldrs draumar*, since *Málsháttakvæði* 9 mentions Hermóðr as the one trying to make Baldr’s life longer.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>The *Hauksbók* version, which lacks str. 31, 32, 33 and 35 according to Neckel-Kuhns’s numbering, does not mention the death of Baldr at all, and the Váli mentioned seems more in correspondence with the one described as Loki’s, not Óðinn’s son in *Gylfaginning* ch. 50. Generally on the versions of *Vǫluspá*, see Quinn 1990.

<sup>4</sup>The description of the mistletoe in *Vǫluspá* may be correspondent to *Baldrs draumar* 9; but only on the condition that *hróðrbarm* there is interpreted as mistletoe (so, e.g., Dronke 1997). A rather more convincing interpretation of *hróðrbarm* is Baldr himself (so, e.g., Lindow 1997, 43–44).

<sup>5</sup>For example, Jónas Kristjánsson 1990 and Pàroli 1992, 150–151 n. 48. *Vǫluspá* seems to have existed in one form or another at least by the middle of the 11th century, since Árnorr Jarlaskáld uses pieces of it in *Þórsdrápa* (Simek 1993, 336). The question of whether and to what extent *Vǫluspá* reflects pre-Christian beliefs (see Kragerud 1974) is not an issue here, since what is at stake are specific notions of the 11th and 12th centuries.

<sup>6</sup>For example, Schröder 1964, 330 and Lindow 1997, 102; 117; 125. The alliterating parts of the dialogue between Frigg and Loki in *Gylfaginning* do not necessarily prove that the prose is based on models in verse: as Lindow points out, Snorri may have arranged them thus in order to resemble a traditional dialogue form (Lindow 1997, 59).

<sup>7</sup> Friggjar þótti sviðr at syni,  
sá var taldr ór miklu kyni,  
Hermóðr vildi auka aldr,

Thus, *Baldrs draumar* naturally invites us to reconstruct the death of Baldr also using the evidence of mainly *Gylfaginning* ch. 49–50 and *Völuspá*. Further incitement to a ‘factual’, literal interpretation is the fact that *Baldrs draumar* calls for being interpreted according to the riddle genre. As in *Vafþrúðnismál*, Óðinn crosses boundaries to visit a being of another world, hides his identity and poses questions in the form of riddles. In *Vafþrúðnismál*, as also in the *Gáttur Gestumblinda* of *Hervarar saga*, Óðinn finally defeats his adversary by asking: “What did Óðinn whisper in the ear of Baldr on the funeral pyre?” Since that is obviously a question only Óðinn can answer, Óðinn has revealed his identity and the questioning is finished. *Baldrs draumar* takes an end in similar fashion. After asking who is awaited in Hel—answer: Baldr—, who kills Baldr—answer: Høðr—, who avenges Baldr—answer: Váli or at least the son of Rind<sup>8</sup>—, he puts to her the ‘impossible’ question which can receive no answer yet reveals his identity, thus causing the end of the dialogue as well as the poem.

- 1 Senn vóro æsir allir á þingi  
oc ásynior allar á máli,  
oc um þat réðo, ríkir tívar,  
hví væri Baldri ballir draumar.
- 2 Upp reis Óðinn, alda gautr,  
oc hann á Sleipni sǫðul um lagði;  
reið hann niðr þaðan Niflheliar til,  
mætti hann hvelpi, þeim er ór helio kom.
- 3 Sá var blóðugr um bríóst framan,  
oc galdrs fǫður gó um lengi;  
fram reið Óðinn, foldvegr dunði,  
hann kom at hávo Heliar ranni.
- 4 Þá reið Óðinn fyr austan dyrr,  
þar er hann vissi vǫlo leiði;  
nam hann vittugri valgaldr qveða,  
unz nauðig reis, nás orð um qvað:
- 5 ‘Hvat er manna þat, mér ókunnra,  
er mér hefir aukit erfit sinni?  
var ec snívín snióví oc slegin regni  
oc drífín dǫggo, dauð var ec lengi.’
- 6 Vegtamr ec heiti, sonr em ec Valtams;  
segðu mér ór helio — ec man ór heimi —:  
hveim ero beccir baugom sánir,  
flet fagrliga flóð gulli?

---

Éljúðnir vann sólginn Baldr,  
ǫll grétu þau eptir hann,  
aukit var þeim hlátrar bann,  
heyrinkunn er frá h\_num saga,  
hvat þarf ek of slíkt at jaga.

(*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* B II, 140; see Lindow 1997, 115.)

<sup>8</sup>The name Váli is missing in the manuscript, but the verse requires an emendation and ‘Váli’ is an option that makes the alliteration correct.

- 7 ‘Hér stendr Baldri of brugginn miðdr,  
scírar veigar, liggr sciöldr yfir,  
enn ásmegir í ofvæni.  
Nauðug sagðac, nú mun ec þegia.’
- 8 ‘Þegiattu, vǫlva! þic vil ec fregna,  
unz alkunna, vil ec enn vita:  
hverr man Baldri at bana verða  
oc Óðins son aldri ræna?’
- 9 ‘Hǫðr berr hávan hróðrbarm þinig;  
hanþ man Baldri at bana verða  
oc Óðins son aldri ræna.  
Nauðug sagðac, nú mun ec þegia.’
- 10 ‘Þegiattu, vǫlva! þic vil ec fregna,  
unz alkunna, vil ec enn vita:  
hverr man heipt Heði heft of vinna,  
eða Baldrs bana á bál vega?’
- 11 ‘Rindr berr Vála í vestrslom,  
sá man Óðins sonr einnætt vega;  
hǫnd um þvær né hǫfuð kembir,  
áðr á bal um berr Baldrs andscota.  
Nauðug sagðac, nú mun ec þegia.’
- 12 ‘Þegiattu, vǫlva! þic vil ec fregna,  
unz alkunna, vil ec enn vita:  
hveriar ro þær meyar, er at muni gráta  
oc á himin verpa hálsa scautom?’
- 13 ‘Ertattu Vegtamr, sem ec hugða,  
heldr ertu Óðinn, aldinn gautr.’  
‘Ertattu vǫlva, né vís kona,  
heldr ertu þriggia þursa móðir.’
- 14 ‘Heim rið þú, Óðinn, oc ver hróðigr!  
Svá komit manna meirr aprt á vit,  
er lauss Loki líðr ór þöndum  
oc ragna rǫc riúfendr koma.’

Formally, Óðinn’s goal is thus to gather information. In essence, though, the questions posed should be seen as a probing of the power balance between *æsir* and giants just as in *Vafþrúðnismál*. We can also suppose that the goal is not only to probe but also, if possible, to influence the coming events. This is not only a universal idea of underworld visits, such as in *Gilgamesh* and the Orpheus myth, but is also apparent in Hermóðr’s corresponding journey. The imminent destruction of order is pronounced already in the first stanza—which is also used when the hammer of Þórr is missing in *Þrymskviða*—and reflected in the antagonism of the poem. While information from giants is generally structured by questions put to them, information from a *vǫlva* is as a rule more independently presented (see Quinn *forthc.*). Both in its structure of question—answer and in its antagonism, *Baldrs draumar* thus brings to the fore Óðinn’s confrontations with giants. As a transgression of borders can

principally be described as a question of power,<sup>9</sup> I think it safe to presume that the question of knowledge is subordinated the question of power.<sup>10</sup>

The crucial point, to my mind, comes in the twelfth stanza: regardless whether *at muni* is interpreted as ‘at their will’ or ‘over their beloved’, Baldr appears to be the relevant cause and the question really implies: ‘who will not weep?’. The question is directly connected to the riddles of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Gátur Gestumblinda* through its wording: *hveriar ro þær meyiar* occurs several times in *Gátur Gestumblinda* and once in *Vafþrúðnismál*. In those poems, each question has a specific answer, and in *Baldrs draumar* the answer to be expected is the waves. However, the question in itself is of less importance than its function. An answer is not given, nor is the status of the answer commented upon as in *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Gátur Gestumblinda*. Within the poem, the function of the question is to be unanswerable—just as in *Gátur Gestumblinda* and *Vafþrúðnismál* the whole questioning is put to an end by one single question (Holtsmark 1964, 102). It also seems that the function of the question is similar in the respect that just as no one but Óðinn could know what was whispered to him, so he here reveals something that Óðinn would be one of very few to know: which then would prove that he has arrived in Hel not to gather information but to test the balance of power. What reveals Óðinn’s identity might also be a “code slippage” that introduces the Odinic voice from such riddle contests as the one in *Vafþrúðnismál*, as Margaret Clunies Ross has pointed out (1990, 225). This would be in accordance with the increasing animosity.

However, the ambiguity of the present riddle merely inaugurates the problems. We do not receive the answer, we cannot be sure in what way it reveals Óðinn, and we also do not know if his answer—you are neither a vǫlva nor wise, but the mother of three giants—is merely an insult or if it should be understood as a definition of identity. Since there seems to have been an understanding that vǫlur and giants were related, the comment does not seem very insulting—cf. *Hyndluljóð* 4 where Hyndla is called ‘bride of giants’ without any offense<sup>11</sup>—, and since the structure of the poem requires that also Óðinn’s counterpart be revealed, it seems reasonable to assume that Óðinn’s statement should be understood as more than a simple insult. Thus, the question might be described as intended to be meaningless, but only within the logic of the fiction. When the poetic effect of the poem as a whole is considered, the question is by contrast of great meaning and serves to overdetermine the text. The receiver has been incited to ponder upon a variety of options of

<sup>9</sup>See the extensive discussion of Clunies Ross 1994.

<sup>10</sup>As Lindow has shown in this connection, the search for knowledge is in many respects vital and has important analogues (Lindow 1997, 39–43). Still, the structure of the discussion makes the question of power primary, not least since the journey into another world in itself generally embodies the struggle for power. In this vein, see also McKinnell 1994, 102; cf. Quinn (forthc.).

<sup>11</sup>See Quinn (forthc.).

interpretation. Even in order to decide that “mother of three giants” is only an insult, the receiver must evoke all of his/her previous knowledge of the myth. Attempting a literal understanding, the receiver is urged to try to find the answer that the poem laboriously withholds. The associations and attempts at interpretation constitute the beginning of a literary understanding—if the sudden changes from str. 12 are understood not as a clumsy way of ending things but as a consistent way of upholding concentration and suggestiveness.

The only ‘mother of three giants’ mentioned in the tradition is Angrboða, who in *Gylfaginning* is presented as the mother of Loki’s children, the Fenris wolf, the Miðgarð serpent and Hel—all of whom take important places in the scenario of Ragnarøk. Other than this and in *Hyndluslód* 40, where Loki is said to have begotten the wolf with her, Angrboða is not much mentioned, but her name, ‘the one who announces grief’, is congenial with the role of the vǫlva in *Baldrs draumar*. John Lindow, who argues convincingly for this interpretation, has connected this with the question of the waves in str. 12 through an alternative understanding of the name: Angrboða could mean ‘fjord-breaker’ or ‘sea-wave’. This interpretation requires a feminine form *boða* that cannot be verified, but it results in a very tempting structural correspondence between Óðinn and Loki in the myth.<sup>12</sup> The meaning of the name would thus be transformed from ‘announcer of grief’ into something connected with the waves of the sea. Thus, the question the answer of which should be the waves reveals the identity of the vǫlva. And in reverse: the vǫlva realises Óðinn’s identity because of her close connection with Loki and the forces of Ragnarøk. If one interpretation must be chosen, this one seems the best. But others might be considered.

The vǫlva has, a long time ago, been identified as Þökk, the giantess who in *Gylfaginning* refuses to take part in weeping Baldr out of Hel (Rudolf 1887, 73). The strength of this interpretation lies in the mention of weeping in st. 12: the vǫlva then realises that Óðinn knows not only her identity but also of the important rôle she is assigned in the future events. In *Gylfaginning*, Þökk is found in a cave, reminiscent of her placement in *Baldrs draumar* and, for that matter, in *Hyndluljóð*. In effect, the stanza of *Gylfaginning* where she refuses to weep would be the perfect answer to Óðinn’s question in *Baldrs draumar* as to who will not weep over Baldr (were it not that it is in fornyrðislag). The answer, given by the vǫlva/giantess would then be:

---

<sup>12</sup>Lindow 1997, 46–47; 59–60: “Just as Odin learns from the seeress Angrboða, Loki’s mate, the details of the death, killer, and avenger of Baldr, so Loki learns from Frigg, Odin’s mate, the details to be used for the slaying of Baldr. Indeed, the parallel runs even deeper, for just as Loki will depose Odin’s son by his interlocutor, Frigg, so Odin has deposed three of Loki’s offspring with *his* interlocutor, Angrboða, by binding the wolf, casting the Midgard serpent into the sea, and banishing Hel to preside over the realm of the dead. As the focus of these three, especially the sons, is on the end of the world, we may wonder whether Baldr’s focus, too, is there.”

Þökk mun gráta  
þurru tárur  
Baldrs bálfarar.  
Kyks né dauðs  
nautka ek karls sonar:  
haldi Hel því er hefir.<sup>13</sup>

The origin of the stanza is unknown, but if Snorri did not produce it himself, it can be considered part of the tradition of *Baldrs draumar* and thus relevant to the expectations of the receiver that fills stanza 12 with signification: it would be impossible *not* to think of Þökk. If the *völva* is understood as Þökk, the tension of the poem seems even more increased, since it is already clear that Baldr will be killed and avenged, while the implicit information here is that he will also be prevented from returning to the living because of Þökk. This interpretation presupposes the existence of a tradition of weeping Baldr out of *hel* before *Gylfaginning*: evidence of such a tradition are *Málsháttakvæði 9* ('they [the *æsir*] all wept over him')<sup>14</sup> and *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 3 ('Baldr among the *æsir*, over whom the godly powers wept'). These pieces of evidence are not foolproof, and against Þökk speaks that she is mentioned only in *Gylfaginning* and there not as the mother of three children. But if the story of *Gylfaginning* is traditional, she fills a very important function at exactly this junction in the structure of events: the one who fulfills the murder of Baldr, thus enabling the events of Ragnarök as outlined in stanza 14.

The interpretations of the *völva* as Angrboða or Þökk seem to exclude each other, but are both tempting. In different ways, they both suggest the events of Ragnarök as a climactic dramatic curve. Óðinn, as the receiver within the fiction, helplessly experiences the coming defeat of the gods as does the receiver of the poem. Now the common denominator of Angrboða and Þökk is of course Loki. He is obviously the father of the three most threatening giants, and in *Gylfaginning* it is actually suggested that Þökk *is* Loki in disguise. The only scholar I know of who has accepted the possibility of identifying the *völva* as Loki is Hilda Ellis Davidson, and she did so only in passing.<sup>15</sup> We do not know whether the identification of Þökk as Loki is original, but it is obvious that Loki might well be named 'mother' instead of 'father' of the three giants. He is well-known for being the mother of Sleipnir according to *Gylfaginning*

<sup>13</sup>Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes 1982, 48.

<sup>14</sup> Friggjar þótti svípr at syni,  
sá var taldr ór miklu kyni,  
Hermóðr vildi auka aldr,  
Eljúðnir vann sólginn Baldr,  
öll grétu þau eptir hann,  
aukit var þeim hlátrar bann,  
heyrinkunn er frá h\_num saga,  
hvat þarf ek of slíkt at jaga.

*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* B II, 140; see Lindow 1997, 115—admitting the possibility of such a tradition: Lindow 1997, 128.

<sup>15</sup>Davidson 1979, 9; cf. Lindow 1997, 46-47.

and *Hyndluljóð*, but in *Hyndluljóð* he is also mentioned as having been made pregnant with ‘every evil creature’.<sup>16</sup> In the situation of antagonism in *Baldrs draumar* it would also seem a natural form of *nið* for Óðinn to call Loki ‘mother’: highly reminiscent of *Lokasenna* 23, where Óðinn mocks Loki for having given birth to children. In both cases, Loki constitutes a considerable threat to the world order of the *æsir*.<sup>17</sup> If the epithet ‘mother of three giants’ is to be considered an insult, the defamation thus lies in the state of motherhood rather than in the connection with giants—Óðinn has also garnered suspicion of *ergi* by using *galdrar*.<sup>18</sup>

According to *Völuspá* 31, Baldr’s fate was hidden<sup>19</sup>—the notion is also prevalent in *Gylfaginning*. The only one with influence on Baldr’s fate is Loki, and the only one with knowledge of Baldr’s fate is the *völva* in *Baldrs draumar*. And this is a peculiarly secretive *völva*. “The predisposition to answer any question asked of her seems to be another aspect of the female mind as it is represented in myth”, Judy Quinn has asserted (1998, 31). The *völva* in *Baldrs draumar* knows more than even a *völva* should know, and is more reluctant to disclose her knowledge than a *völva* should be. Still, while identification of the *völva* as Loki has certain problems to it, there is one more support. In *Gylfaginning*, Loki is not only said to possibly be Þökk, but the whole story of Baldr’s death begins with his disguising as a woman in order to find out from Frigg what may harm Baldr. Thus, in *Gylfaginning*, the murder of Baldr is first made possible by Loki’s appearing as a female. The murder is then reinforced when Baldr is prevented from returning from the dead—again by Loki acting as a woman. In the structure of an original tradition, one might expect the number of three instead of two occurrences of Loki preparing Ragnarök in female guise. The third occurrence might have been connected to Óðinn’s final attempt at re-establishing the power balance. The extant poem *Baldrs draumar* might then be viewed as a very deliberate evocation of all sequences of Baldr’s death: to practically any receiver it must have been nearly impossible not to see Loki—either in disguise or represented by Angrboða and Þökk—in the *völva*. Thus, the two foster-brothers and adversaries meet in the last decision of which side is the stronger. The whole eschatology is conjured within a few

---

<sup>16</sup>

40 Ól úlf Loki við Angrboða,  
enn Sleipni gat við Svaðilfara;  
eitt þótti skass allra feiknast,  
þat var bróður frá Býleistz komit.

41 Loki át af hiarta lindi brendo,  
fann hann hálfsviðinn hugstein kono;  
varð Loptr qviðugr af kono illri,  
þaðan er á foldo flagð hvert komit.

<sup>17</sup>On *Lokasenna* in this respect, see Meulengracht Sørensen 1988 and Klingenberg 1983. The *nið* aspect, if this interpretation were accepted, is commented upon by Lindow 1997, 46-47.

<sup>18</sup>On *nið* and *galdrar*, see Quinn *forthc*.

<sup>19</sup>If the words *örloq fólgin* are interpreted in that way (see Quinn 1998, 31).

stanzas—first explicitly and then, when the god/giant responsible is revealed, implicitly, through suggestion. This, then, would mean that the mention of Loki in str. 14 is not merely a definition of time, but an organic end to a detailed sequence of events.

Now the structure of the poem might seem to contradict an interpretation of this kind. As Lindow has shown, in many Old Norse sources a threefold structure of the motif emerges: victim—murderer—avenger (Lindow 1997, 130). This structure is certainly a strong one, and it is highly relevant to the death of Baldr. If one were to judge *Baldrs draumar* according to this structure, the three elements have been completed already by str. 11, and str. 12 might then seem to be a (possibly unelegant) strategy of finishing the poem. Lindow—and Ruggerini—make a better interpretation of str. 12 connecting the question of who weeps with the burial of Baldr by the sea (Lindow 1997, 45; Ruggerini 1994, 184–185). But the threefold structure of the murder of Baldr is unusually complicated.

The victim, of course, is easy to define. And apart from the account in *Gylfaginning*, Høðr is generally pointed out as the single murderer, Váli being the single avenger. Thus, one can say that the threefold structure is implemented. In *Baldrs draumar* the victim is obviously rendered in str. 6–7, the murderer in str. 8–9 and the avenger in str. 10–11. The presence of Loki, though, seems to be stronger than that. If he is considered responsible for the death of Baldr, he should be present. On the explicit level, he is so only in stanza 14 as a symbol of the final Ragnarøk. Implicitly, though, str. 12 puts the question of Baldr's second killer: the one that prevents him from returning from the dead, i.e. Loki or one of his female representatives. The structure can be understood in accordance with *Gylfaginning*, where there is not one murderer but two: Loki is the one who has Høðr shoot Baldr. And the avenging party is evident: the æsir together. *Gylfaginning* thus differs from other traditions, but still implements the threefold structure. *Baldrs draumar* not only implements one of the structures: it deploys both. The question gives Óðinn's demonstration of his knowledge and thus power, and its answer cannot be uttered though it is strongly actualised: Loki or one of his female representatives. If the murderer has been doubled, so also the avenger should be doubled. And in stanza 13, the would-be avenger certainly is presented: just as Óðinn revealed the identity of the 'real' murderer, so the vǫlva now discloses the identity of the 'real' avenger, the one who logically should exact revenge—the mention of Loki in fetters str. 14 is in effect a description of the revenge. A threat is thus being posed, and the conversation must be ended. The request of the vǫlva in (str. 14), that she wants to rest until Loki's return and the end of the world is then important precisely through the definition of time: Nothing can be changed, the not threefold but fivefold scheme will be fulfilled. After that, Loki will free himself and defeat

his foster-brother.<sup>20</sup> Loki and Óðinn are the representatives of the two sides at Ragnarok: the former foster-brothers are now adversaries. Also in this respect, preparations have been made. Fratricide is the Leit-motif: Høðr kills Baldr, Váli kills Høðr; Loki has Baldr killed as a means of waging war within which he and his foster-brother are the main protagonists.

If this interpretation is valid, *Baldrs draumar* builds up a tension that increases to the very end. It is done mainly by evoking the whole scenario of Baldr's death in the mind of the receiver first explicitly, but then implicitly, through suggestion. But in order to think of the poem as so well-structured, one must accept that the threefold scheme is here enlarged into a fivefold one where Loki is strongly but implicitly present in str. 12–13. The question is thus whether the notion of Baldr having two killers, as well as the notion of all but one trying to weep him back to life, were in the minds of men before *Gylfaginning*. In regard to the weeping motif, the scant evidence that exists has been mentioned. Regarding the two killers, it is easier to establish the notion. *Lokasenna* 28 suggests a tradition of Loki being responsible for Baldr's absence before *Gylfaginning*, albeit vaguely. *Hyndluljóð* 29, in turn, explicitly defines Høðr as the one who did *not* plan the murder:

Vóro ellifo æsir talðir,  
Baldr er hné við banaþúfo;  
þess léz Váli verðr at hefna,  
síns bróður sló hann handbana;  
alt er þat ætt þín, Óttar heimski

*Handbani* is the legal term of the one who perpetrates a murder, while *ráðbani* is the term of the one who has planned it (Lindow 1997, 157–158). When *handbani* is used for Høðr in connection with Váli's revenge on him, this requires the existence of a *ráðbani*: i.e. Loki, though he is not mentioned. But the most striking evidence of a structure implying two murderers and two revenges is given by the *Codex Regius Vqluspá*, stanzas 31–35:

- 31 Ek sá Baldri, blóðgom tívor,  
Óðins barni, ørlög fólgin;  
stóð um vaxinn, vøllum hæri,  
miór ok miok fagr, mistilteinn.
- 32 Varð af þeim meiði, er mær sýndiz,  
harmflaug hættlig, Høðr nam skióta;  
Baldrs bróðir var of borinn snemma,  
sá nam Óðins sonr einnætr vega.
- 32 Varð af þeim meiði, er mær sýndiz,  
harmflaug hættlig, Høðr nam skióta;  
Baldrs bróðir var of borinn snemma,  
sá nam Óðins sonr einnætr vega.

<sup>20</sup>The meaning and order of events in str. 14 cannot be treated here: see Allén 1961 and Lindow 1997, 46–47.

35 Hapt sá hon liggja undir hvera lundi,  
 lægiarn líki Loka áþekkian;  
 þar sitr Sigyn þeygi um sínom  
 ver velglýiuð — vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?<sup>21</sup>

The description of the central events concerning Baldr's death is parallel in both poems. Just like *Baldrs draumar*, *Völuspá* presents the victim (31), the murderer (32), and the avenging brother (32–33: practically the same verses as in *Baldrs draumar* 11), the 'real' murderer (35) and the revenge meted out on him (35). Also, just as in *Baldrs draumar*, weeping over Baldr is mentioned between Váli's revenge and the mention of Loki: that is, an extra reminder of the deed and the victim. In neither poem is it said that Loki is fettered because of Baldr's death, yet in both poems the description of Loki is so closely connected to the preceding that the stanzas must arguably be understood together.<sup>22</sup>

Fratricide is of course an important part of the Baldr myth and Ragnarök, and above all it is essential in the relationship between Loki and Óðinn. In *Lokasenna*, Loki reminds Óðinn that they are foster-brothers, once inseparable, and Lindow demonstrates the overriding consequences of their conflict (Lindow 1997, 131–163). What happens at Ragnarök is that the foster-brothers finally fight each other, each representing one side. As *Völuspá* 45 has it: *Bræðr muno beriaz*. *Baldrs draumar* seems to epitomize precisely this: by way of Höðr's and Váli's fratricide, the brothers Óðinn and Loki are evoked in close contact, representing their respective sides and testing the balance of power one final time. We do not have to visualize them meeting each other in the underworld: they are evoked regardless of what might be (considered) the identity of the vǫlva, since the receiver is urged to ponder all possibilities of the mythological scenario.

Reading literally, we are impelled to seek a definitive identity of the vǫlva. But *Baldrs draumar* is not a didactic poem; its force is maintained by suggestion. The poem evokes an array of associations and mythological conceptions, and this constitutes its literary impact. Reading literarily would thus be interpreting the poem as part of an oral culture. It might seem paradoxical to connect literariness with orality in this way, but the central issue is the effect of the poem and its impact on the reader in a specific cultural context. The poem viewed, that is, not as a source of history or religion but as a

<sup>21</sup>The stanza numbering follows Neckel/Kuhn. Stanza 34 is omitted here, since it exists only in *Hauksbók* (where it reads):

Þá kná Vála vígbǫnd snúa,  
 heldr vóro harðgor høpt, ór þormom.

See also the separate editions of Bugge in *Norræn fornkvæði*.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Quinn 1990, 312–313; Lindow 1997, 22. Boyer views stanzas 31–35 as part of a greater section describing “the final causes of *ragnarök*,” which includes the stanzas up to 39 (Neckel-Kuhn's numbers: Boyer 1983, 125–126). Since stanzas 36–39 treat places associated with Ragnarök such as Sindri and Náströnd, they differ from the preceding ones which deal with the causes or preparations of Ragnarök.

historical document.

Or, to put it differently: identifying the *völva* as Loki seems impossible although a great many features point in his direction. Precisely this somewhat confusing overdetermination, I would propose, serves to trigger the imagination of the receiver and suggest a great complex of mythological associations. From the apparently self-contradictory first stanzas and onwards, the anomaly is functional.

## References

- Allén, Sture 1961: "Baldrs draumar 14 och Guðrúnarkviða II, 9 – två samhöriga eddaställen", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 76, 74-95.
- Boyer, Régis 1983: "On the Composition of *Völuspá*", *Edda. A Collection of Essays*, ed. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, Manitoba, 117–133.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret 1990: "Voice and Voices in Eddic Poetry", *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages. The Seventh International Saga Conference*, ed. Teresa Pàroli, 219–230.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret 1994: *Prolonged Echoes I. Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, Odense.
- Davidson, Hilda Ellis 1979: "Loki and Saxo's Hamlet", *The Fool and the Trickster: Studies in Honour of Enid Welsford*, ed. P.V.A. Williams, Cambridge, 3–17.
- Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ved Finnur Jónsson. B. Rettet tekst II, København 1973.
- Dronke, Ursula 1997: see *The Poetic Edda*.
- Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, hrsg. Gustav Neckel. I. Text. 5. verbesserte Auflage von Hans Kuhn, Heidelberg 1983.
- Holtmark, Anne 1964: "Den uløselige gåten", *Maal og minne* 1964, 101–105.
- Jónas Kristjánsson 1990: "Stages in the Composition of Eddic Poetry", *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages. The Seventh International Saga Conference*, ed. Teresa Pàroli, 201–218.
- Klingenberg, Hans 1983: "Types of Eddic Mythological Poetry", *Edda. A Collection of Essays*, ed. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, Manitoba, 134–164.
- Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda I. Götterlieder*, hrsg. Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Katja Schulz, Eve Picard, Ilona Priebe, Heidelberg (forthcoming).
- Kragerud, Alv 1974: "Baldrs død. Et religionshistorisk bidrag", *I forskningens lys. 32 artikler om norsk forskning i går, i dag, i morgen*, red. Mauritz Sundt Mortensen, Oslo, 115–126.
- Lindow, John 1997: *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods. Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology*, FF Communications 262, Helsinki.
- McKinnell, John 1994: *Both One and Many. Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*, with an Appendix by Maria Elena Ruggerini, Roma.
- Norræn fornkvæði. Almindelig kaldet Sæmundar Edda hins fróða*, udg. Sophus Bugge, Oslo 1867 (1965).
- Pàroli, Teresa 1992: "Baldr's Dreams: A Poet Awaiting Vision", *Rendiconti della Classe di Scienze morali storiche e filologiche della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 9/3, 137–161.
- Quinn, Judy 1990: "*Völuspá* and the Composition of Eddic Verse", *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages. The Seventh International Saga Conference*, ed. Teresa Pàroli, 303–320.
- Quinn, Judy 1998: "'Ok verðr henni ljóð á munni'—Eddic Prophecy in the *fornaldarsögur*", *alvíssmál* 8, 29–50.
- Quinn, Judy (forthc.): "Dialogue with a *völva*: *Völuspá*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð*", *Mythological Poems of the Edda*, eds. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington, New York (in print: page references to manuscript).
- Rudolf, Adalbert 1887: "Vier altnordische Lieder. Beitrag zur Edda-Kenntnis", *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 78, 43–74.
- Ruggerini, Maria Elena 1994: "Appendix. A Stylistic and Typological Approach to *Vafþrúðnismál*", John McKinnell: *Both One and Many. Essays on Change and Variety in Late*

- Norse Heathenism*, with an Appendix by Maria Elena Ruggerini, Roma, 139–187.
- Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra. The Saga of King Heiðrek the Wise*. Translated from the Icelandic with Introduction, Notes and Appendices by Christopher Tolkien, London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Johannesburg, Toronto and New York 1960.
- Schröder, Franz Rolf 1964: “Die eddischen ‘Balders Träume’”, *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, N.F., 329–337.
- Simek, Rudolf 1993, “Baldrs draumar”, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, Cambridge, 366–367.
- Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, Oxford 1982.
- Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, *Íslensk fornrit XXXV*, Bjarni Guðnason gaf út, Reykjavík 1982, 46–71.
- The Poetic Edda. Volume II. Mythological Poems*. Edited with Translation, Introduction and Commentary by Ursula Dronke, Oxford 1997.

## Die *Húsdrápa* als kosmologisches Gedicht

Edith Marold

University of Kiel

Als der isländische Häuptling Ólafr pái, der Sohn von Höskuldr und der irischen Königstochter Melkorka, die als Sklavin nach Island gekommen war, sich einen eigenen großen Hof im Laxárdal im Westen Islands einrichtete, scheint er großen Wert auf eine großzügige und prachtvolle Ausstattung gelegt zu haben, was ihm möglicherweise seine königliche Abstammung nahelegte. Die *Laxdæla saga* berichtet im 29. Kapitel über den Hauptraum, das *eldhús*, daß er mit Abbildungen so prächtig geschmückt war, daß es noch viel schöner aussah, wenn der Raum nicht mit Wandbehängen festlich geschmückt war.

Þat sumar lét Ólafr gera eldhús í Hjarðar holti, meira ok betra en menn hefði fyrr sét. Váru þar markaðar ágætligar sögur á þilviðinum ok svá á ræfrinu; var þat vel smíðat, at þá þótti miklu skrautligra, er eigi váru tjöldin uppi. (*Laxdæla*, S. 79)

Leider ist diese Pracht nicht erhalten geblieben. Aber zumindest über die Darstellungen wissen wir zum Teil wenigstens Bescheid, denn sie wurden zum Gegenstand eines Gedichtes, das der Skalde Úlfr Uggason verfaßte und bei der Hochzeit von Óláfs Tochter Þuríðr mit Geirmundr gnyr vortrug:

... þat boð var allfjölment, því at þá var algort eldhúsit. Þar var at boði Úlfr Uggason ok

hafði ort kvæði um Óláf Høskuldsson ok um sögur þær, er skrifaðar váru á eldhúsinu, ok færði hann þar at boðinu. Þetta kvæði er kallað *Húsdrápa* ok er vel ort. Óláfr launaði vel kvæðit. (*Laxdæla*, S. 80)

In der *Laxdæla* jedoch werden diese Strophen nicht zitiert. Teile des Gedichts sind erhalten geblieben, dadurch das Snorri Sturluson sie in seiner *Edda*, in *Skáldskaparmál* zitierte. Daraus läßt sich erkennen, daß es sich um sogenanntes Bildgedicht, ähnlich wie *Ragnarsdrápa* oder *Haustlǫng* handelt, die ihrerseits Darstellungen auf Schilden beschreiben. Von diesem Gedicht sind insgesamt 12 Strophen, eine Anfangs- und eine Schlußstrophe, sowie Strophen aus dem Mittelteil erhalten, der einzelne Bildabschnitte darstellte: eine Auseinandersetzung zwischen Loki und Heimdall, die Angelung der Midgardschlange, die Götterprozession zur Bestattung Baldrs und der Leichenbrand selbst. Daß es sich in der Tat um eine Beschreibung von Bilddarstellungen handelt, zeigt der Refrain (Stef): *Hlaut innan svá minnum*. 'Es (sc. das Haus) erhielt auf der Innenseite auch die (alten) Sagen(darstellungen)'. Durch die fragmentarische Überlieferung wissen wir nicht, ob es über die in den erhaltenen Strophen dargestellten Bilder hinaus noch mehr Abbildungen gegeben hatte, oder ob dies alle waren.

Die überlieferten Strophen handeln von drei der Mythen, von denen jedoch nur einer, der Mythos von der Angelung der Midgardschlange, auch durch andere literarische und bildliche Darstellungen bekannt ist. Obwohl dieser Mythos mehr als gut bezeugt ist, erheben sich dennoch eine Reihe von Fragen, nach dem Charakter des Mythos von der Angelung der Midgardschlange, zu welcher Art von Mythen er gehört, nach seiner Einordnung in die das Verhältnis zum Endkampf in Ragnarök. Deshalb soll diese Erörterung bei diesem scheinbar klarsten Abschnitt der *Húsdrápa* beginnen.

### 1. Thor und die Midgardschlange

Die große Zahl und Unterschiedlichkeit der sprachlichen und bildlichen Denkmäler<sup>1</sup>, die diesen Mythos darstellen, zeigt, daß es wahrscheinlich verschiedene Varianten und Traditionen dieses Mythos gab.<sup>2</sup> Die überlieferten Strophen der *Húsdrápa* (Str. 3-6) konzentrieren sich, ebenso wie die Darstellung in der *Ragnarsdrápa* auf den Augenblick, in dem der mächtige Gott und die an der Angel hängende Schlange einander anstarrten (Str. 4 und 5). Die anderen beiden Strophen (Str. 3 und 6) bieten Probleme der Interpretation.

Der erste Helming von Str. 6<sup>3</sup> spricht davon, daß Thor, der

<sup>1</sup> Poetische Denkmäler: *Ragnarsdrápa* (Str. 14-19) und Fragmente von Ólvir hnúfa, Eysteinn Valdason, Gamli Gnævaðarskald., das Eddagedicht *Hymiskviða*. Dazu kommt die Erzählung des Mythos in der *Snorra Edda*, der in erster Linie auf der *Húsdrápa* beruht. Bilddarstellungen: Stein von Ardre VIII, Stein von Hørdum, Gosforth-Stein und Stein von Altuna).

<sup>2</sup> Vgl. Sørensen 1986, Schier 1976a.

<sup>3</sup> Strophe 6 wird nur in der Hs. U als eine zusammenhängende Strophe geboten, in R, W und T

Riesenbekämpfer, dem Riesen eine Ohrfeige versetzt:

Fvllavflvgr<sup>1</sup> let fellir  
fiallgavtz hnefa skialla  
ramt mein var<sup>2</sup> reyni  
reyrøz<sup>3</sup> leGs við eyra.

Lesarten anderer Hss.: <sup>1</sup>-aufligr T; <sup>2</sup> W,T,U fügen þat hinzu; <sup>3</sup>reyrar W, T, U.

Folgt man den Hss. W, T, U ergibt sich folgende Deutung: *Fulloflugr fellir fjall-Gauts lét hnefa skjalla við eyra reyrar leggs reyni; þat vas ramt mein.* 'Der gewaltige Fäller des Gebirgs-Gauten ließ die Faust am Ohr des Erprobers des Knochen des Steinhaufens erschallen.' Die erste Kenning 'Fäller des Gebirgs-gauten' ist eine eindeutige Kenning für den Gott Thor. Dagegen sind die Meinungen darüber geteilt, wer die Ohrfeige erhielt. Obwohl man versucht hat, in der zweiten Kenning die Midgardschlange zu finden<sup>4</sup> beziehen dürfte es doch richtiger sein die zweite Kenning auf den begleitenden Riesen zu beziehen, obwohl die Kenning für eine Riesen-Kenning etwas ungewöhnlich ist: Sie läßt sich folgendermaßen deuten: Knochen des Steinhaufens<sup>5</sup> = Stein, Erprober = Bewohner des Steins = Riese.

Der zweite Teil der sechsten Strophe ist normalerweise als eigene Strophe überliefert, wird aber, weil er in der Hs. U Teil der sechsten Strophe ist, allgemein zu dieser gerechnet. Dieser Helming spricht dann ganz klar davon, daß Thor der Schlange das Haupt abschlägt:

Víðgymnir laust Vímrar  
vaðs af fr\_num naðri  
hlusta grunn við hrønnum.  
Hlaut innan svá minnum.<sup>6</sup>

Er ist folgendermaßen zu deuten: *Víðgymnir Vímrar vaðs laust hlusta grunn af fr\_num naðri við hrønnum. Hlaut innan svá minnum.* 'Der Víðgymnir der Furt des Vímur (-> Thor) schlug den Grund des Gehörs (-> Kopf) von der glänzenden Schlange in die Wogen. Es (das Haus) erhielt auf der Innenseite auch die (alten) Sagen(darstellungen).

Damit ist klar, daß die *Húsdrápa* mit der Tötung der Midgardschlange endet.

Was aber war die Rolle des in Str. 3 und 6 erwähnten Riesen? Strophe 3<sup>7</sup> spricht von der Angst des *þjókkvaxinn þiklingr* vor dem großen Fischzug.

als zwei Vierzeiler, so daß man nicht gewiß sein kann, ob sie zusammengehören.

<sup>4</sup> Schier 1976a:428, der annimmt, daß Thor nicht dem Riesen, sondern der Midgardschlange ans Ohr schlägt, was allerdings angesichts der Formulierung *lét hnefa skjalla við eyra* 'ließ die Fäuste am Ohr erschallen' schwer vorstellbar erscheint.

<sup>5</sup> Eine Deutung mit dem homonymen *reyrr* 'Binse, Rohr' würde voraussetzen, daß damit auch der Sumpf bezeichnet würde, in dem die Binse steht. Das ergäbe ebenfalls die Bedeutung 'Stein' (Knochen des Sumpfes als Variation des Kenningstyps 'Knochen des Meeres').

<sup>6</sup> Die Strophe bietet keine textphilologischen Probleme, daher wird sie gleich normalisiert dargestellt.

<sup>7</sup> Nur die Hs. U schreibt diese Strophe dem Dichter *Húsdrápa* zu, R und W geben Bragi als Verfasser an.

Beides legt den Schluß nahe, daß in einer der nicht überlieferten Strophen das schon bei Bragi überlieferte Motiv des Abschneidens der Angelschnur durch den ängstlichen Riesen dargestellt wurde, denn nur in Zusammenhang mit dem Abschneiden der Angelschnur ist die Erwähnung der Angst des Riesen und die Ohrfeige als Bestrafung sinnvoll.

Die *Húsdrápa* muß damit sowohl das Motiv des Angelabschneidens als auch den Sieg über die Midgardschlange, der der Kopf abgeschlagen wird, enthalten haben. Und genau so gibt es auch Snorri in der *Gylfaginning* wieder, und zwar mit wörtlichen Anklängen an die *Húsdrápa*:

Pá er sagt, at jötunninn Hymir gerðisk litverpr, fólnaði ok hræddisk, er hann sá orminn ok þat, er særinn fell út ok inn of nokkvann. Ok í því bili, er Þórr greip hamarinn ok færði á lopt þá fálmaði jötunninn til agnsaxinu ok hjó vað Þórs af borði, en ormrinn søktisk í sæinn. En Þórr kastaði hamrinum eptir honum, ok segja menn at hann lysti af honum hofuðit við grunninum. En ek hygg hitt vera þér satt at segja, at Miðgarðzormr lifir enn ok liggir í umsjá. En Þórr reiddi til hnefann ok setr við eyra Hymi, svá at hann steypðisk fyrir borð, ok sér í iljar honum. En Þórr óð til landz. ( *Gylf*. Kap. 48, S. 45).

Man hat meist das Abschneiden der Angelschnur, das ja auch z. B. von der *Ragnarsdrápa* erwähnt wird, als Scheitern des Donnergottes interpretiert, weil die Midgardschlange dadurch entkommen habe können (vgl. zuletzt Sørensen 1986:270f.). Aber es gibt nur eine einzige Stelle, die sicher davon spricht, daß die Midgardschlange entkommt: Snorri läßt seinen Mythenerzähler Hárr der Erzählung von der Tötung der Midgardschlange hinzufügen: Er selbst aber glaube, daß die Midgardschlange entkommen sei und bis ans Weltende im Meer liege. Dieser Zusatz läßt sich aus dem Charakter der *Gylfaginning* der *Snorra Edda* erklären, die ja eine Summe der heidnischen Mythen geben soll und dabei natürlich mit dem Widerspruch konfrontiert wäre, daß Thor innerhalb des mythischen Zeitalters die Midgardschlange tötete und dennoch der Darstellung der *Völusp*\_ zufolge am Weltende wieder mit ihr kämpft und beide Gegner den Tod finden. Die Midgardschlange darf in dieser linear-historisch konzipierten Mythologie der *Gylfaginning* keinen vorzeitigen Tod finden.

In der *Húsdrápa* gelingt jedoch die Tötung des Ungeheuers trotz der Intervention des Riesen. In der *Ragnarsdrápa* fehlt das Ende des Mythos, ebenso in den genannten skaldischen Fragmenten. Selbst in der *Hymiskviða* scheinen die entsprechenden Zeilen in Str. 24 ausgefallen zu sein. In Str. 23, 5-6 heißt es *hamri kníði háfiáll scarar*<sup>8</sup>, in der nächsten Strophe wird vom Aufruhr der Elemente gesprochen, dann folgt eine Lücke und schließlich heißt es *Sþochiz síðan sá fiscr í mar*. Dann folgt wieder eine Lücke. Hat hier ein Redaktor der *Edda* eingegriffen, der ähnliche Probleme wie Snorri hatte, da ja der Endkampf der Midgardschlange in Ragnarok am Beginn seiner Sammlung stand?

Man kann sich fragen, ob die Verbindung vom Abschneiden der Angelschnur und der Tötung der Midgardschlange in der *Húsdrápa* eine

<sup>8</sup> 'Mit dem Hammer schlug er kräftig auf das Hochgebirge der Haare (> KOPF)'.

Akkumulierung zweier Motivtraditionen ist, oder ob der Mythos, der ja eine Version des weit verbreiteten primordialen Mythos von der Bezwingung des Urdrachens sein könnte (Schier 1976a:433ff.), von Anfang an ein Sieg war, der der schädlichen Einwirkung einer Begleiterfigur zum Trotz errungen wurde. Man müßte dann nicht zwei Traditionen des beliebten Mythos annehmen, sondern nur eine und zwar die von der Besiegung der Midgardschlange. Wenn man bedenkt, wie beliebt dieser Mythos war – kein Thorabenteurer wurde so oft dichterisch und bildlich<sup>9</sup> gestaltet – dann wäre es doch seltsam, wenn alle diese Darstellungen ein Scheitern des Donnergottes bezeugten, umso mehr, als man annehmen kann, daß die Beliebtheit dieses Themas mit dem Vordringen des Christentums zusammengesehen werden kann (vgl. Kuhn 1983:295). Man hätte wohl kaum einen an einem Riesen, der die Angelschnur abschneidet, scheiternden Thor dem Satanbezwinger Christus entgegengestellt.

Als Ergebnis dieses Abschnitts kann festgehalten werden, daß die *Húsdrápa* und wohl auch die Darstellung in Hjarðarholt einen Mythos von der Vernichtung der Midgardschlange darstellt, der allgemein religionsgeschichtlich den kosmogonischen Kämpfen gegen Chaosungeheuer zuzuordnen wäre. Vergleichbar wären Marduk und Tiamat, Indra und Vrta, Apollon und Python usw. Das besondere an dem Mythos von der Besiegung der Midgardschlange wäre das zusätzliche Motiv, daß der Sieg trotz der Beeinträchtigung durch einen schadenstiftenden Begleiter, den Riesen, der die Angelschnur abschneidet, gelingt.

## 2. Die Auseinandersetzung Heimdalls mit Loki

Leider ist von diesem Abschnitt nur eine einzige, sehr rätselhafte Strophe erhalten. Daß es mehrere gab ist durch eine Bemerkung in der *Snorra Edda* bezeugt:

Heimdallr er eigandi Gulltops; hann er ok tilskækir Vágaskers ok Singasteins; þá deildi hann við Loka um Brisingamen. Hann heitir ok Vindlér. Úlfr Uggason kvað í Húsdrápu langa stund eptir þeirri frásögu; er þess þar getit, at þeir váru í sela líkjum; ok sonr Óðins. (Skm. K. 8, S. 19). (Sperrung vom Verf.)

Die überlieferte Strophe der *Húsdrápa* bietet eine Reihe von Interpretationsschwierigkeiten und da der dort dargestellte Mythos nirgends sonst belegt ist, ist auch der Inhalt des dort dargestellten Mythos unklar. Auf die Interpretation der Stelle durch die *Snorra Edda* kann man sich nicht sicher verlassen, da möglicherweise Snorri bereits nicht mehr alles richtig verstand. (vgl. Schier 1976b:582ff.)

Die Strophe ist folgendermaßen in der Hs. R der SnE überliefert:

Raðgegnin bregðr ragna<sup>1</sup>

<sup>9</sup> In den meisten Bildtraditionen ist das Motiv des Angelabschneidens zumindest durch die zweite im Boot befindliche Figur präsent.

rein at singasteini  
 frægr við firna slægivm<sup>2</sup>  
 fár<sup>3</sup>bavta mavgr<sup>4</sup> vari<sup>5</sup>.  
 moðavflvgr ræðr mæðra  
 mavgr haf<sup>6</sup>nyra favgrv  
 kyNi<sup>7</sup> ec aðr en<sup>8</sup> eiNar  
 atta mærfar þattvm.

Lesarten der anderen Handschriften: <sup>1</sup>raugna T, roгна W; <sup>2</sup>slogian T, slægian W; <sup>3</sup>faar W, far T; <sup>4</sup>mög W; <sup>5</sup>váári W; <sup>6</sup>haft/hafr(?) W; <sup>7</sup>kunni T; <sup>8</sup>ok T, at W;

Es empfiehlt sich, der Hs. W zu folgen, was bisher auch alle Herausgeber taten. Daraus läßt sich ein syntaktisch einfaches und klares Satzschema finden, das allerdings eine erhebliche Zahl an inhaltlichen Fragen aufwirft:

Ráðgegninn, frægr vári (roгна)<sup>10</sup> bregðr rein at Singasteini við firna slægjan Fárbauta mög.

Ganz sicher ist *firna slægjan Fárbauta mög* als ‘überaus schlauer Sohn des Fárbauti’ d.h. Loki zu deuten. *Ráðgegninn, frægr vári (roгна)* muß daher Heimdall bezeichnen. Für das Wort *vári*, ein *απαξ λεγόμενον*, wurden verschiedene Deutungen vorgeschlagen: 1. ‘Verteidiger, Wächter’ als Ableitung zu *verja* ‘schützen, verteidigen’ oder *varr* ‘vorsichtig’<sup>11</sup>, 2. ‘Schwurgenosse’<sup>12</sup>. In jedem Fall bedarf *vári* einer Ergänzung und dafür bietet sich *roгна* ‘der Götter’ an. Inhaltlich läge eine Deutung als ‘Wächter der Götter’ näher, da Heimdall in der Gylfaginning (K. 27) tatsächlich als *vqrðr goða* bezeichnet wird. Sprachgeschichtlich ist diese Deutung wegen der Differenz von a (Kurzvokal) und á (Langvokal) problematisch.<sup>13</sup>

Damit sind die beiden Kontrahenten klar: Das Subjekt ist Heimdall als *ráðgegninn roгна vári*, das Objekt Loki als *firna slægjan Fárbauta mög*, der Ort ist *Singasteinn*. Es bleiben zwei Wörter: *bregðr* und *rein*. *Rein* bedeutet ‘Ackerrain, Erdstreifen, allgemein Land’ und man hat zumeist versucht es mit *vári* zu verbinden, was jedoch einige Probleme macht, weil man entweder eine Tmesis *roгна rein-vári* an ‘Wächter des Götterlandes’ (Finnur Jónsson).<sup>14</sup> oder eine metrisch kaum akzeptable Konjektur *roгна\*reinar vári* (E. A. Kock)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Roгна* ließe sich auch mit *rein* kombinieren, muß allerdings aus weiter unten angeführten inhaltlichen Gründen mit *vári* zusammengezogen werden.

<sup>11</sup> Lex. poet. S. 598, NN á 420. Als Ableitung von aisl. *varr* interpretiert F. Jónsson 1933:13f. das Wort.

<sup>12</sup> Kuhn (1983:296) ohne weitere Angaben zur Ableitung des Wortes. Wahrscheinlich wäre es zu *várar* pl. ‘Eide’ zu stellen.

<sup>13</sup> Man müßte mit einer sonst nicht bezeugten Dehnstufe der Wortwurzel rechnen.

<sup>14</sup> Skj. B I, 128 und Finnur Jónsson 1933:13f.

<sup>15</sup> Kock wollte das Wort zuerst isoliert lassen (NN á420), konjizierte dann aber *\*reinar* und verband es mit *roгна* zu *roгна\*reinar vári* (NN á1952), wodurch er sich inhaltlich nicht mehr von Finnur Jónsson unterschied, sich aber Vorwürfe wegen der Verletzung metrischer Regeln gefallen lassen mußte. Kuhn 1936:138; de Vries 1933:126f.; de Vries versuchte, die Kombination *roгна reinar vári* zu retten, in dem er *at* nach *rein* als Verschreibung für *ar*

annehmen mußte.

Nun ist es jedoch so, daß auch *ragna vári* 'Wächter oder Eidgenosse der Götter' durchaus ausreichend wäre, um Heimdall zu bezeichnen, so daß die Frage, ob *rein* in dieser Kenning mitverwendet werden soll, vom Inhalt des Satzes abhängt, der wiederum vom *bregðr* abhängig ist.<sup>16</sup> Dieses häufig gebrauchte Verb kommt in einer Fülle von Redewendungen vor, aus denen jedoch zumindest die unpersönlichen Konstruktionen ausgeschieden werden können, da ein eindeutiges Subjekt des Satzes, nämlich Heimdall, gegeben ist. Dazu besitzen wir eine Ortsbestimmung *at Singasteini*<sup>17</sup>.

Eine Übersicht über die bei Fritznier (1886:181) belegten Konstruktionen von *bregða* macht schnell deutlich, daß dieses Verb ein Objekt im Dativ braucht. Fritznier führt Folgendes an: 1. "ved en hurtig Bevægelse bringe noget af den Stilling eller Retning, som det har, og føre det hen til et andet Sted, i en anden Retning"; 2. "drage"; 6. "borttage"<sup>18</sup>; zieht man eine engere Verbindung mit der Präposition *við* in Betracht, so böte sich *bregða e-u við* 'über etwas sprechen' an. Als Objekt steht – wenn man auf *Singasteini* verzichtet, wofür aller Grund gegeben ist – nur noch *rein* zur Verfügung. Heimdall und Loki hätten also entweder über das Land gesprochen, oder Heimdall hätte es 'bei Loki' weggenommen.

Ziehen wir den zweiten Teil der Strophe in Betracht, wo das Resultat der Handlung dargestellt ist – Heimdall besitzt "die schöne Meerniere" d. h. ein Land, eine Insel vielleicht<sup>19</sup> –, so können wir vermuten, daß Heimdall Loki im ersten Teil der Strophe ein Stück Land wegnahm. *Rein* 'Rain, Land' und *hafnýra* wären also dasselbe Objekt, nämlich ein Stück Land. Es wäre also von

---

auffaßte. Damit hatte er jedoch die Präposition zu *Singasteini* verloren, ganz abgesehen davon, daß es unwahrscheinlich ist, daß eine solche Verschreibung in allen Handschriften auftritt, vgl. Lindquist 1938:82. Man kann sagen, daß fast alle vorgelegten Interpretationen sich entweder Finnur Jónsson oder der Konjekturen von Kock anschließen, weil sie inhaltlich die ansprechendste ist. Vgl. zuletzt Schier 1976b:580.

<sup>16</sup> Die Ungewißheit über die Bedeutung des Verbs hat zu den unterschiedlichsten Deutungen der Strophe geführt: Im folgenden steht H für Heimdall, L für Loki und S für Singasteinn: 'H begibt sich mit L zum S' (Skj.); '(die Götterbrücke) wird von H aufgegeben bei seinem Streit mit L bei S' (Kock NN á420); 'H zieht gegen L zum S' (Kock NN á 1890). 'H. mußte beim S (den Himmel) wegen L verlassen.' (Ohlmarks) 'H nimmt S in Gegnerschaft zu L weg' (de Vries); 'H. nimmt den S weg bei L' (Pering); 'H bricht mit L beim S (den Götterfrieden)' (Lindquist); 'H bewegt (sich) rasch, wendet sich gegen L beim S.' (Schier 1976b:581)

<sup>17</sup> Die Deutung der Strophe wurde durch eine vorschnelle Gleichsetzung von *Singasteinn* und *Brisingamen* erschwert, die zu kaum akzeptablen Mythenspekulationen führten (eine Zusammenstellung der Deutungen s. Pering 1941:213ff.). Dabei hätte eine genauere Lektüre Snorris gezeigt, daß auch er zwischen *Singasteinn* als Örtlichkeit und *Brisingamen* als Gegenstand des Streites unterschied. Es heißt dort über Heimdall: *hann er ok tilsækir Vágaskers ok Singasteins; þá deildi hann við Loka um Brisingamen*. (Skm.ó8, S. 19). *Þá* zeigt deutlich, daß er sich *Vágasker* und *Singasteinn* als Örtlichkeit vorstellte.

<sup>18</sup> Die Bedeutungen unter 3.-5. und 7. und 8. beziehen sich auf Verbalabstrakta und Qualitätsbezeichnungen, für die entsprechende Objekte in der Strophe fehlen.

<sup>19</sup> Zur Deutung von *hafnýra* als Kenning für 'Stein', 'Insel' vgl. Lindquist 1938:80 und Schier 1976b:583.

folgender Deutung der Strophe auszugehen:

"Der ratkluge, berühmte Wächter der Götter nimmt beim Singasteinn das Land vom überaus schlaun Sohn des Fárbaugi weg. Voll von Mut herrscht der Sohn von acht und einer Mutter über die schöne Meerniere; ich verkünde (das) zuvor<sup>20</sup> in den Abschnitten des Lobgedichts."

Doch welcher Mythos könnte sich hinter dieser Auseinandersetzung der beiden Götter in Seehundgestalt<sup>21</sup> um ein Landstück beim Singasteinn verbergen? K. Schier (1976b:586) hat m. E. in die richtige Richtung gewiesen, indem er diese Stelle mit einem Hinweis auf dualistische, kosmogonische Mythen zu erklären versuchte, die von der Hebung der Welt aus dem Urmeer handeln.

Wir begegnen in den altnordischen Texten zwei Vorstellungen über die Entstehung der Welt: 1. Sie wird aus dem Körper eines getöteten Urwesens (Ymir) geschaffen (Grímnismál 40f., und zahlreiche Kenningar); 2. drei Götter (*Bors synir*) heben sie aus dem Meer (Vsp. Str. 4 und 59, wo die Erde sich in einer zweiten Schöpfung aus den Wogen erhebt, was ein erstes Mal voraussetzt<sup>22</sup>.) Diese Differenz ist am ehesten damit zu erklären, daß den Texten kein einheitliches religiöses System zugrunde liegt, sondern unterschiedliche regional und sozial bestimmte Traditionen.

Die Erschaffung des Kosmos durch das Herausheben der Erde aus einem Urmeer gehört einem über Europa, Asien und Nordamerika verbreiteten und in Volkserzählungen bezeugten Mythenmodell an.<sup>23</sup> Am Anfang stand wohl, wie M. Eliade (1961:207) vermutete, ein (theriomorpher) Schöpfergott, der die Erde emportauchte. Durch die Ausgestaltung der Kosmologien durch Helferfiguren wurde der Tauchvorgang auf eine Helferfigur übertragen und damit bestand die Möglichkeit, die Erzählung des Mythos durch die Ungeschicklichkeit oder den Ungehorsam dieser Helferfigur(en) weiter auszugestalten (ebda. S. 208) und dies geschah in vielen Fällen, und nicht nur in Zusammenhang mit der Taucherkosmogonie.

Wenn wir versuchen, die Heimdall-Loki-Strophe mit Hilfe eines solchen kosmogonischen Modells zu interpretieren, bekäme das *bregðr rein* einen Sinn: Oben wurde die Strophe der *Húsdrápa* so gedeutet, daß Heimdall Loki ein Stück Land (*rein*) wegnimmt. In einer großen Zahl von osteuropäischen

<sup>20</sup> Es ist nicht ganz sicher, ob das *áðr* der 7. Verszeile zum Hauptsatz oder zur Parenthese zu stellen ist. Die von Schier 1976b:581 vorgeschlagene Deutung als 'früh' stößt nicht nur auf lexikalische Schwierigkeiten, da *áðr* im Sinn von 'früher, der aktuellen Zeit voraus liegend' gebraucht wird (vgl. die Bsp. in ONP Sp. 45ff.), sondern auch auf metrische, da die Satzgrenzen in Versen dieses Typs nicht nach dem finiten Verb fallen (vgl. Gade 1995:161ff.). Obwohl es Schwierigkeiten bereitet, wird man deswegen *áðr* doch eher zum Klammersatz ziehen müssen.

<sup>21</sup> Dies wird nur bei Snorri in Skm. (Kap. 8, S. 19) angegeben: *er þess þar getit at þeir váru í sela líkjum*.

<sup>22</sup> Vgl. Schier 1963:315. Die Schilderung der *Snorra Edda*, daß die Bors-Söhne Ymir töten und daraus die Erde formen, ist vielleicht eine Kombination aus beiden.

<sup>23</sup> Ausführlich dazu Schier 1963 mit Hinweisen auf die religionswissenschaftliche Literatur.

Erzählungen wird das Empортаuchen der Erde so ausgestaltet, daß die Helferfigur (hier oft der Teufel, der die Rolle der "negativen" Helferfigur übernahm) auf Befehl Gottes die Erde aus dem Meer heraufholt. Der Teufel aber wendet sich gegen Gott: Er will entweder den eingeschlafenen Gott ins Meer stürzen, um über die Erde allein zu herrschen<sup>24</sup>, oder er behält ein Stück Erde im Mund zurück, wo sie so sehr wächst und Qualen verursacht, daß er sie sich freiwillig auf dem Mund nehmen läßt,<sup>25</sup> oder daß Gott ihn zwingt, sie auszuspucken. In anderen Sagen sind die Motive des Tauchens und der Gegnerschaft zum Schöpfergott auf verschiedene Wesen verteilt (vgl. Eliade 1961:179ff.).

Angewandt auf die vorliegende Strophe könnte man die Rolle Lokis so bestimmen, daß er wie der vorhin genannte Teufel versuchte, ein Stück Land zurückzuhalten. Heimdall aber nahm Loki dieses Stück Land weg. Stimmt diese Interpretation, dann wäre das die *fagrt hafnýra* der zweiten Hälfte der Strophe, über die Heimdall dort herrscht.<sup>26</sup>

Die Aussage von Snorri, beide Götter seien bei ihrem Streit in Seehundgestalt gewesen – dieses Wissen zog er wohl aus den nicht überlieferten Strophen – paßt durchaus in dieses kosmologische Szenario. Neben dem Teufel sind es in der Mehrzahl der überlieferten Mythen zwar Wasservögel, die die Erde emportauchen, doch können auch andere Tiere an ihre Stelle treten<sup>27</sup> und in diesem Fall wären es Seehunde.

Der Singasteinn wäre dann der Ort auf dem sich die beiden aufhalten, wo dieser Streit stattfindet: In einer Reihe von aufgezeichneten Sagen befinden sich die Weltschöpfer zuvor auf einem Schiff, in einer finnischen Sage ruht Gott auf einer Goldsäule mitten im Meer, in einer zentralasiatischen auf einem Felsen (Eliade 1961:163, 164). Die für uns unlogische Vorstellung der Existenz von Land und Erdboden vor der Schöpfung begegnet z. B. wieder in der Weltentstehungssage, in der die Urwesen zwischen einer nördlichen kalten und einer südlichen heißen Region entstehen, bevor durch sie die Erde geschaffen wird. (SnE, Grm.).

Welche Rolle aber spielt Heimdall in diesem kosmogonischen Mythos? Ist er der schon inaktiv gewordene Schöpfergott (ein *deus otiosus*<sup>28</sup>), der seinem Helfer das Herauftauchen überläßt und nur noch eingreift, als dieser versucht, etwas von dieser Erde zurückzuhalten, wie dies in zahlreichen Erzählungen

<sup>24</sup> Bsp. bei Eliade 1961:157-162.

<sup>25</sup> So z. B. in finnischen, russischen, ugrischen und türkischen Erzählungen, vgl. Eliade 1961:163ff.

<sup>26</sup> Die Angabe Snorris, es habe sich dabei um das Brisingamen gehandelt, ist vermutlich eine seiner mythologischen Kombinationen. Er kannte Loki als Dieb des Brisingamen – er wird bereits in Hlg. als *brisingas girði-þjófr* 'Dieb des Gürtels des Brising' bezeichnet – und deutete die "schöne Meerniere", die er als Kenning für 'Stein' erkannte, als Brisingamen, da ja *steinn* auch Bernsteinperle bedeuten kann (Lex. poet. S. 536).

<sup>27</sup> Insbesondere in Nordamerika, vgl. dazu Eliade.1961:194ff..

<sup>28</sup> Vgl. dazu Eliade 1961:165.

dieser Art der Fall ist? Es gibt aber wenig Anlaß, Heimdall als einen verblaßten ursprünglichen Schöpfergott zu betrachten. Man sollte auch bedenken, daß in den altnordischen kosmogonischen Mythen immer drei Götter auftreten und nicht zwei. Die *Burs synir* der Snorra Edda werden als drei Götter, Óðinn, Vili und Vé interpretiert. Bei der Erschaffung der Menschen treten wiederum drei Götter auf: Odin, Hœnir und Lóðurr (Vsp. 17f.) und vielleicht kann man diesen Göttertriaden auch die von *Haustlong* anschließen: Odin, Hœnir und Loki.<sup>29</sup> Man müßte dann in der Mahlzeit der Götter, an der der Riese teilhaben will, vielleicht eine erste Kultmahlzeit in der mythischen Anfangszeit sehen.<sup>30</sup> Diesen Triaden ist wohl auch die allerdings erst ad hoc gebildete Dreiergruppe Hárr, Jafnhárr, Priði der *Gylfaginning* anzuschließen. Daß Odin häufig in einer Dreiergruppe von Göttern auftritt, bestätigt auch der Odinsname *Priði*.<sup>31</sup> Selbst auf der Nordendorfer Bügelfibel A wird der Name Wodan von vermutlich zwei anderen Götternamen begleitet: Logapore<sup>32</sup> und Wigiponar. Die Überlieferungen dieser Triaden und der Götternamen ist allzu fragmentarisch, so daß man nur Vermutungen äußern kann bezüglich ihrer inneren Struktur. Odin scheint eine Art Zentrum gewesen zu sein, mit dem sich unterschiedliche Götterpaare verbinden. Aus der Trias der *Haustlong* könnte man vermuten, daß es sich um ein Paar handelt, das Gegensätze repräsentiert. Die umfangreiche Literatur zur Göttergestalt des Loki scheint auf eine Erklärung dieser Figur als "Trickster" hinzuführen, eine spezielle Variante kulturheroischer Figuren, die in diesen Kontexten Schaden und Unfug stiften<sup>33</sup>, und diese Rolle scheint er auch in der Göttertrias der *Haustlong* und auch in der hier besprochenen Strophe der *Húsdrápa* zu haben. Die zweite Figur in *Haustlong* ist Hœnir, eine Göttergestalt, zu der es überaus unterschiedliche Überlieferungen gibt – einerseits gibt er den Menschen den *óðr*, den Verstand, auf der anderen Seite ist er in der Geiselerzählung (Hkr., Ys. Kap. 4), außerstande, ohne seinen Begleiter Mímir Beschlüsse zu fassen. Es könnte möglich sein, daß in dem Paar Hœnir – Loki einander entsprechende Eigenschaften gegenübergestellt werden: Loki ist der listige, aber vorschnell handelnde Gott, der dadurch Unheil über die

<sup>29</sup> Daß diese Gruppierung nicht zufällig ist, belegt ihr Auftreten in der Erzählung von der Otterbuße in *Reginmál*, wo wiederum Loki als die Rolle des Schadenstifters hat.

<sup>30</sup> Dafür spräche, daß in Str. 4 die Rede ist von einer "heiligen Schüssel" und vielleicht bezeichnet der Schaltsatz *hlaut hrafnásar vinr blása* 'dem Freund des Rabenasen (vermutlich Hœnir) fiel es zu zu blasen' eine kultische Handlung. Ein Reflex davon könnte in der Schilderung der Heimskringla (Kap. 17) liegen, daß König Hákon góði über der Schüssel mit der Opfermahlzeit gähnt (anstelle daraus zu essen).

<sup>31</sup> Dieser Name ist schon in Grm. 46 und frühen Skaldengedichten bezeugt: Einarr skálaglamm, *Vellekla* 29; Hallfreðr, *Hákonardrápa* 3.

<sup>32</sup> Bei den zahlreichen Interpretationen, die diese Inschrift und insbesondere dieser Name gefunden hat, kann hier aus Platzgründen nur am Rande auf die häufig vorgetragene Gleichung Logapore – Lóðurr verwiesen werden, ohne irgendwelche Schlüsse daraus zu ziehen.

<sup>33</sup> Bereits Leland 1884 hatte auf Ähnlichkeiten mit Mythen amerikanischer Indianerstämme aufmerksam gemacht, ihm folgte v. d. Leyen 1909:222f., und schließlich auch A. Olrik 1911 in seiner letzten Publikation über Loki, de Vries 1933 und zuletzt A. B. Rooth 1961.

Götter bringt, Hœnir ist der weise, schweigende, nicht-Handelnde<sup>34</sup>. Und ebenso könnten in Heimdall und Loki gegensätzliche Göttergestalten einander gegenüberstehen: der Wächter der Götter mit seiner Schutzfunktion und der listige Trickster, der Unheil über die Götter bringt. Die Gegnerschaft der beiden Götter scheint so markant gewesen zu sein, daß sie in der Gylfaginning als eines der kämpfenden Götterpaare des Weltendes einander gegenübergestellt wurden. Daß Odin die beiden in dem erschlossenen Mythos vom Emporstauchen der Erde zu einer Trias ergänzt hätte, läßt sich anhand des nur fragmentarisch belegten Mythos lediglich vermuten, aber nicht beweisen. Für die hier interpretierte Strophe der *Húsdrápa* würde dies bedeuten, daß sich hier in einem kosmogonischen Kontext zwei gegensätzliche Helferfiguren des Schöpfergottes gegenüberstehen und Heimdall, als Vertreter des "Guten" den Sieg über die "bösen" Aktionen des "Tricksters" Loki davonträgt.

Es wäre verlockend, auch in den anderen Göttertriaden solche Gegensätze auszumachen. Sie können aber nur kurz angedacht werden: In der Gruppe Odin, Hœnir und Lóðurr, könnte man den weisen Hœnir als positive, Lóðurr vielleicht als negative Figur verstehen, wenn man auf Krogmanns allerdings unsicheren Versuch einer Deutung des Namens Lóðurr durch ae. *logeþer*, *logðor*, *logþor*, *logþer* als 'arglistig' verweist (Krogmann 1938:68), damit würde Lóðurr strukturell Loki entsprechen. Wenn man in der Trias Óðinn Vílir und Vé von einem Namen Vílir, mit *í* ausginge (so in Sonatorrek bezeugt), könnte man ihn mit den in der Edda bezeugten *vílmegir* 'elende Knechte' verbinden<sup>35</sup> und in Vílir den negativen Pol der Trias sehen. Den positiven Pol der Trias könnte man in Vé ('das Heilige, oder das Heiligtum') sehen, dem darin zum Ausdruck kommenden sakralen Charakter entspräche die Funktion Hœnirs, in der neuen Welt nach dem Weltuntergang den Loszweig zu wählen (Vsp. 63: *Þá kná Hænir hlautvið kjósa*), eine priesterliche Handlung. In der Trias der *Húsdrápa* stünde selbstverständlich Loki für den negativen Part und Heimdall wäre als Götterwächter oder Eidgenosse der Götter der positive.

Man käme also zu folgenden, einander entsprechenden Triaden:

Óðinn	Vílir	Vé
Óðinn	Loki	Heimdall
Óðinn	Loki	Hœnir
Óðinn	Lóðurr	Hœnir

Bei dieser Interpretation, die – das muß klar gesagt werden – äußerst spekulativ ist, könnte sich eine bestimmte Struktur der Göttertrias ergeben, in der Odin in seiner Funktion als Kulturheros und Schöpfergott umgeben ist von einem Götterpaar, das seinem Beginnen fördernd und hindernd gegenübersteht.

<sup>34</sup> Vgl. Marold 1983:196f.

<sup>35</sup> Skírnismál Str. 35, wo Skírnir droht, *vílmegir* würden im Totenreich als Knechte des Purses Hrímgrímnir der Riesin Gerðr Ziegenharn zu trinken geben.

## Schlußbetrachtung

Wenn man an den ersten Teil der *Húsdrápa* zurückdenkt, so fallen einige Gemeinsamkeiten der beiden dargestellten Mythen ins Auge: In beiden Fällen handelt es sich um einen kosmogonischen Mythos: das Heraufheben der Erde aus dem Urmeer und die Besiegung der Midgardschlange, des Urdrachen. In beiden Fällen gelingt die Tat des göttlichen Helden einer hindernden Einwirkung einer weiteren Person – Lokis im ersten Fall, des Riesen Hymir im zweiten – zum Trotz. Man könnte damit den Riesen Hymir den schadenstiftenden Begleitern eines Schöpfergottes zurechnen. Damit ist offensichtlich ein Grundmuster von kosmogonischen Mythen erfaßt, das die beiden ersten der *Húsdrápa* dargestellten Mythen prägt.

## Literaturverzeichnis

- Eliade, Mircea. 1961: Mythologies asiatiques et folklore sud-est européen. I. Le Plongeon Cosmogonique. In: *Revue de l'histoire des Religions* 159, S. 157-212.
- Finnur Jónsson. 1933: Kenningers ledomstilling og tmesis. In: ANF 49, 1933, S. 1-23.
- Fritzner, Johan. 1886: Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog. 4 Bde. Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø 1886-1896.
- Gade, Kari Ellen. 1995: *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*. (Islandica XLIX)
- Gylf = Snorri Sturluson Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning. Ed. by Anthony Faulkes, Oxford 1982.
- Hkr. Ys. = Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla Ynglingasaga. Hg. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. (Íslenzk Fornrit XXVI.) Reykjavík 1979, S. 9-83.
- Krogmann, Willy. 1938: Loki. In: APhS 12, S. 59-70.
- Kuhn, Hans. 1936: Zu Ernst Albin Kocks Notationes norroenæ. In: PBB 60, S. 138.
- Kuhn, Hans. 1983: *Das Dróttkvætt*. Heidelberg.
- Laxdæla*. Hg. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. (Íslenzk Fornrit V.) Reykjavík 1934.
- Leland, C. G. 1884: The Algonquin Legends of New England or Myths and Folklore of the Micmac, Passamaquoddy and Peerobscott Tubes. London
- Lex. poet. = Lexikon poeticon antiqua linguae septentrionalis. Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog forfattet av Svenbjörn Egilsson, forøget og påny udgivet for det kongelige nordiske Oldskriftselskab ved Finnur Jónsson. København 1931.
- Leyen, Friedrich v. d. 1909: Die Götter und die Göttersagen der Germanen. München
- Lindquist, Ivar 1938: Gudn Heimdall enligt Snorres källor. In: Vetenskaps-Societeten i Lund Årsbok 1937. Lund 1938, S. 53-98.
- Marold, Edith 1983: Kenningkunst. Ein Beitrag zu einer Poetik der Skaldendichtung. Berlin.
- NN = Ernst Albin Kock: Notationes norroenæ. Anteckningar till edda och Skaldediktning. Lund 1923-1944.
- Ohlmarks, Åke 1937: Heimdalls Horn und Odins Auge. Lund
- Olrik, Axel 1911: Myterne om Loke. In: Festskrift til H. F. Feilberg, S. 548-593.
- ONP: Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog 1: a-bam. Red. af Helle Degnbol u. a. Udg. af Den arnamagnæanske kommission Kbh. 1995.
- Pering, Birger. 1941: Heimdall.
- Rooth, Anna Birgitta 1961: Loki in Scandinavian Mythology. Acta reg. societatis humaniorum litterarum Lundensis LXI. Lund.
- Shier, Kurt. 1963: Die Erdschöpfung aus dem Urmeer und die Kosmogonie der Völuspá. In: Märchen, Mythos, Dichtung. Festschrift zum 90. Geb. F. v. d. Leyens 1963. Hg. H. Kuhn und K. Schier. München, S. 303-334.
- Schier, Kurt. 1976a: Die *Húsdrápa* von Úlfr Uggason und die bildliche Überlieferung altnord. Mythen. In: *Minnjar og Menntir*: Afmælisrit helgað Kristjáni Eldjárn, 6 desember 1976. Hg.

- Guðni Kolbeinsson et al. Reykjavik 1976. S. 425-43.
- Schier, Kurt. 1976b: *Húsdrápa*, 2. Heimdall, Loki und die Meerniere. In: Festgabe für Otto Höfler zum 75. Geburtstag. Hg. Helmut Birkhan. (= *Philologica Germanica* 3). Wien 1976. S. 577-88.
- Skj. = Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning. Hrsg. v. Finnur Jónsson 4 Bde. København 1912-1916.
- Skm. = Snorri Sturluson. Edda. Skaldskaparmál. Ed. by Anthony Faulkes. London 1998.
- Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht. 1986: Thor's Fishing Expedition. In: *Words and Objects: Towards a Dialogue Between Archaeology and History of Religion*. Hg. Gro Steinsland. (=Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Oslo. Ser. B: Skrifter, 71). Oslo 1986. S. 257-78.
- Vries, Jan de 1933: *The Problem of Loki* (FFC 110) Helsinki.

# From Godan to Wotan: An examination of two langobardic mythological texts

John Stanley Martin

University of Melbourne

## **Introduction**

As most of our knowledge of the gods and myths of the North is from Scandinavian and particularly Icelandic sources, occasionally the curtain is lifted to give us a tantalising glimpse of a facet of the world of the ancient Germanic gods south of Dannevirke.

On this occasion I intend to revisit the mysterious mention of the god, Godan, in two ancient Italian accounts in Latin of how the Langobards won their name after a battle with the rival Vandals to determine territorial possession.

## **Langobardic sources**

The first mention of this god is an anonymous text entitled *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, dated in the seventh century and the second in the eighth-century text, *Historia Langobardorum*, by Paul the Deacon. The spotlight of this presentation is on the sparse evidence given on the nature and function of

Godan, and the evidence is then assessed in the light of later information from the rich Icelandic and Norwegian sources on Óðinn.

The version of the tale in the *Origo gentis Langobardorum* runs as follows:<sup>1</sup>

The Winniles lived on an island called Scadanan. They were ruled by two chieftains, called Ybor and Agio, and their mother, Gambara. The Vandals moved in with their army, and the two Vandal chieftains, Ambri and Assi, ordered the Winniles either to pay or to engage with them in battle. The Winniles chose to fight their opponents. Then the Vandals entreated Godan to grant them victory, and he replied that he intended to bestow victory on those whom he first saw at sunrise. Not to be outdone, Gambara approached Godan's wife, Frea, for advice. She suggested that the warriors of the Godan's wife should line up at sunrise, accompanied by their wives with their hair let down and held around their faces to resemble beards. When day broke, Frea turned around the bed of the still sleeping Godan to face the east and then woke him. On seeing the Winniles lined up, Godan exclaimed, "Who are these long-bearded ones?" Frea then commented that since he had given the Winniles a name, he had to give them victory. Consequently the Winniles defeated the Vandals and were thenceforth called 'Langobards'.

The second account of the same story is from the pen of the Lombardic historian, Paul the Deacon. It differs from the older version in certain aspects:<sup>2</sup>

Because of overpopulation, the Winnili, originally inhabitants of an island called Scandinavia, were forced to draw lots and a third of the tribal group sailed away. The emigrant Winnili under their appointed leaders, Ibor and Aio, and their powerful mother, Gambara, settled in Scoringa for some years. The Vandals under Ambri and Assi, coercing their neighbouring provinces, sent messengers to the Winnili to either pay tribute or engage in battle. The Winnili decided rather to fight for their liberty than be enslaved by the Vandals. When the Vandals besought Godan for victory, he promised it to those whom he first saw at sunrise. However, Gambara went to Frea for advice, and she suggested that the Winnili should line up early with their wives with their hair let down and arranged around their faces like beards. When Godan saw the long line of warriors at dawn, he exclaimed "who are these long-bearded ones?" Frea persuaded him to give victory to those to whom he had given a new name. Hence the Winnili were victorious.

### Some comments on the texts

It is apparent that Paul the Deacon based his section of the origin of the name of the Langobards on the account in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*. There are, nevertheless, some divergences. Paul adds the story of population pressure, which caused a third part of the Winnili to migrate; he names two areas where the Winnili lived, the original Scandinavia and Scoringa, where they resettled; he modifies the events surrounding the waking of Godan, omitting the stage management by Frea to have him facing the east, thus seeing the assembled Winnili warriors and their women. On the other hand *the Origo Gentis*

<sup>1</sup> In the Appendices there is a new translation of the Latin text from *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, from *Edictos Rothari: Origo gentis Langobardorum, Scriptorum Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, saec VI--IX*, ed. G. Waitz, Hanover, 1878, pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> In the Appendices there is a new translation of the Latin text from *Pauli Diaconi Historia Langobardorum*, ed. Lidia Capo, 11 editione febbraio, Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1993, pp. 22-26.

*Langobardorum* mentions the island of Scadanan as the only place of residence of the tribe. Jordanes in his *Getica* (ch. 4, §25) names the place of origin of the Goths as “Scandza”.<sup>3</sup>

Mommsen is mainly correct in commenting that Paul misunderstood the earlier narrative of events.<sup>4</sup> He sees the bed facing the west, and hence the Vandals would be the recipients of the promised victory, but the change in position of the bed meant that victory would be apportioned to their opponents. On the other hand Paul has Godan looking east out of a window. This would seem to be the obvious direction for him to look at dawn to greet the rising sun. But Frea’s ruse in *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* does explain why Godan granted victory to the Winnili, whereas the reader of Paul’s account would attribute it to the inscrutability of a capricious divinity, under female influence.

Paul is obviously embarrassed by this mythological vignette. He calls it a “silly story” (*ridicula fabula*) narrated by the “antiquity” or “people of olden times” (*antiquitas*)<sup>5</sup> Later, in the same chapter, Paul writes that “these things are worthy of laughter and are to be treated as being of no significance”.<sup>6</sup> Then, treading the path of theological correctness, perhaps necessary in a world which was still shaking from the taint of Arianism, Paul piously opines that “victory is not to be attributed to the power of men, but it is rather granted from heaven”.<sup>7</sup>

Then Paul gives an alternative etymology lest anyone think that he has fallen for syncretism, “. . . it is certain that the Langobards were later thus called on account of the length of their beards, untouched by any iron implement, whereas they were first called Winnili. For according to their language “lang” means long and “bart” means beard.”<sup>8</sup>

Paul the Deacon also comments on the form of the divine name, “Godan”. In 1.9 he uses the form “Wotan” and comments that “Wotan, whom they called Godan by the addition of a letter, is the one who is called Mercury” Again Paul covers his tracks in order to anticipate any possible accusation of theological impropriety by stating that the Mediterranean god did not exist in modern times,

<sup>3</sup> Jordanes writes, “Now from this island of Scandza, as from a hive of races or a womb of nations, the Goths are said to have come forth long ago . . .” See *The Gothic History of Jordanes*, trans Charles Mierow, Cambridge and New York, 1966, p. 57. Earlier Jordanes quoted Claudius Ptolemæus. “There is a great island situated in the surge of a juniper leaf with bulging sides, witch taper to a point at a long end” (Ch. 3, §16 Mierow edition p. 55). It lies in front of the River Vistula.

<sup>4</sup> Mommsen, Th, “Die Quellen der Langobardengeschichte des Paulus Diaconus”, *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere Geschichte*, Hanover, 1879, Vol 5, pp. 65-66.

<sup>5</sup> *Historia Langobardorum* 1.8 “Refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam” (At this point the ancient tell a silly story)

<sup>6</sup> loc.cit. “Haec risu digna sunt et pro nihilo habenda”

<sup>7</sup> loc.cit. “Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur.”

<sup>8</sup> *Historia Langobardorum* 1.9 “Certum tamen est, Langobardos ad intactae ferro barbae longitudine, cum primis Winnili dicti fuerint, ita postmodum appellatos. Nam iuxta illorum linguam “lang” longam, “bart” brabam significat.”

and not in Germany, but in Greece.<sup>9</sup>

### Correspondences between Godan and Óðinn

#### (1) Name

The form of the name of the god used in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* and also by Paul the Deacon was Godan, but the latter mentions the form Wotan. The form Godan derives from the initial “wo” in many forms of the name or the “wuo” (as in the Old High German *Wuotanestac* for “Wednesday”) having the consonant “g” added to the “wo”.<sup>10</sup> De Vries gives the Low German forms of *Godensdag* and *Gaunsdag* for “Wednesday”.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly enough, one of the MS variants of the name “Winnilis” in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* is “Guinnilis”.<sup>12</sup>

Having discussed a possible alternative etymology of the name of the Langobards, Paul writes, “Wotan, whom they called Godan by the addition of a letter, is the one who is called Mercury”. (see Footnote 9). This indicates that the form “Wotan” was also known to Paul, presumably from contact with some contact with Germanic world, or perhaps from the earlier Gothic settlers.

In 1.9 Paul stated that Godan corresponds with the Roman god, Mercury. Paul based this comment on a well-attested tradition amongst classical writers. In *Germania* c.9 Tacitus wrote that the ancient Germanic tribesmen honoured Mercury most and they thought it fitting to present human sacrifices to him on certain days. In the text he continued with a mention of Hercules (?) and Mars as also being the object of sacrifices.<sup>13</sup> Here it is obvious that Tacitus was referring to the correspondence between Mercury and Wotan.

Adam of Bremen, on the other hand, identified Óðinn with Mars. Here he may have been thinking of shared characteristics as war gods rather than basing his identification on a long-standing custom. Jordanes wrote that the Goths sacrificed their prisoners to Mars and hung captured war-gear on trees.<sup>14</sup> This

<sup>9</sup> op. cit. 1.9 “ipse est qui apud Romanos Mercurius dicitur et ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur; qui non circa haec tempora, sed longe antea, nec in Germania, sed in Graecia fuisse perhibetur.” (...whom they called Godan by the addition of a letter, is the one Mercury amongst the Romans and by all the peoples of Germany is worshipped as god, is considered to have existed not in these times, but a long time ago, and not in Germany, but in Greece.) This idea fits in with the Euhemerism adopted by the early Church, whereby pagan gods were perceived as having been real human beings, later divinised, but currently of a diabolical nature.

<sup>10</sup> The same feature occurred with the adoption of Germanic words into Romance languages e.g. “war” and “guerre” in French, “ward” and “guardare” in Italian.

<sup>11</sup> de Vries, Jan, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, vol 2, 1957, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> See Waitz p. 2, note k). The only other use of the name in the nominative had “Winniles”.

<sup>13</sup> Tacitus, *Germania* c.9 “Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent. (Herculem et) Martem concessis animalibus placant.”

<sup>14</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, book 4, (40-41). “Moreover so highly were the Getae praised that Mars, whom the fables of poets call the god of war, was reputed to have been born among them. Hence Virgil says: ‘Father Gradivus rules the Getic fields.’ (*Aeneid* book 3, line 35) Now Mars has always been worshipped by the Goths with cruel rites, and captives were slain as his victims.

practice suggests that the god referred to was Wotan.

## (2) The function of the warrior god

From both Langobardic texts it is impossible to perceive with precision whether Godan was both the war god and the leading god of both the Vandals and the Winnili-Langobards, because he is the only male god mentioned. He is at least the war god, but the reader gains the impression that he is both. It is in his hands to grant victory as the lord of the battle and to whomsoever he chose. We are not told of any sacrifice offered to him by his devotees to gain the desired victory. The Vandals merely besought him to aid them to defeat their enemy and received the enigmatic answer that he would grant success to those whom he saw first at dawn. When Gambara, on behalf of the Winnili, approached his wife, Frea, this fact of the first to be seen was taken for granted and the goddess suggested to Gambara a possible stratagem to win the victory.

This corresponds with one of the many functions of Óðinn. In contrast to the simple account of Godan in the two Lombardic sources, the figure of Óðinn in his capacity as a war god is far more complex and the various aspects can only be lightly touched upon here. The first aspect is Óðinn inciting heroes to battle.<sup>15</sup> One of his nicknames was Hnikarr or Hnikaðr, which means “the one who incites to battle”. In *Harbarðsljóð* 24 Óðinn boasts that he incites princes to fight against each other. The second aspect is that armies sacrificed to him before engaging in battle for a successful outcome. Adam of Bremen (book IV 27) reported that Swedes were wont to sacrifice to Óðinn before a war. Snorri Sturluson states in *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 14 that during the sacrificial banquets the Thrándheimers drank toasts firstly to Óðinn for the king’s victory in war and his power and then to Njörðr and Freyr for good harvests and peace. Thirdly, he is seen as the protector of heroes. In many accounts he is depicted as the patron of the hero, e.g. in *Völsunga saga*, where he is the guardian of Völsungs. Fourthly, it was Óðin’s function to apportion victory to those whom he designated. Hence amongst his titles were Sigfaðir (the father of victory) and Sighöfundr (the awarder of victory). But this victory could be awarded unjustly, such as is mentioned in *Lokasenna* 22. In the already mentioned *Völsunga saga*, the last stand of the hero, Sigmundr, indicates the capricious nature of Óðin’s apportioning victory. A one-eyed, black-coated man with a spear in his hand accosted Sigmundr. The hero’s sword struck the spear and shattered. From that point on, the battle turned against Sigmundr and he lost his life. The fifth aspect was the taking by Óðinn of his favourite slain warriors to dwell with him in

---

They thought that he who is lord of war ought to be appeased by the shedding of human blood. To him they devoted the first share of the spoil, and in his honour arms stripped from the foe were suspended from trees. And they had more than all other races a deep spirit of religion, since the worship of this god seemed to be really bestowed upon their ancestor.” *The History of Jordanes*, trans. Charles Mierow. Cambridge and New York, 1966, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> Turville Petre, Gabriel, *Myths and Religion of the North*, London, 1964, p. 51.

Valhöll. Thus in *Völuspá* 1 he is called Valföðr (the father of the slain).

### (3) The link with chieftains

In Paul the Deacon's account the two leaders of the Winnili, Ibor and Aio, were "appointed" over the third part of the tribe, which was forced to abandon their native soil. (Book 1, ch. 3) The account further describes them as being "in the bloom of youthful vigour and more eminent than the rest". This suggests that they were appointed because of their potential leadership qualities rather than belonging to a power-broking élite. They were appointed immediately prior to the emigration.

In the two Lombardic texts it was the Vandal chieftains. In *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* it was Ambri and Assi, the leaders of the Vandals, who had direct access to Godan, and the matriarch of the Winnili, Gambara, who had direct access to Frea, who thought up the stratagem of having the women masquerading as men and effected the moving of furniture so that Godan would look first to the east and give victory to her devotee. Paul the Deacon relates that it was the Vandals who approached Godan to win his support for victory. He does not mention the two leaders of the Vandals, Abri and Assi, but it can be assumed that it was only they who negotiated with the god. There is no reference to sacrifices being offered to Godan, but presumably knowledge of the ancient heathen cults was lost to the Langobards by the 7th and 8th centuries. Hence, the only information we can glean from the Langobardic texts is that the leaders had access to the gods, at at least to one god and his wife.

The Norse tradition is very rich in examples of the link between Óðinn and the ruling class. He was at times the protector of prominent heroes and the progenitor of some royal families. In Sweden he was the father of Yngvi, who is seen to be Freyr as well as the ancestor of the Ynglingar.<sup>16</sup>

### (4) The celestial vantage point

In both the Langobardic and the Norse traditions the war god had a vantage point in the skies from which he could observe the world of humans. In *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* Godan informed the Vandals, who sought his support for success in combat, that he would give victory to those whom he first saw at sunrise. The text informs us that later "... when it became light as the sun was rising, Frea, the wife of Godan, turned the bed, where her husband was lying, putting his face towards the east, and woke him up. And looking at them, he saw ...". From this source we gain the impression that in the god's abode there are windows at least to the west and the east and that he normally looked out of a western window. The change in the location of the bed caused victory to be granted to the group for which it was not intended. Paul the Deacon (1.8)

---

<sup>16</sup> *Snorra Edda*, Prologue, ch 5, *Edda Snorri Sturlusonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, Akureyri, 1954, p. 7.

changes this part of the tale and states that Godan “was accustomed to look through his window towards the east” Both sources have the Vandals approaching him and learning that he would grant victory to the army he first saw at dawn. The *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* gives a clear reason why the Winnili outwitted the Vandals, but Paul misses the point.

In the Norse tradition Óðinn had a *hásaeti* (= high-seat) in Ásgarðr from which he could perceive all that went on in the nine worlds.<sup>17</sup> The value of this piece of furniture was that it was one of the four sources he had of obtaining intelligence. The second was the two ravens, Huginn and Munin, who flew around the worlds and returned to perch on Óðin’s shoulders and supply information (*Grímnismál* 20). The third source was the loss of an eye in return for a draft of the precious fluid at the well of Mímir (*Gylfaginning* 8). Finally, there was the gaining of the runes, i.e. secret, occult knowledge of the wisdom behind all things, by sacrificing himself to himself one windswept tree for nine nights and days (*Hávamál* 138-141)

##### (5) The war god’s wife

In the Langobardic Latin texts Godan’s wife is called Frea, whereas in the Norse tradition she is Frigg. One can only wonder how Frigg became Frea, which can be so easily confused with the name of the goddess Freyja, the sister of Freyr and daughter of Njörðr.

##### Reliability of the Langobardic tradition

The episode of the tribal naming, which has captured our interest with its mythological implications, inevitably poses the question of whether the tale is a genuine survival from a mythopoeic situation, which stems back to the time of emigration, or whether it is a later invention.

In the 19th century there were several writers who suggested alternative etymologies. Even Paul (ch. 6) himself - perhaps as an act of theological correctness - later gives the demythologised literal etymology, which he may have taken from Isidore of Seville, who wrote, “The Langobards were commonly so called from their flowing and never shaven beards.” (*Etymologies* IX, 2, 94)

William Dudley Foulke in his translation and commentary presents three variant etymologies in a footnote to Ch. 9 of Paul the Deacon.<sup>18</sup> Schmidt imagines that *bard* or “beard” was the original name of the tribe and that *lang* was later added. Hodgkin prefers the Old High German *barta* or “axe”, which survives in the English “halburt”, whereas Schmitz derives the name from *bord*, which he envisioned being the long and low meadows of the River Elbe,

<sup>17</sup> *Grímnismál*, prose introduction; Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning* chs 6, 9, 40, 68.

<sup>18</sup> *History of the Langobards by Paul the Deacon*, translated and edited by William Dudley Foulke, New York 1906, p. 18.

where the Langobards resided. Foulke sums up these three derivations as “the long-bearded men, the long-halbert-bearing men, the long-shore-men”. All except the suggested literal etymology of Isidore belong to the world of fantasy and throw no light on the subject,

Our interest at the moment is not in the origin of the Langobards but in the mythological connection with the name-giving. Nevertheless, in order to posit the mythological tale in its setting, it is helpful to examine the evidence available about the tribe when it first appears in historical sources. Several Greek and Roman authors wrote that the Langobards lived in territory along the River Elbe. Strabo comments that they were part of a larger Suevic confederation between the Rhine and the Elbe. At the time of writing Strabo said that they had been driven to flight out of their country into the land on the far side of the river. He added that “it is a common characteristic of all the peoples in this part of the world that they migrate with ease, because of the meagreness of their livelihood and because they do not till the soil or even store up food, but live in small huts that are merely temporary structures, and they live for the most part of their flocks, as the nomads do, so that ... they load their household belongings on their wagons and with their beasts turn whithersoever they think best.”<sup>19</sup>

It appears that the Germanic tribes were fluid in structure and this fact makes it difficult for archaeologists to define a tribe by means of a distinct material culture with clearly defined social and stylistic traits.<sup>20</sup> Christie refers to the work of W. Wegewitz in a compact group of urn-cemeteries in an area in the Elbe valley between the River Oste in the west and River Jeezel in the east, centred on Bardengau. Excavations have since the late 19th century uncovered a large number of cremation cemeteries dating from the 6th century B.C. to the 3rd A.D. Wegewitz discovered a decline in finds 100-50 B.C., and then the occurrence of finds of lances, swords and shields from about 30 B.C.<sup>21</sup> He regarded these as belonging to a newly immigrated tribe, which he identified as Langobards.

The weapons reflect a militaristic community, where the use of the lance was prominent. Christie reports that the appearance of spurs indicates competence in horsemanship, a skill not common in West Germanic tribes, but noted amongst the Langobards.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Strabo, *Geographica*, translated by H. L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library, London and New York, 1944, Book 7, 1.3, pp. 157-158.

<sup>20</sup> Christie, Neil, *The Lombards: The Ancient Langobards*, Oxford UK and Cambridge USA, 1995, p. 4. The following section of my argument is dependent on the material in this book.

<sup>21</sup> Christie, op. cit. pp. 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> Christie, op. cit. p. 7. Paul the Deacon (Book IV ch. 37. Latin text ed. Lidia Capo pp. 210-216; Foulke translation pp. 179-183) writes of an attack on the Langobards under Duke Gisulf by a band of mounted Avars, and the daring flight on horseback of three lads, one of them very young. Even children are shown as being skilled horsemen.

The same period is noted by an increased importing of Roman goods, which accelerated a growing social stratification. This increased trade is reflected in finds of imported goods in graves of the upper class.<sup>23</sup>

The Marcomannic invasions and the campaign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (164-180) shattered the fragile economic balance that had developed, leading to economic and social instability as tribal élites lost their wealth and sought alternative sources of wealth. The resultant growing demand for goods from the Roman world and the population increase are suggested as being causes of a break in the pattern of settlement and of push and pull factors of a new wave of migration in the later 2nd or earlier 3rd centuries.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, the difficulty of a precise identification of the archaeological material as being Langobardic makes it hard to be definite about the evidence. No urn in one of the cemeteries has a tag with “*langobardi*” on it. One can only say that it is possible and even perhaps probable. Christie sums up the situation as follows:<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, we must remain cautious in these arguments. Excavations outside the Bardengau zone remain somewhat patchy and do not, as yet, clearly help to distinguish a Longobard territory from those of neighbouring tribes. Many of the cultural traits identified by Wegewitz, such as the use of weapon graves, of separate male and female cemeteries and of distinctive metalwork, can now be shown to extend across a much broader territory, running from the Weser to the Vistula. The probability is that the Bardengau belongs culturally to the wider grouping of the Suevi and, later on, the Saxons and stands out merely because of its better archaeological documentation ...

According to Christie a battle against the Vandals or some other group perhaps lay behind this upheaval. Indeed it could have happened that the outcome was, in reality, different from that recorded in the Langobardic sources and that outcome was less favourable to the Langobards than recorded. These external pressures effected a more general Germanic destabilisation of settlement patterns, and the Langobards may have been drawn into the migratory chain.

This examination of evidence of possible Langobardic settlement on the Elbe indicates the situation out of which the change of name of the ancient Germanic tribe might have occurred. In 7th and 8th century Italy there was a memory that the now semi-assimilated community in times of yore had changed its name from Winnili to Langobard. The story may be much older than the period of the settlement on the Elbe: it may have been re-adapted to fit later historical conditions. But the correspondences between the figures and functions Godan and Óðinn name, role as war god, link with tribal chieftains, possessing a celestial vantage point and in having a wife with versions of the

<sup>23</sup> Christie, op. cit. p. 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> Christie, op. cit. p. 9-11.

<sup>25</sup> Wegewitz sums up his findings in Wegewitz, *Rund um den Kiekeberg: Vorgeschichte einer Landschaft an der Niederelbe, Vor- und Frühgeschichte aus dem niederelbischen Raum*, Neumünster, 1988, pp. 135-178. Here I cite Christie's brief summary op. cit. p. 12.

same name indicate a striking similarity and a connection lying far back in antiquity.

## Appendices

### 1. English translation of *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, ch. 1

#### IN NAME OF THE LORD THE ORIGIN OF THE PEOPLE OF THE LOMBARDS BEGINS

**Ch. 1.** In the regions of the north, where many people live, there is an island, which is called Scadanan and which means “destruction”; among these there was a small tribe called the Winniles. And with them there was a woman called Gambara, and she had two sons; the name of one was Ybor and the name of the other, Agio. With their mother, Gambara by name, they held power over the Williles.

Then the leaders of the Vandals, that is Ambri and Assi, moved with their army and said to the Williles, “Either pay us tribute or prepare yourselves for battle with us.” Then Ybor and Agio with their mother Gambara answered, “We had better prepare for battle than pay tribute to the Williles.”

Then Ambri and Assi, that is the leaders of the Vandals, asked Godan to give them victory over the Winniles. Godan answered, say thus, “I shall give victory to those whom I first see at sunrise.”

At that time Gambara, with her two sons, that is Ybor and Agio, who were chieftains over the Williles, asked Frea, (the wife of Godan), to be propitious to the Williles. Then Frea gave advice that the Williles should come at sunrise, and that their women should also come with their husbands with their hair let down around the face like beards.

Then when it became light as the sun was rising, Frea, the wife of Godan, turned the bed, where her husband was lying, putting his face towards the east, and woke him up. And looking at them, he saw the Williles and their women having their hair let down around their faces; and he said, “Who are those long-bearded ones?” And Frea said to Godan, “Since you have given them a name, give them also victory.” And he gave them victory, so that they should defend themselves according to this plan and gain victory. Since that time the Williles were called Langobards.

### 2. Latin text of *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*

#### IN NOMINE DOMINI INCIPIIT ORIGO GENTIS LANGOBARDORUM

**Cap. 1.** Est insula qui dicitur Scadaman, quod interpretatur excidia, in partibus aquilonis, ubi multae gentes habitant; inter quos erat gens parva quae Winnilis vocabatur. Et erat cum eis mulier nomine Gambara, habebatque duos filios,

nomen uni Ybor et nomen alteri Agio; ipsi cum matre sua nomine Gambara principatum tenebant super Winniles. Moverunt se ergo duces Wandalorum, id est Ambri et Assi, cum exercitu suo, et dicebant ad Winniles: “Aut solvite nobis tributa, aut praeparate vos ad pugnam nobiscum.” Tunc respondent Ybor et Agio cum matre sua Gambara: “Melius est nobis pugnam praeparare, quam Wandalis tributa persolvere”. Tunc Ambri et Assi, hoc est duces Wandalorum, rogaverunt Godan, ut daret eis super Winniles victoriam. Respondit Godan dicens: “Quos sol antea videro, ipsis dabo victoriam.” Eo tempore Gambara cum duobis filiis suis, id est Ybor et Agio, qui principes erant super Winniles, rogaverunt Fream, (uxorem Godan), ut ad Winniles esset propitia. Tunc Frea dedit consilium, ut sol surgente venirent Winniles et mulieres eorum crines solutae circa faciem in similitudinem barbae et cum viris suis venirent. Tunc luciscente sol dum surgeret, giravit Frea, uxor Godan, lectum ubi recumbebat vir eius, et fecit faciem eius contra orientem, et excitavit eum. Et ille aspiciens vidit Winniles et mulieres ipsorum habentes crines solutas circa faciem; et ait: “Qui sunt isti longibarbae?” Et dixit Frea ad Godan: “Sicut dedisti nomen; da illis et victoriam.” Et dedit eis victoriam, ut ubi visum esset vindicarent se et victoriam haberent. Ab illo tempore Winniles Langobardi vocati sunt.

The Latin text is taken from *Origo gentis Langobardorum, from Edictus Rothari: Origo gentis Langobardorum, Scriptores Rerum langobardicarum et Italicarum, saec Vi--IX*, ed. G. Waitz, Hanover, 1878, pp. 2-3.

### 3. English translation of Paul the Deacon: *History of the Langobards*

**Ch.1.7.** The Winnili, then, having set sail from Scandinavia with their leaders, Ibor and Aio, coming into the district, which is called Scoringa, settled there for a number of years. And this at that time Abri and Assi, the leaders of the Vandals, were subjecting the neighbouring provinces by war. The latter, already elated by many victories, sent messengers to the Winnili, telling them that they should either pay tribute to the Vandals or that they should prepare themselves for struggles of war. Then Ibor and Aio, with the agreement of their mother, Gambara, resolved that it would be better to defend their liberty by arms than to disgrace it with the payment of tribute. They sent a reply to the Vandals by messengers that they would rather fight than be slaves. Inasmuch as all the Winnili were then at the prime of their youthfulness, but very few in number, since they had only been the third part of one island of no considerable size.

**Ch.1.8.** At this point the ancients tell a silly story that the Vandals, approaching Godan, asked for victory over the Winnili and he replied that he would give victory to those of whom he first caught sight at sunrise. Then Gambara approached Frea, the wife of Godan, and asked for victory for the Winnili. And Frea gave her the advice that the Winnili women, having let down their hair,

should arrange it around their faces like beards and in the early morning should stand next to their husbands and place themselves to be seen as well by Godan from the place, from which he was accustomed to look through his window towards the east. And it was done like this. And when Godan caught sight of them at sunrise, he said, "Who are these long-bearded ones?" Then Frea persuaded him to grant victory as a gift to those to whom he had bestowed a name. And thus Godan granted victory to the Winnili. These things are worthy of laughter and are to be treated as being of no significance. For victory is not to be attributed to the power of men, but it is rather granted from heaven.

**Ch.1.9.** However, it is certain that the Langobards were later thus called on account of the length of their beards, untouched by any iron implement, whereas they were first called Winnili. For according to their language "lang" means long and "bart" means beard. Wotan, whom they called Godan by the addition of a letter, is the one who is called Mercury amongst the Romans and by all the peoples of Germany is worshipped as god, is considered to have existed not in these times, but a long time ago, and not in Germany, but in Greece.

**Ch.1.10.** Therefore, the Winnili, who also are Langobards, having joined battle with the Vandals and, as one might expect, struggling vehemently for the glory of liberty, they won victory. Having later suffered privations from hunger in the same province of Scoringa, they were greatly troubled in spirit.

#### **4. Latin text of Pauli Diaconi Historia Langobardorum**

**Cap.1.7.** Igitur egressi de Scandinavia Winnili, cum Ibor et Aione ducibus, in regionem quae adpellatur Scoringa venientes per annos illic aliquot conederunt. Illo itaque tempore Abri et Assi Wandalorum duces vicinas quasque provincias bello premebant. Hi iam multis elati victoriis, nuntios ad Winnilos mittunt, ut aut tributa Wandalis persolverent, aut se ad belli certamina praepararent. Tunc Ibor et Aio, adnintente matre Gambarara, deliberant, melius esse armis libertatem tueri, quam tributorum eandem solutione foedare. Mandant per legatos Wandalis, pugnatos se potius quam servituros. Erant siquidem tunc Winnili universi iuvenili aetate florentes, sed numero perexigui, quippe qui unius non nimiae amplitudinis insulae tertia solummodo particula fuerint.

**Cap.1.8.** Refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam: quod accedentes Wandali ad Godan victoriam de Winnilis postulaverint, illeque responderit, se illis victoriam daturam quos primum oriente sole conspexisset. Tunc accessisse Gambaram ad Fream, uxorem Godan, et Winnilis victoriam postulasse. Freamque consulum dedisse, ut Winnilorum milieres solutos crines erga faciem

ad barbae similitudinem conponerent manequ primo cum viris adessent seseque a Godan videndas pariter e regione, qua ille per fenestram orientem versus erat solitus aspicere, conlocarent. Atque ita factum fuisse. Quas cum Godan oriente sole conspiceret, dixisse “Qui sunt isti longibarbi?” Tunc Fream subiunxisse, ut quibus nomen tribuerat victoriam condonaret. Sicque Winnilis Godan victoriam concessisse. Haec risu digna sunt et pro nihilo habenda. Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur.

**Cap.1.9.** Certum tamen est, Langobardos ad intactae ferro barbae longitudine, cum primis Winnili dicti fuerint, ita postmodum appellatos. Nam iuxta illorum linguam “lang” longam, “bart” brabam significat. Wotan sane, quem adiecta littera Godan dixerunt, ipse est qui apud Romanos Mercurius dicitur et ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur; qui non circa haec tempora, sed longe antea, nec in Germania, sed in Graecia fuisse perhibetur.

**Cap.1.10.** Winnili igitur, qui et Langobardi, commisso cum Wandalis proelio, acritur, utpote pro libertatis gloria, decertantes, victoriam capiunt. Qui magnam postmodum famis penuriam in eadem Scoringa provincia, valde animo consternati sunt.

The Latin text is taken from *Pauli Diaconi Historia Langobardorum*, ed. Lidia Capo, 11<sup>a</sup> edizione febbraio, Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1993, pp. 22-26.

# Völkische Altnordistik: The Politics of Nordic Studies in the German-Speaking Countries, 1926-45

Bernard Mees

University of Melbourne

Blaue Nacht mit lauen Wellen!  
Am Geländ' die Juchzer gellen,

Wo noch Hollas Büsche blühn.  
Feuer leuchten durch die Tale,  
Wie Balders Grabesmale,  
Und des Rades Funken glühn.  
Laßt die Sonnenrunen funkeln,  
Hakenkreuz erstrahl' im Dunkeln,  
Sei begrüßt, erhabner Phol!  
Tausend Bauta-Steine reden,  
Druiden-Weisheit, Edda, Veden,  
Von dir, ewigem 'Symbol'!

Blue night with mild waves!  
In the open country, the cry of the delighted  
rings,  
Where still Holle's bushes bloom.  
Fire shines through the valleys,  
Like Balder's monuments,  
And from the wheel sparks glow.  
Let the sun-rune spark,  
Swastika radiant in the dark,  
Be welcome, exalted Phol!  
A thousand Bauta-stones counsel,  
Druidic wisdom, Edda, Vedas,  
From you, eternal 'symbol'!

So reads an anonymous *völkisch* poem of 1899 glorifying the swastika, known from an Old Norse source as the *sólarhvel* ('sun-wheel').<sup>1</sup> Drawing on a smorgasbord of references to German, Norse and other Indo-European traditions, it appeared in *Heimdall* (1897-1918), one of a number of political journals of Wilhelmine times with names evoking a Nordic connection, also including *Odin* (1899-1901), *Hammer* (1901-1913, 33), *Runen* (1918-29) and the *Werdandi-Jahrbücher* (c. 1913). All of the groups that published these journals had one trait in common apart from an interest in pagan Nordic antiquity: they were all devotees of a new movement of the political far right that had been christened by its proponents as *völkisch*.

The *Völkisch* Movement has its genesis in a political sense in the unresolved question of the German-speaking citizens of the Hapsburg Empire since the unification of (what to many of them amounted to merely the rest of) Germany in 1871 as the 'little-Germany', Prussian-dominated and excluding the Austro-Germans. Although the German cult of the *Volk* can be traced back to the days of Herder, in order to separate the political identity of the Austro-Germans from the concept of nation (in fact to transcend it), a new term appeared in the political vocabulary, in the manner of a calque based on the term *national*. *Volk*, apparently the indigenous equivalent of the Latin loan *Nation* became the model for an indigenous identity, and the term *völkisch* 'common, popular' took on a new, political meaning.<sup>2</sup>

The most effective representation of these *völkisch* Germans were the Pan-Germans (*Alldeutsche*) whose movement was founded in Vienna in the 1870s. Pan-German sentiment soon spread to Wilhelmine Germany where the purview of Pan-Germanism (*Alldeutschtum*) expanded to encompass German overseas interests, and colonialist Pan-Germans entered the Reichstag from the 1890s.<sup>3</sup> The various *völkisch* parties of Austria and Germany were never to enjoy much success among the public at large until one of these groups, founded as a workers' branch of Munich's Thule Society, the publisher of *Runen*, rejected the elitism typical of their *völkisch* forebears, and sought instead to capture a mass following. As the National Socialist German Workers' Party it was to achieve a *völkisch* victory in 1933, a unified Greater Germany by 1938 and a thousand year Reich that ended in ruins after only twelve.

To understand *völkisch* thought, the approach today is to view it as an

<sup>1</sup> Anon., 'Sonnenwende', *Heimdall* 13, 14. 4/1899, p. 95; K. Weißmann, *Schwarze Fahnen, Runenzeichen*, Düsseldorf 1991, pp. 67 ff.

<sup>2</sup> J. & W. Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* XXVI, Berlin 1951, p. 485; A. G. Whiteside, *The Socialism of Fools*, Berkeley 1975; F. L. Carsten, *Fascist Movements in Austria*, London 1977; G. Hartung, 'Völkische Ideologie', *Weimarer Beiträge* 33, 1987, pp. 1174-85; J. Hermand, *Old Dreams of a New Reich*, trans. P. Levesque with S. Soldovieri, Bloomington 1992; B. Schönemann, 'Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse XII.3', in O. Brunner, W. Conze and R. Kosselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* VII, Stuttgart 1992, pp. 373-76.

<sup>3</sup> R. Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German*, Boston 1984.

element of the German (and Austrian) variety of a generic political form: fascism. Although there have been many shifts in the manner in which historians have viewed the Third Reich over the past 50 years, the end of the Cold War essentially saw the end of the interpretation of Nazism as Hitlerism (as a mirror to the enemy of Communism/Stalinism). The German experience is now more readily compared with movements of a similar ilk, not just in Italy, but also in England, France, Belgium, Spain, Finland, Hungary, Rumania, and even as far afield as Brazil and South Africa. The common thread of this fascism is, according to Roger Griffin, 'a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism'.<sup>4</sup> In other words, all of these movements aimed at a radical renewal of their societies. As such, fascist thought is riddled with idealistic notions of nation and the past, and pleas for renewal, resurgence, reinvigoration, rebirth.

In Italy the utopian past of Mussolini's Fascists was ancient Rome. In Germany, the *völkisch* utopia comprised a mixture of the Ideals of 1914 (the time of the Civil Truce or *Burgenfrieden* declared at the outbreak of WWI), the spirit of the *Kultur* of the nineteenth century, the medieval *Ritterzeit* of the early days of the Holy Roman Empire, but increasingly, and most romantically, the Germania of the time of Tacitus, Arminius and the *furor Teutonicus*. *Völkisch* notions of genealogy and rootedness led these thinkers back to the pure, untrammelled youngest Germany of pre-Christian times. Indeed, the writings of leading National Socialists are filled with notions of remote antiquity: Hitler's call for 'a Germanic State of the German Nation' (*einen germanischen Staat deutscher Nation*) clearly draws on the picture of the racially pure ancient Germany described in the fourth book of the Germanic ethnography of Tacitus.<sup>5</sup> The *völkisch* ideal increasingly became a Germanic utopia reliant upon the picture of antiquity developed by popularisers and scholars, both past and contemporary. The use of the swastika and various runes as emblems for organs of the NSDAP kept the ideal of the pre-Christian Germany evermore to the fore, and among more radical ideologues such as Himmler, even led to the revival of a National Socialist neopaganism based in reconstruction of practices from the Germanic Iron and even Bronze Age.

Although German texts published between 1933 and 1945 are often used with some care by researchers today, the influence of *völkisch* thought on scholarship pre-dates the Nazi seizure of power. *Völkisch* thought first makes its overt presence felt in scholarship of the 1890s with Gustaf Kossinna and thereafter the archaeological school he founded in Berlin, and Rudolf Much and the school of folklore studies (*Volkskunde*) he inaugurated in Vienna. Both were

<sup>4</sup> R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London 1991, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 44th ed., Munich 1933, p. 362. Some authors seek to link this phrase solely with the medieval *Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation*, though the chapter it ends concerns race which clearly reveals it also as a Tacitean reference: (pace) F.-L. Kroll, *Utopie als Ideologie*, Paderborn 1998, p. 73.

Nordicists/ Germanists, and along with the physician Ludwig Wilser, the writer of dozens of antiquarian and anthropological works, they were to engender *völkisch* modes of thought in German archaeology, anthropology, literary philology, linguistics, runology and Old Norse studies.

Of course Kossinna and Much did not themselves make an indelible impression in Old Norse scholarship. Yet their legacy continued on after the 1914-1918 war and is represented in the studies of scholars who came after them. A leading example of the *völkisch* legacy was the publication in 1926 of a collection of essays by academics from Germany, Austria and Switzerland under the editorship of Herman Nollau. This volume, *Germanic Resurgence (Germanische Wieder-erstehung)*, sought to capitalise on the growing popularity of Old Germanic studies, and contains a lead article on the Nordic branch of Germania by Andreas Heusler.<sup>6</sup>

Heusler's influence on Nordic studies is immense. Mentioned by one commentator in comparison with the Grimms,<sup>7</sup> the Swiss-born philologist had an enormous impact on his colleagues at the University of Berlin until his retirement in 1919, and thereafter in his publications written back in Arlesheim-bei-Basel until his death in 1940. Linguists of course remember him most fondly for his work on comparative Germanic meter, though in Old Germanic studies as a whole he is probably best known for his concept of Germanicness (*Germanentum*).<sup>8</sup> Although he did not coin this expression (which had to that time usually been merely a grandiose synonym of *Deutschtum*),<sup>9</sup> he imbued in it a new meaning; in fact he conceptualised Germanicness formally for the first time.<sup>10</sup> He also proselytised this conception, perhaps most famously in his collection of essays from 1933, entitled simply *Germanicness (Germanentum)*. The lead essay in this work is a reprint of that of 1926's *Germanic*

<sup>6</sup> H. Nollau (ed.), *Germanische Wiedererstehung*, Heidelberg 1926.

<sup>7</sup> S. Sonderegger, 'Vorwort', in A. Heusler, *Kleine Schriften II*, ed. S. Sonderegger, Berlin 1969, p. v.

<sup>8</sup> H. Beck, 'Andreas Heuslers Begriff des „Altgermanischen“', in H. Beck (ed.), *Germanenprobleme in heutiger Sicht*, Berlin 1986, pp. 396-412; idem, 'Heusler, Andreas', in J. Hoops, *Reallexikon der germanischehn Altertumskunde XIV*, 2nd ed., Berlin 1999, pp. 533-43.

<sup>9</sup> According to the Grimms (*Wörterbuch II*, p. 1053) in 1866 *Deutsch(h)um* was a comparatively recent coin (and 'meist ironisch'). *Germanent(h)um*, which is not listed in the relevant (1897) volume of their dictionary, first appears in book titles in (medieval and modern) historical, political and anti-Semitic discourse; cf. also Leo Berg's attempt to claim Ibsen's works as German in character: J. Venedy, *Römerthum, Christenthum und Germanenthum und deren wechselseitiger Einfluß bei der Umgestaltung der Sklaverei des Alterthums und die Leibeigenschaft des Mittelalters*, Frankfurt a. M. 1840; B. Bauer, *Rußland und das Germanenthum*, Charlottenburg 1853; W. Streuber, *Das Germanenthum und Österreich*, Darmstadt 1870; W. Marr, *Das Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum*, Bern 1879; L. Berg, *Henrik Ibsen und das Germanenthum in den modernen Literatur*, Berlin 1887.

<sup>10</sup> For earlier terminologies used by *völkisch* thinkers before Heusler see K. v. See, 'Kulturkritik und Germanenforschung zwischen den Weltkriegen', *Historische Zeitschrift* 245, 1987, pp. 346-48 [= idem, *Barbar, Germane, Arier*, Heidelberg 1994, pp. 189-91].

*Resurgence.*<sup>11</sup>

Nazi Germany hailed Heusler's work. Yet Germanicness, based principally in interpretations of Norse literature, supplemented (for comparative purposes) with the less copious early English and German literary remains, was in fact a Germanised form of Nordicness. Heusler claimed that 'the thought that [the Scandinavian] Eddas have a common Germanic background no longer excites Nordic hearts and minds' (*der Gedanke, daß ihre Edda einen gemeinengermanischen Hintergrund habe, schlägt keine Funken in nordischen Betrachten*). For Heusler true Germanicness lived on only in Germany; after all, witness the interest in all things Germanic in the Germany of the day. Yet Heusler was fundamentally reliant on Nordic sources for this *verdeutschendes Nordentum*: especially when it came to issues of Germanic sensibility he admits 'we rely on the people of the Icelandic sagas for help' (*nehmen wir die isländischen Sagamenschen zu Hilfe!*) — *Germanentum* could not be reconstructed from the literature of medieval Germany.<sup>12</sup> It is no surprise, then, given the nature of his sources that Heusler's Germanicness is a heroic one. But a militant, and indeed Nietzschean Germanicness<sup>13</sup> was hailed in fascist Germany as a discovery of genius, and moreover, as an encapsulated *völkisch* past with an uncanny relevance to the struggles of the then present day. Not only was Germanic studies, in the words of Hermann Güntert in 1938, recognised as a 'service to our people' (*Dienst an unserem Volk*).<sup>14</sup> As Hermann Schneider put it in 1939:<sup>15</sup>

Das Jahr 1933 brachte eine Betrachtung der deutschen Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte zum Siege, die dem germanischen Element im Deutschen eine bisher ungeahnte Bedeutung verschafte: das Beste am Deutschen ist germanisch und muß in der germanischen Frühzeit in reiner Gestalt zu finden sein.

The year 1933 brought a victory for the way in which we regard German cultural and intellectual history. It gave the Germanic element in German a previously unforeseen importance. The best in German is Germanic and its pure form can only be found in early Germanic times.

In a speech given to the National Socialist Teachers' League (Nationalsozialistische Lehrerbund) in 1935, Heusler's work was held up as

<sup>11</sup> A. Heusler, *Germanentum*, Heidelberg 1934.

<sup>12</sup> A. Heusler 'Von germanisch und deutsche Art', *Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde* 39, 1925, pp. 746-57 [= *Germanentum*, pp. 79-88 = *Kleine Schriften* II, pp. 598-607].

<sup>13</sup> Heusler, *Germanentum*, p. 71; and cf. H. Beck, 'Andreas Heusler und die zeitgenössischen religionsgeschichtlichen Interpretationen des Germanentums', in E. Walter and H. Mittelstädt (eds), *Altnordistik: Vielfalt und Einheit*, Weimar 1989, pp. 33-45; idem, 'Heusler, Andreas', pp. 538-40; K. v. See, 'Andreas Heusler in seinen Briefen', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 119, 1990, pp. 387-88 [= *Barbar, Germane, Arier*, pp. 271-72].

<sup>14</sup> H. Güntert, 'Neue Zeit - neues Ziel', *Wörter und Sachen* 19 (NF 1), 1938, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> H. Schneider, 'Die germanische Altertumskunde zwischen 1933 und 1938', *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 15, 1939, pp. 1-3.

essential reading for the times. After summarising Heusler's expressions of Germanicness, the speaker, Hans Taeger, commented:<sup>16</sup>

Heusler hat uns für die künstlerischen Qualitäten der Edda, für die Eigenart germanischen Kunst und germanischen Menschentums den Blick geschäft und in ihrer Beziehung auf Nietzsches sittliche Forderungen die Brücke von der Vergangenheit zur Gegenwart geschlagen.

Heusler has produced in us an appreciation of the artistic quality of the Eddas, the characteristically Germanic art and Germanic humanity, and with his affinity with Nietzsche's moral challenge has forged a bridge from the past to the present.

The bridge from the past to the present had become the course for a German Germanic resurgence.

Clear evidence for the impact of Heusler's concept of Germanicness is the manner in which brown literature began to take on the trappings of his language and speak in terms of this new notion of *Germanentum*. Another Nazi writer in 1944 described Germanicness so:<sup>17</sup>

Deutsches Germanentum ist aus nordischen Rassenentum entspringende metaphysische Charkterlichkeit, die sich in einer schöpferischen Gestaltungskraft auf dem Grunde eine heraldisch Haltung ... erschließt ... Das deutsches Germanentum hat die Aufgabe, die weltgeschichtliche Neuordnung zu vollziehen.

German Germanicness is a metaphysical form of character, derived from a Nordic racial essence, which reveals itself in a creative power based on a heroic attitude ... German Germanicness has the task of bringing the new order of world history to completion.

Heusler's Germanicness had become the transalpine sister of Fascist Italy's *Romanit *.<sup>18</sup>

Taeger also mentions another leading figure in the study of Germanicness, a well-known Nordacist who had succeeded Heusler at Berlin, the Prussian scholar Gustav Neckel. Neckel's offerings, however, went much further down the *v lkisch* path than had Heusler. In 1929, for example, he came out in favour of the old *v lkisch* theory (once proselytised by Wilser and Kossinna) that rather than based in a Mediterranean prototype, the runes were an indigenous creation of the North, and although he first couched his words in terms of a cognate relationship (*Urverwandschaft*) between the Germanic and the Mediterranean scripts, by 1933 he had come out squarely in favour of this most preposterous of *v lkisch* postulates.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, like Much in Vienna, Neckel

<sup>16</sup> H. Taeger, 'Germanentum und wir', *Zeitschrift f r Deutschkunde* 50, 1936, p. 409.

<sup>17</sup> F. A. Beck, *Der Aufstieg des germanischen Weltalters*, Bochum 1944, pp. 45-47.

<sup>18</sup> See R. Visser, 'Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of *Romanit *', *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, 1992, pp. 5-22 [Thanks to Steven R. Welch for this reference].

<sup>19</sup> G. Neckel, review of M. Hammarstr m, 'Om runeskriftens h rkomst' (*Studier i nordisk filologi* 20, 1929), *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 50, 1929, pp. 1237-39; idem, 'Die Herkunft der Runenschrift', *Neue Jahrb cher f r Wissenschaft und Jugendbildung* 9, 1933, pp. 406-17 = L. Roselius (ed.), *Erstes Nordisches Thing*, Bremen 1933, pp. 60-76.

had become a champion of Germanicness. In the year of the onset of the Great Depression he penned a book that started with an attack on the German Gothicist Sigmund Feist and finished with an immoderate attack on the *General Characteristics of the Germanic Languages* of the great French linguist Antoine Meillet, comparing it adversely to Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* of Napoleonic times simply because he felt that Meillet's acceptance of the substrate theory inaugurated by Feist impugned the honour of the Germanic tribes.<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, in his private correspondence with Wilhelm Ranisch, Heusler attacked Neckel, called into question his sanity, and accused him of fostering delusions. Yet Heusler had joined this project some years earlier, and by the early 1930s, with political backing of a most overt nature, *völkisch* Germanomania had become a state-sponsored enterprise. A posthumous collection of Neckel's works were published in 1944 under the Heuslerian title *On Germanicness (Zur Germanentum)*. Indeed, Neckel was even upbraided for not toeing the official party line in 1935 after an exchange with the young Amt-Rosenberg-aligned Nordicist Bernhard Kummer (who had served as his assistant at Berlin from 1930-33), and was banished to Göttingen for two years where he became the inaugural holder of a Nordic chair at the university of the Grimms.<sup>21</sup>

Neckel's '*Altertumsfimmels*' (deluded picture of antiquity)<sup>22</sup> was one that could be found in the works of earlier authors enraptured by the *völkisch* spell. Study of the Germanic ancestors had become worship, and for some writers dreaming. Such an attitude had been part and parcel of *völkisch* thought since the 1890s when the Austrian mysticist Guido (von) List had started having visions about Germanic antiquity, and clearly under the influence of Helena Blavatsky's Theosophy, inaugurated Ariosophy (or as he termed it Armanism), a seminal step in the revival of Germanic paganism.<sup>23</sup> List's attempt to produce a new Teutonism was part of a tradition that began with Paul de Lagarde and Richard Wagner that sought to distill a German spirituality from German

<sup>20</sup> A. Meillet, *Caractères généraux des langues germanique*, Paris 1917; R. Much, 'Sigmund Feist und das germanische Altertum', *Wiener Prähistorische Zeitschrift* 15, 1928, pp. 1-19, 72-81; G. Neckel, *Germanen und Kelten*, Heidelberg 1929; B. Mees, 'Linguistics and Nationalism: Henry d'Arbois de Jubainville and Cultural Hegemony', *Melbourne Historical Journal* 25, 1997, pp. 46-64.

<sup>21</sup> G. Neckel, *Vom Germanentum. Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge von Gustav Neckel*, ed. W. Heydenreich and H. M. Neckel, Leipzig 1944; F. Paul, 'Zur Geschichte der Skandinavistik an der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen: Eine vorläufige Skizze (1985)', <[www.gwdg.de/njuhs/semgesch.htm](http://www.gwdg.de/njuhs/semgesch.htm)>; K. Düwel and H. Beck (eds), *Andreas Heusler an Wilhelm Ranisch. Briefe aus den Jahren 1890-1940*, Basel 1989, nos 466/2 (10.3.35), 475/1 (8.12.35), 529 (6.4.33). On Kummer see K. v. See, 'Das "Nordische" in der deutschen Wissenschaft des 20. Jahrhunderts', *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 15/2, 1983, pp. 27 ff. [= *Barbar, Germane, Arier*, pp. 224 ff.].

<sup>22</sup> Heuser to Ranisch 28/1/38 (letter no. 499/2).

<sup>23</sup> G. v. List, *Das Geheimnis der Runen*, Gross-Lichterfelde 1907 [Leipzig 1908]; N. Goodrick-Clark, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, Wellingborough 1985.

Christianity; and indeed Hitler was seen by some National Socialists as the new German messiah who would complete Luther's work of German reformation.<sup>24</sup> This interest in a *völkisch* religiosity, however, was also paralleled by another development in Nordic and Germanic studies in Germany: the beginnings of a properly historical *Germanische Religionsgeschichte*, a History of Germanic Religion.

Before the publication of the first volume of Karl Helm's *History of Old Germanic Religion* in 1913, the study of Norse myth was usually characterised as mythological study. Since the time of Jacob Grimm, Germanic mythology was essentially studied in the shadow of the repertoire of Norse myths, as continental and Anglo-Saxon figures were interpreted in light of those of the Eddas. Helm instead concentrated on pre-Christian beliefs among the Germanic tribes as a developmental process. He spoke of the development of cults, such as that of Woden/Wuotan/Óðinn over time and indeed over space.<sup>25</sup> Eugen Mogk recognised the breakthrough made by Helm when the second edition of his *Germanic Mythology* appeared as *Germanic Religious History and Mythology* in 1921.<sup>26</sup> In 1938, Jost Trier marked out the development of the new understanding of the history of Germanic religion in a review of an exciting new development. The approach in Helm's initial work had become so developed over the succeeding decades that a true picture of the development of the religiosity of the Germanic past could now be attained. The work in which this *Religionsgeschichte* had reached its apogee was that which was the occasion of Trier's review, the first edition of Jan de Vries' *History of Old Germanic Religion*.<sup>27</sup>

After Helm's breakthrough work, Germanic mythology (which is, of course, mostly Norse mythology) could be seen as a stage in the development of Germanic and German religiosity. No better example of this could be seen than in the Much school which by this time had developed an altogether new manner of looking into Germanic myths and folktales. Much had been heavily criticised by the leading German linguist Herman Hirt in 1896 for his chauvinistic

---

<sup>24</sup> G. L. Mosse, 'The Mystical Origins of National Socialism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, 1961, pp. 81-96; idem, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, New York 1964, pp. 31 ff., 280 ff.; I. Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth"*, Oxford 1987.

<sup>25</sup> K. Helm, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 2 vols, Heidelberg 1913-53; idem, 'Spaltung, Schichtung und Mischung im germanischen Heidentum', in P. Merker and W. Stämmeler (eds), *Vom Werden des deutschen Geistes: Festgabe Gustav Ehrismann*, Berlin 1925, pp. 1-20.

<sup>26</sup> E. Mogk, *Germanische Mythologie*, Leipzig 1906; idem, *Germanische Religionsgeschichte und Mythologie*, Leipzig 1921; though cf. R. M. Meyer, *Germanische Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin 1910.

<sup>27</sup> J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (Grundriß der germanischen Philologie<sup>3</sup> 12), 2 vols, Berlin 1935-37; J. Trier, 'Germanische Religionsgeschichte', *Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde* 52, 1938, pp. 382-86; cf. W. H. Vogt, 'Altgermanische Religiosität', *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 15, 1939, pp. 246-48.

approach to Germanic philology,<sup>28</sup> but such criticism did not faze him, and under his influence Vienna had become a hotbed for *völkisch* Germanism, a mantle unfortunately it has only thrown off comparatively recently. The breakthrough work in this new school has turned out to be Lily Weiser's 1927 study *Old Germanic Juvenile Devotions and Men's Leagues*. The investigation of *Männerbünde* (Men's Leagues) is clearly reminiscent of developments within the Youth Movement in Germany and Austria at the time. Politics had infiltrated this originally apolitical (or rather idealistic) movement, especially that of the *völkisch* theorists. The *völkisch* theorists of the German Youth Movement had developed a notion of Eros, the bond of affinity that developed among young men. This Eros was held by some to be the equivalent of the *esprit de corps* of the front soldiers of the Great War. The youth in the *Männerbund* was to become the partner of the fascist new man.<sup>29</sup>

The links between the *Männerbund* theories emanating out of Vienna and *völkisch* ideology was not to become palpable until 1934 when the Nordicist Otto Höfler, another of Much's students, published his professional thesis, *Secret Cultic Leagues of the Germanic Peoples*, not with a traditional publisher, but in the new monograph series of Moritz Diesterweg's, a Frankfurt firm better known as publisher of a journal of a *völkisch* Youth Movement group, the Artam League (Bund-Artam), that had at one time included Himmler among its members. This journal, *The Sun*, used the (younger) Norse h-rune, *Hagal* (which had been attributed special powers by German mysticists), as its emblem and bore the subtitle the 'Monthly of Nordic Life and Ideology'.<sup>30</sup> A favourite book of Himmler's, after the appearance of his *Secret Cultic Leagues* Höfler was to become a leading National Socialist academic, overseeing the German translation of Vilhelm Grønbech's *World of the Teutons* (published by the Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt — another *völkisch* publisher, but by then firmly under National Socialist control). The theories of the Much school are based around the continuity of antiquity into the present — whether this be Eros or Höfler's demonic aspect of the Germanic warrior band. Höfler's fuller treatment of Germanic continuity even appeared as the lead article in the prestigious *Historische Zeitschrift* in 1938 after he had given it as a speech to a conference of historians in Erfurt the previous summer.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> H. Hirt, 'Nochmals die Deutung der germanischen Völkernamen', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 21, 1896, p. 127.

<sup>29</sup> L. Weiser, *Altgermanische Jünglingsweihen und Männerbünde*, Bühl 1927; O. Bockhorn, 'Von Ritualen, Mythen und Lebenskreisen: Volkskunde im Umfeld der Universität Wien', in W. Jacobeit, H. Lixfeld and O. Bockhorn (eds), *Völkische Wissenschaft*, Vienna 1994, pp. 477-526.

<sup>30</sup> *Die Sonne: Monatsschrift für nordische Weltanschauung und Lebensgestaltung* 1923-44; M. H. Kater, 'Die Artamanenschaft: Völkische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik', *Historische Zeitschrift* 213, 1971, pp. 557-638.

<sup>31</sup> O. Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen I*, Frankfurt a. M. 1934; idem, *Die germanische Kontinuitätsproblem* (Schriften des Reichsinstituts für die Geschichte des Neuen Deutschlands), Hamburg 1937 = *Historische Zeitschrift* 157, 1938, pp. 1-26 and as a Dutch

Heusler's Germanicness, Helm's *Religionsgeschichte* and the Germanic continuities of the Much school were heavily influenced by and indeed had become entwined with the development of *völkisch* thought, one of the major planks of the National Socialist Weltanschauung. The interest of Himmler in such developments led to the establishment of a learned society within the SS whose aim was to promote Old Germanic learning. The influence of the Party, especially after 1935 in the form of the SS-Ahnenerbe in the expansion of archaeology and runology in the Third Reich, was fundamental to the boom in academic archaeology and runology at the time, as, in the *völkisch* tradition, both drew on wells of unimpeachable pedigree: the legacies of Kossinna and List.<sup>32</sup> The development in Nordic studies over a comparable period is not so palpably influenced by *völkisch* thinkers, but by the language of the *Volk*, of *völkisch* renewal, of German(ic) religiosity and continuity from ancient times; all are to be witnessed in the works of Nordicists from Heusler to Neckel and Much's students in Vienna and beyond. Some such as Höfler and Trier<sup>33</sup> were to continue on the *völkisch* project after the war and some of the more extreme post-war German runology obviously owes a debt to the developments of the 1930s and 40s. It is also clear that such thinking was a critical influence on Jan de Vries, who after the war explained his collaboration with the Ahnenerbe in terms of a hope for a Germanic renewal on Dutch soil.<sup>34</sup> It comes as no surprise,

---

translation in *Volksche Wacht* 8, 1943, pp. 289-97; idem, 'Die politische Leistung der Völkerwanderungszeit', *Kieler Blätter* 1938, pp. 282-97 [= Schriften der wissenschaftlichen Akademie des NSD-Dozentenbundes der Christian-Albrechts-Universität Kiel, Heft 7, Neumünster 1939 = idem, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. H. Birkhan, Hamburg 1982, pp. 1-16]; idem, 'Volkskunde und politische Geschichte', *Historische Zeitschrift* 162, 1940, pp. 1-18; W. Grönbech, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, ed. O. Höfler, trans. E. Hoffmeyer, 2 vols, Hamburg 1937-39, 4th ed. 1940-42; Mosse, *Crisis of German Ideology*, pp. 204-33; K. v. See, 'Politische Männerbunde-Ideologie von der wilhelmischen Zeit bis zum Nationalsozialismus', in G. Völger and K. v. Welck (eds), *Männerbunde, Männerbünde*, 2 vols, 1990, I, pp. 93-102 [= a revised version in *Barbar, Germane, Arier*, pp. 319-42]; J. Hirschbigel, 'Die „germanische Kontinuitätstheorie“ Otto Höflers', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Schleswig-Holsteine Geschichte* 117, 1992, pp. 181-98; U. Wiggershaus-Müller, *Nationalsozialismus und Geschichtswissenschaft*, Hamburg 1998, pp. 153 ff.; and regrettably A. H. Price, *The Germanic Warrior Clubs*, 2nd ed., Tübingen 1996.

<sup>32</sup> M. H. Kater, *Das „Ahnenerbe“ der SS 1935-1945*, Stuttgart 1974; U. Hunger, *Die Runenkunde im Dritten Reich*, Frankfurt a. M. 1984; U. Veit, 'Ethnic Concepts in German Prehistory: A Case Study on the Relationship between Cultural Identity and Archaeological Objectivity', in S. Shennan (ed.), *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*, London 1989, pp. 35-56; B. Arnold, 'The Past as Propaganda - Totalitarian Archaeology in Nazi Germany', *Antiquity* 64, 1990, pp. 464-78; W. J. McCann, "'Volk und Germanentum': The Presentation of the Past in Nazi Germany", in P. Gathercole and D. Lowenthal (eds), *The Politics of the Past*, London 1990, pp. 74-88; B. Arnold and H. Hausmann, 'Archaeology in Nazi Germany: The Legacy of the Faustian Bargain', in P. L. Kohl and C. Fawcett (eds), *Nationalism, Politics and Practice of Archaeology*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 70-81.

<sup>33</sup> On Trier, see now C. H. Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich*, London 1999, pp. 86-105.

<sup>34</sup> K. Heeroma, 'Vorwart', in J. de Vries, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. K. Heeroma and A. Kylstra, Berlin 1965, p. vi.

then, to discover the French friend of Höfler and De Vries, Georges Dumézil, associated with French radicals of the far right including Charles Maurras — indeed he dedicated his first monograph to his friend Pierre Gaxotte, the editor of the ultra-right French journal *Candide*, and another leading figure of the Action Française.<sup>35</sup>

All of these scholars were at the very least at one time sympathetic to the Nazi cause; and although Nazism is often derided as an incoherent mass of conflicting ideals, *völkisch* ideology in its many forms had as powerful a hold over its believers in its day as any of the other *grands récits* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The criticism of the historical theorist Hayden White that fascism like chiliarism was not ‘cognitively responsible’ is another expression of this prejudice that dismisses *völkisch* thought as anti-intellectual — merely an extreme form of reaction.<sup>36</sup> Instead, the manner in which *völkisch* thought intruded into disciplines such as Old Norse studies in Germany in the 1920s and 30s is very much what is expected of a coherent ideology; and the continuity of this thought in the comparativism of the post-war scholarship of De Vries, Dumézil, Trier and Höfler underlines again the intellectual consistency to be found in fascist, palingenetic thought and its search for rooted continuities and ancestral utopia.

---

<sup>35</sup> G. Dumézil, *Le Festin d'immoralité*, Paris 1924; idem, *Entretiens avec Didier Eribon*, Paris 1987, pp. 205-8; E. Weber, *Action Française*, Stanford 1962; R. Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave 1924-1933*, New Haven 1986, pp. 20-26; B. D. Lincoln, *Death, War and Sacrifice*, Chicago 1991, pp. 234-38, 267, n. 18.

<sup>36</sup> H. White, *Metahistory*, Baltimore 1973, p. 22, n. 11.

# Vagn Åkesons vekst og fall

John Megaard

Denne artikkelen er en frukt av et arbeid som drøfter forholdet mellom de forskjellige variantene av *Jómsvíkinga saga*.<sup>1</sup> Som kjent er denne sagaen bevart i flere forskjellige versjoner enn noen annen islandsk saga. Undersøkelsen behandler bl.a. forholdet mellom sagaen og Saxos versjon av jomsvikingebereitningen. Et uløst spørsmål er hvorfor Saxo så sterkt grad avviker fra de andre kildene, og særlig hvorfor han ikke nevner Vagn Åkeson, som ellers fremstår som den største helten av de danske jomsvikingene.

Det finnes ca. 10 ulike varianter av beretningen om jomsvikingenes kamp mot Håkon jarl i Hjørungavåg. På den ene siden har vi de fem sagaredaksjonene (AM 291 4to, Flateyjarbók, Sthlm membran nr. 7 4to, AM 510 4to og Arngrimur Jónssons latinske tekst). Ved siden av dette finner vi utdrag av beretningen i *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla*, *Odds saga om Olav Tryggvason* og *Den større saga om Olav Tryggvason*. De fem sagaredaksjonenes versjon avviker på endel punkter fra den versjonen vi finner i *Fagrskinna* og *Heimskringla*, noe som gjør det mulig å snakke om to grupper av tekster. Den

---

<sup>1</sup>John Megaard: "Studier i *Jómsvíkinga sagas* stemma." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 2000.

samme beretningen er også gjengitt i *Jómsvíkingadrápa* som var diktet av orknøyingen Bjarni Kolbeinsson. I undersøkelsen har jeg sammenlignet innholdet i diktet med de forskjellige prosavariantene, og finner at innholdet bygger på en prosatekst som står nokså nær den versjonen vi finner i *Fagrskinna* og *Heimskringla*. Det interessante spørsmålet blir da når Bjarni Kolbeinsson kan ha diktet dråpaen. Bjarni ble utnevnt til biskop i 1188. Jeg vil slutte meg til dem som har hevdet at den uhøytidelige og erotiske tonen i diktet tyder på at det er diktet av en yngre mann.<sup>2</sup> Min konklusjon blir at *terminus ante quem* for en tidlig versjon av beretningen bør settes til 1188.

Heinrich Hempel<sup>3</sup> pekte på at de fem sagaredaksjonene gikk tilbake på et forelegg fra tiden etter 1200, fordi den tyske keiser Otto oppgis å herske over Poitou. Dette passer bare med Otto IV (1198-1218), som hadde arvet grevskapet Poitou etter sin onkel Richard Løvehjerte. Det kan ut fra dette være rimelig å regne med en avstand i tid på minst 20 år mellom den eldre og den yngre versjonen av jomsvikingebereitningen.

Man har ment at Saxo<sup>4</sup> beretning om jomsvikingene ikke bygger på den samme tradisjonen som de øvrige kildene siden denne avviker så sterkt fra de øvrige. I de andre variantene er det Sigvalde jarl som flykter fra slaget, og legger grunnlaget for jomsvikingenes nederlag. Hos Saxo er han derimot blitt en av heltene som viser sin dødsforakt foran henrettelsen. Det er videre påfallende at Vagn Åkesons navn ikke nevnes. Vagns rolle i avslutningsscenen er overtatt av en annen jomsviking ved navn Karlsevne (*Karlshefni*). I undersøkelsen argumenterer jeg for at Saxo her bygger på den samme skriftlige tradisjonen som de andre kildene. Et indisium på dette er opptrinnet der Vagn (Saxo: Karlsevne) skal halshogges. *Fagrskinna* forteller at en annen jomsviking kaster seg foran føttene til bøddelen Torkjell Leira idet denne skal hogge Vagn. Torkjell faller over ham og mister øksen.<sup>5</sup> Ifølge Saxo sparker Karlsevne (=Vagn) *selv* bøddelen overende.<sup>6</sup> I sagaredaksjonene får vi en *kombinasjon* av versjonene i *Fagrskinna* og hos Saxo: Jomsvikingen Bjørn den bretske sparker til Vagn idet bøddelen svinger sverdet slik at Vagn faller foran beina til bøddelen, noe som fører at denne faller overende og mister sverdet.<sup>7</sup>

Overensstemmelsen i slike detaljer gjør at vi må spørre hvilket motiv Saxo kan ha hatt for å fjerne Vagn Åkesons navn fra jomsvikingebereitningen? En mulig grunn kan ha vært at helten fra Hjörungavåg har vært et symbol for den såkalte Thrugot-slekten, som i sin tid rommet viktige motstandere av Saxos oppdragsgiver erkebiskop Absalon. De mest fremtredende medlemmene var de

<sup>2</sup> F.eks. Maurer 1867: 110, jfr. Megaard 2000: 171-174.

<sup>3</sup> Hempel 1968:103.

<sup>4</sup> Lib. x, cap. iv, 1931:272-273, overs. ved Fr. Winkel Horn 1913 I: 312-313.

<sup>5</sup> *Fagrskinna* 1902-03:102.

<sup>6</sup> Karlsevne viste ikke mindre Sjælsstyrke, thi da den anden Hirdmand svang en Øx mod hans Hoved, strakte han ham til Jorden med et Spark (1913 I:388, jfr. 1931:273).

<sup>7</sup> Megaard 2000:162-171.

to første erkebiskopene i Lund, Asser og Eskil, som hadde embetet sammenhengende fra 1104 til 1177. Om erkebiskop Assers far og onkel heter det i *Knytlinga saga*:

þeir váru kallaðir Þorgunnusynir. Þorgunna, móðir þeira var dóttir Vagns Ákasonar.<sup>8</sup>

Betegnelsen *Þorgunnusynir* bekreftes av *Necrologium Lundense*, hvis eldste del stammer fra Assers tid, der Assers far kalles *Sven Thrugunnu sun*.<sup>9</sup> Svens far Thrugot (<Þorgautr) var ifølge *Knytlinga saga* og Saxo også far til Bodil, som var gift med kong Erik Eiegod (1095-1103). Gjennom Bodil var Thrugots etterkommere nært beslektet med de etterfølgende danske kongene. Svært mye tyder på at Asser og hans slekt spilte en viktig rolle ved opprettelsen av det nye erkebispesetet for Norden i 1104, og at Asser og brorsønnen Eskil har vært sentrale aktører i maktspillet i Norden inntil 1170-tallet.

I *Jómsvíkinga saga* fremstår Vagn som den fremste helten blant de danske angriperne. I og for seg kan dette tilskrives mange andre grunner enn at de to erkebiskopene nedstammer fra ham. Likevel kan dette få betydning når vi sammenligner med den andre islandske sagaen som handler om Danmark, *Knytlinga saga*. I denne får Assers far Svein Torgunnason en påfallende stor plass i historien om Knut den hellige. Før kongen blir drept i Odense overlater han Svein beltet sitt, som om han ønsker å gjøre ham til sin arving.<sup>10</sup> Det er også Svein den døde kongen åpenbarer seg for.<sup>11</sup> Den særlige rollen Assers far har i denne kongesagaen uttrykkes ved at sagaen også gir plass til en nokså poengløs beretning om hvordan Svein ønsker å ri over en elv for å ta opp kampen mot helgenkongens fiender, men blir stanset av broren.<sup>12</sup> Hyllesten som blir Assers far til del har et motstykke i omtalen av Vagn i enkelte deler av jomsvikingberetningen. Det fortelles i *Flateyjarbók* at:

sua er hann spakr madr at æinge fezst hans jafninge j Jomsborg [...] ok þikr einge madr hans jafninge til hardfeinge sa er j hernade er sem Vagnn Akason<sup>13</sup>

Heinrich Hempel<sup>14</sup> beskriver hvordan Vagns rolle i historien forstørres fra den eldste versjonen (*Jómsvíkingadrápa*, kongesagaene) og til den yngste (de fem sagaredaksjonene). Både i *Jómsvíkingadrápa* og i *Fagrskinna* er det Bue Digre som vi får flest konkrete opplysninger om. I *Fagrskinna* er det Bue som drar i spissen for flåten inn til Hjørungavåg. Det er også Bue som kjemper mot Eirik

<sup>8</sup> ÍF 24:169.

<sup>9</sup> Forældrene, "Thorkil, som er kaldt Sven Thrugunnu sun", og Inga, mindes med anniversarier i Lundekapitlets mindebog (*Necrologium Lundense*) fra omkr. 1123 som fader og moder til Asser "danernes første ærkebiskop" *Dansk biografisk leksikon* under "Asser (Svensen) ærkebiskop".

<sup>10</sup> Kap. 55, ÍF 35:190.

<sup>11</sup> Kap. 68, ÍF 35:206-207.

<sup>12</sup> Kap. 47, ÍF 35:175-178.

<sup>13</sup> 1860:274

<sup>14</sup> Hempel 1968:105-106.

jarl, den viktigste helten på norsk side. I *Fagrskinna* og *Jómsvíkingadrápa* har Bue følge av begge de to berserkene Aslak og Håvard, og kampen som bølger omkring ham danner kjernen i slaget. I den yngste versjonen er det derimot Vagn som kjemper mot Eirik jarl. I denne har Vagn følge av den ene av de to berserkene, og dette gjør at opptrinn som den eldre versjonen har knyttet til Búi, nå knyttes til Vagn. Ifølge denne versjonen kan det virke som om slaget blir avgjort ved at nordmennene klarer å trengte Vagn tilbake fra Eiriks skip. I de eldre kildene er det derimot det voldsomme uværet som danner vendepunktet.

Samtidig kan man legge merke til at *Jómsvíkingadrápa* likevel regner Vagn som den fremste helten: *frágum Vagn at væri/víst ofrhugi enn mesti* ('men jeg har hørt at Vagn var den modigste helt' (str. 9). Det er Vagn som kløver hundrevis av hoder (str. 28), og i halshoggings-scenen er det Vagn *Jómsvíkingadrápa* konsentrerer seg om (str. 41, 42, 43, 44). Enkelte ting kan imidlertid tyde på at Vagn Åkeson er en sekundær skikkelse i jomsvikingebetretningen. Samtidige skaldekvad som Tindr Hallkelssons *drápa* om Håkon jarl og Einarr skálaglamms *Vellekla* nevner bare Bue og Sigvalde.<sup>15</sup> Vagns navn forekommer i en enkelt strofe som tilskrives Vígfúss Vígaglúmsson.<sup>16</sup> Et argument for at Vagn er sekundær, er at hans rolle i beretningen er en kombinasjon av Bues rolle i slaget, og den rollen Bues sønn spiller da de gjenlevende jomsvikingene skal henrettes. På samme måte som Vagn i den yngste versjonen overstråler Bue under slaget, virker hans opptreden under halshoggingen som en forstørret kopi av scenen der Svein Bueson redder livet.

Studerer man strukturen i *Jómsvíkinga saga*, kan man undres på om ikke beretningen har fått en noenlunde fast form før Vagn kom inn i bildet. Handlingen synes fra først av å være bygget rundt kontrasten mellom Bue som faller og Sigvalde som flykter. Rundt Bue grupperes bifigurene, sønnen Svein (*Fagrskinna*: Sigurd), broren Sigurd Kåpe (*Fagrskinna*: Sigurd Hvite), og de to berserkene Håvard og Aslak. Bues bror Sigurd får gjennom strukturen i fortellingen en relativt fremtredende rolle. Han avlegger Brageløftet på lik linje med broren, og han er forfremmet til å være en av lederne i slaget på linje med Sigvaldis bror Torkjell den høye. Man kan også legge merke til at omstendighetene omkring løftene tjener til å forklare hvorfor Sigurd Kåpe, som selv flykter samtidig med Sigvalde, likevel har berget æren: Han har bare lovet å kjempe så lenge Bue selv var i live!<sup>17</sup> Et påfallende trekk er det også at sagaen uttrykkelig nevner Sigurd Kåpes etterslekt: *ok er mart manna fra honum komit*,<sup>18</sup> på samme måte den sier om Vagn Ákason: *ok er mart stormenni fra honum komit*.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Hos Tindr er Sigvaldi og Búi nevnt i str. 2, og Búi i str. 10 (*Skjaldedigtning* B I:136, 138). I *Vellekla* er Búi og Sigvaldi nevnt i str. 34 (*Skj.* B I: 123)

<sup>16</sup> *Skj.* B I: 115.

<sup>17</sup> *Flateyjarbók* I 1860:181, 194.

<sup>18</sup> *Flateyjarbók* I 1860:203.

<sup>19</sup> *Flateyjarbók* I 1860:202.

Det som her er anført kan være indikasjoner på at beretningen om Hjørungavåg-slaget har funnet mye av sin form før Thrugot-slektens storhetstid i første halvdel av 1100-tallet. Et interessant spørsmål er om beretningen, slik vi kjenner den, har utviklet seg allerede på 1000-tallet. Da er vi riktignok på usikker grunn, men jeg skal likevel anføre et par momenter:

Det er et par paralleller mellom slaget i Hjørungavåg, slik vi kjenner det fra *Jómsvíkinga saga*, og slaget ved Niså i 1062 mellom en norsk flåte ledet av Harald Hardråde og en dansk styrke under Svein Estridsson. Harald hadde herjet i Danmark, og ble på veien hjem omringet av Sveins leidangsflåte. Etter beretningene å dømme har slaget begynt sent på dagen og pågått helt til neste dag. Også i jomsvikinge-beretningen fortelles det om et slag som pågår over to eller tre dager. I den islandske beretningen heter det at noen av danskene på et tidspunkt begynte å flykte.<sup>20</sup> Saxo, som også har beskrevet slaget, legger imidlertid skylden på leidangen fra Skåne. Selv om Saxo vanligvis er negativ i sin vurdering av folk fra Skåne og Jylland, gir han i dette tilfellet uttrykk for usedvanlig sterke følelser:

Medens Danskerne nu ikke kunde vente sig nogen Tilgang af friske Stridskræfter, kom en norsk Høvding uventet sine Landsmænd til Undsætning. Da Skaaningerne saa' det, løste de nedslagne og modfalne, for at Larmen ikke skulde røbe dem, forsigtig deres Skibe ud fra Flaaden, huggede Tovene over, brød Samlaget og listede sig i Nattens Mulm og Mørke bort fra den øvrige Flaade og flyede med dæmpede Aareslag hemmelig op ad Aaen, ad den Vej, de var komne, forlod saa deres Skibe og flygtede gjennem uvejsomme Egne til Spot og Skjændsel, saa længe Danmark bestaar, thi denne skammelige Flugt, som de havde al Grund til at blues over, har sat et uudslettelig Brændemærke paa dem over for Efterkommerne.<sup>21</sup>

Dette er kraftig retorikk, selv til Saxo å være. Endel av forklaringen på disse sterke ordene kan vi få når Saxo videre forteller at biskop Absalons stamfar Skjalm Hvite deltok i slaget, men ble tatt til fange. Av Saxos beskrivelse kan vi ane at dette har vært et ømt punkt for den krigerske biskop Absalon. Slik beskrives det:

Skjalm Hvide, som i sin Levetid havde hele Sjællands Stridsmagt under sig, blev haardt saaret og omringet af en stor Mængde Fjender, saa han blev tagen til Fange, ikke fordi han havde tabt Modet, men fordi han mistede saa meget Blod, at Kræfterne helt svigtede ham. Og saa stor Ærbødighed viste Fjenderne denne udmærkede Mand, at de for at bevare hans Liv satte ham i sikker Forvaring, skjønt de ellers ikke plejede at skaane deres Fanger. [...] I Nattens Mulm undveg han imidlertid fra sine Bevogtere ved Geddesø.<sup>22</sup>

Saxo forteller samme sted at Skjalm Hvite hadde en berserk som het Aslak, som med en kjempestor eikekølle gikk opp på de norske skipene og knuste alle som han kunne nå. I den eldste versjonen av jomsvikingeberetningen er berserk

<sup>20</sup> sumir toku ath flyia (*Flateyjarbók* III 1868:363.)

<sup>21</sup> Lib. xi, cap. v, 1931:307, overs. 1913 II:10..

<sup>22</sup> Lib. xi, cap. v, 1931:307, overs. 1913 II:10.

ved navn Aslak knyttet til Bue Digre, mens han i den yngste versjonen er knyttet til Vagn.

Når slaget ved Niså har fått så stor plass både hos Saxo og i kongesagaene, kan det ha sammenheng med at denne kampen ble innledningen til en lang fredsperiode mellom Danmark og Norge, hele 60 år. Siden Niså-slaget endte med et bittert nederlag for Svein Estridssons hær, kan det være rimelig å tro at man i ettertid har vært opptatt av å fordele skylden. Det er et poeng i den sammenheng at Skåne trolig var den landsdelen der Svein hadde hatt sin beste støtte i kampen mot Magnus den gode og Harald Hardråde.<sup>23</sup> Mange av dem som stod Svein nærmest må trolig ha vært skåninger. I en slik situasjon kunne rykter om skånske krigeres tilbaketrekning ved Nisså ha blitt en del av det maktpolitiske spillet. Kan det ha vært i en slik sammenheng at beretningen om et gammelt slag på Nord-Vestlandet mellom dansker og nordmenn har fått fornyet interesse, fordi den som ledet kampen fra dansk side, og også ledet tilbaketrekningen, var Sigvalde jarl fra *Skåne*? Dette kan være en mulig forklaring på likhetene i historiene om Bue Digre fra *Bornholm*, Skjalm Hvite fra *Sjælland* og Vagn Åkeson fra *Fyn*.

Et indisium på at beretningen om jomsvikingenes dødsforakt foran halshoggingen kan stamme fra Svein Estridssons tid, er en bemerkning av Adam av Bremen, som selv fikk mange opplysninger direkte fra Svein. Adam skriver om danskene:

Noen annen form for straff enn øks eller trelldom har de ikke. Når en mann blir dømt, er det en heder om han viser seg glad.<sup>24</sup>

I et av tilleggene til teksten heter det også:

På torvet henger øksen fremme for alles øyne og truer den anklagede med dødsstraff. I tilfelle slik dom blir avsagt, kan man se ham som skal dø gå til sin straff med jubel og glede, som til et gjestebud.<sup>25</sup>

I utgangspunktet synes det merkelig at Saxo kan gjøre Sigvalde jarl til en av de tapre jomsvikingene, når vi tidligere har sett hvordan han omtaler skåninger. Løsningen må temmelig sikkert være at Saxo har kjent en versjon av *Jómsvíkinga saga*, som i motsetning til den eldre versjonen gjør Sigvalde til jarl over *Sjælland*, slik også sagaredaksjonene gjør. I artikkelen i *Arkiv* argumenter jeg for at den yngre versjonen av sagaen, representert ved de fem bevarte

<sup>23</sup> Kildene viser at Svein hadde sin støtte i øst. Det er i den forbindelse interessant å lese hvor kjølig Saxo (som representant for Sjælland) omtaler Svein Estridsson, jfr. Lib. xi, cap. i, overs. 1913 II:3.

<sup>24</sup> Lib. iv, cap. vi, 1917: 234, overs. 1993:189.

<sup>25</sup> Scol. 110, 1917:234, overs. 1993:189.

redaksjonene, er en kompilasjon av to eldre redaksjoner, der den ene er representert av *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, *Fagrskinna* og *Heimskringla*, den andre av Saxo.

Hensikten har her vært å vise at de mange bevarte variantene av *Jómsvíkinga saga* åpner interessante muligheter for å studere en islandsk saga under utvikling. En videre utforskning av innholdet vil trolig kunne gi spennende bidrag til spørsmålet om hvordan en saga er blitt til.

## Litteratur

- Adam av Bremen. *Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, 3. Auflage, hrsg. von Bernhard Schmeidler, Hannover und Leipzig 1917.
- Adam av Bremen: *Beretningen om Hamburg stift, erkebiskopenes bedrifter og øyrikene i Norden*, fra latin ved Bjørg Tosterud Danielsen og Anne Katrine Frihagen, Oslo 1993.
- Dansk biografisk leksikon*, København 1979-1984.
- Fagrskinna. Nóregs kononga tal*, udg. ved Finnur Jónsson, København 1902-03.
- Flatexjarbók. En Samling af norske Konge-sagaer I-III*, [utg. av G. Vigfússon og C. R. Unger] Christiania 1860-1868.
- Hempel, Heinrich (1968): "Die Formen der Jómsvíkinga saga", i idem, *Kleine Schriften*, Heidelberg; først publisert i *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 39 (1923).
- Jómsvíkinga saga*.
- Jómsvíkinga saga efter Arnamagnæanska handskriften N:o 291 4to diplomatisk aftryck*, utg. af Carl af Petersens, København 1882.
- Flatexjarbók I*.
- Jómsvíkinga saga efter skinnboken 7, 4to å Kungl. Biblioteket i Stockholm*, utg af Gustaf [af] Cederschiöld, Lund 1875.
- Jómsvíkinga saga (efter Cod. Am. 510, 4to) samt Jómsvíkinga drápa*, utg. af Carl af Petersens, Lund 1879.
- Jóms-Víkinga Saga. Historia Jomsburgensium seu Juliniensium, Arngrimi Jonae Opera latine conscripta I*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana vol. IX, Hafniae 1951.
- Knytlínga saga. Danakonunga sögur*, Bjarni Guðnason gaf út, Íslenzk fornrit 35, Reykjavík 1982.
- Maurer, Konrad (1867): *Ueber die Ausdrücke: altnordische, altnorwegische & isländische Sprache*, München.
- Megaard, John (2000): "Studier i Jómsvíkinga sagas stemma. Jómsvíkinga sagas fem redaksjoner sammenlignet med versjonene i *Fagrskinna*, *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, *Heimskringla* og *Saxo*." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 115. Lund.
- Necrologium Lundense*, ed. Erik Kroman, *Corpus codicum Danicorum medii aevi I*, Hafniae 1960.
- Saxo. *Saxonis Gesta danorum I*, ed. J. Olrik et H. Raeder, Hauniae 1931.
- Saxo Grammaticus: *Danmarks Krønike*, Oversat af Dr. Fr. Winkel Horn, København 1913.
- Skjaldedigtning: Den Norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ved Finnur Jónsson, København og Kristiania 1908-1912.

## The Reminiscences of Old Norse Myths, Cults and Rituals in Old Russian Literature

Elena Melnikova

Institute of World Literature, Russian Academy of Sciences

Long-time intense cultural interrelations between Northern and Eastern Europe in the Viking Age made for the formation of the so-called “retinue (warrior) tradition” interpreted in the Russian *Primary Chronicle* (c. 1010-20) as the history of the first princes of Rus and the Old Russian state. However various the origins of each plot might be (Slavic, Germanic, Byzantine, Oriental), the tradition is permeated with the beliefs and practices inherent to the culture of Varangians and has many parallels in the *fornaldar sögur*. They can be recognized more distinctly in the tales about the deeds and death of Prince Oleg (cf. *Örvar Odds saga* et al.), the revenges of Princess Ol’ga, etc.

# Learning Magic in the Sagas

Stephen Mitchell

Harvard University

## Introduction

The image of magic spells being taught by more seasoned practitioners to others eager to learn them comports well with what can be deduced about the actual practice of witchcraft and magic in medieval Scandinavia. For example, at the conclusion of that most remarkable document on love magic, jealousy and sexual intrigue from ca. 1325, *De quadam lapsa in hæresin Ragnhilda Tregagaas*, Ragnhildr tregagás of Bergen claims that the incantation and performative magic she uses against her erstwhile lover are ones she learned in her youth from Solli Sukk.<sup>1</sup> In a similar case from Sweden in 1471, a witch in Arboga referred to in the surviving records as *galna kadhryn* ‘Crazy Katherine’ instructs Birgitta Andirssadotthir on how to prevent her lover from pursuing another woman.<sup>2</sup> Another late 15th-century Swedish case likewise describes

---

<sup>1</sup> “Jtem interrogata respondit quod hujusmodi incantationes hereticas in juventute a Solla dicto Sukk didicit quas in hoc casu practicavit,” Unger and Huitfeldt 1847-, n:o 93. On this case, see Mitchell 1997b.

<sup>2</sup> “...hon høgh hoffwudith aff enne katto och fik henne och tez likis eth oxahorn och sagdhe til birgittho iak far tik hornit fult medh vatn sla thet pa hans dør oc se inthe athir æpthir tik tha thu

how Margit halffstop says that she learned from another woman, Anna finszka, the spell by which she could bewitch a man from a distance.<sup>3</sup> The Norwegian laws, especially *Borgarþings kristinréttir hinn eldri* and *Eiðsivaþings kristinréttir*, express deep concern that people should not consult with the Sámi: *En ef maðr fær til finna* is a phrase which occurs often, and would appear to mean, as Fritzner writes about it in its nominal form, *finnför*, “Reise til Finnerne for at søge Hjælp af deres Trolddomskunst.”<sup>4</sup> All of the terms in this complex (e.g., *finnvitka* ‘to Finn-witch, i.e., to bewitch like a Finn [or Sámi]’),<sup>5</sup> terms which seem only to appear in Norwegian and Icelandic sources, turn on the presumed greater skill, magic or learning of the Sámi, and the practice of their sharing this learning or its outcome with others. This is precisely the sort of scene presented vividly in *Vatnsdæla saga*, when Ingimundr, Grímr and their men inquire of a visiting Sámi witch (“Finna ein fjölkunnig”) about their futures.<sup>6</sup> In addition to such testimony targeting the “lower” practices of magic, church statutes (e.g., the Arboga statute of 1412) and other ecclesiastical writing (e.g., the late 13th-century *Fornsvenska legendariet*) often cite the existence of grimoires (*fjölkynngisbækr*, *galdrabækr*) and other learning aids associated with “high” magic.<sup>7</sup> Nordic books of this sort are in fact known, albeit only from the post-medieval period,<sup>8</sup> and are frequently mentioned in legends and other folklore texts (e.g., *Rauðskinna*),<sup>9</sup> suggesting wide-spread familiarity with the idea. A fully developed narrative about such a magic book is found in the 14th-century story of the Skálholt bishop Jón Halldórsson.<sup>10</sup> That the idea of learned

---

borth gaar,” Noreen and Wennström 1935-, I:360. The question of anaphrodisiac charms of this sort are taken up in Mitchell 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Carlsson 1921-44, II:418, for March 10, 1490 reads, “Stode vp j røtten j forgittens Erich Thuressons nerwaran ok viderkendés, ath hon hade thakit Hans Mille allen sin förlich bort pa sin mandoms wegna etcetera, huilkit hon widerkendés at hon tet giort hade V (5) aar sidan pa then stad ther han hade standit och giort sit watn fran sig. Samme dach widerkerndés halffstopit, ath Anna finszka hon lerdhe henne then trolldomen, som war her Laureuse deyja j Börchlinge wiid Vpsala. Sade hon, tet Anna singerska gaff Hans Mille kattahiernan, at hon tet for henne hade til standit. Samma dach bekendés forscriffne Margith, tet hon sigh ey hade scriptat eller beret j V (5) aar.”

<sup>4</sup> Fritzner 1973 (Rpt. 1886). E.g., Keyser and Munch 1846-95, I:350-51, 362, 372, 389-90, 403.

<sup>5</sup> *Finnr* glosses both Finn and Sámi; for simplicity’s sake, given the geography involved, I hereafter use Sámi.

<sup>6</sup> See Sveinsson 1939, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Gummerus 1902, 30-31; Stephens and Dahlgren 1847-74, I:165, “S. Jacob den Störres Saga.” I take this opportunity to note on a related matter that I am keenly aware that I am not in this essay carefully keeping separate the distinctions often neatly clustered around the ideals of “high” and “low” magic, although I do occasionally, as in this instance, refer to the dichotomy— this choice is not intended to gainsay the excellent work of Kieckhefer, Cohn, Monter and others in keeping this categorization in plainview, but I do find myself agreeing on the whole with Peters and, to some degree, Russell, with respect to these questions. See esp. Peters 1978, 166-70.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Lindqvist 1921.

<sup>9</sup> Árnason 1954-61 (Rpt.), I:499.

<sup>10</sup> Jónsson 1948, I:484-85. *Index Exemplorum* lists this episode as #737 “A student caused a storm when he read his master’s book of magic. When the master returned and read a chapter in

clerics dabbling in the magical arts ran deep in the Middle Ages is also to be seen in the theme of “Escape from the Black School” (ML 3000), found in connection with Sæmundr the Wise already in *Jóns saga helga*.<sup>11</sup>

Such belief systems do not develop in isolation, of course, and it is useful to recall that the image of goetic books plays an important role in the New Testament, when Paul’s missionary work in Ephesus leads many citizens to repent their use of magic: “...a good many of those who had formerly practiced magic collected their books and burnt them publicly” (Acts 19:19). References to texts of this kind increase quite notably throughout western Europe from the late 13th and early 14th centuries on.<sup>12</sup> In particular, necromantic writings take on new dimensions at the court of Pope John XXII: he both approves of a commission to look into the misuse of such books and is himself subsequently said to be the object of necromancy.<sup>13</sup> Such texts as *Lemegeton* (also known as the *Lesser Key of Solomon*) and other pseudo-Solomonic works figure regularly in discussions of witchcraft and sorcery thereafter, and the widespread importance of such books of magic is conveniently captured by the Scots (and now more generally, English) ‘glamour’, ‘glamorous’ (< ‘grammar’, i.e., magical books) in their sense of ‘enchanted’ and so on. Of course, there exists, and existed, a great difference between the image of the *lifkona* ‘herb-woman’ and *myrkriða* ‘hag’, on the one hand, and the *galdrakona* ‘sorcereress’ and *taufirmaðr* ‘sorcerer, enchanter’, on the other, that is, between what might be considered “village-level” witchcraft of popular traditions and something more akin to the “high” magic of élite culture (cf. n. 7). In fact, there raged throughout the 13th and subsequent centuries a debate among the Neo-Platonists about the precise dividing line between such activities as *goeteia* (or theurgy), *maleficium* and simple charm magic, such as the wearing of amulets (e.g., the late medieval amulet from Dømmestrup, Denmark).<sup>14</sup> Protective amulets were likely to have caused only small alarm among the authorities,<sup>15</sup> but they were surely more concerned when they encountered reports of *Finnfarar*, *spá*, *fordæðuskapr*, and *tryllska*, such as are addressed occasionally in the law codes.<sup>16</sup>

Against the background of the normative documents, the more

---

the book of equal length, the storm ceased. [*Islensk Æventyri*] #23,” but this description in Tubach 1969 hardly gives a full impression of this variation of the popular “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” story, which is a evidently multiform of AT 325\* *Apprentice and Ghost*.

<sup>11</sup> Jónsson 1948, II:22-25.

<sup>12</sup> Cp. the older reviews in, for example, Lehmann 1920, I:185-219 and more recent treatments, such as Peters 1978, 63-84, 110-37, and Kieckhefer 1997, 1-21.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Kieckhefer 1997, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Peters 1978, esp. 110-12. Flint 1994 is entirely devoted to perceptions of beneficial and harmful magic in the early medieval period.

<sup>15</sup> See Flint 1994, 243-48 on this question.

<sup>16</sup> The examples enumerated here all mentioned in *Borgarþings kristinréttir hinn eldri*. See Keyser and Munch 1846-95. I:350-51.

ethnographic, performative data, and the non-Nordic *comparanda* (but, given the increased presence of Hanseatic communities in non-insular Scandinavia beginning in the early 14th century, not necessarily *extra patriam*), I take up this particular aspect of medieval Nordic belief systems concerned with witchcraft and magic, i.e. of magic as a learned art, as it is presented in the Icelandic sagas. And as readers soon discover, the sagas are filled with many different scenes involving magic and witchcraft, topics which have given rise to a series of studies looking to account both for the nature and representation of these phenomena.<sup>17</sup> In my own work on various aspects of witchcraft in late medieval Scandinavia, including questions concerning transvection, diabolism, charm magic, and gender,<sup>18</sup> I have largely turned to non-literary sources (e.g., trial documents, laws, synodal statutes) and non-insular traditions (mainly those of Sweden and Norway). The resources in these areas are relatively rich with respect to historical materials and institutional considerations of witchcraft and magic; moreover, as texts granted more credibility because of their presumed greater historical verisimilitude, rightly or wrongly, protocols, laws and so on are not perceived to be as troubled by questions of authenticity versus invention as are literary resources.

### The Sagas and the comparanda

What then do the sagas have to say, and teach us, on these topics, especially on the issue of the careful study of witchcraft and the presentation of witchcraft as learned art? Most prominently, many students of the sagas think, for example, of Gunnhildr's attempts to "nema kunnostu at Finnum tveim" ("to learn sorcery from two [Sámi]") in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* (ch. 32),<sup>19</sup> and of Busla's offer to teach magic to Bósi in *Bósa saga* (ch. 2):

Busla hét kerling, hún hafði verit frilla \_vara karls; hún fóstaði sonu karls, þvíat hún kunn mart í töfrum. Smiðr var henni miklu eftirlátari, ok nam hann mart í töfrum. Hún bauð Bósa at kenna honum galdra, en Bósi kveðst ekki vilja, at þat væri skrifat í sögu hans, at hann ynni nokkurn hlut sleitum [*other mss: með göldrum*], þat sem honum skyldi með karlmensku telja. [There was an old woman named Busla, who had been Thvari's concubine, and fostered his sons for him. Busla was highly skilled in magic. She found Smid more amenable than his brothers and taught him a great deal. She offered to tutor Bosi in magic as well, but he said he didn't want it written in his saga that he'd carried anything through by trickery instead of relying on his own manhood.]<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> So, for example, Strömbäck 1935; Eggers 1932; Jaide 1937; Morris 1991; Dillman 1994; and Jochens 1996; cf. Jochens 1993. See also Kieckhefer 1989, 48-53, who uses the Icelandic materials as a primary example for his discussion of magic in pre- and post-Conversion western Europe.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Mitchell 1997a; Mitchell 1997b; Mitchell 1998; and Mitchell 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Aðalbjarnarson 1962 (Rpt. 1941), 135; Hollander 1991 (Rpt. 1964), 86. Hollander uses 'Finns' here.

<sup>20</sup> Rafn 1829-30, III:195-96; Pálsson and Edwards 1985, 200.

Although Bósi rejects Busla's offer of instruction, a scene where a male purposefully sets out to acquire special knowledge of this sort from a female teacher is alluded to in *Eyrbyggja saga* in the following way:

Gunnlaugr, sonr \_orbjarnar digra, var námgjarn; hann var oft í Mávahlíð ok nam kunnáttu at Geirríði \_órólfsdóttur, því at hon var margkunnig. [Thorbjorn the Stout's son, Gunnlaug, had a passion for knowledge, and he often went over to Mavahlid to study witchcraft with Geirrid Thorolf's daughter, she being a woman who knew a thing or two.]<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the single most apparent component of the sagas' collective presentation of instruction in witchcraft is the degree to which "otherness" plays a vital role: overwhelmingly, it is women who teach, or offer to teach, *galdr*. Both Busla and Gerriðr are presented in this way, and when Gúðriðr reluctantly admits in *Eiríks saga rauða* that she can assist in the *seiðr* that is about to begin, she notes that it was her foster-mother, Halldís, who taught her the *varðlokur* 'warlock songs' ("...kenndi Halldís, fóstura mín, mér á ðslandi þat kvæði, er hon kallaði Varðlokur").<sup>22</sup> In a few instances, such as that of King Haraldr's son, Rognvaldr réttillbeini, how the individual learns magic, and the gender of the person from whom it is learned, is not specified in the sagas.<sup>23</sup> But even though *Heimskringla* does not detail what the source of Rognvaldr's knowledge is, Snorri surely intends Rognvaldr's Sámi heritage through Snæfríðr, Svási's daughter, as the implied explanation. *Historia Norvegiæ*, on the other hand, maintains that Rognvaldr learns witchcraft in the "traditional" manner, that is, from a female elder, his foster-mother.<sup>24</sup>

As the case of Rognvaldr demonstrates, "otherness" need not necessarily only be marked by gender, however: one of the best-known exceptions to the dominance of female teachers occurs when Gunnhildr learns magic from two male Sámi in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, but I submit that this exception rather proves than disproves the point, for Gunnhildr goes to the one place and among the one people who can in social terms trump the "otherness" of being a woman in Old Norse society, i.e., people of an entirely different language, religion and culture. In a very similar fashion, the 10-year-old hero of *Bárðar saga* is sent to live among the otherworldly creatures of the Dovre mountains:

\_ar réð fyrir sá bergbúi, er Dofri er nefndr [...] Síðan vandi Dofri hann á alls kyns íþróttir ok ættvísi ok vígfimi, ok eigi var traust, at hann næmi eigi galdra ok forneskju, svá at bæði var hann forspár ok margvís, því at Dofri var við þetta slunginn; váru þetta allt samman kallaðr listir í þann tíma af þeim mönnum, sem miklir váru ðokð burðugir, því at menn vissu þá engi dæmi at segja af sönnum guði norðr hingat í hálfuna. [A cave-dweller

<sup>21</sup> Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1957 (Rpt. 1935), 28; Pálsson and Edwards 1989 (Rev. ed. 1972), 59.

<sup>22</sup> Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1957 (Rpt. 1935), 207-08.

<sup>23</sup> Aðalbjarnarson 1962 (Rpt. 1941), 138.

<sup>24</sup> "Rognvaldus retillbein, qui a quadam fitonissa in provincia Halthalandia nutritus est et in eadem arte mira ut nutix operatus est." Storm 1880, 104.

ruled there named Dofri [...] Then Dofri trained him in all manner of crafts, and genealogy, and battle skills, and it is not certain that he did not learn magic and witchcraft so that he became wise and gifted with foresight, for Dofri was learned in these arts. These were all called arts in those days by men of power and prestige; for nothing was then known of the true God here in the northern hemisphere.]<sup>25</sup>

Similar constructions of magic and witchcraft also lie behind the instruction received by that most remarkable of saga villains, Ógmundur Eyþiólfsbani, who is said in the later versions of *Qrvar-Odds saga* (i.e., in the 15th-century AM 343, 4 t:o and those manuscripts derived from it) to have been created by the Permians by taking an ogress, stuffing her full of magic, and having her sleep with the king of the Permians, a great idolator (*blótmaðr*). The three-year-old Ógmundur is subsequently sent “...á Finnþork ok nam han þar allzkyns galdra ok gøringar, ok þá er hann var í því fullnuma, fór hann heim til Bjarmalands: var hann þá sjau vetra...” (“...to Lapland where he learned all sorts of magic and sorcery, and as soon as he’d mastered the arts, he went back home to Permian. By that time he was seven...”).<sup>26</sup> These examples illuminate and underscore the remark in *Ynglinga saga* that it is Freyja, a female hostage from the Vanir, who teaches the Vanir’s form of magic to the Æsir (“Hon kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið, sem Vønum var títt”), combining in her gender and her race the two forms of “otherness”.<sup>27</sup> The non-literary evidence, on the other hand, is much more mixed: in one case, it is a man, Solli Sukk, who teaches Ragnhildr how to cast the spell which brings on impotence; in another, it is a woman, initially called ‘Wise Katherine’, and later ‘Crazy Katherine’,<sup>28</sup> who gives similar instruction, and in another case, it is, significantly one suspects, Anna *finszka* ‘Anna the Finn’, who teaches Margit the magic spell.

Against the image of the trained practitioner of magic, carefully learning spell after spell, that is, what is generally referred to in the anthropological literature, following the practice of Africanists, as a ‘sorcerer’, against that image, one needs to place the occasional reference to whole families who— it would appear— are perhaps closer to what might be called witches in the Africanists’ sense, that is, people who do not acquire their powers through the careful study of grimoires or through apprenticeships, but have such powers because they are born with them. Thus, in *Laxdæla saga* we meet the family of the Hebridean Kotkell:

Kotkell hét maðr, er þá hafði út komit fyrir litlu. Gríma hét kona hans; þeira synir váru þeir Hallþjórn slíkisteinsauga ok Stígandi. \_essir menn váru suðreyskir. Öll váru þau miðk fiðlkunnig ok inir mestu seiðmenn. [There was a man called Kotkel, who had only

<sup>25</sup> Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsón 1991, 103; the translation is from Skaptason and Pulsiano 1984, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Boer 1888, 126; Pálsson and Edwards 1985, 81.

<sup>27</sup> Aðalbjarnarson 1962 (Rpt. 1941), 13. See Ross 1994, 206-11, and Näsström 1995, 82-85, on this point.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Noreen and Wennström 1935-, I:354-55.

recently arrived in Iceland. His wife was called Grima. Their sons were Hallbjorn Sleekstone-Eye and Stigandi. These people had come from the Hebrides. They were all extremely skilled in witchcraft and were great sorcerers.]<sup>29</sup>

Of course, it is far from an established fact that this family cannot have acquired its knowledge of magic by way of study, but the image projected by the saga seems to say otherwise. Everything in the description, one suspects, suggests that this is a nest of witches born to the trade.

An outlier in all of these representations— in many respects— is *Piðreks saga*, both for its treatment of the topic and its reported origins in non-Nordic traditions. In it, Queen Ostacia acquires magical knowledge from her step-mother in childhood in a most remarkable fashion: “hennar stiupmoðir var sua fiolkunning at hon firir gerði henni i barneskio oc kastaði til hænnar sinni fiolkyngi sua at hon er nu iamkunnig sem firir henne var hænnar stiupmoðir” [“Her stepmother was so well versed in magic that she cast a spell on her in her childhood so that she put all of her knowledge of magic in the child so that she was just as well versed in magic as her stepmother”].<sup>30</sup> The two-step process described— first, the step-mother enchanting (*fyrirgerða*) the child and, then, sending (*kasta*) her sorcery to her— is remarkable, both for the passivity with which the youthful ‘apprentice’ acquires her knowledge, as well as for the image of the magical arts being passed to a new generation wholesale. This scene in *Piðreks saga* underscores a meaningful isogloss that runs between the historico-ethnographic data and the literary presentations, namely, the fact that in the sagas, those interested in learning witchcraft and magic seem to acquire knowledge of it as a whole— Gunnhildr looks to “nema kunnostu” ‘learn magic’ from the Sámi; in her conversation with Bósi, Busla offers to “kenna honum galdra” ‘teach him witchcraft’; Gunnlaugr “nam kunnáttu at Geirríði Þórólfsdóttur” ‘studied witchcraft with Geirríðr Þórólfsdóttir’; Rognvald réttilbeini “nam fjolkynngi ok gerðisk seiðmaðr” ‘learned magic and became a sorcerer’. Thus, the presentation of how one acquires magical knowledge in the sagas generally encompasses a comprehensive program of study, similar to the kind of activity envisioned in the “Black School” (ML 3000), whereas in the more ethnographic evidence— Ragnhildr tregagás learning a love charm from Solli Sukk, ‘Crazy Katherine’ instructing Birgitta on how to prevent her lover from leaving her, Margit halffstop learning how to remove a man’s penis from a distance from Anna finszka— instruction in magic relates to single, specific charms. We should perhaps not be surprised when we discover that the non-literary Nordic materials, modest in number as they may be, nevertheless parallel what ethnographers have tended to find in living traditions of instruction in holophrastic magic, i.e., that such teaching is done with care and

<sup>29</sup> Sveinsson 1934, 95; Magnusson and Pálsson 1969, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Bertelsen 1905-11, II:268-69; Haymes 1988, 215.

for specific, individual spells.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, Joahannes Nider relates a story in his *Formicarius*, whose events are said to have taken place at the end of the 14th century, and which provides a further useful point of comparison.<sup>32</sup> In a region controlled by the city of Bern, a group of witches is revealed and a recent convert relates that after certain rituals, he had been given a potion to drink, which resulted in his acquiring knowledge of the magical arts.<sup>33</sup> Here is a scene much more akin to the scenario presented in *Piðreks saga* in particular, and comparable in important ways to the testimony of the other sagas, where magic and witchcraft are treated as complete complexes, great chunks of unbroken learning, with respect to how one acquires them.

Interestingly, Nider's tale is something of an exception, as medieval and early modern European sources outside the Nordic world do not typically examine at length the issue of instruction with respect to "low" magic (NB: the details of the witches' rituals are often provided in abundance but not with respect to learning). That this is so depends on the fact that the answer to the question of how a person learned to be a witch is assumed to be contained in the idea of the *pactum cum diabolo*. Reports, on the other hand, that astrologers, necromancers and other practitioners of "high" magic— whether a youthful William of Auvergne (Bishop of Paris 1228-49) or a similarly youthful Jón Halldórsson studying in Paris (Bishop of Skálholt 1322-39),<sup>34</sup> or literary creatures such as the Nectanabus of *Konung Alexander* or the Merlin of Gunnlaugr Leifsson's *Merlínuspá*— require a period of apprenticeship seem to be widely accepted in the western tradition. Thus, one of the things that particularly distinguishes the sagas from most other medieval sources is their treatment of this topic, i.e., their willingness as a group to treat magic, especially malevolent "low" magic, as something *other* than an issue mainly tied to the pact with the Devil. This diabolical explanation is, by way of comparison, present in, and exploited by, a number of texts in the roughly contemporary *Fornsvenska legendariet* (e.g., "Mannen som hade förskrivit sig åt Djefvulen," "Riddaren och djefvulen," "Troll-Karlen Gilbert och Djefvulen, eller Folksagan om Silvester Påfve," "Theophilus och Djefvulen"), and is part of the explanation Bishop Auðfinnr offers for the behavior of Ragnhildr

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Fortune 1932, 147-49.

<sup>32</sup> It is tempting to set against the Icelandic materials the now infamous witchcraft trials in Toulouse in 1335, long believed (e.g., Russell 1972, 182-4) to be the earliest evidence of judicial torture for this kind of offense and very early testimony to quite lurid descriptions of copulation with Satan and other practices at the Witches' Sabbath, as well as the acquisition of this sort of magical knowledge. These cases also have something to say about our topic here, but since two scholars independently showed these materials to be 19th-century forgeries (Cohn 1975, esp. 129-31, and Kieckhefer 1976), appropriate and contemporary *comparanda* has come to be much more difficult to identify.

<sup>33</sup> Hansen 1901, 94; cf. Cohn 1975 204-05.

<sup>34</sup> William is a forceful and outspoken opponent of magic but describes in that context how, as a student, he had himself handled books of magic. See Peters 1978, 89-91.

tregagás in 1324-25.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the texts which look to the Devil for explanation, instruction in witchcraft and magic as it is portrayed in the sagas suggests something much closer to *perceived* pagan practice. The sagas thus differ from the norms of European textual sources by not employing the increasingly widespread Continental view of witchcraft as deriving from a pact with the Devil, while at the same time, differing from known Nordic explanations of performed acts of magic and witchcraft by treating instruction in these areas wholesale, i.e., as a collective form of knowledge about magic, rather than as specific charm- or spell-based knowledge.

### Conclusions

What inferences are to be drawn from this particular case of seeming “Icelandic exceptionalism”? Does the sagas’ apparently idiosyncratic treatment of instruction in magic and witchcraft when viewed in the broader perspective of medieval literary sources enhance or detract from our confidence in them as ethnographic sources in this area? Although not easily susceptible to simple answers— there is no clear ‘yea’ or ‘nay’ here— certain things about the sagawriters’ handling of the issue are suggestive. Specifically, the sagas’ collective presentation of learning witchcraft:

1. is typified by the significant role played by “otherness” (i.e., with respect to gender and ethnicity);
2. displays an awareness of acquired (= learned) versus inherited ability in the magical arts (i.e., of “sorcery” versus “witchcraft” in the usage of Africanists);
3. differs from Continental treatments in its studious avoidance of the *pactum cum diabolo* as an explanation for the practitioner’s knowledge of the art; and, finally,
4. tends to portray wholesale instruction in magic, an image at odds both with modern, observed *comparanda* and with what we know from non-literary sources about spells learned elsewhere in medieval Scandinavia.

In sum, then, the sagas portray the acquisition of magical knowledge in such a way as to demonstrate the influence of both Continental and native thinking about witchcraft and sorcery; they are neither wholly dependent on foreign ideas and configurations of witchcraft, nor are they wholly independent of such constructions either. In the end, they are, of course, our best sources for, and our most promising hope of, evaluating the modes of thinking in the world of medieval Scandinavia, but caution is certainly called for: with respect to how one learns magic and witchcraft, as in so many other ways, the sagas are fraught

---

<sup>35</sup> See Mitchell 1997a.

with artful— and alluring— evidentiary ambiguities.

### Works cited:

- Aðalbjarnarson, Bjarni, ed. 1962 (Rpt. 1941). *Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla I. Íslenzk fornrit 26*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Árnason, Jón, ed. 1954-61 (Rpt.). *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Þjóðsaga.
- Bertelsen, Henrik, ed. 1905-11. *Þiðriks saga af Bern*. Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel nordisk Litteratur 34. Copenhagen: S.L. Møller.
- Boer, R. C., ed. 1888. *Orvar-Odds saga*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Carlsson, Gottfrid, ed. 1921-44. *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker 1483-92*. Stockholms stadsböcker från äldre tid. II:a serien 3. Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & söner.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1994. *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society. 1. The Myths*. The Viking Collection 7. Odense: Odense University Press.
- Cohn, Norman. 1975. *Europe's Inner Demons: An Inquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*. Studies in the Dynamics of Persecution and Extermination. London: Sussex University Press.
- Dillman, François-Xavier. 1994. "Sejd og shamanisme i de islandske sagaer (resumé)." In *Myte og ritual i det førkristne Norden. Et symposium*. Ed. Jens Peter Schjødt. Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag. Pp. 23-24.
- Eggers, Hans Juérgen. 1932. *Die magischen Gegenstände der altislaändischen Prosaliteratur*. Form und Geist. Arbeiten zur germanischen Philologie 27. Leipzig: Hermann Eichblatt Verlag.
- Flint, Valerie I. J. 1994. *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fortune, R.F. 1932. *Sorcerers of Dobu: The Social Anthropology of the Dobu Islanders of the Western Pacific*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.
- Fritzner, Johan. 1973 (Rpt. 1886). *Ordbok over Det gamle norske Sprog*. Oslo, etc.: Universitetsforlaget.
- Gummerus, Jaakko, ed. 1902. *Synodalstatuter och andra kyrkorättsliga aktstycken från den svenska medeltidskyrkan*. Uppsala: Wretmens tryckeri.
- Hansen, Joseph. 1901. *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter*. Bonn: C. Georgi.
- Haymes, Edward, ed. 1988. *The Saga of Thidrek of Bern*. Garland Library of Medieval Literature, series B:56. New York: Garland.
- Hollander, Lee M., transl. 1991 (Rpt. 1964). *Heimskringla. History of the Kings of Norway by Snorri Sturluson*. Austin: University of Texas Press for the American-Scandinavian Foundation.
- Jaide, Walter. 1937. *Das Wesen des Zaubers in den primitiven Kulturen und in den Islandsagas*. Leipzig: Noske.
- Jochens, Jenny. 1993. "Hexerie eller Blind Alarm: Recent Scandinavian Witchcraft Studies." *Scandinavian Studies* 65 (1): 103-13.
- , 1996. *Old Norse Images of Women*. Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jónsson, Guðni, ed. 1948. *Byskupa sögur*. Reykjavík: Þslendingasagnaútgáfan. Haukadalsútgáfan.
- Keyser, R. and P. A. Munch, eds. 1846-95. *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*. Oslo: Chr. Grøndahl.
- Kieckhefer, Richard. 1976. *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- , 1989. *Magic in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge medieval textbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , 1997. *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Lehmann, Alfred. 1920. *Overtro og trolldom: Fra de ældste tider til vore dage*. Copenhagen: Frimodt.
- Lindqvist, N. 1921. *En isländsk svartkonstbok från 1500-talet (Galdrabók)*. Uppsala: Appelberg.

- Magnusson, Magnus and Hermann Pálsson, transl. 1969. *Laxdæla Saga*. The Penguin classics. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Mitchell, Stephen A. 1997a. "Blåkulla and its Antecedents: Transvection and Conventicles in Nordic Witchcraft." *Alvíssmál* 7: 81-100.
- 1997b. "Nordic Witchcraft in Transition: Impotence, Heresy, and Diabolism in 14th-century Bergen." *Scandia* 63 (1): 17-33.
- 1998. "Anaphrodisiac Charms in the Nordic Middle Ages: Impotence, Infertility, and Magic." *Norveg* 38: 19-42.
- 2000. "Gender and Nordic Witchcraft in the Later Middle Ages." *Arv* 56: 7-24.
- Morris, Katherine. 1991. *Sorceress or Witch? The Image of Gender in Medieval Iceland and Northern Europe*. Lanham, etc.: University Press of America.
- Näsström, Britt-Mari. 1995. *Freyja-- The Great Goddess of the North*. Lund Studies in [the] History of Religion 5. Lund: Department of History of Religions.
- Noreen, Erik and Torsten Wennström, eds. 1935-. *Arboga stads taänkeböcker*. Svenska Fornskrift-Saällskapets Samlingar 53. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Pálsson, Hermann and Paul Edwards, transl. 1985. *Seven Viking Romances*. Penguin classics. Harmondsworth, England; New York: Penguin Books.
- 1989 (Rev. ed. 1972). *Eyrbyggja Saga*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Peters, Edward. 1978. *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*. Middle Ages Series. n.p.: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rafn, Carl C., ed. 1829-30. *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda, eptir gömlum handritum*. Copenhagen: n.p.
- Russell, Jeffrey Burton. 1972. *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Skaptason, Jón and Phillip Pulsiano, eds. 1984. *Bárðar saga*. Garland library of medieval literature A:8. New York: Garland.
- Stephens, George and F.A. Dahlgren, eds. 1847-74. *Ett Forn-Svenskt Legendarium, innehållande Medeltids Kloster-Sagor om Helgon, Påfvar och Kejsare ifrån det 1:sta till det XIII:de Århundradet*. Svenska Fornskrift-Sällskapets Samlingar 7. Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt och Söner.
- Storm, Gustav, ed. 1880. *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensum in Monumenta Historica Norvegiae. Latinske Kildeskrifter til Norges Historie i Middelalderen*. Skrifter 14. Oslo: Norske historiske Kildeskriftfond.
- Strömbäck, Dag. 1935. *Sejd. Textstudier i nordisk religionshistoria*. Nordiska Texter och Undersökningar 5. Stockholm: Hugo Gebers förlag.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur, ed. 1934. *Laxdæla saga. Halldórs þættir Snorrasonar*. Stúfs þátr. ðslenzk fornrit 5. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.
- 1939. *Vatnsdæla saga. Hallfreðar saga. Kormáks saga. Hrómundar þátr halta. Hrafn þátr Guðrúnarsonar*. ðslenzk fornrit 8. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur and Matthías Þórðarson, eds. 1957 (Rpt. 1935). *Eyrbyggja saga. Brands þátr orva. Eiríks saga rauða. Grænlandinga saga. Grænlandinga þátr*. Íslenzk fornrit 4. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.
- Tubach, Frederic C. 1969. *Index Exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales*. Folklore Fellows Communications 204. Helsinki: Akademia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Unger, C. R. and H. J. Huitfeldt, eds. 1847-. *Diplomatarium Norvegicum. Oldbreve til Kundskab om Norges indre og ydre Forhold, Sprog, Slægter, Sæder, Lovgivning og Rettergang i Middelalderen*. Oslo: P.T. Mallings.
- Vilmundarson, Þórhallur and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds. 1991. *Harðar saga; Bárðar saga; Þorsfirðinga saga; Flóamanna saga; Þórarins þátr Neffjólssonar; Þorsteins þátr Uxafóts; Egils þátr Síðu-Hallssonar; Oärms þátr Stórolfssonar; Þorsteins þátr tjaldstæðings; Þorsteins þátr forvitna; Bergbúa þátr; Kumlbúa þátr; Stjörnu-Odda draumr*. Íslenzk fornrit 13. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

## Coexistence of Saami and Norse culture – reflected in and interpreted by Old Norse myths

Else Mundal

University of Bergen

In Old Norse sources, both Norwegian and Icelandic, we meet a consciousness of the fact that on the Scandinavian peninsula there lived two peoples, the Nordic people and the Saamis, who in the Old Norse sources are called *finnar*. Both were peoples with their own culture that in many respects differed considerably from the culture of the other people. They spoke different languages. The Nordic people were farmers while most Saamis lived a nomadic life. They had also before Christianization – different religions, but the religion of the Saamis may have been influenced by the religion of the Nordic people – and vice versa. After the Norwegians and the Swedes had converted to Christianity, the Saamis remained heathen for quite some time. The gender roles within the two cultures differed from each other, and many customs which were practised in one of the two societies, were probably seen as very strange in the other society.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A survey of Old Norse sources which mention Saamis is found in Else Mundal: The perception of the Saamis and their religion in Old Norse sources, in Juha Pentikäinen (ed.) *Shamanism and*

In spite of different cultures with different languages, different ways of living and different religions the contact between the Nordic people on the Scandinavian peninsula and their Saami neighbours must have been rather close. We use to think of the Saamis as people who lived in the North, and according to Old Norse sources, the Saamis primarily lived in the North, in the territory named after them, Finnmörk, which according to the sources was a much larger area than the territory we call Finnmark today and extended – in the inland – as far south as to the border between Hålogaland and Trøndelag. But the Saamis also lived in Southern Norway, in Trøndelag and in the inland of Eastern Norway. Quite a lot of Old Norse texts, both Norwegian and Icelandic, place Saamis in this area. Even the two laws from Eastern Norway, the Eidsivathing law and the Borgarthing law indicate that Saami people lived within the territory of these laws. The laws forbid Christians to have contact with *finnar*, to go to them to ask for prophecies or for medical help.

When we take into consideration that the Saamis did not live only in Northern Norway, but also in the inland of Southern Norway, we see that the Norwegians and the Saamis met along a very long borderline, and probably the borderline between the two people was not sharp.

The large number of sources which mention contact with the Saamis and the fact that they lived on a very large territory which was partly shared with their Scandinavian neighbours make it reasonable to think that the Nordic people knew their Saami neighbours and their culture rather well. This impression is also confirmed by some of the pictures of the Saamis in literary sources which may be characterized as close-up. Even though the Saamis most often appear in rather stereotyped literary motifs, some texts – and understandably enough – especially Norwegian texts – give a picture of Saamis and Saami life which reveals an intimate, first-hand knowledge.

One example of this we have in a scaldic stanza made by the Norwegian scald Eyvindr Finnsson who himself lived in the southern part of Hålogaland in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. When describing the cold summer weather during the bad years in the reign of King Haraldr gráfeldr, he turned to a picture from the Saamis' life. "We have to keep our goats in stalls during the summer, just as the Saamis," Eyvindr says.<sup>2</sup>

Another example is found in the Norwegian Latin chronicle *Historia Norwegiæ*. Here the author gives a very intimate description of a shamanistic séance which took place in the hut of a Saami family.

In the Old Norse oaths called *gríðamál* and *trygðamál* a picture from Saami life is used in an interesting context. These oaths are found in different versions in *Grágás* (Konungsbók ch. 115 and Staðarhólsbók, chs. 387 and 388) and in

---

*Northern Ecology*, Berlin and New York 1996, pp.97–116.

<sup>2</sup> Lausavísa nr. 12, in Finnur Jónsson: *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, IB: 65, København 1912–15.

two Icelandic sagas, *Grettis saga*, ch. 72, and *Heiðarvíga saga*, ch. 33. But a little fragment is also found in the Norwegian *Gulathingslaw* (ch. 320) and the contents of the oath point to Norwegian origin. Here, among other things it is said that an enemy shall have peace as long as the falcon flies, the pine grows, rivers flow to the sea, children cry for their mother and the Saamis go skiing. The Saamis being there skiing is mentioned among all the normal things.

It may be that also a stanza in *Hávamál* gives a picture from Saami life. This stanza is stanza 90 where a false woman's love is compared to many difficult tasks:

/.../  
 sem aki jó óbryddum  
 á ísi hálum  
 teitom, tvévetrum  
 oc sé tamr illa,  
 eða í byr óðum  
 beiti stíórmlausu,  
 eða skyli haltr henda  
 hrein í fláfjalli.

The limping man who catches reindeers in the mountain is not necessarily a Saami, but it is likely, especially since the word *henda*, 'catch by the hands', is used.

The skiing Saami in the oath shows that the Saamis are part of their neighbours' world view. They are as necessary as pines, rivers flowing to the sea and children crying for their mother to make the picture of the known world complete. The comparison made in *Hávamál* – provided that this is a scene from Saami life – shows again that the Nordic people had a tendency to include their Saami neighbours and their culture in their own conceptions of life.

The consciousness among the Nordic people of this "other people" who were so different from themselves, gives reason to ask whether the relation between the two people may have been interpreted and understood in the light of mythic patterns, and perhaps is reflected in the myths themselves.

When Saami people and their world and the relation between the Saami and the Nordic people is described in Old Norse texts, the parallels to patterns in the mythic world are sometimes striking. A detail in the text – or in the literary motif – which shows that the parallel is not accidental is the choice of certain words when Saamis are described. In some texts – or in some motifs – the Saamis are called *jǫtnar*, 'giants', or a few times *dvergar*, 'dwarfs'. In the text the Saami man – or woman – may be called Saami and *jǫtunn* alternatively, or in some texts Saamis and *jǫtnar* are presented as members of the same family. At first sight it seems strange to call the Saamis, who were shorter than their Nordic neighbours *jǫtnar*, but tall or short is not the point. When the Saamis are called *jǫtnar*, 'giants', I think it is obvious that the intentions behind this choice of words are to activate the imagination of certain mythic patterns.

In the following I will draw attention to ideas connected to the Saamis and

their world in which parallels to mythic patterns – at least sometimes – are strengthened by the use of the word *jǫtunn*. Such emphasizing of the parallel to mythic patterns call for an interpretation in the light of the myths. Thereafter I will examine one Old Norse myth which I think may reflect an intimate knowledge of Saami culture. This myth is the one about how Skaði came to the gods to avenge her father's death, and as compensation was offered to choose herself a husband from among the gods. What I am going to suggest here is that the giantess Skaði is to some extent modeled on a Saami woman.

The otherness of the Saamis and their culture and the fact that they mostly lived outside the areas where the Nordic people lived, especially in the North, but farther south also in the border areas between Norway and Sweden and in the inland of Eastern Norway, conformed to the pattern of Midgarðr–Útgarðr. According to the mythological map the Saamis became the Útgarðr people. The Miðgarðr–Útgarðr pattern was close at hand even if the Saamis were not called *jǫtnar*, and may be seen as a basic pattern to describe the relation between the two people. In addition to the associations with Útgarðr, the descriptions of Saamis in many texts seem to focus on certain parallels with giants, and it is especially when these characteristics or qualifications which are typical of giants are connected to Saamis, that the Saamis are called *jǫtnar*.

According to Old Norse myths the gods' most precious possessions had their origin in the world of giants or dwarfs. When a precious thing with magic power belonging to a hero in an Old Norse text is said to be a gift from a Saami, such a motif must of course be understood in connection with the Saamis' reputations as great sorcerers. But in some cases where a precious thing has its origin in the Saami world, the Saamis are mixed up with giants in the Old Norse text. This is for instance the case with Ketill hængr's magic arrows which he got from the Saami king Gusir, the brother of the giant Brúni.

The most interesting motifs where the Saamis replace giants in the mythic pattern are, however, the motifs where a Saami replaces a giant – or rather a giantess – in the end of a genealogical line. According to Old Norse myths the marriage between a god and a giantess resulted in a son who became the forefather of the royal family, the *Ynglingar*, or the family of the earls who were called *Háleygjajarlar* and *Hlaðajarlar*. According to *Ynglinga saga*, which builds on *Ynglingatal*, the *Ynglingar* are descendents of the god Freyr and the giantess Gerðr. According to *Háleygjatal* the *Háleygjajarlar* are descendents of the god Óðinn and the giantess Skaði.<sup>3</sup> For the earls there must in the tradition also have existed an alternative line leading back to the giants. Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr is in many Old Norse texts presented as a foremother of the earls, and her father Hǫlgi is mentioned as early as in *Haraldskvæði* as a forefather of

---

<sup>3</sup> The son of Óðinn and Skaði was Sæmingr. His name has been seen in connection with the same root as we have in the word *saami*, but the etymology is uncertain.

the Háleygjajarlar.<sup>4</sup> From many of the sources it is obvious that these figures are looked upon as giants. Some saga characters are presented as descendents of a man with the nickname *hálf troll* or something of the sort. It is not always clear who these *trolls* from whom the children got the nickname *hálf troll* were, but according to the definition of the word *hálf troll* in the dictionaries the mother or the father of a man with such a nickname was a *troll*, a giant. At least in one example where a Old Norse hero has a giantess for mother, the mother's *troll* family is mixed with Saamis. This hero is Grímr loðinkinn, whose mother was Hrafnhildr, the daughter of the giant Brúni, but Brúni's brother was Gusir Finna konungr, king of the Saamis, and Brúni later took over his kingdom. This could perhaps indicate that the nickname *hálf troll* could be given to children of mixed Norwegian and Saami blood. Some people in Old Norse society seem to have traced their family back to a Saami king, and that was something they took pride in. According to *Landnámabók* some Icelanders could trace their family back to Grímr loðinkinn (S 135, H 107 og 202, M 48), and as we have seen, his mother is both presented as a giantess and as a Saami princess. Other Icelanders and Norwegians could trace their family back to a certain Mottul Finnakonungr, a Saami king whose granddaughter according to *Landnámabók* (S 43, H 31) was married into a very prominent Norwegian family, she was married to a great-grandson of Bragi skáld inn gamli.

A god and a giantess produced according to Old Norse myths the proto-king.<sup>5</sup> A human hero and a giant's daughter were of course not so prominent ancestors as a god and a giantess, but I think that these genealogies on a smaller scale signal the same as the genealogies of kings and earls. To bear the nickname *hálf troll* is in fact very promising. The idea seems to be that the giantess, who in the world of men may be replaced by a Saami woman, infuses new blood which makes their offspring born leaders in society.

We have the clearest example of this in the story about the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri who married Snæfríðr, the daughter of the Saami king Svási. The function of this story in the kings' sagas is probably to strengthen and underline the original mythic pattern, in which the god Freyr and the giantess Gerðr produced the proto-king.

King Haraldr hárfagri, the king who united Norway into one kingdom, was married to many women. In his old age he married Snæfríðr, the daughter of the Saami king Svási. The story about King Haraldr and Snæfríðr is first told in the Norwegian king's saga *Ágrip*. Snorri later used the *Ágrip* text. The story is also mentioned in *Flateyjarbók*, in *Páttir Haralds hárfagra* and in *Páttir Halfdanar svarta*. The story says that once upon a time when the king stayed at Dovre, the Saami king visited him and invited King Haraldr to his turf hut. The king did

<sup>4</sup> A survey of all the sources is found in Halvorsen, E. F. "Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr" in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder XX*, 382–384

<sup>5</sup> See Gro Steinsland: *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi*, Oslo 1991, especially ch.VIII.

not want to go, but Svási was very persuasive, and at last the king gave in and followed the Saami. When he arrived in the turf hut, Svási's daughter Snæfríðr stood up and offered the king a welcoming drink. All of a sudden the king was struck by blind love, and he wanted to make love to her the same evening. But Svási insisted on a proper marriage. And the king married her and loved her so dearly that he never departed from her as long as she lived, and after she was dead he sat by her dead body for three years.

Snæfríðr gets a lot of attention in the kings' sagas, more than the other wives of the king. The reason for this is obvious. Eiríkr blóðøx, who became king after Haraldr hárfagri was the son of Queen Ragnhildr, the Danish princess. Eiríkr's sons were pretenders to the Throne, and his son Haraldr gráfeldr reigned together with his mother, Queen Gunnhildr, for some years, but he had no son to succeed him. Hákon inn góði, one of the youngest sons of King Haraldr, who also became king, was the son of Þóra mostrstøng. He had no son who succeeded him. Óláfr Tryggvason became king for a few years. He was a descendent of Óláfr, son of Haraldr hárfagri and his wife Svanhildr, but Óláfr Tryggvason had no son who succeeded him. Some years later Óláfr inn helgi became king. He was a descendent of Bjørn, another of Haraldr's sons by Svanhildr. Óláfr inn helgi was succeeded by his son Magnús inn góði, but he had no son who succeeded him. But thereafter Haraldr harðráði became king. He was the half-brother of King Óláfr inn helgi on the mother side, but his father was Sigurðr sýr, son of Hálfðan, son of Sigurðr hrísi, and Sígurðr hrísi, was one of Haraldr hárfagri's sons by the Saami woman Snæfríðr. From this time on the kings of Norway could trace their family back to King Haraldr hárfagri and the Saami woman Snæfríðr.

During the reign of Haraldr harðráði, the interest in Snæfríðr probably started to grow, and the foremother who made the ancestors of Haraldr harðráði's branch of the royal family conform to the mythic pattern based on the story about the god Freyr and the giantess Gerðr, was made the most of.

In *Ágrip* Svási is presented as a Saami, he is called *finnr* and *Finnkonungr*. Snorri calls him both *finnr* and *jötunn*, and strengthens thereby the associations with the mythic pattern. In all the texts which tell the story about King Haraldr hárfagri and Snæfríðr, this story is linked up with a story told earlier in the text about how Haraldr as a young boy helped a Saami who was taken prisoner by his father to escape, and Haraldr himself ran away with the Saami. In the *Flateyjarbók* text this Saami operates together with Dofri, who takes care of the young Haraldr and becomes his fosterfather. Dofri is called *jötunn* and *troll*. In this version of the story the Saamis are placed in a mythological setting from the very beginning. The fact that the Saamis are called *jotnar* or operate together with *jotnar* makes the Miðgarðr–Útgarðr pattern explicit.

But there are also other parallels with the story about Freyr and Gerðr. The god and the king are struck by blind love much in the same way. Freyr found it very hard, but had to wait nine nights for Gerðr. The king wanted to make love

to Snæfríðr at once, but had to wait so that formalities could be taken care of. Both women are pretty at first sight, but in the descriptions of the two women there is one little detail which I think indicates that the model Snæfríðr is drawn from was Gerðr – and perhaps other young giantesses whom the gods desired. In the myth Freyr fell in love when Gerðr lifted her arms, and light was shed from her arms over both sky and sea, and all worlds were made bright by her. In an anonymous scaldic stanza from around 1200 the scald says about Haraldr and Snæfríðr: *h\_num þótti sólbjört sú*, ‘he thought she was bright like the sun’. The same adjective, *sólbjört*, is also used about the giantess Menglǫð in *Fjolsvinnsmál* (42). The giantess *Billings mæ*r in *Hávamál* (97) is described as *sólhvít*, and a giantess with whom Óðinn had an affair is in *Hárbarðsljóð* (30) described as *gullbjört*. I think these examples show that the description of young desirable giantesses has served as a model for the description of Snæfríðr’s beauty.

If the Saami people were part of their neighbours’ world view to the extent that the Nordic people interpreted and understood their relation to the Saamis in the light of their own myths, we should perhaps also expect to find reflections of contact with Saamis and knowledge of Saami culture in the Old Norse myths themselves.

One broad field of interest here is of course the shamanistic elements in Old Norse mythology and the *vǫlur*. In *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. 10 a *vǫlva* described in a Norwegian setting is in fact presented as a Saami woman. Here I will, however, limit myself to the discussion of one particular myth and one mythological figure, the giantess Skaði and the myth in which she arrives in Ásgarðr to avenge her father’s death, and as compensation was offered to choose herself a husband from among the gods.

When Skaði arrives armed and dressed like a warrior, she is acting like an Old Norse *skjöldmær*, and when she wants to avenge her father herself, we get the impression that she was the only child. If she was her father’s only child, her behavior would to a certain degree be expected according to Old Norse gender rules since such a woman, a *baugrýgr*, would take a son’s position in the family. But it was hardly expected – in the real world – that she would take revenge herself by her own hands. Before Snorri in his *Edda* tells the story about Skaði’s arrival in Ásgarðr, he has, however, already introduced Skaði, and she is introduced in a way which foreshadows an uncommon female behavior from an Old Norse point of view. This woman went skiing and hunted animals! This behaviour does not conform to Old Norse female gender roles. In Old Norse society her behavior is much more in accordance with male gender roles. But people who lived in the Old Norse society knew – or at least knew about – a society where women could behave like Skaði. As early as in the so called Ottar’s Report from late in the 9th century, Ottar who claimed to live farthest north of all the Norwegians, told King Alfred in England about the Saamis who lived from hunting, fishing, bird-catching and reindeer herding,

and both men, women and children went skiing faster than the birds. Also within the Saami culture the male and the female gender roles of course differed from each other, but the border between the two systems of gender roles were drawn up along other lines than in Old Norse society. The fact that women in the Saami nomadic culture seem to have shared outdoor activities with the men to a much higher degree than in Old Norse culture, may have given rise to the opinion among the Nordic people that Saami women often behaved as if they were men.

I find it very likely that Saami female gender roles served as a model for the skiing and hunting Skaði, and since these activities in Old Norse society were seen as typically male, it is very logical – also when we leave Skaði's wish to avenge her father's death out of account – that she should arrive in Ásgarðr with the most masculine manner Old Norse female gender role would allow, as a *skjöldmær* and as a *baugrýgr*. Even her name lays emphasis on Skaði's masculinity. The female name *Skaði* is declined as a weak masculine. Only very few female names in Old Norse are declined in this way, names ending in an /i/ are masculine names. But also among the very few female names with this declension, the name Skaði is special; this name is in fact also used as a masculine name (*Völsunga saga*, ch. 1).<sup>6</sup>

In addition to Skaði's masculine appearance as a skiing and hunting woman there is also another element in this myth which I think could reflect knowledge of Saami culture. This element is the scene where Skaði is offered to choose herself a husband.

When the gods offer Skaði, who is seeking revenge, marriage as compensation for her dead father, this is an act in full accordance with the norms of Old Norse society. Marriage and fosterage were often used to settle a conflict between two families. However, there is something in this strange story which could point at the Saami culture.

In a few Old Norse texts we find a motif where a man is offered, or enters into, a short-time sexual relationship on his arrival in a place outside his own environment. The sexual relationship, or marriage limited in time, is meant to last for as long as the man stays. The most typical example of this motif we have in the Eddaic poem *Rígsþula* where Rígr stays for three nights in three places, and every place he takes the husband's place in bed. This motif has been seen as a result of Irish influence, and the name Rígr has been seen as a loan from Irish. A custom which implied that a distinguished guest was offered sexual relations with the wife of the host, is known from Irish sources from the Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> In *Qrvar-Odds saga* the hero during a stay in Ireland entered into marriage with an Irish princess. The marriage was stipulated to last for

<sup>6</sup> See also E.H. Lind: *Norsk-Isländska Dopnamn från Medeltiden*, Uppsala 1905–1915, sp. 906.

<sup>7</sup> See Jean I. Young: Does Rígsþula betray Irish influence? *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 49, 1933, pp.101–102.

three years. The fact that these two motifs can be associated with Ireland, makes it plausible that the Irish custom, whatever the exact substance of this custom was, was known in the viking world.

However, there is reason to believe that the Nordic people in Scandinavia knew a custom, more or less similar to the Irish, from a culture that was closer to them than Ireland. This culture was the Saami culture.

In the Old Norse sources from the Middle Ages we have no good evidence for the existence of this custom among the Saamis. In many *fornaldarsögur* we find a motif in which the human hero on his arrival in the world of the giants is invited at once to the bed of the beautiful giant's daughter. This motif could very well be the result of the male author's fantasy and imagination. It is noteworthy, however, that this motif also is found in texts where giants and Saamis are presented as members of the same family. When the hero Ketill in *Ketils saga hængs* arrived at the farm of the giant Brúni who had a Saami king for brother and later became a Saami king himself, Brúni offered Ketill his daughter the first evening.

In sources from after the Reformation we have more reliable information about this custom among the Saamis. However, the sources are not rich and detailed. The custom is perhaps known mostly because the sources deny its existence. This has to do with the nature of the sources. The oldest sources with information about Saami culture were written down by Swedish clergymen in the period after the Thirty Years War. During the war the Swedes had been accused of making use of Saami witchcraft. The well organized collection and writing down of Saami culture had the intention to clear the Swedes of suspicion by describing the Saamis as good Christians.

In spite of this there are enough hints in the texts to tell us that a custom more or less similar to the custom reported in Irish sources from the Middle Ages existed among the Saamis,<sup>8</sup> and if this custom existed in the time after the reformation, we can be quite sure that it also existed in the Middle Ages.

Now we can return to Skaði's arrival in Ásgarðr. This scene has been analysed thoroughly earlier, for instance by Margaret Clunies Ross.<sup>9</sup> My analysis will hardly be inconsistent with earlier analysis. But if we consider it likely that Saami women served as a model for the skiing and hunting Skaði, and keep in mind that a distinguished guest in the Saami society perhaps would expect to be offered a sexual partner on his arrival, that will throw new light on the myth which makes it possible to see other aspects of it.

When the gods line up on Skaði's arrival and offer her marriage they probably try to ward off her anger by showing her honour and offering her the

---

<sup>8</sup> See for example Johannis Tornæi: *Berättelse om Lapmarckerna och Deras Tillstånd*, Uppsala 1900, p.46.

<sup>9</sup> Why Skaði laughed. Comic seriousness in an Old Norse mythic narrative, *Maal og Minne*, pp. 2–14.

same hospitality which they suppose she knows from her own environment. In fact we do not know from the sources that women were treated in the same way as men with regard to the custom in question. But in Skaði's case that does not matter much since Skaði arrives as if she were a man in a man's gender role. The fact that she arrives as a man, forces the gods into the female gender role. As we know, Skaði had to choose one of the gods without seeing any more of him than his feet and legs. I agree with Margaret Clunies Ross when she suggests the explanation that when feet or legs are marked in Indo-European myth, they usually stress the sexual nature of the hero.<sup>10</sup> But I also find it a interesting question why their faces are covered and with what. Since Skaði acts in a male gender role and is engaged in choosing herself a spouse, the gods are in fact lining up as potential brides. Could their faces be covered by bridal veils, and are the gods hiding behind bridal veils from shame? Probably their position in this scene is not much better than Þórr's position in *Þrymskviða*.

The next scene in the myth, the tug of war between Loki and the goat, is perhaps even more peculiar than the first scene. To make Skaði laugh, Loki ties a cord round his testicles and the other end to a nanny-goat's beard, and they drew each other back and forth and both squealed loudly. Margaret Clunies Ross has pointed out a suitor test from folk literature, to make a sorrowful princess laugh, as the model for this scene, which I find quite convincing. But the function of this strange tableau within the myth is, in my opinion, to illustrate the power struggle between the gods and Skaði. Loki is not normally a good representative for the gods, but at this occasion the childbearing Loki is well-chosen. His pain illustrates the gods' wounded masculinity. The nanny-goat with a beard, which normally is an indication of masculinity, is well-chosen to represent the giantess who acts in the male gender role. Her position is not extremely good either. She has lost her father and is on her own among enemies. But the gods' position is worse, their position is dishonouring.

As I have tried to show, the Nordic people interpreted their relation with the Saami people in the light of their own myths, and their familiarity with Saami culture may be reflected in the myths themselves. This indicates that the relation between the two people was seen as important within Old Norse society. The fact that Saamis replace giants in mythic patterns certainly demonstrates an ambiguity felt towards the Saamis. However, it is noteworthy that Saamis most typically replace giants in what can be called a marriage pattern. The Saami woman Snæfríðr replaced Gerðr, and Skaði may be modeled on a Saami woman. Neither the mythic nor the mixed Nordic-Saami marriages were normal marriages, and they were not necessarily happy marriages. But the main symbol in Old Norse myths and in Old Norse literature of the relation between the Nordic people and the Saami people is after all a marriage – with its ups and downs.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.p.6.

## Healing hands and magical spells

Britt-Mari Nasstrom

Göteborgs universitet

### Sigrdrifa's invocation

Long I slept, long was I sleeping  
long are the woes of men  
Odin brought it about that I could not break  
the spell of drowsiness

The valkyrie Sigrdrifa addresses Sigurd Fafnesbani with these words after he has wakened her from her sleep on Hindarfjell. Sigrdrifa is better known under another name, Brynhild, and her magic sleep was a punishment of Odin, her father according to the prose version of the story. She had disobeyed her father's will and he stung her with a magical thorn, which made her sleep. Odin put a shield-wall around her and stated that no one who was acquainted with fear could pass this and wake her up. Sigurd Fafnisbani heard this story from the deadly wounded dragon and headed towards Hindarfjel for the maiden. His meeting with the valkyrie is told in *Sigrdrífumál*, belonging to the Eddic poems and the cycle of the Völsungar.

After that she invokes the gods and the mighty fecund earth and beseeches them of "eloquence and native wit and healing hands", not only for herself but

also for Sigurd, the one who never was acquainted with fear and whom she now is expecting to marry. The healing hands are completed with knowledge of magical power, spells and favourable letters, good charms and joyful runes. Sigdrifa furthermore tells that the runes should be cut on the hands and marked on the nails in order to beguile a wife. Others were victory-runes cut on the sword, others to calm the sea; there were speech-runes, mind-runes and book-runes, which at the first glance would have very little to do with healing. Others are more accurate to this connection, like the helping-runes in childbirth:

Helping-runes you must know if want to assist  
and release children from women;  
they shall be cut on the palms and clasped on the joints  
and then the disir is asked for help.

The knowledge of runes is directly connected with an invocation of the disir. The disir referred to “collective” goddesses as well as to women connected with the supernatural, a form of tutelary spirits.<sup>1</sup>

### **The function of the *Dísir***

The *Dísir* were, according to the sources, objects of worship, something that is witnessed by several place-names such as Diseberg, Disin > Disavin, Disathing and Disavid > Disaui. They are also represented in personal names like Freydis, Odinsdisa and Hjördis, for example.<sup>2</sup>

The disir received a special sacrifice called *dísablót*, mentioned in the Icelandic sagas. These were performed in the autumn or in the spring and connected with fertility and the year’s crop. The great sacrifice in Uppsala, described by Adam of Bremen, could have been such a *blót* to the disir. It was held at the vernal equinox at that time and connected with an assembly, the *dishing*. After the Christianization of Uppsala, the *dishing* was moved to the month of February, according to Snorri Sturluson.

The disir were worshipped in a specific building, called the Disarsal. Disarsal must, however, be translated as “the house of the Dis” and the name intimates the existence of one goddesses, who alone represented the anonymous collective of disir. The sources hint at the great goddess Freyja, whose characteristics coincide with the disirs.

### **galder—words of magical healing**

This relation to Freyja and to Frigg, the great mother among the goddesses, are exemplified in another Eddic poem, called *Oddrún’s Lament*, also belonging to the Völsunga cycle. Here the exhausted mother, Borgny, after being delivered twins, blesses her helper Oddrún:

<sup>1</sup> de Vries II p.298.

<sup>2</sup> AnEWb s.v. *dís*, p.77.

May all the kindly beings help you  
 Frigg and Freyja and more of the gods  
 as you warded away  
 that dangerous illness from me.

Borgny's help at the problematic birth was made by certain spells called *galdrar*:

...strongly Oddrún sang, powerfully Oddrún sang  
 bitter spells for Borgny.

*Galdr* derives from the same stem as *gala* "to crow" and *galen* "mad" and was performed in a shrill voice, which must have acted suggestively. Moreover, the *galdr* had its own metre called *galdralag*, the metre of spells.

Two types of *galdr* have survived in a manuscript of Merseburg. The first tells of women, who watch the battles and who are able to tie or loose the feared war-fetter. This charm could have been recited before battle, with a view to invoking these powers to decide the outcome of the struggle.<sup>3</sup> It alludes to a recurrent topic in a martial situation, magic fetters, suddenly being thought to chain the warrior invisibly to the spot, so that he would easily fall victim to his enemies. The force of this magic fetter is demonstrated expressively in *Hárðar saga ok Hólmverja* (36), where Hárð is trying to escape from his enemies when he is hit by the war-fetter and paralysed:

The 'war fetter' came upon Hárð, but he cut himself free once and a second time. The 'war fetter' came upon him for the third time. Then the men managed to hem him in, and surrounded him with a ring of enemies, but he fought his way out of the ring and slew three men in so doing.<sup>4</sup>

The fourth time the "war fetter" falls over him, he is overwhelmed and killed, uttering the word, "a mighty troll decides in this".<sup>5</sup>

We should not think that fear, but a feeling of immobility, not unlike the kind we may experience in nightmares, when we want to run away but cannot move, caused this kind of paralysis. The *galdr* ends with the words: "Dash out of the fetters! Run from the enemies!" in order to cure the paralysis.

The second *galdr* is more related to the healing hands combined with the magic spells, although the patient in this case is a horse:

Phol and Wodan went to the forest  
 Then Baldr's (or the lord's) horse sprained its foot.

The invocation goes to the goddesses and the gods:

then Sinhtgunt, the sister of Sunna charmed it,

<sup>3</sup> F. Ström, 1954, p.71.

<sup>4</sup> *Hárðar Saga*, trans. from H. Davidson 1964, pp.63-64.

<sup>5</sup> There are other examples of the "war fetter" in *Sverri's saga*, 1920, ed. G. Indrebø, Oslo, *Sturlunga Saga*, 1988, ed. Örnólfur Þorsson, Reykjavík, II, 57.

then Frija, the sister of Volla charmed it.  
then Wodan charmed it, as he was well able to do.

Sunna is the old goddess Sól, the sun, and therefore Singunt has been identified as the moon, although there is no other evidence for such an interpretation. Frija is probably Frigg, derived from *frjá* “to love” and her sister Volla appears in the Icelandic literature as Frigg’s *eskimey* “servant”, although she is—as her name reveals—a goddess of abundance, with relatives in Classical Antiquity as Ops and Abundantia.

Finally, Wodan or Odin is the Great Magician among the gods, the master of *galdr*, *galdrsfaðir*. According to *Hávamál* he once learnt nine wise songs and he masters eighteen spells, corresponding to the secret wisdom as earlier mentioned, which was special for the kings.<sup>6</sup>

It is probably Wodan who utters the very essence of the *galdr*:

Be it sprain of the bone,  
be it sprain of blood,  
be it sprain of the limb:  
bone to bone,  
blood to blood  
sinew to sinew  
limb to limb,  
thus be they fitted together.

These lines are most interesting and scholars have earlier drawn attention to the fact that they appear in several charms in Old Irish stories and moreover in *Kalevala*, where Lemminkäinen’s mother joined her son’s severed limbs together, restoring him to life, a formula derived from the Finnish neighbours. The oldest known expression goes back to the Vedic poem *Atarva-Veda* and it as a medium in the healing process as far as we know from *Sigrdrifumál*. This *galdr* is considered to have its roots in an Indo-European tradition of healing. It survived in folklore with the change to Christ’s horse broken, and there are many variants of the charms in this version.

We do not know what kind of *galdr* Oddrún sang to ease Borgny’s pains, but after the change of religion in the North the women in labour invoked the Virgin Mary. She had the certain key to lock up their loins, as these spells say literally. Holy relics were also used to deliver the baby, but there was a striking difference between the Old Norse customs and the Christian. The pain should not be eased, since this was a result of Eve’s sin, but the help still was there to bring the child into this world and to holy baptism. To ease the pain resulted, according to folk belief, in the birth of a were-wolf or a mare. Oddrún’s bitter, strong *galdr* therefore might continue as a secret.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Näsström 1996, 236

<sup>7</sup> Women were forbidden to use Galium Verum to ease the pain at a council 734.<sup>7</sup> In the Old Norse this flower was known as Freyja’s weed, another connection to the goddess’ assistance at childbirth. Somehow the use of Galium Verum seem to survive all prohibitions, but it was now said that the Virgin Mary had made the bed for her child of this flower and the name was changed

### Healing hand at childbirth

In *The Lament of Oddrún* some glimpses of the customs of childbirth are revealed. When she had arrived, she had also loosened the saddles like other knots in the house to ease the childbirth. The woman in labour is kneeling, supported by the midwives, except the one sitting in front of her, expecting to deliver the baby. This is Oddrún's role in the poem: she sits at the lady's knees and during the hard labour she spells her special *galdrar* to help the children on their way. "a girl and a boy were able to kick on earth/cheerful children for the slayer of Hogni"( 8) .

Oddrún had probably those healing hands, which was necessary at childbirth. Returning to *Sigrdrifumál* we notice that not only Sigrdrifa herself was gifted with them but also Sigurd Fáfnisbane, something that should imply that a man could be able to assist at childbirth with his healing hands. The Eddic poem of Rig says that the king should help at childbirth (44). Gånge Rolf assists at the queen's childbirth and it is expressly told that he laid his hand upon her, which effected a quick birth. This concept of the healing hands was connected with the qualities of a king and it is told of St. Olaf of Norway that he had healing hands.<sup>8</sup>

King's qualities are specialised in other Eddic songs like *Hávamál*, where Odin, the great Magician among the gods, enumerates his knowledge. In *Rigsthula* the god Rig instructs the young Kon, the future king, in the similar knowledge and this appears again in Sigrdrifa's speech to Sigurd. Besides healing a king should know how to destroy an enemy's weapon, calm the sea and even raise men from death through his magical knowledge. Still, the healing power of the king was an old and almost universal concept, connected to the sacral kingship, regarded as a gift from the gods. This is the reason why Sigurd's and the other kings-to-be had to learn how to ease the pain of a woman in labour. This is also the meaning behind Gripi's prophecy to Sigurd about his future meeting with Sigrdrifa:

She will teach you powerful runes  
all those which men wish to know  
and how to speak every single human tongue  
medicine with healing knowledge: may you live blessed king!

Healing in Old Norse religion was, as these examples have shown, combined with magical power and knowledge of efficacious *galdr*.<sup>9</sup> This quality was not necessarily given by nature but, according to the sources, by the gods, as

---

into the bedstraw of the Virgin Mary in most of the Germanic languages.

<sup>8</sup> NKS II.s 289

<sup>9</sup> There existed a doctor among the Gods called Eir. She is mentioned in Snorre's enumeration of the goddesses in his Edda. Little is known of her character, though she is mentioned in a number of kenningar, merely describing a beautiful woman.

demonstrated in Sigrdrifa's invocation to the Æsir and the goddesses:

With gracious eyes may you look upon us  
and give victory to those sitting here

### Runes as healing signs

The powerful runes of Sigrdrifa are an expression of the letter as holy in itself. The very word *rúna* meant “secret” and the letters were thought as originating from the gods to special persons, who were said to *ráða rúnom* “to rule and to master the secret letters). The word *ráða* thus implies a special knowledge, which means that the runes had to be understood by the magician or the healer. One famous example of this occurs in *Egils saga Skalla-grimsonar*. Egil Skalla-Grimson is visiting a peasant in Edskog in Sweden, who worries for his sick daughter Helga. She suffers from an unknown illness, never sleeps and seems to have lost her wits. Egil asks the peasant what they had done to cure her and gets the answer that a young man had carved runes in order to cure her, but this made it even worse. He investigates the bed and finds whalebone with runes under it. He reads them and cuts them away and burns the bone. The he makes a poem about this event:

No one should cut runes that did not know them (*ráða*) Many are lost of darkness of the runes. I saw ten secret runes cut on the bone, which caused the pain of the woman for a long time.

Then Egil cut other runes and put them under the pillow of the sick woman, She awakened from her sleep, saying that she felt much better but that she still was very weak.

This story can be associated with an archaeological find, a *lyfstav* “a medicine wand”, from Ribe, a spell to help those who suffer from “the shivering disease”, i.e. malaria, depicted in runes. The spell starts by calling on the earth, the heavens, the Virgin Mary and God the King in a stanza built on the metre of *fornyrðislag* to lend the evoking one healing hands and the tongue of life, after which the charm turns into a conjuration by which the disease is to be exorcised. The feeling of a pre-Christian belief in these lines, where both heaven and earth are invoked together with the holiest powers of Christianity, is stressed by an obscure sentence about *ni : nouðr*, “nine misfortunes” or, more plausibly, nine coercive powers. They lie on a stone, designated as black and standing in the sea, and they will neither sleep well nor waken warmly until the patient has recovered from his illness.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> E. Moltke, 1976, *Runerne i Danmark og deres oprindelse*, Copenhagen, pp.396-400. A. Hultgård, 1992, “Religiös förändring, kontinuitet och ackulturation/synkretism i vikingatidens och medeltidens skandinaviska religion.” *Kontinuitet i kult och tro från vikingatid till medeltid*, ed. B. Nilsson, Uppsala, pp.29-30.

### The norns and the *nauð*

These nine *nouðr* takes us back to the *Lay of Sigdrifa*, where the rune *nauð* denotes “necessity, anxiety, suffering.”

...on a horn they should be cut and on the back of the hand  
and mark your nail with “*nauð*”.

They should be marked at the nails as protection and were obviously connected with the norns, something still existing in folk belief, where small white dots under the nails are called “marks of the norns”. The norns were a third group of collective goddesses, connected with fate and the borders of life and death. Their appearance at childbirth is noticed in *The Lay of Fafnir* in a stanza, usually translated as “those who choose children from the mothers”. The literal translation says, however, that “they choose the mothers from their sons”, which must be interpreted as meaning that they could appear as death goddesses for the women. This stanza is usually translated as meaning who should survive or not. If mother and child survived, they received a sacrifice of porridge called *norne-grautar*, something that resisted the change of religions for many centuries.

The *disir* and the norns were thus deities invoked in spells and through runic magic; still the art of healing had to be learnt. The interaction between healing and magic is conspicuous, but not as the distinction made by Frazer where magic was a means to subdue even the divine. The gods, who ultimately decided fate of man, gave the healing hands and the magic *galdr*.

## Genus och rumslighet i *Völsunga saga*

Agneta Ney

University of Gävle

### “Höviskt och hedniskt”

Ett stråk av hövishet karakteriserar flertalet fornaldarsagor (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*), en genre av de isländska sagorna som tidsmässigt utspelar sig fjärran från den medeltida riddarkulturen. Men förekomsten av hedniska och övernaturliga motiv är också påfallande. Den här blandningen av kultursfärer har inte uppmärksammats särskilt ofta, men Peter Hallberg diskuterar den i en studie, “Some Aspects of the Fornaldarsögur as a Corpus” (1982). Genom en analys av terminologin visar Hallberg att ett höviskt vokabulär används i merparten av sagorna, men att frekvens och variation skiftar från saga till saga. Som förklaring åberopar han ett inflytande från den europeiska riddardiktningen, som vid tiden för sagornas tillkomst hade stor betydelse som bärare av hövisk kultur till Norden. Till Hallbergs studie refererar också Stephen Mitchell i *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (1991), när han diskuterar fornaldarsagornas ursprung och influenser. Enligt Mitchell är de höviska dragen en anakronism, som kan bli en aning svårsmält, i synnerhet när forntida hjältar

som Sigurd Fafnesbane skall förfinas i en ridderlig rumslighet.<sup>1</sup> Dagens historiker försöker undvika tendenser av det anakronistiska slaget, men frågan är om medeltidens historieberättare hade samma inställning.

### Källorna

Det finns många belägg för att den europeiska riddarkulturen nådde de nordiska länderna, fastän i en mer måttlig omfattning. Om dess spridning i Norden respektive funktion i det medeltida samhället skriver Herman Bengtsson i *Den höviska kulturen i Norden. En konsthistorisk undersökning* (1999), varvid han bland annat framhåller den höviska kulturens "kommunicerande funktion", ett sätt för kung och aristokrati att skapa och bekräfta sin identitet i förhållande till samhället i övrigt. Författaren belyser till en del höviska drag i medeltida nordisk litteratur, och nämner därvidlag medeltida krönikor, kungasagor och furstespeglar, dock inte fornaldarsagor. Han framhåller särskilt *Konungs skuggsjá*, från Håkon Håkonssons tid (r. 1217-1269). Det var också på kung Håkons initiativ som utländska riddarromaner och annan hövisk litteratur översattes till norska. Enligt medeltida ideologi skulle kungarna vara litteraturens främsta beskyddare och uppdragsgivare;<sup>2</sup> att uttrycka sin makt i historisk och politisk litteratur ingick sannolikt därför i Håkons politiska strategi.

Medan hövisk kultur har uppmärksammats i ett flertal internationella studier på senare tid,<sup>3</sup> har svenska historiker ägnat den sparsamt intresse. Svensk forskning utifrån fornaldarsagor som källor har också varit försumbar, något som egentligen inte är förvånansvärt. Med tanke på den hybridartade texten, de övernaturliga inslagen, bristerna i angivelser av tid och rum tillika med anonymt författarskap och osäkerhet vad gäller dateringen är det inte märkligt att genren en gång stoppades i malpåse. Nu när historieämnet berikats med nya infallsvinklar och ämnesval kan det ändå vara dags att på nytt pröva

---

<sup>1</sup> "Genus och rumslighet i *Völsunga saga*" ingår i projektet *Vapen och verbalt vett. Om genusidentitet i den norröna litteraturen*, finansierat av STINT, Stiftelsen för internationalisering av högre utbildning och forskning, Sthlm. Hallberg, Peter, "Some Aspects of the Fornaldarsögur as a Corpus", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 97 1982 ss 1-35 (Hallberg); Om höviskhet, se bl a Bumke, Joachim, *Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter 1-2*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 6 uppl, München 1992 (1986) (Bumke); Mitchell, Stephen A, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, Cornell University Press 1991 s 20f, s 83f (Mitchell).

<sup>2</sup> Bengtsson, Herman, *Den höviska kulturen i Norden. En konsthistorisk undersökning*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Sthlm 1999, s 68ff (Bengtsson); Om *Konungs skuggsjá*, se Bagge, Sverre, *The Political Thought of The Kings's Mirror*, Odense University Press, 1987 s. 103f, 230 (Bagge); Bumke s 595f; Helle, Knud, *Norge blir en stat 1130- 1319*, Bergen m fl s. 230f (Helle); Bengtsson s 68ff.

<sup>3</sup> Se bl a Duby, Georges, *The Chivalrous Society*, övers, London 1977; William Marshall eller Den bäste riddaren i världen, övers, Sthlm 1985; *The Study of Chivalry. Resources and Approaches*, red. Howell Chickering & Thomas H Seiler, Kalamazoo 1988; Löfqvist, Karl Erik, *Om riddarväsen och frälse i nordisk medeltid* (1935).

deras källvärde. Min utgångspunkt därvidlag är att fornaldarsagorna sällan speglar konkreta företeelser vare sig i det förkristna eller kristna nordiska samhället, men till en stor del mentalitet och kulturella koder från såväl vikingatid som medeltid.

Ett av de utländska riddarepos som översattes till norska under Håkon Håkonsons tid är *Piðriks saga av Bern*, en germansk hjältedikt, som i tysk version knappast tillkom mycket senare än *Nibelungenlied*, nedskriven omkring 1200, och som den förstnämnda bygger på. Gestalter och motiv i dessa båda verk återkommer till viss del i en av de mest kända fornaldarsagorna, *Völsunga saga*, som av Theodore Andersson daterats till omkring 1240.<sup>4</sup> Till största delen bygger *Völsunga saga* på inhemsk muntlig tradition, och ett flertal Eddadikter som omformats till prosanarration av sagans författare. Det finns dock motiv i *Völsunga saga* som saknas i *Den poetiska Eddan* och inte heller återfinns på annat håll. Dessa partier kan ha funnits i en längre dikt, som gått förlorad redan vid tiden för sagans tillkomst.<sup>5</sup> Avsnitten som saknar existerande förlagor är enligt min mening de mest intressanta, eftersom de bidrar till att sätta ljuset på samtiden, syftet och sagaförfattarens roll.

I korthet berättar *Völsunga saga* om Sigurd Fafnesbane, hans förfäder, barndom och tid som hjälte. Den handlar vidare om kärleken mellan Sigurd och Brynhild samt om Sigurds giftermål med Gudrun. Senare delen skildrar Gudruns tid som Atles hustru respektive striderna mellan hennes ätt och hans. Som en fortsättning i *Ragnar Lodbroks saga* berättas om hur Sigurds och Brynhilds dotter Aslaug förs till Norge av sin fosterfar Heimer.

### ***Völsunga sagas terminologi***

Att döma av Peter Hallberg och Stephen Mitchell kan det förefalla som om "höviskt och hedniskt blandades hur som helst i fornaldarsagorna. Avsikten med föreliggande studie är att därför att diskutera de höviska dragen i åtminstone en av dem, *Völsunga saga*, och presentera nya förslag till tolkning vad gäller komposition och innehåll. Finns trots allt en "logik i galenskapen" när det gäller blandningen av kultursfärer?<sup>6</sup> Genom att studera det språkliga kan

<sup>4</sup> *Piðriks saga af Bern*, udgivet for Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur ved Henrik Bertelsen 1. Khvn 1905-11; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas und Sagas. Die mittelalterliche Literatur Island*, övers Helmut Buske Verlag Hamburg 1994 s 344. (Jónas Kristjánsson); Andersson, Theodore M, "Goðafræði eða sagnfræði", i *Heiðin minni. Greinar um fórnar bókmenntir*. Ed Haraldur Bessason & Baldur Hafstad, Heimskringla, Háskólafélag, Máls og menning, Rvk 1999 (Andersson 1999); jfr Rindal, Magnus, "Innleing", i *Norrøne bokverk. Soga om volsungane*. Omsett av Magnus Rindal, Oslo 1974 s 26f (Rindal); Torfi Tulinius, "La Matière du Nord". *Sagas légendaires et fiction dans la littérature islandaise, en prose du XIIe siècle*, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris 1995 s 165 (Torfi Tulinius).

<sup>5</sup> Andersson, Theodore M, *The Legend of Brynhild*, *Islandica XLIII*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 1980 s 23ff (Andersson 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Här refereras till *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*. Udgivet for Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur ved Magnus Olsen, Khvn 1906-08. Till den svenska översättningen,

sannolikt samhälleliga relationer synliggöras, i synnerhet om terminologi prövas tillsammans med andra analysfaktorer. När ändrar terminologin karaktär? Vilka förändringar går att se? Den här studien inleds med ett nedslag i *Völsunga sagas* språkdräkt för att genom en analys av sagans ord för kvinnor se om det går att urskilja eventuella strukturella mönster. Ord för släktskap har inte medtagits, utan enbart termer med avseende på social och mytologisk status respektive funktion. Resultatet visar att i *Völsunga saga* kapitel 1-23 (om Sigurds förfäder, hans barndom, tid som drakdödare och mötet med sköldmön Brynhild) respektive kapitel 24-44 (som inleds med att Sigurd kommer till Heimers borg) förekommer följande ord för kvinnor:<sup>7</sup>

<i>drottning</i> (drottning)	<i>drottning</i> (drottning)
<i>konungsdóttir</i> (konungsdotter)	<i>frú</i> (fru)
<i>ambátt</i> (trälkvinna)	<i>frilla</i> (frilla)
<i>skjáldmær</i> (sköldmö)	<i>skjáldmær</i> (sköldmör)
<i>seiðkona</i> (sejdkvinna)	<i>meyjar</i> (mör)
<i>óskmær</i> (önskemö)	<i>skemmumeyjar</i> (kammarjungfrur)
<i>nornir</i> (nornor)	<i>hirðkona</i> (hirdkvinna)
	<i>vinkona</i> ("väninna")
	<i>dísir</i> (diser)

Det finns ett tydligt brott i sagan beträffande kvinnlig terminologi. Efter kapitel 23 är de mytologiska inslagen betydligt sparsammare, och terminologin är framför allt relaterad till kvinnors funktion vid ett kungahov. Påfallande är således i den senare delen inslag av en hövisk terminologi som *frú* och *hirðkona*, samt att kvinnor relateras i förhållande till andra kvinnor, med termer som *vinkona* och *skemmumeyjar*.<sup>8</sup> När motsvarande undersökning av

*Völsunga saga*. Översättning Inge Knutsson. Inledning Staffan Bergsten. Luns, Studentlitteratur, hänvisas inom parentes. De fornisländska namnformerna är försvenskade. För tidigare studier av *Völsunga saga* med avseende på strukturella drag, men med andra utgångspunkter, se Torfi H Tulinius; Viðar Hreinsson, "Ofbeldi, klám og kóngafólk. Goðsagnir í Völsunga sögu, i *Heiðin minni. Greinar um fórnar bókmennitir*. ed Haraldur Bessason & Baldur Hafstad. Heimskringla. Háskólafélag Máls og menningar, Rvk 1999 (Viðar Hreinsson). Jfr Chanson de Geste, se Kay, Sarah, *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance. Political Fictions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995 s 4 (Kay).

<sup>7</sup> De isländska namnformerna är normaliserade utifrån Fritzner, Johan, *Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog* 1-3, Kra 1886-1896.

<sup>8</sup> *Oskmeyjar*, 'önskemör' är ett slags valkyrior, men med en livgivande uppgift i den här sagan; 'ordet *vinkona* syftar sannolikt på den relation som uppstått mellan svågerskor, något som har att göra med de speciella band av lojalitet som fanns svågrar emellan, och har sannolikt litet med det moderna 'väninna' att göra. I *Völsunga sagas* fortsättning, *Ragnar lodbroks saga*, definieras kvinnor övervägande i förhållande till ålder och civil status som flickebarn, mö, husfru eller "kåring" och i relation till män som moder, dotter och fosterdotter. Ordet *kerling*, som kan översättas med 'kåring', 'gammal kvinna', respektive *húsfreyja*, 'husfru', visar att det är fråga om en bondemiljö, med kvinnan som styrande över hushållet. Jämförelsevis saknas i *Den poetiska Eddans* terminologi för kvinnor (i de dikter som sannolikt ligger till grund för *Völsunga saga*) begreppen kammarjungfrur (*skemmumeyjar*), hirdkvinna (*hirðkona*), och "väninna" (*vinkona*), det vill säga de ord som framför allt hör till sagans senare del och som tydligt utgör ett höviskt inslag, se *Norræn Fornkvæði. Islandsk Samling af folkelige oldtidsdigte om Nordens guder og heroer*

terminologi görs för män ges följande resultat:

<i>konungr</i> (konung)	<i>konungr</i> (konung); herkonungr (härförare)
<i>konungssonr</i> (konungsson)	<i>konungssonr</i> (konungsson)
<i>höfðingi</i> (hövding)	<i>höfðingi</i> (hövding)
<i>herra</i> (herr)	<i>herra</i> (herr)
<i>þræll</i> (träl)	<i>þræll</i> (träl)
<i>hermaðr</i> (krigare)	<i>hermaðr</i> (krigare)
<i>stormaðr</i> (storman)	<i>riðdari</i> (riddare)
<i>vikingar</i> (vikingar)	<i>hirð</i> (hird)
<i>bodsmaðr</i> (budbärare)	<i>konungsbuð</i> (konungens bud)
<i>hestasveinn</i> (hästpojke)	<i>kappi</i> (kämpe)
<i>geitasveinn</i> (getpojke)	<i>ráðgjafi konungs</i> (konungens rådgivare)
<i>þorparasveinn</i> (torparpojke)	<i>sendimaðr konungs</i> (konungens sändebud)
<i>jotunn</i> (jätte)	<i>lánardrott</i> (husbonde)
<i>bondi</i> (husbonde)	<i>bondi</i> (husbonde)
<i>trúnaðarmaðr</i> (trohetsman)	<i>þjónn</i> (tjänare)
<i>smiðr</i> (smed)	

Generellt förändras terminologin för män mot flera benämningar för kungens män, men dessa motsvaras emellertid inte av samtida termer för kungens handgångna män. De mytologiska termerna saknas nästan helt i kapitel 1-23, vilket dock inte innebär att manliga gestalter ur den nordiska mytologin saknas i sagan.<sup>9</sup> Utvecklingen beträffande terminologin för män och kvinnor förefaller ändå att gå "åt samma håll" — från mytologiskt inslag i sagans första del till ett ökat höviskt i den senare delen. Med hänsyn till terminologi föreslår jag därför tills vidare en indelning av *Völsunga saga* i två tydligt avgränsade delar — en *mytologisk del* och en *hövisk del*. Indelningen i två delar har förvisso gjorts tidigare, bland annat av Jesse Byock.<sup>10</sup> Till skillnad från Byock, som menar att den andra delen inleds med att Sigurd kommer till kung Gjukes hov, förlägger jag brottet i sagan tidigare i sagans handling, närmare bestämt i samband med att Sigurd kommer till *Heimers borg*. Det är bland annat då som terminologin får en annan karaktär. Intressant nog saknas dessa avsnitt i förlagorna till *Völsunga saga*.<sup>11</sup> Byock, som inte diskuterar de höviska inslagen, betonar

*almindeligt kaldet Sæmundar Edda hins fróða*, utg Sophus Bugge, Universitetsforlaget 1965; *Den poetiska Eddan*, övers Björn Collinder, 3 uppl, Uppsala 1992 (Den poetiska Eddan).

<sup>9</sup> Helle s 211ff. *Völsunga saga* 1:1ff (25ff), 2:4, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Byock, Jesse L, *The Saga of the Volsungs. The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. Introduction and Translation by Jesse L Byock, University of California, Berkeley m fl 1990 s 8 (Byock); Jämförelsevis kan *Völsunga saga* och *Ragnars saga loðbrokar* tillsammans ses som en helhet, och samtidigt efter karaktär och ursprung delas in i tre delar: mytologi, hjältediktning och vikingaberättelse, se exempelvis Viðar Hreinsson s 104ff; Finch, R.G., 'The Treatment of Poetic Sources by the Compiler of Volsunga'. *Saga-Book*. Vol XVI:4. Viking Society for Northern Research, 1965 s 353; Gottzman, Carola L, "Volsungasaga: Legendary History and Textual Analysis", i *Fourth International Saga Conference*, München 1979, i *Alþjóðlegt fornsagnahöfund* 4:197, s 3 (Gottzmann).

<sup>11</sup> Snorre har inte avsnitten med Heimers borg, men väl en hänvisning: "Det levde en dotter kvar efter Sigurd som hette Aslaug och var uppvuxen hos Heimer i Hlymdalarna, och från henne kommer stora släkter". *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, utg Magnús Finnbogason, Rvk s 161; *Snorres*

skillnaderna mellan de båda delarna genom kontrasten mytologi och historia. Mytologiska motiv och övernaturliga drag hör till den första delen, medan den andra delens persongalleri till en del går att identifiera med historiska motsvarigheter från folkvandringstiden.<sup>12</sup> Den skillnad som jag vill framhålla är till hälften samma som Byocks, nämligen förekomsten av mytologi i första delen, men i stället för att kontrastera med historiskt stoff från folkvandringstiden vill jag lyfta fram historiska inslag från högmedeltiden, men inte utgörandes av händelser, utan av samtida föreställningar om hövisk mentalitet.

### Medeltida föreställningar om rummet

Den textindelning som föreslås här kan givetvis inte grundas enbart på social terminologi, även om den i källkritiskt avseende utgör en huvudnyckel för tolkningen. Generellt sett är förvisso en språklig analys av största vikt för studier av källor från äldre tid, men givetvis också samtida föreställningar om förhållandet mellan människa, myt och samhälle. Här menar jag att sagans författare och de eventuella tillägg som han gjort har en viktig roll.<sup>13</sup> För att gå vidare i analysen kan det vara intressant att se huruvida grundläggande drag i den medeltida mentaliteten, som exempelvis uppfattningar om det rumsliga kommer till uttryck i sagan. Av terminologin att döma förefaller det som om att sagans höviska del förflyttar kvinnorna inomhus, och dessutom ger dem särskilda rumsligheter. Vad männen beträffar ger dock terminologin inte samma tydliga förändring, men där kanske föreställningar om rummet kan ge besked.

Motsatsen mellan *natur och kultur* var grundläggande i den medeltida människans föreställningsvärld och kontrasterades ofta som skillnaden mellan skogen/det vilda och bebyggelsen/det samhällligt organiserade. I samtidens höviska litteratur gestaltades natur - och kulturbegreppet som en antites mellan skog och slott, och i den hade skogen både en narrativ och symbolisk betydelse.<sup>14</sup> När genus knyts till rumsliga begrepp kan generellt sett sägas (med rötter tillbaka till antiken) att kvinnor har förknippats med natur och män med kultur.<sup>15</sup> Tidigare forskning har dessutom visat att det medeltida nordiska

---

*Edda*. Översättning från isländskan och inledning av Karl G Johansson och Mats Malm. Fabel Bokförlag, Sthlm 1997 s. 151; Mellan *Völsunga saga* (Sigurd och Brynhild) s. 58 och *Pidreks saga* (Samson riddari och Hilldisvidr) s.10 finns dock vissa överensstämmelser vad gäller motiv och dialog.

<sup>12</sup> Byock s 8f; Rindal s 7.

<sup>13</sup> Clunies Ross, Margaret, *Hedniska ekon. Myt och samhälle i fornordisk litteratur*, övers, Anthropos 1998 (1994) (Clunies Ross).

<sup>14</sup> Le Goff, Jacques, 1988 (1985), *The Medieval Imagination*, övers, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London s 47ff; Clunies Ross s 59ff.

<sup>15</sup> För ett annat sätt att se på natur/kultur i förhållande till manligt/kvinnligt, se Tarkka, Lotte, "Sense of the Forest. Nature and Gender in Karelian Oral Poetry", i *Gender and Folklore. Studia Fennica Folkloristica* 4, Helsinki 1998.

samhället också förknippade manligt och kvinnligt med rumsliga begrepp som *inomhus* och *utomhus* (*utangarðs* och *innangarðs*).<sup>16</sup> Viktigt i sammanhanget är frågan om vilken eventuell narrativ och symbolisk betydelse rumsligheter ges i *Völsunga saga*, och i förhållande till ett genusperspektiv. Min grundtanke är därvidlag att eventuella förändringar beträffande manligt, kvinnligt och rumsligt skall ses i relation till varandra och en hypotes är att också dessa förändringar "går åt samma håll".

I *Völsunga sagas mytologiska del* utspelas de händelser som sagaförfattaren lägger vikt vid i skogen. Skogen är i sagan den rumslighet som också förknippas med övergångsstadier, dels från pojke till man, dels från människa till djur. I skogen prövas söner. Duger de till karlatag och hämnd? I skogen lever far och son ett stråtrövarliv, hanterar vilda djur och identifieras med naturen till fullo genom att ikläda sig varghamn, till förödelse för andra människor, men på sikt en förberedelse för att hämnas och rädda ätten. Även kvinnor tar sig djurhamn; i varghamn identifieras kvinnan med trolldom och död, i kråkhamn med mytologi och födelse.<sup>17</sup> Det är inte enbart som arena för trolldom, otillåtna förbindelser eller gömställen som skogen och föreställningar om det kvinnliga (och det manliga) gestaltas. I sagans mytologiska del syns kvinnor rida i vackra kläder, en scen som man hellre skulle vänta sig i ett mer höviskt sammanhang. Eftersom dessa kvinnor senare uppträder som sköldmör, förefaller det åtminstone här som om Stephen Mitchells uppfattning om sammanblandning av kultursfärer har fog för sig.<sup>18</sup> Skogen och det vilda används också som verbalt tillhygge i okvädande i den mytologiska delen. Beskyllningar om att inte vara människa utan i stället ha levt ute i skogen med vargar, kastas som glåpord mellan män. Det nid som utspelas mellan dem har förvisso sexuella övertoner om att inte vara tillräckligt manlig, men beskyllningarna om att vara mer djur än människa förefaller att vara lika kränkande.

I den *höviska delen* är det borgen som står i centrum. Dit flyttar det vilda in i form av drömmar, i vilka vilda djur förekommer. I den höviska delen blir

<sup>16</sup> Hastrup, Kirsten, 1985, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland. An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change*, Oxford Clarendon Press. Inomhus och utomhus var inte enbart könsspecifika sfärer, utan även en gräns för hemfriden, som symboliskt och konkret gick vid tröskeln. Eliade, Mircea, 1959, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, övers, San Diego m fl. Enligt Barbara Hanawalt behövde medeltidens kvinnor inte gå särskilt långt för att överträda sin "inomhusrumsliga" sfär. Att stå i dörren eller luta sig ut genom fönstret ansågs vara samma sak som att gå ut, se Hanawalt, Barbara, 1995, "At the Margin of Women's Space in Medieval Europe", i *Matrons and Marginal Women in Medieval Society*, ed Robert R Edwards & Vickie Ziegler, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge s 3ff; om litterära exempel på att kvinnosfären användes för att ta heder och ära av en man, se Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben, *Norrønt Nid. Forestillingen om den umandige mand i de islandske sagaer*, Odense, Odense Universitetsforlag 1980.

<sup>17</sup> *Völsunga saga* 1:1ff, 6:12f (31f); 7:13f (41f); *Völsunga saga* 8:15f (44f). Om vargsymbolik i *Völsunga saga*, se Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir pågående forskning (*Úlfhams sögu*).

<sup>18</sup> *Völsunga saga* 5:10ff (37ff); 9:21(51ff).

skogen farlig – det är till exempel från skogen som ingredienser till trolldekokten plockas.<sup>19</sup> I stället för skogens “interiörer” skildras borgens inre. Författaren använder sig av något nytt i sin beskrivning av Heimers borg. Det är därför värt att pröva sagans framställning mot det som är bekant om samtida ideal, när det gäller samhällets högre skikt. Det finns inte utrymme här att närmare gå in på hur miljön skildras, hur gäster tas emot, hur kvinnor placeras i fönster, kammare och jungfrubur, hur umgängesformerna skildras, dialogen med mera, men sagan har förändrats i riktning mot det höviska vad gäller miljö, individteckning, terminologi, och man frågar sig vad detta beror på.

### Sigurd Fafnesbane och Brynhild

Sigurd Fafnesbane och Brynhild är de enda personer som förekommer i *Völsunga sagas* båda delar. Med hjälp av den terminologiska tablån och dess förändring i förhållande till sagans komposition, kan det vara intressant att ställa skildringen av Sigurd och Brynhild mot varandra. Hur omnämns de i respektive del? Vad händer egentligen när den mytologiske drakdödaren Sigurd respektive sköldmön Brynhild förflyttas till den höviska sfären? Är den forne drakdödaren helt malplacerad i en riddarborg?

Enbart av terminologin som används för att definiera Sigurd respektive Brynhild, kan vi inte dra några slutsatser om förändringens logik.<sup>20</sup> Kontextens helhet bör därför beaktas. Det är i *Völsunga sagas* mytologiska del som vi möter Brynhild för första gången. Hon ligger och sover i en sköldborg, när hon blir väckt av Sigurd. Hon är klädd som en man och krigare, och befinner sig i en manlig sfär:<sup>21</sup>

#### *Brynhild väcks i sköldborgen:*

Sigurd gick in i sköldborgen  
och såg att en man låg och sov där  
beväpnad; han tog först hjälmen  
av honom och upptäckte att det var  
en kvinna. Hon var iklädd en brynja  
som satt så tätt intill hennes kropp  
att det var som om den var fastvuxen;  
då skar han itu den från halsöppningen

Sigurdr geck i skialldborgina ok sa,  
at þar svaf madr ok la med aullum hervopnum.  
Hann tok fyst hialmynn af haufde honum ok sa,  
at þat var kona.  
Hun var i bryniu,  
ok var sva faust,  
sem hun veri holddgroinn  
þa reist hann ofan or haufudsmatt

<sup>19</sup> *Völsunga saga* 32:79(30 s. 126f.)

<sup>20</sup> Sigurd omnämns som barn i den mytologiska delen med orden ‘gosse’ (*sveinbarn*, *sveinn*) och med retsamma ironiska uttryck som ‘kungens hästskötare’ (*hestasveinn konungs*), ‘en som springer till fots’ (*hlauparar*) och ‘torparsven’ (*Þorparasveinn*), senare som vuxen man som ‘hövding’ (*höfðingi*) och ‘herr’ (*herra*). I den höviska delen kallas han för ‘make’ (*bonde*), ‘herr’, husbonde (*lanardrotti*), ‘kung’ (*konungr*), och hånfullt för träl (*þræll*). Brynhild omnämns i den mytologiska delen som ‘kungadotter’ (*konungadottir*), och i den höviska delen som ‘fager kvinna’ (*fagra kona*), ‘Budlas dotter’ (*Budladottur*), ‘fru’ (*fru*) och ‘drottning’ (*drottning*). Tillyttermeravisso kallar hon sig själv för ‘sköldmö’ (*skjaldmær*).

<sup>21</sup> *Völsunga saga*:21(20):47(87).

och nedåt och sedan utåt genom båda  
ärmarna, och det var som att skära i tyg.  
Sigurd sade att hon sovit tillräckligt länge.

ok i gegnum nidr ok sva ut i gaugnum badar  
ærmar, ok beit sem klede.  
Sigurdr kvad hana hellzte leinge sofit hafa.

*Völsunga sagas* höviska del inleds med att Sigurd kommer till Heimers borg. Han rider i skogen med sina hundar och hökar, och när han kommer till borgen, flyger en av hans hökar upp i ett högt torn och sätter sig i en glugg. Sigurd följer efter fågeln och får då syn på en vacker kvinna, som han känner igen som Brynhild. Han blir förtjust, men han blir också dyster till sinnes och vill inte längre delta i några lekar. Han berättar för en förtrogen om sina känslor för Brynhild, och säger att han skall söka upp henne. Sigurd går till jungfruburen och hälsar Brynhild med ett höviskt tilltal: "Sitt i frid, min fru, hur mår ni?"<sup>22</sup>

Ett av motiven i den för medeltiden nya uppfattning om kärlek var riddaren som på avstånd ser en glimt av en vacker kvinna och blir förälskad.<sup>23</sup> Allt började för mannens del med ett ögonkast, som när Sigurd blickar upp mot det tornrum, där Brynhild sitter.<sup>24</sup> Inom det höviska kärlekskonceptet skulle mannen dessutom bli värdig sin älskades gunst, som när Sigurd säger om Brynhild: "Henne skall jag söka upp" (---) och skänka henne guld och vinna hennes kärlek".<sup>25</sup> Sagaförfattaren är angelägen om att beskriva scenen för Sigurds och Brynhilds möten vid Heimers borg med mer återhållsamhet än vid det tidigare mötet i sköldborgen. Exempel på det är Sigurds andra väckning av Brynhild, skildrat i kontrast till den första:<sup>26</sup>

#### *Brynhild väcks i slottet:*

Sigurd gick in och fann  
salen öppen; han betraktade henne där hon låg och  
sov och drog av henne  
täcket och sade:  
'Vakna, Brynhild, solen skiner  
överallt och du har sovit tillräckligt;  
övervinn din sorg och var glad.

Sigurdr geck ut ok fann  
opinn salinn.  
Hann hugde hana sofa ok  
bra af henne klædum ok mellti:  
'Vake þu, Brynhilldr, sol skin  
um allan bæinn, ok er ærit sofit  
Hritt af þer harme ok tak glede.

Sigurd är förvånansvärt passiv i samband med det andra mötet, till skillnad från

<sup>22</sup> *Völsunga saga* 25(24):59 (100): "Sith heil, fru, eda hversu meghe þær?"

<sup>23</sup> Duby, Georges, "The Courtly Model", i *A History of Women II. The Silences of the Middle Age*, ed Georges Duby mfl 1992. The Belknap of Harvard University Press s. 250ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Völsunga saga* 24:166 (99).

<sup>25</sup> *Völsunga saga* 25(24):58f (100): "Hana skal ek hitta (---) ok gefa henni gull ok na hennar gafne ok iafnadarþocka".

<sup>26</sup> *Völsunga saga* 25(24):59f (101), min kursiv. Strax innan Sigurd går in i sköldborgen sägs att han såg "ett väldigt sken, som om det brann en eld vilken avtecknade sig mot himlen"; andra gången "skiner solen överallt". Den mytologiska krigshimlen som inramar deras första möte, är utbytt mot en "vardagshimmel". I Inge Knutssons svenska översättning sägs att Sigurd "drog av henne kläderna", men *klæði* kan också betyda 'täcke', ett ordval som passar bättre in i sammanhanget.

den mytologiska delen, där han är mer handlingskraftig. Varför? Sigurd har kommit till kung Heimers borg, där han är en okänd man i en främmande miljö. Han definieras inte längre som en medlem av völsungaätten, utan som en av kung Heimers män.<sup>27</sup> Sigurd har förflyttats till en hövisk miljö, och binds till en kung och skall visa denne troskap. Genom Sigurd försöker författaren sannolikt uttrycka såväl ett traditionellt hjälteideal som ett feudalt riddarideal, det vill säga den höviskhet som präglade 1200-talets högre världsliga skikt, såväl i Norden som i övriga Europa.

I den höviska delen är Brynhild förflyttad från sköldborgen till jungfruburen: från att vara stridande sköldmö utomhus till en broderande mö inomhus. Medeltida höviska damer skulle ägna sig åt handarbete, och Brynhild sitter med sina kammarjungfrur och syr en bonad som avbildar Sigurds hjältedåd. Kontrasten manligt och kvinnligt, som inte förekommer i den mytologiska delen, framhålls här. Brynhild har begränsats rumsligt, som det anstod en aristokratisk kvinna under högmedeltiden. Det aktiva krigarliv som hon levt som sköldmö, broderar hon nu på en bonad!<sup>28</sup>

### Myt och samtida ideal

Både Brynhilds och Sigurds roller förändras, men i samklang med varandra – från mytologisk sköldmö respektive drakdödare till riddare och jungfru, varvid sagaförfattaren låter terminologi, dialog, miljö med mera färgas av höviskhet. Skildringen speglar sannolikt samtida föreställningar om manligt och kvinnligt men också skiftande lojaliteter. Sigurds förändras från en handlingskraftig ättemedlem som försvarar ättens ära till en försiktig man vid kungens hov som försöker försvara sin egen individuella heder samt visa lojalitet gentemot sin svärfar och sina svågrar. Brynhilds förändring från krigslysten sköldmö till hämndlysten drottning går via “mö-motivet”, som placerar henne i jungfruburen, senare i frustugan, omgiven av ett kvinnokollektiv. I enlighet med en medeltida uppfattning om åtskillnad mellan könen, har Brynhilds rumslighet begränsats, och när hon sörjer sin situation, markeras med en tydlig symbolik att den högmedeltida gifta kvinnan rumsligt sett inte kom längre än utanför väggen till frustugan.

Sannolikt hade *Völsunga sagas* författare ett motiv till att förändra sagans huvudpersoner beträffande karaktär, rumslighet med mera. Det görs också med en konsekvens beträffande föreställningar om kvinnligt, manligt och rumsligt. Eftersom förlagor saknas till de avsnitt, i vilka skogen respektive borgen utgör

---

<sup>27</sup> Se Viðar Hreinsson s 103ff.

<sup>28</sup> Vid Heimers borg visas flera exempel på en uppdelning i manliga sysslor och kvinnliga. Männen var sysselsatta utomhus med att vårda sina vapen, sätta skaft på pilar och att jaga med hökar. I en längre version återkommer jag till “bonaderna” och jämför därvidlag *Völsunga sagas* motiv med *Överhogdalsbonaderna*, se Oscarsson, Ulla, *Överhogdalsbonaderna*, Jämtlands läns museum 1994.

centrala rumsligheter, kan det förefalla rimligt att författaren när det gällde dem i högre grad lät sig influeras av samtidens föreställningar. Anledningen till att dessa partier överhuvud taget får stort utrymme i sagan står sannolikt också att hitta i samtida ideologi. Vid tiden för sagans nedskrivning, är det kungamakten som står i blickpunkten. Eftersom litteratur var politik vid den tiden, är det tänkbart att sagan ger uttryck åt samtida ideologi. Vad ville kungen att folket skulle höra? Att kungamakten genealogiskt kunde räkna sina anor tillbaka till Odin? Att den i sin släkt hade yppersta germanska krigarkungar som lade under sig land och rike under folkvandringstiden, kungar vars ideal vilade på personlig styrka och rikedom?<sup>29</sup> Att kunna härleda sin släkt så långt bakåt som möjligt var betydelsefullt, men det var sannolikt också strategiskt att relatera sig själv till ett samtida höviskt ideal. I *Völsunga sagas* centrala avsnitt vid kung Heimers borg har höviskheten sitt säte, och det är där som Brynhild och Sigurds dotter Aslaug uppfostras. Med tanke på att Aslaug skall komma att föra völsungaätten vidare och senare bli en länk till en norsk kungaätt, förefaller det rimligt att hennes förfäder bör ha ett mytologiskt och heroiskt förflutet. Men förutom ett mytologiskt förflutet, förses såväl Aslaug som hennes föräldrar också med höviskhet – ett gott påbrå som behövdes för att ge legitimitet åt sagaförfattarens samtida kungar.

## Referenser

- Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, *Úlfhams sögu*, opubl manus, Rvk 2000.
- Andersson, Theodore M, *The Legend of Brynhild*, Islandica XLIII, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London 1980
- Andersson, Theodore M, "Goðafræði eða sagnfræði", i *Heiðin minni. Greinar um fórnar bókmenntir*, ed Haraldur Bessason & Baldur Hafstad, Heimskringla, Háskólafélag Máls og menningar, Rvk 1999
- Ármann Jakobsson, *Í leit að konungi. Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna*, Háskólaútgáfan, Rvk 1997
- Bagge, Sverre, *The Political Thought of The Kings' s Mirror*, Odense University Press 1987
- Bergsten, Staffan, "Inledning", i *Völsungasagan*, övers Inge Knutsson, Lund, Studentlitteratur 1991
- Gurevich, Aron, *Den svärfångade individen. Självsyn hos fornnordiska hjältar och medeltidens lärde i Europa*, övers Sthlm 1997
- Bumke, Joachim, *Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter 1-2*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 6 uppl, München 1992 (1986)
- Bengtsson, Herman, *Den höviska kulturen i Norden. En konsthistorisk undersökning*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell International Sthlm 1999
- Byock, Jesse L, *The Saga of the Volsungs. The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. Introduction and Translation by Jesse L Byock, University of California, Berkeley m fl 1990
- Clunies Ross, Margaret, *Hedniska ekon. Myt och samhälle i fornnordisk litteratur*, övers. Anthropos 1998 (1994)
- Duby, Georges, "The Courtly Model", i *A History of women II. The Silences of the Middle Ages*,

<sup>29</sup> Gottzman s. 2; Steinsland, Gro, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi. En analyse av hierogami-myten i Skirnismál, Ynglingatal och Hyndluljóð*. Oslo 1991, Solum Forlag ss 260-274; Ármann Jakobsson, *Í leit að konungi. Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna*, Háskólaútgáfan, Rvk 1997 s 159ff.

- ed Georges Duby mfl, The Belknap of Harvard University Press 1992
- Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, utg Magnús Finnbogason, Rvk; *Snorres Edda*. Översättning från isländskan och inledning av Karl G Johansson och Mats Malm, Fabel Bokförlag, Sthlm 1997
- Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, övers, San Diego m fl 1959
- Finch, R.G., 'The Treatment of Poetic Sources by the Compiler of Volsunga', *Saga-Book*, Vol XVI:4, Viking Society for Northern Research, 1965
- Fritzner, Johan, *Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog* 1-3, Kra 1886-1896
- Gottzman, Carola L, "Volsungasaga: Legendary History and Textual Analysis", i Fourth International Saga Conference, München 1979, i *Alþjóðlegt fornsagnarþing* 4:197
- Hallberg, Peter, "Some Aspects of the Fornaldarsögur as a Corpus", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 97, 1982
- Hanawalt, Barbara, "At the Margin of Women's Space in Medieval Europe", i *Matrons and Marginal Women in Medieval Society*, ed. Robert R Edwards & Vickie Ziegler, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 1995
- Hastrup, Kirsten, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland. An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1985
- Helle, Knud, *Norge blir en stat 1130- 1319*, Bergen m fl 1974
- Jochens, Jenny, *Old Norse Images of Women*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1996
- Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas und Sagas. Die mittelalterliche Literatur Islands*, övers, Helmut Buske Verlag, Hamburg 1994
- Kay, Sarah, *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance, Political Fictions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995
- Le Goff, Jaques, *The Medieval Imagination*. övers, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London 1988 (1985)
- Lönnroth, Lars, *Njáls saga. A Critical Introduction*, University of California, Berkeley m fl 1976
- Oscarsson, Ulla, *Överhogdalsbonaderna*, Jämtlands läns museum 1994
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben, *Norrønt Nid. Forestillingen om den umandige mand i de islandske sagaer*. Odense, Odense Universitetsforlag 1980
- Mitchell, Stephen A, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, Cornell University Press 1991
- Ney, Agneta, (tidigare Breisch), "Vapen och verbalt vett. Om genusidentitet i den norröna litteraturen", i *Manligt och omanligt i ett historiskt perspektiv*, Forskningsrådsnämnden Rapport 99:4, Sthlm 1999
- Norræn Fornkvæði. Islandska Samling af folkelige oldtidsdigte om Nordens guder og heroer almindeligt kaldet Sæmundar Edda hins fróða*, utg Sophus Bugge, Universitetsforlaget 1965; *Den poetiska Eddan*, övers Björn Collinder, 3 uppl, Uppsala 1992
- Rindal, Magnus, "Innleing", i *Norrøne bokverk. Soga om volsungane*. Omsett av Magnus Rindal, Oslo 1974
- Steinsland, Gro, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi. En analyse av hierogami-myten i Skirnismál, Ynglingatal och Hyndluljóð*, Oslo, Solum Forlag 1991
- Tarkka, Lotte, "Sense of the Forest. Nature and Gender in Karelian Oral Poetry", i *Gender and Folklore. Studia Fennica Folkloristica* 4, Helsingki 1998
- Torfi Tulinius, "La Matière du Nord". *Sagas légendaires et fiction dans la littérature islandaise, en prose du XIIe siècle*, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris 1995
- Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age. Narration and Representation in the Saga of Islanders*. Heimskringla, Mál og Menning Academic Division, Rvk 1998
- Viðar Hreinsson, "Ofbeldi, klám og kóngafólk. Goðsagnir í Völsunga sögu, i *Heiðin minni. Greinar um fórnar bókmennir*, ed Haraldur Bessason & Baldur Hafstad, Heimskringla, Háskólafélag Máls og menningar, Rvk 1999
- Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*. Udgivet for Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur ved Magnus Olsen. Khvn 1906-08, *Völsunga saga. Översättning Inge Knutsson. Inledning Staffan Bergsten*. Lund ,Studentlitteratur
- Þiðreks saga af Bern*, udgivet for Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur ved Henrik Bertelsen 1. Khvn 1905-11

# Woman or Warrior? The Construction of Gender in Old Norse Myth<sup>1</sup>

Lena Norman  
Harvard University

Dóttir Bjarmars var með barni þat var mærl einkar fögr. Sú var vatni ausin ok nafn gefit ok kölluð Hervör. Hon fæddisk upp með jarli ok var sterk sem karlar, ok þegar hon mátti sér nökkut, tamðisk hon meir við skot ok skjöld ok sverð en við sauma eða borða. (Bjarmar's daughter was with child; and it was a girl of great beauty. She was sprinkled with water, and given a name, and called Hervör. She was brought up in the house of the jarl, and she was as strong as a man; as soon as she could do anything for herself she trained herself more with a bow and shield and sword than with needlework and embroidery [HS,10]).<sup>2</sup>

This example from *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra* gives us an excellent opportunity to examine and understand the gender roles in what is traditionally

---

<sup>1</sup> Nagy argues in his forthcoming essay "Can Myth be saved?" that the word myth, deriving from *muthos*, can or should be used in its most extensive way and then the "reality of this *muthos* is the plot of narration." Nagy, forthcoming, pp. 1-8. I take this opportunity to thank Stephen Mitchell, William Layher, Joseph Harris and Malte Herwig for helpful comments on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra* 1960. Hereafter cited parenthetically as (HS) in the text.

called the patriarchal society of the Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> Hervör was a woman who trained herself for male duties, thus leaving behind conventions of female role behavior. It is true that she is only a literary fantasy but it is helpful to use literary fantasies as case studies in discussing the construction of gender.<sup>4</sup> As Clover argues, the literary fantasy, if collective, “has much to tell about the underlying tensions of the society that produced it” and that “when the subject is one such as woman, which the 'legitimate' sources treat only scantily, the literary fantasy takes on a special importance.”<sup>5</sup> Clover further argues for a one-sex cultural model of gender where focus is on the binary opposites of power/powerless instead of the question of male/female.<sup>6</sup> This model does not, however, offer an explanation of the transgressive behavior of females in Old Norse myth. I argue that it is also important to look at female sexuality and the two different images of the “erotic” or the “non-erotic” woman proposed by Linke about the birth of men and the cultural construction of gender.<sup>7</sup> In this paper I will explore these gender roles and the function of the remarkable phenomenon of the warrior woman dressed as a man in chain mail and the queen with her own army; the maiden king.<sup>8</sup> I also extend the notion of gender to include transgender.<sup>9</sup> Rather than distinguishing between discrete binary opposites as Clover and Linke do, the notion of transgender locates the human or social behavior in an intermediary space, the “somewhere” in-between the poles.

As the story about Hervör proceeds we are told that ”Hon gerði ok optar illt en gott” (She did more harm than good [HS,10]). When she was told to behave less badly she ran away to the woods and killed for her pleasure. When

---

<sup>3</sup> The question of gender has been widely discussed among scholars who represent different views of how to interpret this issue. Jochens notes the social construction of gender, she writes “the Christian message was a fundamentally liberating force that included women as well[...]women were better off during the Christian period and in Christian countries than they had been before and elsewhere.”(Jochens 1995, p. 2). Clover and Linke discuss the cultural image of gender and do not include Christianity in their arguments.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Clover 1986, p. 36. Mitchell also stresses the fact of looking at the sagas as a literary fantasy, maybe without a certain message about morality or education; however, the narratives still reflect the insight view of “the cultural and psychological dilemmas of their audience”. Mitchell 1991, pp. 126-127.

<sup>5</sup> Clover 1986, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Clover 1993, op cit.

<sup>7</sup> Linke 1992, pp. 265-288.

<sup>8</sup> The term maiden king and *meykongr* are from Whalgren’s dissertation: *The Maiden King in Iceland*, 1938.

<sup>9</sup> Transgender is a term used for someone who crosses the barriers of gender but not the ones of sex, i.e. someone who lives in the gender opposite to the one given by birth. This term is discussed by Feinburg 1996, pp. IX-XVII, 3-9, and Butler 1990, pp. vii-xii, 1-34. Feinburg notes that the binary opposites most commonly used with gender are not enough, and that the language is one of the barriers as there are only two pronouns for human beings, male or female. Feinburg also asks questions as to why societies only recognize two sexes and that people belonging to this group have to fight for their existence. Hence they call themselves Trans Warriors.

Bjarmarr, the jarl and Hervör's grandfather, heard of this he gathered his men and they seized Hervör and brought her home. She then stayed home, but still neglected the domestic duties associated with a woman. The servants grew tired of Hervör's behavior and told her the truth about her parentage: that her father Angantýr was of a lower class, that he had a reputation for being a berserk (HS,3). Hervör now wants to avenge her father who has been slain. In a poem she tells her grandfather how she will become like a man: "Skal skjótliga/um skör búa/blæju líni/áðr braut fari:/mikit býr í því,/er á morgin skal/skera bæði mér/skyrtu ok ólpu"(I will wrap swiftly /around my hair /a linen headgear /ere I hasten away; /much rests on it, /that when the morning comes /cloak and kirtle /be cut for me [HS,11]).

Hervör calls herself "Hervarðr" and departs to become the captain of a band of vikings. Her father is buried on Sámsey and "Hervarðr" goes ashore to meet her dead father and talk to him. He eventually gives her the magic sword Tyrfingr (HS,12-15), a clear token of male power. Both her appearance and behavior are now conforming to a male role model. Androgyny has been much discussed among scholars who note the significant difference between male and female androgyny, where the distinction is made between the negative moral of a man behaving or dressing like a woman, while females dressing like men are not considered to be as negative.<sup>10</sup> Both the Norwegian Gulaping Law and *Grágás*, the Icelandic law code, express the view that anyone who dresses like the opposite sex and women who wear weapons as a man must be punished.<sup>11</sup>

Ef kona klæðist karlkæðum eða sker sér skör eða fer með vopn fyrir beytni sakir, það varðar fjörbaugsgarð. Það er stefnumælt um karla ef þeir klæðast kvenna kæðnaðði (If a woman dresses in men's clothing or cut her hair like a man or uses weapon in a dangerous way, that should be punished by the lesser outlawry [fjörbaugr = life money]. It is the same punishment if a man dresses like a woman).<sup>12</sup>

A woman, however, who dressed like a man was mostly regarded as being headstrong or bold, a troublemaker.<sup>13</sup> The question is, then, if the authors of the sagas accepted women warriors or maiden kings as belonging to a different gender, as the narratives do not mention prosecution or punishment. Still, cross-dressing is considered to be something of a "problem" because the cultural

<sup>10</sup> Linke 1992, p.276.

<sup>11</sup> Keyser, R. and Much, P.A, eds. 1846-95. *Norges gamle Love undtil 1387*.

<sup>12</sup> Karlsson, Gunnar, ed. 1997. *Grágás* (Konungsbók), p. 125.

<sup>13</sup> In *Laxdæla saga* Þórðr Ingunnarson declares himself divorced from his wife Auðr who dresses like a man. This became a problem for Þórðr who asks Guðrún what the penalty was for a woman who dressed like a man. She answers him "Slíkt víti á konum at skapa fyrir þat á sitt hóf sem karlmanni, ef hann hefir höfuðsmátt svá mikla, at sjái geirvörtur hans berar, brautgangssök hvárttveggja" (that the same penalty applies to women in a case like that as to a man who wears neck opening so wide that his nipples are exposed both are grounds for divorce [*Laxdæla saga*, ch. 35]). Women dressed like men are called "karlkonur", this term, however, is not used for either Hervör, Þornbjörg or Brynhildr.

gender model mentioned earlier is seriously challenged when faced with androgynes and maiden kings which do not fit into the model of gender defined by binary opposites. Here transgender would be a better term for those who socially act in the intermediary sphere between the poles.<sup>14</sup>

If we now return to Hervör, we are told of a woman who was the captain of a band of vikings, who showed no intention to spend her life in the domestic sphere, but rather to revenge her slain father in battle. How was it possible for the audience to accept her change? The idea of using literary fantasies can be of great help in understanding the "underlying tensions" in the cultural model of gender roles.<sup>15</sup> Even if Hervör acts as the leader of the band of vikings, she is suspected of being a woman. King Guðmundr's remarks about Hervör's appearance indicate how complex a question it is to define gender. He says "mun yðr þykkja í manni þessum minni hefnd, en þér ætlið, því kvennaman ætla ek hann væra" (for your vengeance on this man will seem smaller than you now think, because it is my guess that he is a woman [HS,20]). The seminal point of this discussion resides in the changes back and forth in the socially-defined gender roles described in the narratives, and how the audience accepts Hervör's behavior as a man, but the opposite scenario would not be acceptable, according to the laws. And it should be noted how ambivalent the attitude is towards Hervör: is she a man, or is she a woman?<sup>16</sup>

Clover's one-sex cultural model suggests gender as consisting of two poles or binary opposites, and she plausibly suggests that instead of using the terms male/female, one should discuss power/powerless. Clover argues that the sex-gender system in general is rather different in the Germanic, and above all in the Scandinavian culture, as compared to other cultures in the Christian Middle Ages.<sup>17</sup> Linke, who in her essay argues for a model of gender similar to Clover's, also notes this difference, when arguing for the birth of men of two different kinds of mothers, the erotic mother and the non-erotic mother.<sup>18</sup> This difference also affects the offspring and Linke argues that the binary opposites of good/bad should also be included. Gender studies suggest that we examine carefully the information the narrative gives us about the circumstances under which the females who act like men are born. The connection between parents

<sup>14</sup> An exceptional example of crossing gender boundaries is to be found in *Flóamannasaga*. Þorgils needs to nurse a child, or the child will die. He decides to "skera mér geirvörtuna – ok svá var gört: fór fyrst ór blóð, síðan blanda, ok lét eigi fyrr af en ór fór mjólk, ok þar fæddiz sveinninn upp við þat" (he took a knife and pierced his nipple, and there came blood: then he let the child tug at it, and then there came water and milk, and he did not stop until milk came, and the boy was nursed upon it [*Flóamannasaga*, p. 43, 44]). Þorgils managed to keep the child alive, and he was only talked about as being a hero for his deed, not to be someone who must be punished for crossing the barriers of biological gender.

<sup>15</sup> Clover 1986, p.36.

<sup>16</sup> See earlier discussion about laws against men dressing as females, notes 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> Clover 1993, pp. 365-366.

<sup>18</sup> Linke 1992, pp. 265-288.

and children is in general rarely described in the narratives; with respect to women warriors, their relationship with their parents does not seem to be very close. Hervör's father, Angantýr, was dead even before she was born and the only description given about Hervör's mother, Sváfa, is that she married a berserk, about whom it was known that he and his brothers "illt eitt hafa gört" (have done nothing but evil [HS,4]). Could the fact that the author is telling us that Sváfa's "transgression" (i.e. crossing the social boundary and marrying someone who was not considered to be the perfect match) turned her into the erotic or bad mother who is connected with sexuality. This action in turn mandates that the offspring, Hervör, act in a way not connected to her biological gender, in contrast to male protagonists like Egill, Grettir and Skarpheðinn.<sup>19</sup> However, I argue that binary opposites – male/female, power/powerless, erotic/non erotic– in the model of gender roles are inadequate and that a focus on the intermediary sphere of transgender would bring us a better understanding of the construction of gender in the narratives.

With respect to gender, is it easier to define a maiden king or a woman warrior from the standpoint of the social construction of gender only rather than of biological gender. Several competing theories concerning how to interpret the question of gender are relevant to our discussion. Among feminist scholars, Scott argues for the importance of understanding the difference between biological and social gender, a view that anticipates in interesting ways Clover's cultural one-sex model of gender.<sup>20</sup> This theory would have been better applied in the case of Hervör if the author had described her as acting like a man throughout the saga. Hervör, however, never reaches the binary opposite of Clover's cultural model of gender roles, since she stays in between genders when acting as a man and then after being weary of raiding, she returns home to "settisk til hannyrðanáms" (do fine works with her hands [HS,20]).

The traditional image of gender in Viking Age Scandinavia is that of the woman as the keeper of keys of the household and the man as the one whom actively takes part in the realm outside the household.<sup>21</sup> There are, as we have seen, exceptions in the literature, such as the woman warrior, the maiden king, and other "traditional" headstrong women. Now I would like to address the differences between transgendered figures and the ones who retain femininity despite evil deeds.

In *Völsunga saga* we can find two strong women:<sup>22</sup> Brynhildr, the woman warrior, and Guðrún, who is headstrong but acts without chain mail.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> As discussed by Linke 1992, pp 265-288.

<sup>20</sup> Scott 1988b, pp. 3-49.

<sup>21</sup> Jochens 1995.

<sup>22</sup> *Völsunga saga* 1965, p. 35. Hereafter cited parenthetically as (VS) in the text

<sup>23</sup> Theodore Andersson discusses the problem of the central figures in *Völsunga saga*. Even though it seems like it is Sigurðr who would be the hero, Andersson argues that it is in fact Brynhildr who is the heroine of the saga. The title of the saga itself and the poems are a few of the

Brynhildr is presented as follows:

Sigurðr gekk í skjaldborgina ok sá at þar svaf maðr ok lá með öllum hervápnnum. Hann tók fyrst hjálminn af höfði honum ok sá at þat var kona. Hon var í brynju, ok var svá föst sem hon væri holdgróin. (Sigurd went inside the fort and saw a man there, asleep and lying in, full armor. First he removed the helmet from his head and saw that it was a woman. She had on a hauberk and it was as tight as if grown into the flesh [VS,35])

This description contradicts everything that a woman should be, namely a good mother in her own home. In this case we have a young woman dressed like a man, in a coat of mail, sleeping inside a fort. After waking up Brynhildr, Sigurðr tells her that he has heard of her beauty and wisdom, and now he wants to put these to the test (VS, 23). Surprisingly enough, Brynhildr tells us how she has fought in battles and won. After too many victories, Óðinn talks to Brynhildr, he: "kvað mik aldri síðan skyldu sigr hafa ok kvað mik giptask skulu. En ek strengða þess heit þar í mót at giptask engum þeim er hræðask kynni" ([he] said that I should never again win a victory, and that I was to marry. And in return I made a solemn vow to marry no one who knew the meaning of fear [VS, 35]). Here are we told not only about a woman who fights but also has contact with the mightiest of the Æsir, Óðinn. Óðinn reimposes the male order on the narrative by telling Brynhildr that she will not win a fight again and that she has to abandon the life of a warrior and become a wife and mother instead. She has to return to her gender role given by birth. Guðrún was also said to be beautiful, wise and courtly. However, she stays at home, and dreams about getting married. She is the one, of course, who will marry Sigurðr (VS,43-48). A comparison between the two women would indicate that Brynhildr is in the sphere of transgender and Guðrún is acting within the boundaries for her biological gender.

In *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* we are introduced to a woman acting as a maiden king; Þornbjörg, the daughter of King Eirík and Queen Ingigerð.<sup>24</sup> She is introduced as follows:

Hún var konu vænni ok vitari, þeria er menn vissu. Hún fæddist upp heima með feðr sínum ok móður. Svá hafa menn sagt af mey þessari, at hún var hverri konu kænni, þeiri er menn höfðu sprun af, um allt þat, er kvenmanns handa kom. Þar með vandi hún sik burtreið ok skilmast með skjöld ok sverð. Hún kunni þessa list jafnframt þeim riddurum, er kunnu vel ok kurteisliga at bera vápn sín (She was unusually good looking and intelligent, and thought there wasn't a girl to compare with her. She was brought up at home by her father and mother, and it's said she was better at all the feminine arts than any other woman. She used to tilt on horseback too, and learnt to fence with a sword and shield, mastering these arts as perfectly as any knight trained in the courtly skill of plying his weapon [HSG, ch. 4]).

---

discussed problems but also the change in focus from Brynhildr to Sigurðr in the end of the saga. Reasons for this could have been that the parts of the saga derived from different legends and the author/compiler's view of gender. Andersson 1980, pp.74-79.

<sup>24</sup> *Hrólfs Saga Gautrekssonar* hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as (HSG)

There is a slight difference between Hervör and Þornbjörg. They are differently introduced in the narratives: Þornbjörg has a “good” relationship with her parents, she learns all the female arts as a child, and she was better than any other woman. At the same time she practises male arts like horseback riding. Hervör, on the other hand, is never described as having spent time on female arts, not until she grew tired of raiding, then she went home and practised domestic skills (HS,20). However, they both fight like men in the liminal period between adolescence and womanhood, but they disappear differently from the narratives. Hervör returns home and starts to embroider while Þornbjörg once again enters the battlefield to rescue her husband. Wahlgren argues that the maiden king fits into a defined pattern: she is a young woman, unmarried, wise and beautiful. She turns down every proposal and she is capable of ruling a country on her own. A young male hero sets out to win her and does so, even though he will meet many difficulties before the end of the story.<sup>25</sup> However beautiful and bold the maiden kings and the woman warriors are said to be, they fight as men for a while but when the hero comes along and captures their hearts, they leave their roles as woman warriors. This description fits Þornbjörg perfectly. As a young woman she asks her father to let her rule a part of the country, to be able to both govern and command the men entrusted to her. She also tells her father:

Er þat enn í þessu máli, ef nokkurir menn biðja mín, sem ek vil ekki játa, þá er kíkara, at ríki yðvart sé í náðum af þeira ofsa, ef ek held ansvör í móti þeim (There’s one more point, if anyone asks to marry me and I don’t want him, there’ll be a better chance of your kingdom being left in peace if you leave the answers to me [HSG, ch. 4])

The description of maiden kings and woman warriors as being in a pre-pubertal state is noted by Jochens, who argues that lack of awareness of their own sexuality contributes to their not having found their "gender-identity" yet.<sup>26</sup> I agree with this conclusion to a certain extent, as the discovery of their sexuality is the reason for abandoning their lives as fighters, but I argue that it is necessary to define this period of existence in-between the poles, to focus on the discussion of transgender. These young women return home after having discovered their sexuality and they devote themselves to embroidering and other domestic tasks.

As for Hervör, she ceases to fight after having grown weary of being out with the band of vikings, and she returns home to “settisk til hannyrðanáms” (do fine works with her hands [HS,20]), even before she meets the husband to be. The story about Brynhildr in *Völsunga saga* is told a bit differently. Sigurðr tells her: "Engi finnsk þér vitrari maðr, ok þess sver ek at þik skal ek eiga, ok þú ert við mitt æði" (No one is wiser than you, and I swear it you I shall marry, and

<sup>25</sup> Wahlgren. 1938. Warrior women and “Maiden Kings” are also discussed by Jochens in her book *Old Norse Images of Women*, pp. 87-112.

<sup>26</sup> Jochens 1996, pp. 87-112.

we are ideally suited). She replies: “Þik vil ek helzt eiga, þótt ek kjósa um all men” (I should wish to marry you, even though I might have the choice of all the men there are). “Ok þetta bundu þau eiðum með sér” (And this they swore, each to the other (VS,40).

Brynhildr knows that she has to marry, as Óðinn earlier told her so. Does that mean that she has to change her life completely? She has so far not spent much time at home, she has not yet taken care of a household, and she is only familiar with and really good at being out in armor and fighting. However, after having opened her heart for Sigurðr she changes. In the following chapters of the saga we are told how Brynhildr returns home and that she: “sat í einni skemmu við meyar sínar. Hon kunni meira hagleik en aðrar konur. Hon lagði sinn borða með gulli ok saumaði á þau stórmerki er Sigurðr hafði gert, dráp ormsins ok upptöku fjórings ok dauða Regins” ([she] lived in her own quarters with her maidens. She was more skilled in the domestic arts than other women. She was working her tapestry with gold thread and embroidering on it the great deeds performed by Sigurðr, the slaying of the dragon, the seizure of the treasure and the death of Regin [VS, 42]). This is a completely different Brynhildr from the one we first met when she slept in her chain mail. Brynhildr now acts within the given roles for her gender, but problems will arise when someone wants to return to the role of gender given by birth after having acted outside the frames for the given model, in the sphere of transgender. We know by now that Brynhildr will not have a happy ending to her life, as told in the saga.

A similar story is told about Þornbjörg, who changes her name to King Þorberg. The saga even discusses her using the masculine pronoun about herself. King Hrólfur Gautrekssonar is advised to marry Þornbjörg. He gets her father's consent, as the father is unhappy with his daughter's masculine way of acting:

Nú með því at mér er hennar þessi framferð ekki at skapi, því at hún gerir af sér mikit ofbeldi, því at engi maðr skal hana þora at kalla öðruvísi en með konungs nafni, utan hann þoli af henni nokkut harðrétti. Nú ef þú vill sækja þessa konu þér til handa [...]svá kyrrir hjá öllum ykkrum samskiptum (I don't like her behavior at all, she keeps committing one injustice after another, and no one's allowed to call her anything but the name of king without getting a rough handling for it. If you're determined to win her at all cost, then [...], we're willing to give our consent.[HSG, ch. 9]).

King Hrólfur finally wins her heart and then she immediately returns home:

Gjarna viljum vér, at þú hættir styrjöld þessi, ok viljum vér, attu takir upp kvenligr atferðir ok farir í skemmu til móður þinnar. Síðan viljum vér gifta þik Hrólfri konungi Gautrekssyni, því at vér vitum enga hans jafningja hingat á Norðrlönd [H]Eptir þat gekk hún til skemmu, en gaf í vald Eireki konungi vápn þau, er hún hafði borit. Settist hún til sauma með móður sinni, ok var húnhverri mey fegri ok fríðari ok kurteisari, svá at engi fannst jafnfrið í norðrálfu heimsins. Hún var vitr ok vinsæl, málsnjöll ok spakráðug ok riklynd (The King said, 'We'd be very pleased if you'd stop this fighting and turn to feminine matters in your mother's boudoir. After that, we'd like to marry you to King

Hrolf Gautreksson, because we haven't come across his equal anywhere in Scandinavia.' [...] She went over to the budoir, handed her weapons over to King Eirik, and began working at embroidery with her mother. She was the loveliest, most polished and courteous woman in the whole of Europe intelligent, popular, eloquent and the best of advisers, but imperious too [HSG, ch.13]).

Þornbjörg's personality is completely changed, and she acts the powerless part if we use Clover's cultural model for gender that consists solely of binary opposites. She gives up her weapons and follows her husband. It is said that Þornbjörg and King Hrólfur came to love each other dearly. Indeed, this example fits into Wahlgren's ideas about the story of the maiden king with a happy ending. The story about Þornbjörg can be seen as an exception because in general the frames for the roles of gender are not flexible enough to allow a change in the way you act, as you cannot act both outside and inside of your group, and if you cannot be defined as belonging to one of the binary opposites, the intermediary space is where you can act before returning back to your biological gender, and in some cases, change gender completely.<sup>27</sup>

So far we have only looked at women who start out to act in a gender that is unrelated to body, outside their own biological gender, the sphere of transgender. Hervör, Brynhildr and Þornbjörg all dressed like men, had armor and weapons. Guðrún, on the other hand, is only presented as acting within the frames of the cultural model for gender. She is the unmarried daughter staying with her parents. As the saga proceeds, she acts differently, but she never leaves her domestic and feminine sphere. After Sigurðr's death, Guðrún remarries King Atli and moves to his court, but there is little love between them. Guðrún intrigues in the plot between her husband and her brothers, where her brothers finally get killed. Guðrún has two sons by King Atli, and she kills them to take revenge for her brothers. She tells her sons that she will kill them, and she slits their throats. When the king asks for his sons, Guðrún coldly tells her husband this:

Þú hefir misst þína sona, ok eru þeira hausar hér at borðkerum hafðir, ok sjálfr drakktu þeria blóð við vín blandit. Síðan tók ek hjörtu þeira ok steikta ek á teini, en þú azt. (You've lost your sons, and here are their skulls used as drinking cups and you yourself drank their blood mixed with wine. Then I took their hearts and roasted them on a spit and you've eaten them [VS,72]).

How cruel can Guðrún be? What woman can be without any feelings for her children and unable to show any compassion? She is, however, still acting within the frames for her biological gender, according to previous discussions, but she is not showing solidarity with her group, as a mother in general does not kill her children. Why is she not excluded from her own group of gender according to the model of binary opposites? One explanation for this must be that in whatever she does, she acts as a woman, and only so, and never enters

<sup>27</sup> Scott 1988a, pp. 43-44.

the sphere of transgender. She has never been a warrior in armor or a maiden king. She has never refused to marry or tried to rule a country, she is a woman who seeks revenge in the only way she can, and that is to kill what her husband loved most.

The most interesting part of the analysis of the woman warrior or the maiden king is not to look for a happy ending, an ending that would place them back within the role of acting female. I argue that it is necessary to look at what happens to them and their behavior when they let themselves feel love. After discovering and experiencing their own sexuality they return to their given place within society, the domestic sphere. They now act as wives and mothers, but it does not always work out for the best and the ending of the saga can be anything but happy. Then the question is if it is their acting within the concept of transgender that hinders them from returning to, and then acting within, the given roles for the biological gender. Wahlgren writes that the happy consummation does not come until the very end of the story, when the couple is finally united. Our examples can be used to combine Clover's cultural model for gender— where the binary opposites are not the biological gender — with the discussion of Linke's model for the non-erotic or the erotic mother, and finally look for the binary opposites of good and bad. This combination would lead us to the discussion of the intermediary space between genders, transgender, i.e. a new interpretation of gender that will lead us to new conclusions and hopefully to a better understanding of gender in the narratives from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### Bibliography:

- Andersson, Theodore M. 1980. *The Legend of Brynhild*. Islandica XLIII. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Clover, Carol. 1986. "Maiden Warriors And Other Sons". *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85: 35-49.
- 1993. "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe". *Speculum* 68: 363-387.
- Feinberg, Leslie. 1996. *Transgender Warriors*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Finch, R.G., ed. 1965. *Völsunga saga, The Saga Of The Volsungs*. Edited by Sigurður Nordal and G. Turville-Petre. London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson (Printers) Ltd.
- Jochens, Jenny. 1995. *Women in Old Norse Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- 1996. *Old Norse Images of Women*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jónsson, Finnur, eds. 1932. *Flóamannasaga*. København: Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur.
- Jónsson, Guðni and Vilhjálmsson, Bjarni, eds. 1944. *Hrólfs Saga Gautrekssonar*. Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda 3. Reykjavík: Bokaútgáfan Forni.
- Karlsson, Gunnar, Kristján Sveinsson and Mörður Árnason, eds. 1997. *Grágás*. Reykjavík: Mál og Menning.
- Keyser R. and P. A. Munch, eds. 1846-95. *Norges gamle Love undtil 1387*. Oslo: Chr. Gröndahl.
- Linke, Uli. 1992. "The theft of blood, the birth of men: cultural constructions of gender in medieval Iceland." *From Sagas to Society*. Ed. Gísli Pálsson. Hisarlik Press. PP, 265-288.
- Magnusson, Magunus, and Pálsson, Hermann, transl. 1969. *Laxdæla saga*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

- Mitchell, Stephen A. 1991. *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Nagy, Gregory. Forthcoming. "Can Myth be Saved?"
- Pálsson, Hermann, and Edwards, Paul, transl. 1972. *Hrolf Gautreksson; a Viking Romance*. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press.
- Scott, Joan Wallace. 1988a. "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference". *Feminist Studies* 14: 33-50.
- 1988b. *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York & Oxford: Columbia University Press.
- Sveinsson, Einar Ól, ed. 1934. *Laxdæla saga*. Íslensk fornrit 5. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Tolkien, Christopher, ed. 1960. *Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra, The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*.
- Edited by Sigurður Nordal and G. Turville-Petre. London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne and Johannesburg: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.
- Vigfusson, Gudbrandur and Powell, York F, eds and trans. 1905. *Origines Islandicae: A collection of the More Important Sagas and other Native Writings Relating to the Settlement and Early History of Iceland*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. II: 629-72.
- Wahlgren, Erik. 1938. *The Maiden King In Iceland*. Ph.D. Diss. Chicago: University of Chicago Libraries.

## *goð geyja*: the limits of humour in Old Norse-Icelandic paganism

Richard North

University College London

Laughing at religion was easy for medieval Christians, whose Twelfth Night and Shrovetide revels seasonally encouraged the parody of God's priests and scriptures (Screech, pp. 220-61). Here it is presumably the worshipper's, not the agnostic's, familiarity with the divine which 'breeds innocent humour within groups who share common knowledge and common assumptions' (*ibid.*, p. 228). Within religious groups the humour is innocent even when propriety is transgressed, for 'without the veneration there would be no joke' (*ibid.*, p. 232), and the common set of beliefs amplifies a shared response to jokes, be they ever so irreverent (cf. Cohen, pp. 25-9). The joker elicits the knowledge of others, who then find themselves contributing the background that will make the joke work; if it works (even tastelessly), the audience joins him in its response (even unwillingly) and both find themselves 'a community, a community of amusement' (*ibid.*, p. 40). And yet there are some who fail to see the joke, who might regard religious irreverence as blasphemous. To what extent heathen jokers could blaspheme is a question I shall face here

But I shall start with a Christian humourist, Hjalti Skeggjason, whose

brother-in-law, Ísleifr Gizurarson, became the first bishop of Skálholt. In his *Íslendingabók* (c. 1125), Ari says that Hjalti was sentenced in the Alþing to the lesser outlawry of *goðgá*. *En þat vas til þess haft, at hann kvað at lögbergi kviling þenna* ('for blasphemy. And it was held as grounds, that he had recited this ditty at the law-rock'):

Vil ek eigi goð geyja: grey þykki mér Freyja.

*I don't want to mock the gods (the gods to bark); to me Freyja seems to be a bitch* (ÍF 1, 15; cf. Skj B I 131)

Hjalti would have made his joke in 998, a year before Iceland became Christian by an act of the same parliament. Ari's word *goðgá*, which occurs only here and in the same story in *Njáls saga*, ch. 104 (c. 1290; ÍF 12, 269), is usually thought to mean 'blasphemy', which, by the laws of Moses or Justinian at least, was punishable by death. Yet Hjalti was only exiled for three years. By the standards of Icelandic Christian law (the heathen laws having perished), three years for a defamer was mild. *Grágás* (c. 1119) stipulates full outlawry for even half a verse that contains either insult, or praise that the poet can turn into an insult (*Scog gang varðar ef maðr yrkir vm man hálfá víso þa er löstr er í eða haðung eða lof þat er hann yrkir til haðungar*; p. 183 (§238)). By calling Freyja a bitch, Hjalti had charged her with promiscuity (*ergi*). That much is clear from the symbolic *grey* in *Hávamál* that *Billings mæ*r (probably the 'wife of Billings') leaves in her bedroom as her substitute for sex with Óðinn (*Háv* 101), who regards the bitch as one *hýðung* ('humiliation') among several that his promised date inflicted on him (*Háv* 102). A charge of promiscuity, when made against men as passive homosexuality, entitled the defamed party to kill the slanderer (cf. Ström, pp. 4-8). So it is not clear that we can equate Hjalti's *goðgá* with an offence as severe as *níð* ('slander'), which, when made against gods, might have counted as 'blasphemy'.

The word *goðgá* not only suggests a lesser category, but undermines the idea of heathen piety itself. *Goðgá* is not attested in the legal texts and means 'mocking the gods', its second element deriving from *geyja* ('to bark; mock'). Hjalti plays on the ambiguity of this word, unexpectedly turning *goð* from the verb's object to its subject, as if beginning with an avowal of good behaviour among heathens after an earlier transgression against them. His words *goð geyja* are syntactically analogous to a construction in *Háv* 135, in which a man is advised to be kind to beggars: *gest þú né geyia né á grind hrækir* ('neither mock a guest nor drive him to the gate'). The idea of *goðgá*, then, was not only to scorn the gods, but also to expel them from one's society. Hjalti's fellow Icelanders, who did not see his joke, expelled him from theirs. In this light, it seems to be the corollary of *goð geyja* that Norse heathens saw their gods as guests at the feast, where the same questions of precedence (*hvar skal sitia síá?*, *Háv* 2), food (*Háv* 3-4), attentiveness (*þunno hlióði þegir*, *Háv* 7) and

squabbling (*órir gestr við gest, Háv 32*), would arise as for humans. It is hard to see much piety in these circumstances. Even Loki, the gods' professional joker, is not killed but outlawed when he charges Freyja with promiscuity in Ægir's feast in *Lokasenna* (*Ása ok álfa, er hér inni ero, hveir hefir þinn hór verit*, 'Of Æsir and elves who are here within each one has been your bed-fellow': *Lok 30*). This is true, in a sense, and Freyja makes fun of her own mystery to Þórr when she turns down his request that she wed Prymr in the land of the giants: *Mic veiztu verða vergiarnasta* ('you'll know then that I really have become the man-craziest woman alive', *Prymskviða 13*). These are poems probably from the Christian era, from the eleventh and twelfth or thirteenth centuries respectively. But the fact that Hjalti walked away from Freyja in 998, even while his judges knew her cult to be under threat, probably means that the religion of these Eddic poets hardly matters, because Icelandic heathens knew neither blasphemy nor veneration, two faces of the devout religious coin, as Christians understand these things.

'Heathen piety' for Norsemen must be redefined. There appear to be no surviving hymns to Norse gods, although Vetrliði's invocation of Þórr, a fragment, may be one (*Skj B I, 127*). As the poetry alludes to the gods with a focus on exploits, not attributes, perhaps heathens had a fear of litigation similar to that which directs skalds in *Grágás* to compose neither praise nor blame of a man (*vm maN löst ne löf, §238*). But that even adds to the Norse gods' humanity. And when they all die in Ragnarök, it is clear that they express not the failure of godhead but man at his best (*Vafþrúðnismál 52-3, Voluspá 53-7*). Human embodiments for the divine are not only standard in Norse mythology, but also fundamental, in that Þórr personifies 'thunder', Ullr 'brilliance', Frigg 'love', and so on. The inference from these names is that heathens gave human shapes to natural and abstract phenomena in order to deal with them as gods. Portraying men as gods, the other way about, is also integral to Norse poetry, in which heathen skalds sometimes styled their patrons as gods and regularly used divine names as *heiti* for humans and giants. Yet for gods the drawback to this two-way flow of influence is that weakness as well as strength attends the human form. The poet of *Lokasenna* plays by this rule, in that Loki's time-calling technique is to deconstruct the gods by moralizing their mysteries as flaws of character. So Freyja's fertility becomes nymphomania, Njörðr's oceanic process deviancy, Óðinn's quest for an avenger a matter of effeminacy (st. 30, 34, 24). As Frigg says to Loki, *firriz æ forn roç firar* ('let men always shun old mysteries', *Lok 24; pace Dronke, p. 338*): humans should not know too much, lest they end up unravelling the powers on which they depend. Even Þórr stands and falls by his humanity, and not only in *Lokasenna*. His first duel with the world serpent is treated heroically in *Ragnarsdrápa 14-20* (c. 850), *Húsdrápa 3-6* (c. 990), Eysteinn's and Gamli's verses (?c. 1000), if not in at least three Viking Age stone reliefs (McKinnell, figs. 6-8). But his anxious time in Skrymir's giant glove, in which he dared neither sneeze nor fart, figures

unflatteringly in *Hárbarðsljóð* 26 (?s. x) and in *Lok* 60, as well as in Snorri's tale of Útgarða-Loki in *Gylfaginning* (cf. Faulkes 1982, pp. 37, 67). Snorri's jokes are Christianized embellishments, but there is a suspicion that heathens had many stories in which they could laugh at Þórr besides other gods (cf. McKinnell, pp. 80-5).

To turn suspicion into likelihood, we must look for evidence in Scaldic verses with dates and contexts in the century preceding Hjalti's ditty in c. 998. *Haustlǫng* is a work of mythology; it was probably composed in c. 900 by Þjóðólfr of Hvinir, and possibly for Þorleifr inn spaki, a chieftain of Hordaland (North, pp. xxxi-xli). In what survives, Þórr is treated with affection, as he races towards Hrungrnir (st. 14-20); but in the first tale, Loki, Hýnir and particularly Óðinn are treated with mockery (st. 2-6). When Þjazi, in eagle's form, asks them for some roast ox from their cooking fire, Óðinn fails to see the risk:

Fljótt bað foldar dróttinn Fárbauda mög vára  
þekkiligr með þegnum þrymseilar hval deila,  
en af breiðu bjóði bragðvíss at þat lagði  
ósvífrandi ása upp þjórhloti fjóra. (st. 5)

*Swiftly the handsome lord of the land [Óðinn, Earth's husband] bade Fárbaudi's boy [Loki] deal out the whale of the cracking rope of spring-times [whale of the traces: ox] among the thegns, and after that the Æsir's prank-wise disobliger [Loki] served up four bull-portions from the broad table.*

With beef on a table, Loki as a bad-tempered serving boy and Óðinn as a naively festive host in a retinued hall, Þjóðólfr responds to the situation by framing a conceit that gives a human bathos to his gods. He has already called them *vélsparir varnendr goða* ('defenders of the gods economizing on trickery', st. 4), so perhaps they deserve the indignity. But there is no doubt that his comparison mocks them. No tale survives to tell us that Þjóðólfr's host thought his joke on Óðinn fell flat; the initial survival of this work might suggest that he laughed at it. The title and vocabulary of *Haustlǫng* ('harvest-long [lay]') show that this poem was probably made for an autumn festival, in which the laughter was presumably communal.

It was probably in Trøndelag in c. 960 that Kormakr composed *Sigurðardrápa* in honour of Earl Sigurðr of Hlaðir. With the exception of effectively two stanzas quoted in Snorri's *Hákonar saga góða*, the stanzas of this work are strewn about his *Edda* (I follow the sequence in *Skj* B I, 69-70, while quoting from Faulkes (1998) and breaking up st. 6 as st. 6 and 7):

Heyri sonr á (Smrgr) sannreynis (fentanna  
orr greppa lætk uppi jast-Rín) Haralds (mína). (*SnE* vs. 292)

Meiðr er mǫrgum æðri morðteins í dyn fleina.  
Hjorr fær hildiborrurum hjarl Sigurði jarli. (*ibid.* vs. 211)

Eykr með ennidúki jar\_hljótr díafjarðar  
breyti, hún sá er beinan bindr. Seið Yggr til Rindar. (*Ibid.* vs. 12,  
308)

Svall, þá er gekk með gjallan Gauts eld hinn er styr beldi  
glæðfæðandi Gríðar, gunnr. Komsk Urðr ór brunni. (*Ibid.* vs. 241)

Hróðr geri ek of mög mæran meir Sigrøðar fleira;  
haptscenis galt ek hánum heið. Sitr Þórr í reiðum. (*Ibid.* vs. 301)

Hafit maðr ask né eskis afspring með sér þingat  
fésæranda at færa fats. Véltu goð Þjaza. (*ÍF* 26, 168, vs. 68)

Hver myni vés við valdi vægja kind of bægjask?  
þvít fúr-Roðni[r] fagnar fens. Vá Gramr til menja. (*ibid.*)

Algildan bið ek aldar allvald of mér halda  
ýs bifvangi Yngva ungr. Fór Hroptr með Gungni. (*SnE* vs. 21)

1. Let the lively son of the true tester of Haraldr [Earl Sigurðr] hear! (Being a generous man) I will let my yeast-Rhine of the Sýr [Freyja] of the poets of the fen-teeth [rock-poets' (:giants')] Freyja's (:Gunnlōð's) yeast-Rhine: mead of poetry: poem] be heard.

2. The tree of the murder-twig [sword's tree: warrior: Sigurðr] is better than many a man in the din of arrows. The sword gets dominion for battle-keen Earl Sigurðr.

3. The land-obtainer honours the provider of the deities' fjord [:poetry] with a forehead-canvas [:head-band?], he who binds the mast-top straight. Yggr [terrifier: Óðinn] bewitched Rindr.

4. Battle swelled, when he who has brought about war, the feeder of Gríðr's mount [giantess' mount: wolf], advanced with the shrieking fire of Gautr [Óðinn's fire: swords]. Urðr [fate] came out of her spring.

5. Even more glory, furthermore, I perform for the renowned son of Sigurðr [Earl Hákon]; him I have paid the wages of the gods' ?reconciler [:poetry]. Þórr sits in his chariot.

6. Let no man have food-dish or the bowl's offspring to take to the house of the man who inflicts wounds on his own vat's wealth. The gods tricked Þjazi.

7. Which man's son would allow himself to quarrel with the ruler of the sanctuary? for it is the prince of the marsh-fire who gives the welcome [:gold-giver: Earl Sigurðr]. Gramr [:Sigurðr Fáfnisbani's sword] fought for necklaces.

8. I who am young bid the fully-endowed power-wielder of the people of Ingvi-freyr [:men of Þrændalqg] to hold over me his bow's quivering slope [:hand]. Hroptr [Óðinn] took Gungnir on campaign.

Each stanza ends with a throw-away comment consisting of five syllables, an effect which Snorri, creating his own in *Háttatal*, calls *hjástælt* ('abuttet'), adding that *skal orðtak vera forn minni* ('the expression must be old proverbial statements', text: Faulkes, 1991: 10; cf. Faulkes 1987: 176). Turville-Petre may be wrong when he says that these *minni* 'have nothing to do with the context' (p. 46). It is pretty clear that Earl Sigurðr is identified with Óðinn in st. 3 and 8, in which earl and poet in the main stanza are juxtaposed with Óðinn plus another subject in the *minni*. The inference of st. 3 seems to be that the poet, honoured as he is by the earl in a public ceremony, is as terrified as Rindr was when Yggr, with enormous difficulty (cf. Saxo's tale of Rinda), made her the mother of Váli; in st. 8, Kormakr makes himself the earl's instrument as much as Gungnir is Óðinn's spear. If we accept these correspondences, the earl is identifiable with Óðinn in other places too. Given the focus on the earl's *hjorr*

(‘sword’) in st. 2, the sword-kenning *Gauts eldr* (‘Gautr’s fire’) suggests that Sigurðr himself is Gautr (Óðinn) in st. 4, so wild in battle that Urðr herself comes out to register the dead. Sigurðr, the earl who bestows his wealth on unlimited numbers of guests in st. 5, is probably ribbed there for his unquestioning bounty in the proverb *Véltu goð Þjazi* (‘the gods tricked Þjazi’). After all, it was Þjazi who tricked the *vélsparu* gods when Óðinn offered him an ox-portion in *Haustlög* 5, even if the gods just managed to survive by having Loki trick Iðunn back and by killing Þjazi (cf. *vélum leiða mey aptr*, *ibid.* 11). The Þjazi-proverb must mean ‘don’t be too trusting’: a jest about prodigality. But then, in the st. 7 which does follow st. 6, Kormakr turns on the gentry with *vá Gramr til menja* (‘Gramr fought for necklaces’): each freeloader at Sigurðr’s table, like Kormakr, may expect to become his sword, his foot-soldier, in the battles by which this Óðinn-hypostasis seizes yet more treasure. Kormakr does not forget the earl’s son in st. 5, on whom he claims to load even more praise: *Sitr Þórr í reiðum* (‘Þórr sits in his chariot’: i.e. ‘help is coming’). If Earl Sigurðr is flattered as Óðinn, it follows that Kormakr meant to style his up-and-coming son as Þórr.

Hákon became Þórr’s more serious hypostasis when, as earl of his father’s region and ruler over most of Norway (c. 978-95), he consolidated his power after his victory against the Danes in Hjørungavágr in c. 985. It is thought that Eilífr’s *Þórsdrápa* was one of many works composed then in his honour, in which Þórr and the giants can be read as an allegory of Hákon in action against the comic Danes and their allies (Davidson, pp. 500-40). In this baroque masterpiece Þórr wades across a torrent on his way to see the giant Geirrðr in his cave. The flood is rising because of Gjálp, the giant’s daughter, who straddles the river the better to cascade into it from higher up (so Snorri, *SnE* 24-5). There is one thing left for Þórr to do (*SnE* vs. 79):

Har\_vaxnar lét (WT; R sér) herðir hallands of sik falla  
 (gatat maðr njótr in neytri njarð-ráð fyr sér) (-)gjarðar;  
 þverrir lét, nema þyrri (Þórs barna) sér Marnar  
 snerriblóð, til svíra salþaks megin vaxa. (st. 7)

*The temperer of the land of the whetstone [:sword-temperer: warrior: Þórr] dropped his hard-grown (strength-) belt [f. pl. acc.] about himself; the possessor of the (strength-) belt [f. sg. gen.; Þórr] had not learnt as a man [cf. lengi man sá er ungr getr] Njorðr’s recourse to be the more useful option; the diminisher of the ogre’s (/Þorn’s) children [:giants] declared that unless Mírn’s swift-blood [urine: river] dried up, his power would grow to the peak of the hall-hatch [:to heaven] itself. (pace Davidson, p. 522).*

I take the prefix *njarð-* to have two meanings and the word *gjarðar* two cases and roles; thus *njótr* can go into the second clause in apposition to *maðr*, without competing with *herðir* in the first clause, while neither *maðr* nor *herðir* need be emended (as in *Skj B I*, 141). The consensus is for a sg. compound *njarðgjörð* (‘strength-belt’, with Njorðr’s name in abstract form) in tmesis, but in a poem of so many facets there is no reason why *njarð-* cannot also

compound with *ráð*, its neighbour ('Njörðr's recourses'; cf. Kock, § 449). The meaning would be that Þórr is too warlike to do what Njörðr would have done in his place, swallow the giantess's urine. Loki charges Njörðr with this refinement in *Lok* 34 (*Hymis meyjar hofðu þik at hlandtrogi ok þér í munn migo*, 'Hymir's daughters had you as a piss-trough and made water into your mouth', Dronke, p. 340), whereby the river-drinking ocean is scorned as a patrician deviant. This is the human perspective Eilífr appears to invoke for Njörðr in his poem, whose cult may become marginal (cf. \*Hallfreðr's claim to have left him a year before the other gods: *fjörð lét ek af dul Njarðar*; Turville-Petre, p. 72; cf. *Skj* B I, 159, 9). There is no disrespect for Þórr in *Pórsdrápa*, who is fashioned into a more military hero than his prototype in *Haustlög*; but his prestige in *Pórsdrápa* 7 still seems to come at another god's expense.

If Hákon could laugh at Njörðr's mystery in one poem, it seems that he was ready to make even more fun of Óðinn in another. *Hákonardrápa*, probably of Hallfreðr, lavishly describes a marriage between Earl Hákon and Norway. This poem must be reconstructed from the scattered stanzas that appear to belong to it in Snorri's *Edda* (*Skj* B I, 147-8), so no claims can be based on stanzaic sequence, although the idea contained in st. '3-6' is clear enough (cf. Davidson; Ström 1981, pp. 452-56):

Sannyrðum spenr sverða snarr þiggjandi viggjar  
barhadda\_a byrjar biðkván und sik Priðja. (*SnE* vs. 10)

Því hykk fleygjanda frakna (ferr jörð und menþverri)  
ítra eina at láta Auðs systur mjök trauðan. (*ibid.* vs. 121)

Ráð lukusk, at sá síðan snjallráðr konungs spjalli  
átti einga dóttur Ónars viði gróna. (*ibid.* vs. 118)

Brei\_leita gat brúði Báleygs at sér teygða  
stefnir stöðvar hrafna stála ríkismálum. (*ibid.* vs. 119)

3. The brisk receiver of the steed of the following wind [ship's pilot] entices beneath himself with the true messages of swords the barley- (pine-cone)-wimpled waiting-wife of the Third One [Óðinn].

4. For this reason I think that the spear-caster [Hákon] (Earth goes down on the man who diminishes his store of necklaces) would be hugely unwilling to leave the gleaming sister of Auðr [earth] alone.

5. The deal closed in such a way that, afterwards, the king's eloquent conversational confidant took possession of the only daughter, who was grown with / in (back-)woods, of Ónarr [Norway].

6. The broad-featured bride of Furnace-Eye [Óðinn's bride: Norway] was lured by the harbour-ravens' [ships'] captain to himself by the kingdom-building words of his steel blades.

Óðinn's union with Jörð had engendered Þórr; and his marriage with Norway, in particular, is hailed in Eyvindr's *Háleygjatal* of c. 985 (Ström 1981, pp. 446-8). But while Hallfreðr attributes a *hieros gamos* role to Óðinn in *Hákonardrápa*, he characterizes this god rather differently from Eyvindr, as a

‘third-party’ (*Þriði*) ‘furnace-eyed’ (*Báleygr*) husband, whose deception by a bored peasant wife (*biðkván; viði gróna; breiðleita brúði*) follows on from her being sweet-talked (*snjallráðr; teygða -málum*) by a passing ship’s captain into taking his necklaces (*menþverri*). It is odd enough that Hallfreðr uses this ribaldry to convey Hákon’s conquest of Norway. But why does he mock Óðinn while doing so? How, is easy enough: Óðinn is known to be cuckolded by his brothers (*Lok* 26). But Óðinn was also acclaimed as Hákon’s ancestor, and if anything, Hallfreðr’s mockery of this god is even sharper than Þjóðólfr’s nearly a century earlier in *Haustlǫng*.

Whatever the sequence of st. ‘3-6’ of *Hákonardrápa*, the poet’s emphasis on the earl’s victories as a sexual conquest is so strong there that it suggests Hákon wished to sanctify real-life coercions as an institution of kingship. The historical records of Hákon in the closing years of his reign do show him to have made peripatetic use of his subjects’ wives and daughters through the fjords of western Norway (cf. *ÍF* 26, 293-6). Perhaps for this reason, *Hákonardrápa* may be dated to c. 990, a few years before Earl Hákon’s wronged subjects overthrew him (cf. *SnE* 158). Its style is confident, and in st. ‘3-4’ the poet appears to identify Hákon with Ingvi-freyr in his predatory role in *Skírnismál*. Three elements within Hallfreðr’s st. 3 (the horse (*viggr*), sword (*sverð*) and the barley-wimpled woman (*barrhǫdduð*)) connect Hákon with Freyr, whose emissary Skírnir, in order to secure a giantess for his master, rides the god’s horse (*Skí* 8-10), wears his sword (*Skí* 23) and relays Gerðr’s promise to meet Freyr in *Barri* (‘barley’, *Skí* 41). With Norway’s being *ítr* in st. 4, Hallfreðr’s text is also reminiscent of Iðunn, whose arms are *ítrþvegnir* (‘gleaming washed’) when she embraces her brother’s killer in *Lok* 17 (just as Gerðr fears to do in *Skí* 16). These are traces of older mythologems, but in *Hákonardrápa* they appear to reflect a shift in the earl’s politics by which he intended to revive the sexual privilege of archaic kingship. To do that, Hákon would probably have had to sideline Óðinn. The Freyr-ideology would have been a mistake, however, given Þórr’s overriding popularity in the Viking age (cf. McKinnell, pp. 57-86). *Þórsdrápa* bears witness to a solidarity between Hákon and his people which *Hákonardrápa* may show him in the process of losing.

If these examples show wit at the expense of different deities, it can also be inferred that a heathen poet could mock one god from the relative safety of being friends with another. *Hárbarðsljóð* is of course a case where Þórr’s ‘slave’ adherents (*þræla kyn*, st. 24) are no match for Óðinn’s ‘earls’ (*iarla*, *ibid.*). In the more political context of occasional verse, however, Þórr generally comes out on top. He is more central to the harvest than either Óðinn or Loki in *Haustlǫng*; Njǫrðr can be mocked without fear of offending him in *Þórsdrápa*; although Óðinn, and perhaps Þórr, have lost prestige to Freyr in *Hákonardrápa*. With each shift of allegiance the pagan community is configured differently. That there were squabbles between cults is suggested by the Vanir-Æsir cult-

war (*Vsp* 23), the Óðinn-Þórr antagonism in *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Gautreks saga* (ch. 7), even an Óðinn-Freyr rivalry in the background of *Víga-Glúms saga*. But the community itself remained intact, even in the early days of a new god. When Ulfr mocks Þorvaldr veili, who had asked him c. 998 to murder the missionary Þangbrandr, as the Þórr marooned on the other side of Hárbarðr's fjord —

Tekka ek, sunds þótt sendi sannreynir boð, tanna  
hvarfs við hleypiskarfi, Hárbarðs véa fjarðar; (ÍF 12, 263)

*I'm not going to accede to the headlong cormorant of the teeth's vanishing [mouth's bird: fly], though the invitation is sent from a true-tester of the strait of the fjord of Hoary-Beard's sanctuaries [a poet (=Þorvaldr); also a baffled Þórr].*

— he makes fun of Þórr as well. But it is unlikely that he would do so without first shifting his allegiance to Christ. That also Hjalti had the Christian community to go to, is clear from his mockery of Freyja as a 'bitch' (*grey*). Hereby the gods are dogs, their interaction rather like a scene in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (c. 1014), in which Archbishop Wulfstan describes a gang of men who buy a woman and use her *an æfter oðrum, and ælc æfter oðrum, hundum geliccast, þe for fylþe ne scrifað* ('one after the other, and each man after the other, most like dogs, that have no care for filth'; Bethurum, p. 270.88-9). In this way Hjalti's conceit appears to be Christian, and one made against a relatively minor target. It is worth asking what penalty would have come from the law-rock if Hjalti had provoked Þórr.

To sum up, it seems that heathens could make jokes against Norse gods without breaking any limits, so long as they were ready to use traditional means of playing off one against the other. Rulers could be styled as different gods, and gods as variously flawed people, and it is likely that heathen communities that laughed at these permutations constantly changed configuration while keeping the same unfenced openness. The real blasphemy had to embody a foreign community, and to that extent alone, Hjalti's *goð geyja* may be our one surviving example.

## References

- Bethurum, Dorothy, ed., *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957)  
 Cohen, Ted, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (Chicago, 1999)  
 Davidson, Daphne L., ed., trans. and comm., 'Earl Hákon and his Poets', unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford 1983  
 Dronke, Ursula, and Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, Gerd Wolfgang Weber and Hans Bekker Nielsen, ed., *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre* (Odense, 1981)  
 Dronke, Ursula, ed., trans. and comm., *The Poetic Edda: Vol. II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford, 1997)  
 Faulkes, Anthony, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (Oxford, 1982)  
 Faulkes, Anthony, trans., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*, Everyman Classics (London, 1987)  
 Faulkes, Anthony, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Háttatal* (Oxford, 1991)  
 Grágás: *Konungsbók: efter Vilhjálmur Finsens udgave 1852* (Odense, 1974)  
 ÍF 1: Jakob Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, Íslensk Fornrit 1, 2 vols. [printed as

- one] (Reykjavík, 1986)
- ÍF 12: Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk Fornrit 12 (Reykjavík, 1954)
- ÍF 26: Bjarni A. Albjarnarson, ed., *Heimskringla I*, Íslenzk Fornrit 26, 3rd ed. (Reykjavík, 1979)
- McKinnell, John, *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*, with an appendix by Maria Elena Ruggerini (Roma, 1994)
- Neckel, Gustav, and Hans Kuhn, ed., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, I Text, 5th ed. (Heidelberg, 1983)
- North, Richard, ed., *The Haustlíng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir* (London, 1997)
- Screech, M. A., *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* (Harmondsworth, 1997)
- Skj: Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, A I, II, B I, II (København and Kristiania, 1912-15)
- SnE: Faulkes, Anthony, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, 2 vols., Viking Society for Northern Research (London, 1998)
- Ström, Folke, 'Ní\_, ergi and Old Norse Moral Attitudes', *Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture 10 May 1973* (London, 1974), 1-20
- Ström, Folke, 'Poetry as an Instrument of Propaganda. Jarl Hákon and his Poets', in Dronke ed., 1981, pp. 440-58
- Turville-Petre, E. O. G., *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, 1976)

A verse attributed to Eyvindr *skáldaspillir*;  
and again the origin of *dróttkvætt*

Richard Perkins

University College London

The verse in question, (*L\_tum langra nóta*, etc.) in chapter 16 of *Haralds saga gráfeldar* in *Heimskringla* will first be analysed in detail. Then two aspects of it are discussed which have relevance to the propositions that: (a) skaldic language evolved from *noa*-language; and (b) that *dróttkvæðr þátr* had its origin in rowing chants. In connection with (a), material from e.g. Malaysia (Sarawak) will be adduced, in connection with (b), certain modern verses from Iceland and the Faroes. The overall status of (b) as a proposition will then be reviewed. Finally, the fact that the verse in question is addressed to a woman will be given attention.

# Swords, Shields and Disfigurement: Symbols of Law and Justice in Norse and Modern Mythology

Sandra Petersson

Faculty of Law, Victoria University of Wellington

This paper compares Norse symbols of law and justice to their modern counterparts. Although we now live in a digital age, law remains an oral narrative, carrying on the tradition of the *lqsgogumaðr*. Despite the supposed importance of the written letter of the law, law retains the use of visual symbols.

## Old Norse/Icelandic Myth in Relation to *Grettis saga*

Russell Poole

Massey University

1. *Grettis saga* is exceptionally rich in both psychological and mythological terms. Its account of the protagonist shows a diversity of forces combating within him (Viðar Hreinsson 1992:105). Equally, it is replete with allusions to mythological figures. In this respect Grettir is notably polysemous (cf. Hastrup 1986:310), having in his composition something of Óðinn, something of Þórr, something of Loki, something of the giants. The proposition that the pre-Christian mythic world continued to form an implicit frame of reference for medieval Icelanders as they sought to understand and represent human life and behaviour (Clunies Ross 1998:23; cf. Guðrún Nordal 1998:221) can readily be supported with reference to this saga. Just like the gods and giants upon whom he is styled, Grettir behaves in ways that are more extreme and more flamboyant than people allowed themselves in their quotidian existence (cf. Clunies Ross 1998:24). The story of Grettir, in its extant realizations, can be understood, I shall argue, as a fourteenth-century mythicization of tensions and pressures, fears and

desires, within Icelandic culture.<sup>1</sup> Here I propose to concentrate on familial relationships within Grettir's "primary group", developing the proposition that the figure of Glámr personifies crucial aspects of that dynamic.<sup>2</sup>

2. The unfolding of Glámr's character within the story can be summed up if we describe him as at first a merely reckless and godless Swedish stranger, come to labour on the farm of one Þorhallr; then an "undead" who disrupts property and lives; and finally the pronouncer of a decisive curse upon Grettir.

- 2.1. Glámr's most arresting feature is his gaze, which issues from dark-blue, wide-open eyes (ch. 32). "Þórhalli brá nokkuð í brún er hann sá þenna mann" (82), "Þorhallr was somewhat taken aback at the sight of Glámr" (71).<sup>3</sup> Here "brá nokkuð í brún" could be more closely translated as "caused his eyebrows to rise", suggesting that Glámr's is a gaze that compels reciprocation, as if in recognition. It is when the moon appears from behind a cloud that his and Grettir's gazes disastrously meet (ch. 35). "Tunglskin var mikið úti og gluggaþykkn. Hratt stundum fyrir en stundum dró frá. Nú í því er Glámur féll rak skýið frá tunglinu en Glámur hvessti augun upp í móti. Og svo hefir Grettir sagt sjálfur að þá eina sýn hafi hann séð svo að honum brygði við. Þá sigaði svo að honum af öllu saman, mæði og því er hann sá að Glámur gaut sínum sjónum harðlega, að hann gat eigi brugðið saxinu og lá nálega í milli heims og heljar" (90-91). "Outside the moonlight was bright but intermittent, for there were dark clouds which passed before the moon and then went away. At the very moment when Glámr fell, the clouds cleared away, and Glámr glared up at the moon. Grettir himself once said that was the only sight he ever saw which frightened him. Then, because of exhaustion and the sight of Glámr rolling his eyes so fiercely ["looking piercingly" would be a closer translation], Grettir was overcome by such a faintness that he could not draw his short sword, and so he remained there lying closer to death than to life" (78-79). This description is reminiscent of phobias and dreams where the subject feels petrified or immobilized in the face of some threat.

- 2.2. Glámr goes on to pronounce his curse. From now Grettir will develop no further, having attained only half the strength he might have had – mighty though his works have been and will continue to be. Moreover,

---

<sup>1</sup> For the dating of the extant saga see Sigurður Nordal 1938, along with references there given; also Nordland 1953:38 and Óskar Halldórsson 1977:639, n. 25.

<sup>2</sup> In concentrating upon the family I am to some extent taking my cue from recent studies by Marianne Kalinke (1997) and Torfi Tulinius (1997), who have argued for a focus on familial, especially paternal and father-like, relationships in analyses of *Hallfreðar saga* and *Egils saga*.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated, citations from *Grettis saga* are from the 1996 edition; translations of prose from the saga are taken from Fox and Hermann Pálsson 1974; translations of the verse are my own.

he will incur outlawry and be forced to live in solitude. As others have already foreseen, he is a man whose luck will run out. “Þá legg eg það á við þig að þessi augu séu þér jafnan fyrir sjónum sem eg ber eftir og mun þér erfitt þykja einum að vera. Og það mun þér til dauða draga” (91). “I also lay this curse on you: you will always see before you these eyes of mine, and they will make your solitude unbearable, and this shall drag you to your death” (79). In the aftermath, Grettir’s already difficult temperament deteriorates further and he finds himself burdened by disabling anxieties about being alone at the approach of darkness (ch. 35), especially outside inhabited districts.

- 2.3. To round out the evidence for Glámr’s meaning, it is important to consider his name. This unfamiliar name is likely, despite Magnús Fjalldal (1998:25), to have been thematized in some way in the saga, consistent with the author’s transparent handling of a series of other names, which may to some extent be influenced by the characteristic use of *ofljóst* in *kviðuháttir* verses like those included in this saga. Grettir, for instance, has the mannerism of “grinning” and also, as an outcast, traits in common with “snakes”, while Þorbjörg gains a mythic dimension when she is described providing “rescue” for a “Þórr”-like Grettir. Björn, Grettir’s self-proclaimed rival in tackling a bear, makes the equation between himself and his namesake (ch. 21). Þorbjörn glámr’s nickname is explicitly linked with his temperament (ch. 69). Spes I shall mention presently. To the name Glámr an assortment of loosely related meanings has been ascribed. *Lexicon Poeticum* (s.v.) cites it in two *þulur* which list respectively names of giants and of the moon. De Vries 1977 (s.v.) compares Modern Icelandic *glámur* “horse with white marking on forehead”, Modern Norwegian *glaama* “bluish mark on the hide”, and other semantically and phonologically similar words. Taken together, the sense of this group of words wavers between “dark” and “light” (cf. Hermann Pálsson 1980:101), meanings combined in OE *glom*, *glomung* “gloaming, twilight, dusk, dim light before dawn”. Taking all the evidence together, we may connect Glámr’s name with the liminality and doubleness of the twilight – a feared borderland between the safety of day and the danger of night<sup>4</sup> – and go on to propose that he represents a hypostasis of that fear.
3. I turn now to consider the psychological and social implications of the fears of darkness and solitude imposed on Grettir by Glámr’s curse.
  - 3.1. Modern empirical literature on fear of the dark tells us that it is a classic childhood anxiety. Nearly all children experience it, and

---

<sup>4</sup> We can compare Boer’s suggestion that Glámr is the personification of winter moonlight, a treacherous illumination that shows the way but also leads travellers astray (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1900:xlii).

particularly intensely at ages 4 to 6. It is often accompanied by fears of storms, thunder, strange events, animals, monsters, witches, or other fantasy images. Over time, these normal fears fade in normal people, although they can persist. One psychologist chronicles the therapy of a client presenting at age 25 with fear of the dark and other disabling phobias (Zane 1982). Often such anxieties are associated with the loss (temporary or permanent) of a member of the subject's primary group – typically, though not necessarily, the mother. One case study of insomnia, nightmares, night terrors, and fear of the dark in an eleven-year-old boy occurred as a result of severe injury and hospitalization away from his family (Howsam 1999).

- 3.2. It might seem absurd to apply modern clinical terminology and case studies to a literary work that dates from many centuries ago and that purports to describe a protagonist who lived several centuries earlier again. I am of course making no truth claims for the saga insofar as it purports to describe a historical personage. What is of interest to me here is the psychological predicament, in its possible relation to fourteenth-century Icelandic culture. Now it is acknowledged that the characteristic types of anxiety across cultures differ systematically, in correlation with the different child-rearing methods (Tan 1980). Nevertheless, Icelandic folk literature, with its copious tales of ghosts, revenants, and spooks of every kind, offers good reason to believe that fear of the dark, along with related anxieties, would have possessed decided resonances with the contemporary audience, as, to judge from Icelandic distance teaching materials for playschool teachers on the Internet, it still does nowadays. Also, the transcultural incidence of phobias and anxiety disorders is a recognized phenomenon. To take a somewhat related affliction, the concept of the “evil eye” (*mal ojo*) is fairly common among people of Mediterranean cultural origin. Manifestations include emotional disturbances, unexplained illnesses, and in particular a phobia for certain groups of people or types of situations. Strangers or women are ascribed special powers in inflicting the evil eye and children frequently figure as victims (Tan 1980).
- 3.3. In his struggles with his fear, Grettir exhibits avoidance behaviour, just as is typical of modern victims of anxiety disorders. A central fear is precisely that of being alone, a contingency almost inevitable for an outlaw. Modern agoraphobics counter this fear by ensuring that when they go out they do so accompanied by a trusted person, and that is what Grettir contrives too, even when it involves the certain loss of his younger brother's life. The end of the saga ushers the audience towards a transcendence of that fear, as Þorsteinn drómundr (the half-brother of Grettir – on his father's side, be it noted) and Spes (his strong, “hope”-full wife) dedicate themselves serenely to a sanctified and immured

version of solitude where no avoidance is possible (cf. Fox and Hermann Pálsson 1974:xiii).

- 3.4. Avoidance behaviour is apt to rebound against sufferers in the shape of loss of empathy, criticism, anger, and urging of confrontation with the object of fear. In the saga narrative empathy for Grettir seems equivocal. Take the sentence “Sýndist honum þá hvers kyns skrípi”, “All kinds of phantoms appeared to him then” (ch. 35). Significant here is that although *skrípi* is a recognized expression for “monster” or “phantom”, it carries a connotation of unreality (Cleasby-Vigfússon, s.v.). That, together with the notion that a person afflicted with *glámsýni* hallucinates or sees things otherwise than they really are, suggests narratorial ambivalence concerning the realistic basis for Grettir’s fears. So too, possibly, does the incident in ch. 61 where the bleating of a ewe on a roof at night prevents the hero from sleeping – fitting punishment because he has slaughtered her lamb (cf. De Looze 1991:91).
4. As already stated, I would interpret Glámr as the hypostasis of forces that operate within Grettir and his primary group. Here is a case where an anterior mythic type – in the shape of an “undead” who wreaks havoc on persons and property – has gained new meaning. In reducing Grettir to helplessness in the face of terrors classically associated with the childhood years, the effect of Glámr is to perpetuate his dependence. More than that, Glámr’s role in the scheme of the narrative could be formulated as overdetermining characteristics of Grettir that have already manifested themselves in his heritage and upbringing.<sup>5</sup> These characteristics are dominantly formed through and by his mother.
  - 4.1. First, it is through her that Grettir claims kinship with the Hrafnistumenn – descendants of the prehistoric Úlfr inn óargi who came from the island of Hrafnista in Norway – and therefore ultimately with giants and other non-human kinds. In addition to the link through her father, the saga mentions (ch. 13) that Ásdís is descended from Ketill hængur on her mother’s side (Óskar Halldórsson 1982:30). Although Grettir is certainly also shown as connected with the Hrafnistumenn by marriages among his paternal ancestors, he has no genetic link with them on his father’s side if we adhere strictly to the tracing of his pedigree that this saga supplies (Ciklamini 1966:137). It is true that that version of his paternal lineage could easily be modified or supplemented from other sources, but it is important not to fall into that temptation. What matters here is not historical accuracy but the saga’s construction of Grettir in such a way that the mythical

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Fox and Hermann Pálsson, who comment that Glámr is in literary terms “a manifestation of Grettir’s own character” (1974:xii).

dimension to his unruliness is supplied by his mother's kin rather than his father's. He bears a particular resemblance in point of strength and aggressiveness to his mother's brother, Jökull Bárðarson, Jökull being a giant name (Ciklamini 1966:141). For her part, Grettir's mother keeps holding up to him the example of Jökull and other Vatnsdælir. The idea of Grettir as the scion of his maternal ancestors is further reinforced through the commonalities between him and the various non-human adversaries he encounters. In ch. 21 he looks and acts a bit like the bear he is fighting and in ch. 38, having swum an icy channel to fetch fire, he is mistaken for a troll (perhaps even a frost giant). The saga's restriction of mythical non-human types to the maternal line may indicate that operative here in some way is the mythological pattern where Æsir males marry the daughters of giants, who bring with them destructive, non-human influences. We might see the linkage of Ásdís with non-human types as reflecting a communal anxiety about maternal dominance.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, though, we should bear in mind the countervailing view that "the world of the giants represents a potential store of qualities that are important in the world of gods and men" (Mundal 1990:18). We are dealing with heteroglossia, a contest of attitudes in society, not with dogma.

- 4.2. Secondly, Grettir is exceptional for his expressions of attachment to his mother. One of the embedded skaldic stanzas sums it up: "As a sea-faring man, sail set/ for a following wind, let me/ tell you that some rich people/ equipped me poorly for this trip./ A strong woman bettered my lot/ When she made this sword her gift:/ Once more the saying's borne out/ That 'the mother is best for the child'" (v. 11). She for her part loves him dearly, "unni honum mikið" (ch.14: p. 25). A modern Icelander gives eloquent expression to this attachment (Ólafur H. Kristjánsson 1978:23).<sup>7</sup> In modern scientific terms the concept of "attachment" has been classically theorized by the developmental psychologist John Bowlby. Five patterns of behaviour – sucking, clinging, following, crying, and smiling – all function to maintain the child's proximity to his or her mother from about 9 to 18 months (Bowlby 1982:244). Attachment behaviour begins to wane in human beings at about the age of three, although it continues to be important

<sup>6</sup> To cite a possible analogue in *Bárðar saga*, Helga's sudden removal of young Gestr to be her foster son is a commonplace of giantess behaviour in *fornaldarsögur*. It has been suggested that the episode could be interpreted psychoanalytically as reflecting collective parental (and particularly maternal) anxiety at the removal of children into fosterage (Clunies Ross 1998:119-20).

<sup>7</sup> "Frá því hin fyrsta móðir á Íslandi fæddi afkvæmi sitt hefur móðurastin verið sú vernd og skjól, er veitt hefur veiki lífi þrótt og þroskamöguleika, sá ljósgeisli, sem rofið hefur myrkur ótta og öryggisleysis, bægt frá Glámsaugunum, sem svo oft verða á vegi þess sem veikur er fæddur og skammt á að lifa."

throughout life (Taylor and Arnow 1988:21).

5. Ásdís is no ordinary mother: indeed, she has been lauded as the most famous and best loved mother to have lived in Iceland (Ólafur H. Kristjánsson 1978:19). The text conveys the esteem she enjoys with the community before and after the deaths of her sons and admits into the story line other examples of strong women safeguarding the interests of their offspring. We hear in particular of Auðr in *djúpúðga* and of Signý, the widow of *Öndóttir kráka*. But while in no way wishing to cast aspersions on Ásdís's reputation, I would suggest that there is a characteristic play of heteroglossia around the proverb cited by Grettir in his stanza, as around other proverb citations and adaptations in the saga (Örnólfur Thorsson 1994:79; De Looze 1991:95). Rather than simply dogmatizing that the mother is best for the child, the text leaves it open how far maternal dominance has good outcomes.
  - 5.1. Although she does not simply condone Grettir's numerous offences, Ásdís's role is on the whole protective. She sets him up as a warrior when his father refuses to do so, presenting him with a fine sword that belonged to her grandfather Jökull, along with other *Vatnsdælir* (ch. 17), and thus underlining the importance of his maternal heritage. In a rather obscure and textually difficult stanza it may be implied that the thought of Ásdís weeping in sympathy sustains Grettir if he feels fear (ch. 54: ÍF 7:177 and n. ad loc.): "brúðr strýkr horsk, ef hræðumk,/ hvarma", "if I am afraid, the wise woman wipes her eyes." She certainly sheds tears in ch. 69, when she sacrifices her youngest son Illugi for Grettir's sake. "Er svo nú komið að eg sé að tvennum vandræðum gegnir. Eg þykist ekki Illuga missa mega en eg veit að svo mikil atkvæði eru að um hagi Grettis að hann verður eitthvert úr að ráða" (169-70). "So it has come to this. I am now trapped between two griefs: I cannot bear to lose Illugi, but I know Grettir's plight has become so serious that something must be done for him" (144). In sum, as ch. 69 shows with special vividness, Grettir's peculiar anxieties mean that maternal protectiveness cannot be phased out in a normal way; instead, his dependence on and attachment to his mother remains essential to his adult welfare, indeed to his very survival.
  - 5.2. Grettir's father competes with this resolute mother for dominance in their son's upbringing. What makes his task virtually impossible is Grettir's marked and enduring distaste for work. At the same time, Ásmundr is not exactly pragmatic or tactful in the allocation of tasks, which, psychologically speaking, might seem remarkable when he himself has had to make the transition from a work-shy youth, unpopular with his father, to a sterling farmer (cf. Guðmundur Andri Thorsson 1990:103). In ch. 14 we are presented with an incremental series of three examples that positively cry out for the attentions of a

structuralist. First assigned the demeaning task of minding geese and goslings, Grettir loses patience and wrings the necks of some. Ásmundr next gives Grettir an even more demeaning, unmanly indoor job, that of rubbing his back as he sits by the fire. Grettir objects to the excessive heat and eventually takes his revenge by scraping his father's back with the carding comb – an action that foreshadows a flaying. Ásmundr's final job allocation takes Grettir out into the cold, minding the horses. Grettir is pleased to receive this colder, therefore more manly assignment, which suggests that if Ásmundr is attempting to acculturate his son to the farmer's livelihood then his efforts are enjoying some measure of responsiveness. But, unable to stand the full rigours of the cold, Grettir checks Ásmundr's self-willed mare Kengála in her rambles to exposed places by flaying the hide off her back. The discovery of this enormity leads to a suspension of chores. Even then, Ásdís maintains an even-handed approach: “Eigi veit eg hvort mér þykir meir frá móti, að þú skipar honum jafnan starfa eða hitt að hann leysir alla einn veg af hendi” (29). “I don't know which I think more immoderate, that you are always giving him jobs, or the fact that he discharges them all in the same way” (my translation). A modern assessment would probably be less litotic and more receptive to a diagnosis of sadism or pathological cruelty, arising from anger that instead of being directed toward a parent becomes deflected toward other targets (cf. Bowlby 1975:199-200).

6. As a result of this complex and toxic familial dynamic the acculturation process has failed. In one sense, then, Grettir remains less of a man than his father, but in another sense he becomes more of a man, since the logic of the narrative seems to be to propel him into the warrior, not the farmer class. His alienation from farmers continues to manifest itself intermittently in episodes of his adulthood (e.g. chs 52, 60, and 71). At the same time, as the mutual mockery between Grettir and Sveinn, the farmer, in *Söðulkolluvísur* tends to demonstrate, this alienation is double-edged. What underlies it, textually speaking, might well be an anxiety in the culture about the relevance of higher-class people such as himself to the economy and the polity. Unlike a farmer, who must work day in day out, making hay or mucking out cow stalls, Grettir adopts the patterns of the Vikings or the Arthurian knights, celebrated in fourteenth-century Icelandic culture, by deploying his copious stocks of energy and ability in a spasmodic fashion. His raids and quests, like theirs, are punctuated by periods of marked inactivity. He disdains chores and embraces exploits. Some of them, such as the marathon swims, are on definite missions; others, such as the mighty lifts, do not necessarily have any clear purpose (chs 30, 38, 58, 59, and 75). A disinclination to assist with routine blacksmithing work, which certainly demands strength (in hammering) but without the opportunity to show off,

leads to his ejection from Þorsteinn Kuggason's homestead (ch. 53) and thus adds to our sense of his marginal social and economic utility.

7. As we have already started to note, Grettir exhibits reluctance to form homosocial associations and functions deficiently within them. The obvious exception, his unexpected alliance, after an inauspicious start, with Hallmundr, tends to confirm the tendency, since Hallmundr is not fully human.
  - 7.1. In a culture that also consumed versions of *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, with their emphasis upon archaic forms of homosocial bonding, *Grettis saga* displays some ambivalence on the score of socialization and its value. The solemn declamation of the *Tryggðamál* at the Hegranessþing in ch. 72 is made to look foolish in the sequel and yet the author also insists on the nobility with which the farmers held this pledge in the face of Grettir's provocation. Hallmundr affirms that no man can trust in his own strength (ch. 62). But Guðmundr advises Grettir, "trú þú öngum svo vel að þú trúir eigi best sjálfum þér" (ch. 67: 166), "trust no one so well that you do not trust yourself [best]" (141). Grettir's behaviour shows the same ambivalence. The bonding in the small followings that he tends to cultivate is often fragile and compromised by disloyalty and treachery (e.g. ch. 55) or sometimes simple negligence. Grettir is literally "let down" on two occasions when supposed helpers fail to maintain their "festarhaldinu", "hold on the rope" (chs 18 and 66; cf. Óskar Halldórsson 1982:14). Equally, his characteristically cryptic and delphic manner of speech falls short of linguistic cooperativeness.
  - 7.2. Games with other young males are classically an avenue towards socialization and they are depicted in this saga as an event for the whole wider community. Characteristically, in a process I shall examine later in this paper, Grettir is not fairly matched in his game, his opponent being Auðunn Ásgeirsson, who is several years older than fourteen-year-old Grettir. Between them they fall into a fight which does nothing to foster goodwill, though eventually reconciliation is effected (ch. 15). Soon afterwards we see him in his lair under the boat on Hafliði's ship (ch. 17), declining either to share in the work or to buy himself off from working. Instead he foments discord with satirical verses. His attentions to the young wife of Bárðr, who stitches up his sleeves to hold the warmth in, look like a case of persisting attachment to a surrogate maternal figure, though of course a sexual element is hinted at as well. The combination of indolence and a desire to be coddled and kept warm is another trait tending to identify Grettir with the *kolbíttr* type in this episode, though earlier he was described as not one to recline beside the fire in the hall (ch. 14). On the other hand, as the ship gets more leaky and Grettir sees the dire necessity of

contributing to the common cause his efforts are Herculean and leave the rest of the crew deeply impressed. That is in accord with the spasmodic and exhibitionistic work patterns I have already noted.

- 7.3. The protagonist in this saga is typically seen enacting resistance to male homosociality, not solidarity with it. In a series of scenes Grettir is shown forcibly held by a hostile male crowd. At Ísafjörður a group of older lower-class men tries to hang him in the forest, after the style of Víkarr and other mythic victims, until the protective female figure of Þorbjörg comes to his rescue. Auðunn's violence against the adolescent Grettir, on two of its mentions in the saga, though not in the initial context, is also presented as a form of strangulation. Possibly this motif is reinforced by the status of "Auðunn" as a name for Óðinn, the god specifically associated with hanging and the gallows. Now the fact that hanging appears to have been a rather archaic penalty by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, not mentioned in *Grágás* though occasionally exacted on thieves (Guðrún Nordal 1998:200-01), might lead us to speculate that the saga in invoking this route to death is harking back to atavistic fears – fears triggered by male homosocial oppression of the kind we see inflicted by bands of berserks in chs 19 and 40. Classically, initiatory rites evoke fear among the initiands. In traditional societies senior males remove young males from their nurturing female kin and subject them to symbolic death, often in the form of physical torture or sensory deprivation, so as to bring them to new life as fully adult members of male cult groups (Clunies Ross 1994:225). From the viewpoint of the initiand, these trials appear sacrificial, with himself as the victim. He fears that he is going to die and that his tormentors are enemies rather than male relatives dressed up to terrify him (Clunies Ross 1994:225-26). Analogous points could be made about college and gang initiations in New Zealand and other nations. It is this adversarial viewpoint on male socialization that seems recurrently to underlie the saga narration.
- 7.4. Correspondingly, Grettir's heterosexual associations are constructed as of short duration or little enduring consequence. His sexual feats, like his other feats, are spasmodic and exhibitionistic and there is even anatomical reason to doubt his full maturation (ch. 75). He has a child, if local gossip is correct, by Steinvör, the housewife at Sandhaugar (chs. 64-67), but no marriage is contemplated and the liaison is short-lived. The saga seems to underline that society does not achieve propagation of an enduring kind through the likes of Grettir when it reports that the son died at the age of seventeen and that there are no sagas about him. Again, it is his half-brother Þorsteinn, with Spes, who transcends this incapacity.
- 7.5. The emphasis on persisting childhood attachments and limitations

might prompt us to a comparison with *Parcevals saga*, which, in common with other *riddarasögur*, must have been incorporated into the Icelandic ethos to some degree by the fourteenth century. Parceval, like Grettir, would have been readily explicable as a *kolbíttr*, and whereas in Chrétien's telling of the story the resolution of the Fisher King mystery brings him to full maturation, such a conclusive moment of transition never arrives in the extant Scandinavian version (Weber 1986:442).

8. To summarize, the saga constructs Grettir as dominated by his maternal heritage and upbringing. Because of the nature of that input, his interactions with the community are typically double-edged. Where the routine operations of society are concerned, he is shown as an unreliable member (cf. Óskar Halldórsson 1977:635). Instead, his function is as a carnivalesque disrupter of normal social and economic processes – a trickster, a jester, a gadfly. If we posit an audience that covertly resented externally imposed authority and found its sense of independence compromised (as it well might in fourteenth-century economic and political circumstances), we can easily extrapolate to the appeal of such a role. Simultaneously, however, where society finds itself in non-routine circumstances, Grettir possesses special powers to help. His helpfulness centres on rescuing human lives and property interests by entering at sacrificial cost into a halfway world between human and non-human kinds. It is at least arguable, though hard to prove, that for contemporary Icelanders this halfway world was intensely real, a reification of deep-seated fears that Grettir enacts and to that extent helps to dispel.

### Works Cited

- Boer, Richard. 1898. "Zur Grettis saga." *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 30:53-71.
- Bowlby, John. 1975 and 1982. *Attachment and Loss. 1. Attachment. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.* New York: BasicBooks, 1982. 2. *Separation: Anxiety and Anger.* London: Penguin, 1975.
- Ciklamini, Marlene. 1966. "Grettir and Ketill Hængur, the Giant-Killers." *Arv* 22:136-55.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1994 and 1998. *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse myths in medieval Northern society.* 2 vols. The Viking Collection, 7 and 10. Odense: Odense UP.
- Cook, Robert. 1984-85. "The Reader in Grettis saga." *Saga-Book* 21.3-4:133-54.
- De Looze, Laurence. 1991. "The Outlaw Poet, The Poetic Outlaw: Self-Consciousness in Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar." *ANF* 106:85-103.
- Fox, Denton, and Hermann Pálsson. 1974. *Grettir's saga.* Toronto: U of Toronto P.
- Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar.* Ed. Richard Boer. Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek, 8. Halle: Niemeyer, 1900.
- Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar.* Ed. Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit, 7. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka fornritafélag, 1936.
- Grettis saga.* Ed. Örnólfur Thorsson. Sígildar sögur, 4. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1996.
- Guðmundur Andri Thorsson. 1990. "Grettla." *Skáldskaparmál* 1:100-17.
- Guðrún Nordal. 1998. *Ethics and Action in Thirteenth-Century Iceland.* Viking Collection, 11. Odense: Odense UP.
- Hastrup, Kirsten. 1986. "Tracing Tradition: An Anthropological Perspective on Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar." In *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to*

- Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*. Ed. John Lindow et al. Viking Collection, 3. Odense: Odense UP. Pp. 281-313.
- Hermann Pálsson. 1980. "Glámsýni í Grettlu." *Gripla* 4:95-101.
- Howsam, David G. 1999. "Hypnosis in the treatment of insomnia, nightmares and night terrors." *Australian Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 27.1:32-39.
- Kalinke, Marianne. 1997. "Stæri ek brag: Protest and Subordination in Hallfreðar saga." *Skáldskaparmál* 4:50-68.
- Lexicon Poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis: Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog oprindeligt forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilsson*. Ed. Finnur Jónsson. 2nd edn. Copenhagen: Møller, 1931. Rpt. Copenhagen: Atlas, 1966.
- Magnús Fjalldal. 1998. *The Long Arm of Coincidence. The frustrated connection between Beowulf and Grettis saga*. Toronto: U of Toronto P.
- Mundal, Else. 1990. "Forholdet mellom gudar og jotnar i norrøn mytologi i lys av det mytologiske namnematerialet." *Studia Anthroponymica Scandinavica: Tidskrift for Nordisk Personnamnsforskning* 8:5-18.
- Nordland, Odd. 1953. "Norrøne og europeiske litterære lån i Grettis saga." *Maal og minne*, 1953:32-48.
- Ólafur Halldórsson. 1960. "Grettisfærsla." *Opuscula* 1:49-77.
- Ólafur H. Kristjánsson. 1978. "Þórdís á Bjargi. Ræða flutt á Þjóðhátíðardaginn 7. júlí 1974." *Húnavetningur*. Ársrit Húnavetningafélagsins í Reykjavík 3:17-24.
- Óskar Halldórsson. 1977. "Goðsögnin um Gretti." In *Sjöttú ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*. Ed. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, Rit 12. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar. 2: 627-39.
- Óskar Halldórsson. 1982. "Tröllasaga Bárðdæla og Grettluhöfundur." *Skírnir* 156:5-36.
- Sigurður Nordal. 1938. *Sturla Þórðarson og Grettis saga*. Studia Islandica, 4. Reykjavík: Ísafold.
- Tan, Eng-Seong. 1980. "Transcultural aspects of anxiety." In *Handbook of Studies on Anxiety*. Ed. Graham D. Burrows and Brian Davies. Amsterdam: Elsevier. Pp. 133-44.
- Taylor, C. Barr, and Bruce Arnow. 1988. *The nature and treatment of anxiety disorders*. New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan.
- Torfi H. Tulinius. 1997. "Le statut théologique d'Egill Skalla-Grímsson." In Hugr. *Mélanges d'histoire, de littérature et de mythologie offerts à Régis Boyer pour son soixante-cinquième anniversaire*. Paris: Presses de l'Université. Pp. 279-88.
- Viðar Hreinsson. 1992. "Hver er þessi Grettir?" *Skáldskaparmál* 2:77-106.
- Vries, Jan de. 1977. *Altisländisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 3rd edn. Leiden: Brill.
- Weber, Gerd Wolfgang. 1986. "The decadence of feudal myth: towards a theory of riddarasaga and romance." In *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*. Ed. John Lindow et al. Viking Collection, 3. Odense: Odense UP. Pp. 415-54.
- Zane, Manuel D. 1982. "A Method to Study and Conceptualize Changes in Phobic Behavior." In *Phobia. A Comprehensive Summary of Modern Treatments*. Ed. Robert L. DuPont. New York: Brunner/Mazel. Pp. 11-26.
- Örnólfur Thorsson. 1994. "Farið á hriflingabjörgum í Grettlu." In *Strengleikar slegnir Robert Cook 25. nóvember 1994*. Ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir et al. Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen. Pp. 79-83.

## The ‘Home of their Shapes’ : Old Norse Mythology and the Archaeology of Shamanism

Neil Price

University of Uppsala

For over a century comparative theologians and philologists have debated the possible presence of shamanic elements in Scandinavian pre-Christian religion, concentrating on the cult of Óðinn. Archaeologists have come relatively late to this discussion, and have encountered many problems caused by an often superficial grasp of the sources and an inadequate grounding in wider shamanic research; certain categories of material (such as the gold bracteates) have also been focused upon at the expense of others – including the necessary study of *all* the Viking Ages peoples of Scandinavia, both Germanic and Sámi – and will focus on the implications that a shamanic interpretation has for our understanding of Old Norse society and its world-view.

## Myths - ways of telling, ways of arguing

Catharina Raudvere

Lunds universitet

Many studies of mythology sway, when applied to empirical material, between an understanding of myth as genre and myth as defined by content. The paper will be an attempt to discuss the tension between form and content in myth analyses, taking the descriptions of the early phases of the *ragnarøk* narrative (in Snorri and *Völuspá*) as point of departure.

What was apparently a productive flux for the Norse writer can hopefully also support a more profound understanding of literary forms, cultural variability and the transition from oral to literate culture.

# Probleme der Quellenbewertung am Beispiel der Gruppenbildung von Göttern, insbesondere Asen und Wanen

Hermann Reichert

Universität Wien

## Was fehlt in den üblichen Gliederungen von Göttern?

Die zahlreichen Bezeichnungen für ‚Götter‘ scheinen unter verschiedenen Gesichtspunkten gewählt worden zu sein, unter denen man von ihnen sprach. Da die Eddalieder und Snorri nur mehr ein Chaos von Homonymen und Synonymen kennen, ist nicht mehr rekonstruierbar, welche Bezeichnung unter welchen Bedingungen in paganer Zeit gewählt worden war. Wörter für ‚Götter‘ sind: *týr* (Sing.), *tívar* (Plur.), *díar*, *rögn*, *regin*, *bönd*, *höpt*, *gop*, *æsir*, *vanir*. Davon sind *bönd* und *höpt* etwa synonym und bedeuten ‚Fesseln‘. Außer *díar* und dem Asen-Wanen-Gegensatz werden diese alle von U. Dronke (*Hoops ErgBd.* 5) zusammengestellt. Daß *díar* dort fehlt, erkläre ich mir vermutlich so: anscheinend gehört Dronke zu jenen, die annehmen, daß die Form *díar* in der *Heimskringla* dadurch entstanden ist, daß Snorri eine Strophe des Skalden Kormákr mißverstanden hat, der (*Skáldskaparmál* 2) in *día fjarðar* (des Fjordes der Götter = des Dichtermets) ein irisches Fremdwort

gebraucht habe, das etymologisch mit altnord. *tívar* identisch sei, so wie dieses und lat. *deus* auf idg. anlautendes *d-* (idg. *\*deivos* ‚klarer Himmel‘) zurückgeht, und daß Snorri es einfach verständnislos von Kormak übernommen und geglaubt habe, es handle sich um ein weiteres Wort für ‚Götter‘ und es daraufhin in der *Heimskringla* selbst benutzt habe. Die Glieder dieser Kette sind schwach, denn Kormákr war zwar anscheinend mütterlicherseits irischer Abstammung, aber nicht selbst Ire, und man fragt sich daher, warum er unbedingt ein irisches Fremdwort für ‚Götter‘ hätte benutzen sollen, und auch, warum Snorri in der *Heimskringla* bei einer recht großen Auswahl an Synonymen für ‚Götter‘ ausgerechnet eines gewählt haben soll, das er nicht verstand.

Unmöglich ist diese Hypothese zwar nicht, aber dann wäre es ein merkwürdiger Zufall, daß die *Heimskringla* Kap. 2, 4, 6 und 9 *díar* gerade dort von den Göttern setzt, wo diese Speiseopfer empfangen wie die griechischen *theói*, die etymolog. mit dem Verb *thýein* ‚opfern‘ zusammengehören: germ. *d* und griech. *th* gehen gleicherweise auf idg. *dh-* zurück, daher könnten *díar* und *theói* einander etymologisch entsprechen. Der Gesichtspunkt ‚Empfänger von Opfern‘ scheint mir in vielen Zusammenhängen für den Begriff ‚Götter‘ wesentlich zu sein. *Völuspá* 23 beraten die Götter, ob alle Götter Opfer erhalten sollten. Hier stehen einander *ginnheilug goð* (nicht *díar*) als Ganzes und *æsir* als Teil gegenüber. Das heißt wir haben in der *Vsp.* nicht die Bezeichnung Kormaks, aber einen Beleg für das Opfer als zentralen Begriff im Zusammenhang mit ‚Götter‘.

Nun aber zurück zur *Heimskr.* (Kap. 4): Der Friedensschluß zwischen Asen und Wanen, der eine Aufteilung der Opfer zwischen allen Göttern enthält, entspricht Kallimachos (frag. 119 Pf.): „Die Götter warfen bei Mekone das Los und teilten sich in ihre Ehren.“ Diese Aufteilung der Opfer unter den Göttern spiegelt eine frühe Stufe der griech. Religion, die nicht in den dem griech. Mythos entnommenen Elementen der röm. Literatur oder der römischen Soldatenreligion wiederkehrt. Wenn sich hier eine Parallele zwischen altgriech. und nord. Vorstellungen findet, muß das als idg. Erbe betrachtet werden, weil es nicht auf Kontakte der Germanen mit spätantiker Kultur zurückgeführt werden kann. Bei der Einsetzung der Opfer ist Prometheus Ratgeber des Zeus. Die Einsetzung des Opfers durch Prometheus findet sich schon in der ältesten Quelle, die dessen Namen nennt, in Hesiods *Theogonie*, und zwar in einer Form, die unmöglich Motivation für Snorri gegeben haben kann, Ähnliches mit altnordischem Namenmaterial zu erfinden. Daß die Einigung der Götter, wie die Opfer aufzuteilen seien, nicht gleich friedlich, aber dann durch einen Friedensvertrag erfolgte, ist idg. Erbgut, nicht in später Zeit in den Norden transportiert. Auch dieser Aspekt des Opferwesens ist also aus Snorri auf die heidnische Religion zurückführbar.

Der Raub des Götter- und Dichtertranks, auf die die zitierte Kenning des Kormákr anspielt, ist ein Mythos, von dem man schon im 19. Jh. erkannt hat,

daß er sich im Raub des Göttertranks durch Indra in Hymnen des *RG Veda* spiegelt (insbesondere *RG Veda* IV,26); wichtig ist, daß es bei den *RG Veda*-Hymnen, die dieses Thema enthalten, durchwegs um Hymnen zum Opfer bzw. über das Opfer oder dessen Erklärung handelt. Unter den altnordischen Mythen, deren Ähnlichkeit mit anderen idg. Überlieferungen mit Sicherheit in die Zeit vor der Entstehung des Germanischen überhaupt datiert, sind daher zumindest einige (je nach Interpretation vielleicht sogar ein guter Teil), die die Götter als Opferempfänger sehen. Speziell *Heimskringla* Kap. 2-10 sieht die Götter ganz unter dem Gesichtspunkt des Opferempfanges.

Georges Dumézil ist auf seiner Suche nach Götterkriegen in Mythen idg. Völker entgangen, daß diese strukturell sehr verschiedene Funktion haben können: im Falle der zu römischer Frühgeschichte euhemerisierten römischen Mythologie des Livius ist es tatsächlich so, daß aus den zwei um die Vorherrschaft kämpfenden Gruppen eine Ganzheit entsteht, zu der die ursprünglichen Teile Verschiedenes beitragen. Eine ganz andere Gruppe von Kämpfen, die besonders für den griechischen Mythos kennzeichnend ist, thematisieren den Generationenkonflikt: der Kampf des Sohnes gegen den Vater, wobei der Vater die Kinder verschlingt, der Sohn, wenn er diesem Schicksal entkommen ist, den Vater entmannt. Die griechische Mythologie, die lange glaubte, der Kampf des Zeus gegen ‚Alte Götter‘ (die Titanen) sei als Reflex des Einwanderungskampfes der Griechen gegen die vorgriechische Bevölkerung zu deuten, hat diese Theorie aufgegeben: kleinasiatische in Keilschrift überlieferte Epen des ausgehenden 2. vorchristlichen Jahrtausends (Ras-Schamrah-Texte: *Das Lied von Ullikummi*; A. Lesky, *Griech. Mythos und Vorderer Orient*, S. 41) zeigen, daß es sich um eine bei den idg. Völkern Kleinasiens schon vor dem Kontakt mit den Griechen vorhandene Vorstellung handelt (Pauly-Wissowa *Real-Encycl.* s. v. Prometheus).

Der Generationenkonflikt ist ja eine der wichtigsten Strukturen griech. Mythologie überhaupt, nicht nur in der Ödipus-Sage. Auch Zeus entmannt nicht nur seinen Vater; er selbst ist immer wieder in der Situation, männliche Nachkommenschaft verhindern zu müssen: Metis, die Mutter der Pallas Athene, muß er verschlucken, weil ein Orakelspruch besagt, daß ein Sohn von Metis ihn der Herrschaft berauben würde (im Bauch des eifersüchtigen Mannes ist die Frau am besten vor sexuellen Verführungen gesichert). Als Zeus und Poseidon die Thetis begehren, verzichten beide auf sie, als sie den Orakelspruch erfahren, den nur Prometheus weiß und den er dem Zeus dafür verrät, daß er wieder loskommt: daß der Sohn der Thetis stärker werden wird als sein Vater. Also gibt man sie einem Sterblichen, dem Peleus, und daß Achill stärker wird als dieser, ist für die Götter ungefährlich.

Der Streit um die Aufteilung der Opfer – ein anderer, strukturell nicht zum vorgenannten Typus gehöriger Konflikt – ist, wenn man, wie es gut möglich scheint, *Vsp.* 23 und 24 als zusammengehörig betrachtet, mit dem Asen-Wanen-Krieg verbunden. Der Streit um die Aufteilung der Opfer ist im griech. Mythos

ebenfalls mit dem Kampf von Göttergruppen verbunden: Prometheus, hierin der Gegner des Zeus, ist der Sohn des Titanen Iapetos, also Angehöriger eines anderen Göttergeschlechts. Dumézil hat in einem Punkt Recht, nämlich, daß der *Vsp.* Str. 24 genannte Krieg von Göttern gegen Götter nicht historische Ereignisse reflektieren kann, etwa Einwanderung eines neuen Volkes mit der Asen-Religion in ein ursprünglich ‚wanisches‘ Skandinavien. Die Mythen von den Götterkriegen sind älter. Der Strukturalismus Dumézils leidet aber daran, daß er die Strukturen unzulässig vereinfacht.

*Díar*, glaube ich hiemit wahrscheinlich gemacht zu haben, war eine Einteilung (bzw. besser: Sichtweise; wenn die Götter, sofern sie gerade als Empfänger von Opfern angesprochen werden, mit einem bestimmten Ausdruck bezeichnet werden, heißt das nicht, daß diese Bezeichnung einer bestimmten Gruppe von Göttern vorbehalten gewesen sein muß), die in heidnischer Zeit relevanter gewesen sein könnte als in den überlieferten Texten.

Nun zu einer Einteilung, die in paganer Zeit vielleicht weniger relevant war als in den überlieferten Texten und in diesen weniger relevant als in modernen Gliederungen: zum Gegensatz **Asen – Wanen**. Hiezu verweise ich zunächst auf ein paar Details in den literarischen Texten:

*Heimskringla* (Kap. 4) wird der Wanenkrieg nicht mit einem Streit um Opfer begründet; er erscheint als nicht weiter motivierter Eroberungszug Odins, an dem nur der am Schluß stehende Versöhnungsvertrag interessiert. Nicht einmal bei Snorri findet sich eine militärische Unterlegenheit der Wanen; *Hskr.* 4 spricht von Unentschieden). Der Gegensatz: im Kampf siegreiche Wanen - im Vertrag überlegene Asen, den man aus den dunklen Andeutungen der *Vsp.* herausliest, ist in der *Hskr.* gerade nicht thematisiert, nur die Unterlegenheit der Wanen beim Ausnützen der Fähigkeiten der Geiseln.

*Gylfaginning* 34 sind die Wanen über das Dahinfliegen des Pferdes von Friggs Dienerin Gná erstaunt; *Skáldskaparmál* 1 heißt es bei der Erzählung vom Ursprung des Dichtermets: *Pat vár upphaf til þess, at goðin hófðu ósætt við þat fólk, er vanir heita*. An diesen beiden Stellen sieht es also aus, als wären die Wanen gar keine ‚Götter‘. Gleich darauf ist das allerdings vergessen (was nach dem oben an den Sonnenpferden Exemplifizierten niemanden zu Hypothesenbildung anregen darf) und es wird von den goð gesagt, daß sie aus dem Speichel, den sie zum Zeichen des Vertragsabschlusses zusammen in eine Schüssel spuckten, den Kvasir schufen, und man versteht das üblicherweise so, daß hier auch die Wanen unter die goð zu subsumieren sind. Dann, ab der Ermordung des Kvasir durch die Zwerge, sind die göttlichen Partner im Konflikt die Asen; der Wanen wird nicht mehr gedacht. Mehr Funktion kommt den Wanen im Zusammenhang von Kenningar für Njörd, Freyr und Freyja zu: Freyja wird *vanadís* genannt *Gylf.* 34, im Zusammenhang mit der Nennung des Brisingamen und ihrer Verkleidung auf der Suche nach Óðr. Allerdings auf die Frage des Gangleri: *Hverja eru ásynjurnar?*, und in der Antwort wird sie als 6. Asin von 14 aufgezählt; der Namentausch, Verkleidung und die langen Reisen

erinnern auch an das, was wir von Odin erwarten würden. Für sie gibt es aber Kenningar, die die Zugehörigkeit zu den Wanen sichern: *Vana-goð* heißt sie *Skspm.* 20, sowie *vanabrúðr Skspm.* 35 [37], bzw. Njörd und Freyr *Vana-guð*, *Vana-nið* oder *Van* (*Skspm.* 6f.). Njörðr ist nach *Gylf.* 22 der dritte Ase nach Odin (hinter Thor und Baldr) und in *Vanaheimr* aufgewachsen, in diesem Satz ist eine räumliche Vorstellung von *Vanaheimr* deutlich. Aber die Opposition zu *vanir* bilden in diesem Absatz nicht nur die Asen, sondern auch die ‚Götter‘:

Eigi er Njörðr ása ættar; hann var upp fœddr í Vanaheimi, en vanir gísluðu hann goðunum  
... hann varð at sætt með goðum ok vönum.

Da ist also ‚Götter‘ und ‚Asen‘ synonym, aber die Wanen gehören nicht dazu.

Die gleich danach erzählte Geschichte von Njörd und Skadi zeigt Nóatún als Wohnsitz Njörds. *Gylf.* 23 heißt es dann, daß Njörd in Nóatún, also doch wohl mit Skaði, zwei Kinder bekam, Freyr und Freyja. Die beiden werden hier Asen genannt, die Einteilung in Asen und Wanen ist schon wieder vergessen. Die Ehe Njörds scheint die Prosa vor *Fór Skírnis* ähnlich zu sehen: Skaði agiert wie Freys Mutter. In *Fór Skírnis* (Liedstrophen) ist der Begriff ‚Wanen‘ zwar präsent, aber in der Formulierung (*hvat er þat* bzw. *emcat ec*) *álfa, né ása sona, né víssa vana*. Da sind die Wanen weise, was sie bei Snorri anscheinend weniger sind als die Asen, und die Götter dreigeteilt in Alben, Asen und Wanen. Aber Freyr oder Njörd selbst werden hier nicht Wanen genannt. Die *Heimskringla* läßt Freyr und Freyja schon in *Vanaheimr* geboren sein, und zwar aus einem Geschwisterinzest, und ist daher in Widerspruch zu den eddischen Quellen.

Der Wanenkrieg ist nur an ganz wenigen Stellen präsent. Saxo kennt (Buch III, p. 118) einen Krieg von ‚Menschen‘ gegen Götter, aber in der Baldersage, und der ‚menschliche‘ Gegner ist Høtherus, der gegen Othinus, Balderus und Thorus kämpft. Daß die Götter diesen Krieg verlieren, kann am ehesten mit *Ragnarøk*-Vorstellungen zusammengebracht werden, wofür ja auch die Verbindung mit der Baldersage spricht (obwohl es in der Schilderung dieses Krieges durch Saxo keine Parallelen zu uns bekannten Versionen der Weltuntergangsdichtung gibt). Der Wanenkrieg scheint bei Saxo gar keinen Reflex hinterlassen zu haben.

Die Ungleichmäßigkeiten bei Snorri bestehen nicht nur in einer chaotischen Synonymik und Homonymik sowie in Widersprüchen auf der Faktenebene (‚Wer war Freys Mutter?‘), sondern auch in widersprüchlicher Wertung: einerseits sind Njörd und Freyr besonders mächtige Götter, andererseits werden die Wanen, wo Näheres über sie erzählt wird, von Snorri als den Asen unterlegen und als eine Art ‚Götter zweiter Klasse‘ dargestellt.

Nun ist die Beziehung der norwegischen Könige zu Odin deutlich, und die der schwedischen zu Freyr, und Snorri schreibt zu Gunsten des norwegischen Königs. In diesem Punkt ist also ausnahmsweise eine Ursache für die Ungleichmäßigkeiten leicht erkennbar und *communis opinio* in der Forschung. Die hierarchische Unterordnung der Wanen unter die Asen ist zumindest zum

Teil dadurch bedingt, daß unsere Quellen hauptsächlich westnordisch und aus dem 13. Jh. sind. Wäre früher oder in Schweden eine Snorri entsprechende Mythologie aufgeschrieben worden, sähe sie vielleicht anders, weniger pro-odinisch, aus. Die *Liederedda* kennt, *Vfm.* 38f., die Herkunft Njörds aus Vanaheimr, wo ihn weise *regin* schufen, aber er wird zum Weltuntergang (*alda rǫc* ‚Schicksal der Zeiten‘) zu den Wanen zurückkehren. Was die *Vfm.* sich als nach dem ‚Ende der Zeiten‘ folgend vorstellen, wissen wir nicht. Ganz dem Mythos inadäquat ist es, elaborierte Systeme zu bauen, etwa: ‚die Wanen sind einerseits weise, andererseits den Asen unterlegen, also kann es nur eine bestimmte Weisheit sein, die im Gegensatz zu einer anderen steht ...‘ und dann verschiedene Arten von Weisheit zu erschließen. Die Mythen dürfen widersprüchlich sein, und je weniger sie es sind, desto mehr Gefahr besteht, daß sie von einem Redaktor so stark bearbeitet wurden, daß sie den Charakter des Mythischen schon verloren haben und besser als Balladen über mythologische Stoffe bezeichnet werden.

Welche dieser widersprechenden Vorstellungen am ehesten eine Bedeutung in paganer Religion gehabt haben könnte, ist schwer zu entscheiden. Ein paar skandinavische Ortsnamen, die anscheinend zu Götternamen gebildet wurden, bieten vermutlich altes, in diesem Zusammenhang verwertbares Material.

Die nur aus schwedischen ON erschlossene Göttin Niærþ (Hellberg 1986,62f.) wird zwar weder bei Snorri noch in einer anderen Quelle genannt, kann aber als feminine Entsprechung zu Njörðr angesehen werden, weil Snorri eine Schwester Njörds erwähnt. Niærþ wird oft als Entsprechung zu Nerthus gesehen, wie bei Tacitus (*Germania* 40) in allen für die Rekonstruktion des Originaltexts heranziehbaren Hss. die Hauptgöttin der Stämme an der östlichen Norseeküste und in Teilen Jütlands heißt, aber einen Geschwisterkult nennt Tacitus nicht. Da er den Kult der Nerthus genau beschreibt, ist es unmöglich, anzunehmen, Nerthus habe zur Zeit des Tacitus einen mit ihr in einem Geschwisterkult verehrten Bruder besessen, den Tacitus nicht gekannt habe. Entweder es handelt sich um in der Wurzel verschiedene Vorstellungen, oder die Rolle des Bruders wurde erst zwischen Tacitus und der Bildung der Kultorte relevant.

Die Wanen müssen nicht insgesamt nach dem Krieg den Inzest aufgeben, sondern nur Njörðr, der jetzt bei den Asen lebt und hier sich nach deren Gesetzen verhalten muß.<sup>1</sup> *Hskr.* Kap. 4 sagt nicht, wie man es oft liest und gern als Überlegenheit asischer Kultur deutet, daß die Asen allen Wanen ihre Sozialordnung aufzwingen, obwohl die Wanen nach *Vsp.* 24,7-8 siegreich waren. Auch gehört der Satz, daß die Asen nicht Inzest erlaubten, zu denen, die nur punktuelle Gültigkeit haben. Was ist das Verhältnis von Odin und Jǫrð

<sup>1</sup> Daß Loki *Lokasenna* 32 Freyja und Freyr wegen dieses Vergehens tadelt, ist weder diachron vorwärts, als Erklärung für das in der *Hskr.* an Njörðr gerichtete Verbot, brauchbar, noch rückwärts, daß eine heidnische Mythologie die Wanen wegen des Inzests getadelt hätte. Alles was bleibt, ist die allen Quellen gemeinsame Feststellung des Inzests bei den Wanen.

(*Gylf.* 9 ist Jörð Odins Tochter und Frau) anderes als Inzest? Der Satz *Óðinn heitir Alfǫðr, þvíat hann er faðir allra goða Gylf.* 19 zeigt, wie punktuell die Gültigkeit der Aussagen Snorris bezüglich der Verwandtschaftsbindungen der Götter sind; natürlich ist Odin nicht Vater aller Götter, und schon gar nicht Göttinnen. Über den Vater Friggs, Fjörgynn, erfahren wir nichts; wenn der Satz, daß die Asen keinen Inzest erlauben, mehr als punktuelle Gültigkeit hätte, könnte sie keine Asin sein; sie müßte, entsprechend der Etymologie ihres Namens und ihrer besonderen Zuständigkeiten, (nicht nur Ehe- und Nachkommenschaftsprobleme, sondern auch Weissagungsfähigkeit, die sie nicht ausübt: *Gylf.* 19), Wanin sein, oder aber sie ist, wie der Name am ehesten nahelegt (wenn auch denen Recht zu geben ist, die argumentieren, Snorri sage das nicht *expressis verbis*), Tochter eines Riesen. Nach *Hskr.* 8 vermählt sich Odin auch mit Skaði, der Tochter des *jötunn* Þjazi, nachdem deren Ehe mit Njörð gescheitert ist. Ein System der Heiraten, daß Angehörige einer Gruppe nur Angehörige bestimmter anderer Gruppen oder der eigenen Gruppe heiraten dürfen, scheint nicht beweisbar. Man sollte wohl hier kein System wie das Exogamiegebot totemistischer Kulturen (insbesondere Lévi-Strauss hat gezeigt, daß das Exogamiegebot das Hauptmerkmal des Totemismus ist) suchen. Das System der Eheschließungen und Wertigkeiten der Ehen in heidnischer Zeit ist mit Kategorien wie unserem ‚illegitim‘ gegen ‚legitim‘ nicht zu vergleichen, da schon die älteste im Germ. überhaupt erwähnte Partnerschaft bigamistisch ist: Caesar (*BG* 1,53) berichtet von zwei Gemahlinnen Ariovists, eine anscheinend aus seinem eigenen Volk, also vermutlich Suebin, und eine Tochter des Königs von Noricum; Tacitus (*Germ.* Kap. 18) kennzeichnet Bigamie als auf den Hochadel beschränkt; keiner von beiden bezeichnet eine der beiden Ehefrauen als ‚Nebenfrau‘ bzw. die Bindung an sie als eine Ehe niedrigerer Rechtsform (Much, *Germaniakommentar* 3. Aufl. S. 94, 283). In christlicher Zeit erscheint die ‚Friedelehe‘ zunächst (in karolingischer Zeit) als Bindung niedrigerer Rechtsform, aber nicht als illegitim (Konecny, Jesch). Die Wortwahl Snorris, daß Frigg *elja* der Jörd usw. ist (*Skskp.* 19), nicht umgekehrt, stimmt zu der Beobachtung von M. Clunies Ross (*Echoes*), daß in der von Snorri hierarchisch bezeichneten Aufzählung der Asen (*Gylf.* 19ff.) nicht der ‚legitime‘ Baldr (Platz 3) vor dem ‚illegitimen‘ Thor (Platz 2) steht.

Nun zu einer Einteilung, die in paganer Zeit vermutlich keine Rolle gespielt hat: Saxo und die *Heimskringla* bringen in euhemerisierenden Darstellungen psychologische Momente ins Spiel; es gibt z. B. Kategorien wie ‚gut‘ und ‚böse‘, ohne die die meisten Mythen auszukommen scheinen. Deshalb frage ich mich, ob die wenigen Stellen, an denen in der *Snorra Edda* so etwas wie gute oder böse ‚Charaktere‘ angedeutet werden, nicht Snorris Zutat sind – *illr* ‚böse‘ sind für Snorri: Ymir und alle anderen Reifriesen (so Jafnhár in *Gylfaginning* Kap. 7), Loki (*Gylfaginning* Kap. 32) und böse Nornen (Kap. 14). Die Wertung gut/böse entsteht vermutlich dadurch, daß die Götter bei Snorri, aber auch an den wenigen Stellen in Eddaliedern, aus denen man diesbezüglich

Information herauslesen kann (z. B. *Hárbarzljóð* 23), zugunsten der Menschen handeln.

Nach Snorri wollen **Götter und Menschen**, daß *Naglfar* möglichst spät fertig wird, der Mensch steht also bei den *Ragnarök* auf der Seite der Götter gegen Loki und seine Kinder. Wenn die Geschichte vom Útgarda-Loki zeigen sollte, daß Loki etwas mit dem gezähmten Feuer, im Gegensatz zum wilden Feuer, zu tun hat, würde ihn das noch mehr in die Rolle des Kulturbringers drängen, die der in mancher Hinsicht über Motivgemeinschaften mit Loki verfügende Prometheus deutlich spielt. Dumézil meint (*Loki* S. 116), Loki erinnere in Art und Umständen seiner Bestrafung an keinen von den großen „Gefangenen“ des Kaukasus. Wichtiger ist aber vielleicht das Zusammentreffen der Fesselung mit der Möglichkeit zur Rache in ferner Zukunft, die Loki, Prometheus und manchen kaukasischen Erzählungen gemeinsam ist.

Unsere Hauptquellen für den Prometheusmythos sind Hesiod (sowohl in der *Theogonie* als auch in den *Erga*) und Aischylos. Von dessen Prometheus-Trilogie ist ein Teil, der *Gefesselte Prometheus*, erhalten; die beiden anderen Teile und ein Prometheus-Satyrspiel, das zu einer anderen Trilogie gehörte, sind in teils sehr geringen Fragmenten überliefert.

Der entscheidende Gegensatz besteht darin, daß bei Hesiod Zeus auch die Menschen für die Tat des Prometheus bestraft, also Prometheus daran schuld ist, daß es den Menschen nicht mehr so gut geht wie ursprünglich, daß sie hart arbeiten müssen und Übeln ausgesetzt sind, insbesondere durch die Frau, die auf Befehl des Zeus zur Rache an den zunächst anscheinend nur als Männer gedachten Menschen erschaffen wird. Dagegen ist bei Aischylos Prometheus Stifter des Aufstiegs der Menschen von schattenhafter Nichtigkeit zu mächtigem und selbstbewußtem Dasein; Zeus trägt bei Aischylos manche Züge eines Gewaltherrschers (Kraus in *RE* s.v. Prometheus, 671). Diese unterschiedlichen Ausdeutungen des Mythos haben jedoch gemeinsam, daß Prometheus für die Menschen gegen Zeus auftritt. Die Stellungnahme gegen den Plan der Götter, die Menschen auszurotten, ist auch die wichtigste Gemeinsamkeit des Prometheus mit vorderasiatischen mythologischen Figuren, insbesondere dem hethitischen Ea, der im Götterrat über die Unsinnigkeit klagt, die Menschen zu vernichten (Lesky, 158). Dieselbe Grundhaltung spiegelt auch die Komödie, wo (Aristophanes, *Vögel* 1494-1551) Prometheus, vom Olymp kommend, also anscheinend nicht mehr gefesselt, dem Pisthetairos gegen die Götter helfen will, allerdings voll Angst, dabei von Zeus gesehen zu werden. Zu den bei Aischylos, *Prometheus* 445ff., genannten Gütern, die Prometheus den Menschen brachte, gehören insbesondere: des Geistes mächtig und bewußt werden, Technik, Wissenskünste, Schrift, Jahreszeitengliederung, Domestizierung der Haustiere, Medizin, Weissagung und Orakel.

Dumézil (*Loki* S. 123) behauptet, Loki sei tief amoralisch. Das stimmt nicht. Die Götter sind nicht in der Lage, eine wirkliche Gemeinschaft zu bilden, wenn sie Höðr nicht an ihrer Freude teilhaben lassen. Dumézil (*Loki* S. 104)

meint, auch als nicht blind hätte Höðr nicht minder von Loki den Mistelzweig erhalten können. Da übersieht er die Funktion des von der Freude ausgeschlossenen Blinden. Der erste Fehler liegt bei den Asen.

An Snorris Loki wird in jeder Geschichte ein prinzipieller Mangel der Götter sichtbar, der durch Loki zunächst verschlimmert, dann aber geheilt wird (ausgenommen Baldrs Tod, wo die Götter nicht mehr in der Lage sind, den Intellektuellen in die Kultur zu integrieren und seine Tat zu nutzen bzw. ihre Notwendigkeit einzusehen – wozu sollte ein Sohn von Odin mit Frigg führen?). Die andere moralische Wertung der Balder-Geschichte bei Saxo scheint nahezuzeigen, daß der Mythos überhaupt keine Wertungen im Sinne einer Morallehre, wie sie das Christentum kennt, aussprach, so daß die Bearbeiter nach eigenem Gutdünken Figuren als gut oder böse interpretieren konnten. Daß Snorris Loki bei Saxo überhaupt nicht erscheint, nur Snorris Útgarða-Loki, und Loki keinen in Ortsnamen sich widerspiegelnden Kult besessen hat, ist ein Indiz, daß Saxo in mancher Hinsicht sogar besser Schwerpunkte heidnischer Vorstellungen bewahrt als Snorri. Loki aus einer altnordischen Mythologie ausschließen können wir aber deswegen nicht. Vor allem seine Rolle in Triaden spricht gegen die Deutung, er sei nur ein ursprünglich verschiedenen, teils altererbten, teils aus mittelalterlichem Erzählgut zusammengefloßenen Figuren des mythischen ‚trickster‘ übergestülpter Name (vergleichbar der Erscheinung, daß man in Österreich 1970 unterschiedlich alte, ursprünglich auf Maria Theresia, Franz Joseph oder Schuschnigg gemünzte Anekdoten plötzlich auf Kreisky übertragen hat). Die *Lokasenna*, für ein so junges Anhängsel an die *Hymiskviða* (in der er nicht vorkommt) ich sie auch halte, wird von Snorri als Quelle zitiert, muß also älter sein als er. Triaden, die seinen Namen enthalten, könnte man als jünger interpretieren als solche, die stattdessen andere Namen (Lóðurr) enthalten. Was in (relativ) älteren Dichtungen von ihm gesagt wird, ist ziemlich stimmig: *Vsp.* 35, 51, die unheilvolle Rolle, in der *Prymskviða* die des witzigen Helfers (Dieners?) Thors, dem alle Götter vertrauen (Thor scheint neben ihm zu schlafen, Freyja leiht ihm ihr Federhemd, Thor vertraut sich seinem Schutz an).

In der *Lokasenna* ist Loki zunächst Mitglied der Göttergesellschaft. Er begeht einen Mord an Ägirs Diener Fimafeng, der gelobt wird. Das stimmt zur Rolle Lokis als Diener der Asen, der ein Motiv haben könnte, nämlich Eifersucht gegen einen anderen Diener, der mehr gelobt wird als er. Es kann auch einen strukturellen Hintergrund haben, nämlich daß die Einladung zu Ägir und Thors Kesselbesorgung – ohne Lokis Begleitung – nicht die Frage löste, wieso den Göttern die Nahrung ausgegangen war, eine Frage, die eigentlich eine Bitte an Loki, eine Erkundungsfahrt zu unternehmen, auslösen sollte. Für diesen Mord wird er ausgeschlossen, aber wegen der Blutsbrüderschaft mit Odin wieder aufgenommen und an den Ehrenplatz von Widar (Odins Sohn mit der – den Asen, insbesondere Thor, auch in *Skskp.* wohlgesonnenen – *gýgr* Gríðr) gesetzt, also strukturell von Odin seinem eigenen Sohn vorgezogen,

obwohl die *Lokasenna* Baldrs Tod in der Vergangenheit denkt. Als Freyja Loki tadelt, daß er sich vor Frigg seiner Schuld am Tode Baldrs rühmt, sagt sie ... *er þú yðra telr leiðstafi* „daß du von **euren** *leið-stafir* ‚leiderregenden Reden‘ erzählst“, Frigg und Loki werden da von Freyja in bezug auf Baldrs Tod wie auf gleicher Stufe stehend behandelt. Wenn man die *Lokasenna* für in sich stimmig hielte, hätte das weitreichende Konsequenzen für die Interpretation des Baldr-Mythos (die alte ‚Höðr = Odin‘-Hypothese möchte ich aber nicht wieder auferwecken).

Auch daß böse Menschen, *vándir menn* (*Gylf.* 2) nach dem Tod hinunter, in ein unterirdisches Reich, fahren, und ‚recht gesittete‘ *þeir er rétt eru síðadír*, nach *Gimlé* kommen, wird kaum jemand für altgermanische Vorstellung halten; die um einiges jüngere *Njáls saga* läßt die toten Heiden in den Berg zu ihren Vorfahren gehen und steht mit dieser Vorstellung vermutlich näher am Heidentum. Die Stellung im Jenseits scheint in dem einzigen dürftigen (weil aus einem christlichen Missionsbericht, also auch nicht primären) Zeugnis von der sozialen Stellung auf der Welt abhängig, nicht von ‚gut‘ oder ‚böse‘: die *Vita Wulframmi* zeigt (anlässlich der Bekehrung des Friesen Radbod Anfang des 8. Jh.), daß die Vorstellung des heidnischen Fürsten war, zu seinen Vorfahren zu gehen, und die scheint er sich alle an dem selben Platz vorgestellt zu haben (oder ein Fürst betrachtete seine Vorfahren selbstverständlich alle als ‚gut‘; jedenfalls rechnete er offensichtlich nicht damit, daß sie sich an zwei verschiedenen Orten befinden könnten, das ist alles, was wir ganz sicher sagen können). Dieses Thema wird komplizierter dadurch, daß Snorri Freyja die Hälfte der Schlachttoten zuspricht: *halfan val hon kýss hverjan dag, en halfan Óðinn á* (*Gylf.* 23). Steht ihr das, abgesehen davon daß es sowohl *Gylf.* 2 als auch dem Wulfram-Bericht widerspricht, zu, weil sie eine Wanin ist, oder warum? Welche Hälfte? Die sie lieber hat? Die Tapfereren? Die Guten sie, Odin die Bösen oder umgekehrt? Letzteres kaum – das wäre wohl christlich.

Inwieweit kann man hier Freyja als Variante zu Hel sehen? Der Hund, mit dem sie - nicht nach Snorri - zu tun hat, könnte eine solche Verbindung andeuten: Hundedarstellungen werden in mythologischem Kontext oft als Unterweltsbezüge gedeutet (vom griech. *Kerberos* bis zur altgerman. *Nehalennia*). Ein Spottvers, den die *Njáls saga* (Kap. 102) einem Christen des 10. Jh. in den Mund legt, scheint für Freya Hundegestalt oder zumindest den Hund als Sympathietier zu bezeugen: *Spari ek eigi goð geyja! Grey þykki mér Freyja* ‚Mir ist es zu viel, wenn Götter bellen! Eine Hündin dünkt mich Freya. Andererseits ist Freya aber im Besitz eines Ebers als Reittier (*Hyndlóljóð* Str. 5 und 7) und eines Katzen- (= Löwen-?)gespanns (*Gylf.* 23). Die Motivgruppe ‚Hund + Eber‘ tritt auch bei den Langobarden auf. Diese Verbindung geht daher wohl in gemeingerm. Zeit zurück. Die Schutzgöttin der Langobarden, Frea, entspricht aber etymologisch Frigg und ist wie diese Gemahlin Wodans. Freyja und Frigg besitzen anscheinend konkurrierend je ein Falkengewand, das nur die Funktion hat, von Loki ausgeborgt zu werden. Daß es ein geschlossenes System

des paganen Mythos gegeben hat, in dem Loki sich mal dieses, mal jenes Falkengewand ausborgt, wird man kaum annehmen.

Wenn die moralische Kategorisierung nicht aufgeht, scheint es günstiger zu sein, sie durch die Kennzeichnung als nützlich oder schädlich für eine bestimmte soziale Gruppe von mythischen Wesen oder Menschen zu kennzeichnen. Innerhalb der Nützlichkeit würde ich differenzieren: schutzpendend, kraftspendend, fruchtbarkeitsspendend, wissensspendend. Das Schädliche beitzte verschiedene Nuancen des versus Angsterregenden, Gefährlichen, Bedrohlichen. Für den Erforscher heidnischer Mythen hat das Verstehen des in einer christlichen Kultur überlieferten Quellentextes in seinem christlichen Kontext die wichtige Funktion, Mißverständnisse zu reduzieren: wenn z. B. in einem Werk eines christlichen Autors mythologische Figuren als ‚gut‘ oder ‚böse‘ bezeichnet werden, ist damit noch nicht gesagt, daß in einer heidnischen Mythologie dieses Gegensatzpaar gleich wichtig gewesen sein muß, denn es ist ein christliches; eine heidnische Mythologie könnte etwa die Kategorien ‚freundlich‘ und ‚bedrohlich‘ für wesentlicher gehalten haben oder ‚nützlich‘ und ‚schädlich‘ oder auch andere. Die meisten idg. Völker scheinen mächtige unsichtbare Wesen gekannt zu haben, die ihre Kräfte zum Nutzen ihrer Schützlinge und zum Schaden derer Feinde gebrauchten. Manchmal waren sie auch unberechenbar und entzogen plötzlich ihre Gunst, wie Odin.

Die Frage, welche Gottheit von den Menschen um Hilfe gebeten wird, ist für die Einschätzung, wer in der Götterwelt die Entscheidungen tatsächlich trifft, sehr wichtig. Wie geht ein Zwist unter Menschen aus, wenn eine der Parteien Schützling einer männlichen, die andere einer weiblichen Gottheit ist? Odins Frau Frigg hat in dieser Hinsicht eine ähnliche Stellung wie Hera als Gattin des Zeus bei Homer. In den *Grímnismál* verhilft ihre List ihrem Schützling Agnarr dazu, daß Odin gegen seinen Schützling Geirroðr ergrimmt und ihn vernichtet. Auf dem Kontinent begegnet sie uns, in der Schreibung Frea als Gemahlin Wodans in der *Origo gentis Langobardorum* (Ende 7. Jahrhundert) und bei Paulus Diaconus in dessen *Historia Langobardorum* (Ende 8. Jahrhundert). Sie erscheint dort in dem Mythos, der erzählt, wie die Langobarden ihren Namen bekamen, als deren Schutzherrin und bringt Wodan durch eine List dazu, nicht den Wandalen, die sich zuerst an ihn um Hilfe gewandt hatten, sondern den Winnilern den Sieg zuzusprechen. Sie rät den Winnilern, ihre Frauen mögen sich die Haare so vor das Gesicht binden, daß sie wie Männer aussehen. Wodan erwacht und fragt „Wer sind diese Langbärte?“ Frea antwortet: „Du hast ihnen den Namen gegeben, gib ihnen nun auch den Sieg.“ Das Thema ‚Überlistung des Patriarchen durch die Frau‘, die ein ‚heimliches Matriarchat‘ ausübt, findet sich in Mythen verschiedener indogermanischer Völker, und wohl darüber hinaus. Das kann Fakten spiegeln oder den Wunsch eines Patriarchen, die Dinge so darzustellen, als herrsche ein Matriarchat. In der *Völsunga saga* (Kap. 1) erhören Frigg und Odin (in dieser Reihenfolge werden sie genannt) Rerirs Bitte um Nachkommenschaft. In der

*Snorra Edda* (*Gylfag.* Kap. 34) erwirkt eine weibliche Gottheit, Lofn, die Erlaubnis zum Geschlechtsverkehr durch Fürbitte bei Odin oder Frigg. Der Begriff der **Fürbitte** findet sich vor allem in christlicher Heiligenverehrung; im Christentum sind die Fürbittenden oft weibliche Heilige (Maria), die Entscheidung trifft die männliche Gottheit; im Germanischen dagegen kann die **Entscheidung** auch von der weiblichen Gottheit getroffen werden. Zu beachten ist dazu auch die Einwendung des Jafnhár, der, als Gangleri nach den Asen fragt, einwirft, *eigi eru ásynjurnar óhelgari ok eigi megu þær minna*.

‚Sterbliche‘ gegen ‚unsterbliche‘ Wesen: wenn wir Götter sagen, trennen wir sie gegen Riesen und andere meist durch den Begriff der Unsterblichkeit ab. Nicht in allen Kulturen verläuft die Begriffsgrenze gleich: im Griechischen werden die Götter älterer Generationen, wie Kronos und die Titanen, nicht getötet, sondern in den Tartaros geworfen oder (wie Metis) verschluckt, aber sie sind ewig gedacht, während die Giganten von den Göttern getötet werden. Heroen sind zwar, durch einen göttlichen und einen menschlichen Elternteil, meist sterblich, aber es gibt Ausnahmen: Herakles etwa wird im Olymp gedacht. Das zeigt, daß diese Vorstellung in Griechenland nicht wirklich ausgefeilt war und sich änderte, vermutlich nicht nur Änderungen unterworfen, sondern auch zu einem Zeitpunkt nie in sich widerspruchsfrei stimmig war. Was wirklich der Unterschied zwischen einem nach dem Tod in den Hades gelangten sterblichen Menschen, wie Laertes (Vater des Odysseus) und einem dorthin verbannten Unsterblichen war, wird der durchschnittliche Grieche kaum je überlegt haben und von den antiken Mythographen haben es nicht alle gleich erklärt.

So ein einfaches Wort wie ‚nordische Götter‘ zeigt schon, daß wir eigentlich uns immer klar sein müßten, ob wir es im Sinne der modernen Religionswissenschaft meinen, also dem Begriff unsere Füllung geben, oder im Sinne Snorris meinen, also ausdrücken wollen, was für Snorri (unserer Meinung nach) ein ‚Gott‘ war, oder ob wir den Begriff meinen, den wir einer heidnischen Epoche zuerkennen, und der für uns nur sehr vage rekonstruierbar ist, und der sich auch innerhalb der heidnischen Zeit gewandelt haben kann. Was die Unsterblichkeitsfrage betrifft, so werden in Snorris Mythen die von Thor erschlagenen Riesen eindeutig vom Leben zum Tod befördert; es gibt also auch übermächtige Figuren, die schon vor *Ragnarøk* sterben; die Baldersage ist strukturell kein Einzelfall. Auch der Fenriswolf wird nach der Fesselung nicht erschlagen, weil die Götter die Eide achten, nicht weil er vor dem Weltuntergang nicht getötet werden könnte. Auch Loki wird ja mit dem Erschlagen, Kopfabschneiden usw. gedroht. Snorri muß sich also vorgestellt haben, daß es prinzipiell möglich sein könnte, auch andere Götter als Baldr vor *Ragnarøk* zu töten. Nur sind sie eben zu schlau (oder stark, glückbegünstigt ...), als daß es tatsächlich geschehen würde.

Es ist also eine unlösbare Frage, ob in paganer germ. religiöser Vorstellung die Götter als unsterblich gedacht waren. Noch schwieriger wird es mit

Halbgöttern, falls man diese Kategorie besessen haben sollte: Jordanes nennt die Vorfahren des gotischen Königshauses *anses*, was mit altnord. *Æsir* etymologisch identisch ist, und bezeichnet sie als *semidei*. Wenn Jordanes got. mythologische Figuren als Zwischenwesen zwischen Mensch und Gott, *semidei*, benennt, ist nicht klar, ob das eine Klassifizierung von außen (aus antik-christlicher Kategorisierung) oder aus germ. Tradition repräsentiert oder nur Scheu des Christen davor ist, heidnische Götter als *dei* zu bezeichnen. Für die Frage nach einer etwaigen Hierarchisierung heidnischer Göttergruppen wäre das besonders interessant, weil es, wenn es germanische Wurzeln hätte, die Asen als Stammväter von Menschengeschlechtern und als anderen Göttern **untergeordnete** Gruppe kennzeichnen würde. Unter die *heroas* subsumiert Jordanes den Vidigoia *Getica* 5,43; aber 34,178 nennt er ihn *Gothorum fortissimus*. Ob damit Heros als ‚tapferer Mensch‘ bestimmt ist oder in einen Bereich von Vorzeitmenschen liegt, die über das Maß der dem Gegenwartsmenschen eigenen Kräfte verfügten und ob die Trennlinie zwischen diesen und den Göttern scharf oder fließend war, ist unbekannt. Wir gewinnen damit einige Verdachtspunkte, daß die hierarchische, sympathiemäßige usw. Bewertung und Zuordnung der Götter bei Snorri mindestens genau so unheidnisch ist wie bei Saxo, aber die Kürze und Mehrdeutigkeit der wirklich alten Quellen erlaubt uns nicht, ein fixes System für irgendeine bestimmte Unterepoche der heidnischen Zeit dagegenzustellen. Eine klar auf eine Generation beschränkte Zwischengruppe sterblicher Halbgötter mit übernatürlichen Kräften zwischen einem rein göttlichen Großvater und einem rein menschlichen Enkel scheint im Griechischen eine junge Vorstellung zu sein, und im Germ. gibt es keine Indizien dafür. Die Frage der **Unsterblichkeit oder Sterblichkeit** von Göttern, die ein weiteres Einteilungskriterium bieten könnte, kann nicht für sich allein gesehen werden. Sie steht in Zusammenhang damit, daß in manchen Mythologien die Erde ewig gedacht ist, es also keinen Weltuntergang gibt (etwa in der altgriechischen nur ein Ende der Herrschaft des Zeus), in anderen gibt es ein Ende der Welt, und in anderen herrscht ein zyklisches Weltbild und in wieder anderen, z. B. der *Völuspá*, ein zwei- oder dreistufiges (die neue Welt nach *Ragnarök* scheint ewig zu dauern, also kann man nicht von zyklisch sprechen).

Wesen, die den Menschen etwas vermitteln, sind eine Gruppe, die wir erwarten würden, die aber anscheinend fehlt: erstaunlicherweise gibt es in nordischen Mythen keine Figur, die den Menschen die Kulturtechniken vermittelt, eine Art ‚Kulturheros‘, wie in vielen anderen Mythologien. Eine der Hauptquellen für einen Kulturheros, der Herrschaftsgründung und Kultureinführung verbindet, ist Diodorus Siculus. Dieser erzählt (II,38f.) einen indischen Mythos, in griech. Interpretation und mit Namen griech. Gottheiten, in dem Dionysos in Indien die Segnungen der Kultur einführt (Städtebau, Götterverehrung, Gesetz, Gericht) und Stammvater der Könige wird, bis mit Herakles, „von dem die Inder sagen, daß er bei ihnen geboren wurde“, eine

neue Ära beginnt. Die ausführliche Schilderung der Heraklesmythen bei Diodor (IV,7-39) zeigt den Heros auf seiner Fahrt durch viele Länder mehrfach als K.; z. B. nach Libyen bringt er Ackerbau, Kulturpflanzen, Wohlstand der Städte, Recht und Gesetz; bei den Kelten gründet er Alesia; auf dem Weg nach Italien begründet er den Straßenbau über die Alpen. Unter den ihm bei verschiedenen weiteren griech. Autoren zugeschriebenen Taten fallen besonders die Städtegründungen auf.

Namen der Wanen: *vanir* wird meist zur idg. Wurzel von lat. *Venus* gestellt, danach sind die Wanen zuvörderst Liebesgötter. Freyr von idg. *\*prouios* ‚der vorne befindliche‘ = ‚Herr, Führer‘; Freyja ist moviertes fem. dazu: ‚Herrin‘. Frigg dagegen zu *\*pri-* ‚lieben‘, der Etymologie nach ist ihr Aufgabenbereich also ein eher ‚wanischer‘, der Aufgabenbereich Freyjas sollte dem Namen nach zu schließen ein eher ‚odinischer‘ sein. Dumézil, *Loki* S. 123 meint, Asen und Wanen seien wie Clans. Das stimmt in gar keiner Hinsicht. Daß in zahlreichen Mythen die Sympathien des Erzählers auf der Seite der Asen stehen, insbesondere wenn es sich um Kämpfe gegen Riesen handelt, bedeutet für mich nicht, wie für M. Clunies Ross, daß die Riesen auf dem niedrigsten Rang der sozialen Hierarchie stehen. Auch wenn eine Figur noch so schädlich für Asen und Menschen gezeichnet ist, wie etwa Surt, so steht er keinesfalls niedrig in der sozialen Hierarchie; jedenfalls höher als die Angehörigen des Totenheers, das er anführt. Eine hierarchische Kategorisierung der Riesen würde auch die Einordnung der ‚Geberin‘ Gefjon unmöglich machen (der Ausweg, sie in zwei gleichnamige Figuren aufzuteilen, würde gerade das Hauptproblem nicht lösen, denn in der Erzählung *Hskr. 5/Gylf. 1* ist sie Sendbotin Odins, den Dänen hilfreich und nacheinander Gattin eines Riesen und des Ahnherrn der Skjöldungen, eines Sohnes Odins; daß sie *Gylf. 34 mærr* und Schutzpatronin der jungfräulich sterbenden Mädchen, also anscheinend unverheiratet ist, genügt bei der systemimmanenten Widersprüchlichkeit des Textes nicht, die viertwichtigste Asin – das ist sie für *Gylf. 34* – von der Ahnherrin der Dänen zu lösen. Daß es in altgermanischer rheinländischer Mythologie ‚gebende‘ Göttinnen im Plural gab, ist ein anderes Problem). Während die soziale Hierarchie der Gruppen gegeneinander eher ein Konstrukt unserer Betrachtung ist, ist die Rolle des einzelnen mythischen Wesens innerhalb seiner Gruppe (Anführer, Helfer, Außenseiter ...) in den Figuren deutlich angelegt.

Es ist nicht eine Welt wie die der USA des 19. Jahrhunderts, in der ein Schwarzer auf Grund seiner Rasse ein Angehöriger der niedrigsten Klasse war, sondern eine Welt von konkurrierenden Gesellschaften mit jeweils eigener Hierarchie. Gruppierungen, wie die Zusammenfassung von 12 Asen oder Asinnen, erscheinen offensichtlich als willkürlich und sind ein Ausfluß hochmittelalterlicher Dodekadenbildung in der Imitation der Apostel (von den Paladinen Karls des Großen in der Heldensage angefangen). Alt sind hingegen die Triadenbildungen; daß auch das Heidentum sie kannte, bezeugt Adams Bericht über Uppsala mit größerer Sicherheit als Tacitus. Doch da die Triaden

so gut bezeugt sind, darf man auch Tacitus bezüglich der bei ihm überlieferten Triaden vertrauen, und vermutlich auch umstrittenen südgerman. Zeugnissen (z. B. Spange von Nordendorf). Was den Kult betrifft, so ist die einzige verwertbare Nachricht bei Adam von Bremen, der *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte* IV, 26f., über den Tempel der Schweden in Uppsala berichtet:

In diesem Tempel, der ganz aus Gold verfertigt ist,<sup>2</sup> verehrt das Volk die Standbilder von drei Göttern, und zwar so, daß der mächtigste von ihnen, Thor, mitten im Gemach seinen Thron hat; zu beiden Seiten nehmen den Platz Wodan und Fricco ein.

Ihre Bedeutung ist folgende: Thor, sagen sie, herrscht in der Luft und gebietet über Donner und Blitz, Wind und Regen, heiteres Wetter und Fruchtbarkeit. Der andere, Wodan, d. h. Wut (*id est furor*), lenkt die Kriege und verleiht dem Menschen Tapferkeit gegen seine Feinde; der dritte ist Fricco, der Frieden und Freude den Sterblichen spendet.

Sein Bild versehen sie auch mit einem gewaltigen männlichen Glied. Den Wodan aber stellen sie bewaffnet dar, wie wir es mit dem Mars zu tun pflegen; Thor aber scheint mit seinem Szepter dem Jupiter zu ähneln.

Sie verehren auch zu Göttern erhobene Menschen, die sie wegen gewaltiger Taten mit der Unsterblichkeit begaben; so liest man auch in der Lebensbeschreibung des heiligen Anskar, daß sie es mit dem König Erich gemacht haben.

Nach der Lektüre dieser Passage würden wir annehmen, daß die Nordleute unsterbliche Götter und Heroen kannten, was der späteren Überlieferung widerspricht. Aber das ‚unsterblich‘ bei Adam ist wohl christliche Interpretation und hat sicher keine Grundlage in Informationen über pagane Vorstellungen. Was Glauben verdient, sind jedoch die Beschreibungen von für Augenzeugen sichtbaren Dingen. Da gibt es drei Hauptgötter, und daß sie der Mythologie nach zwei verschiedenen Gruppen zugehörig sein sollen, spiegelt sich nicht im Kult. An *Fricco* ist vor allem sein Name auffällig. Adam latinisiert die germanischen Namen selbstverständlich, eine gewisse lautliche Abweichung ist dabei ohne weiteres in Kauf zu nehmen. Aber das *-co* muß wohl als Deminutivsuffix verstanden werden. Es scheint so zu sein, als hätte dieser Gott eine Art ‚Kosenamen‘ getragen, was für einen Fruchtbarkeitsgott verständlich wäre. Die Gliederung, die hier erkennbar ist, entspricht insofern anderen Belegen, als uns immer wieder Triaden von Göttern begegnen. Bei Tacitus begegnen uns als Göttertrias ein Mercurius (*Germania*), ein Mars (*Annalen* und *Germania*) und ein Hercules (*Annalen* und vermutlich auch *Germania*) der Germanen; eine Trias eponymer Heroen in der Abstammungstradition (*Germania*); in der ‚sächsischen Abrenuntiation‘ Thunaer, Uuoden, Saxnot; Freyr, Njörðr ok hinn almáttki áss (*Landnb.* 268; der letztgenannte Gott vielleicht christlicher Ersatz für einen heidnischen Gott?); in der *Liederreda*

<sup>2</sup> Das ist offensichtlich übertrieben, bedeutet aber nicht, daß deswegen dem ganzen Bericht Glaubwürdigkeit abzusprechen ist.

bzw. bei Snorri Odin, Vili, Vé; Odin, Hœnir, Lóðurr; Hárr, Jafnhárr, Þriði (sicher christlich inspiriert); Odin, Hœnir, Loki. Auffällig ist, daß zwei der Mitglieder der Trias von Uppsala, Thor und Fricco/Freyr, in keiner der eddischen Triaden vorkommen.

Wenn wir den Beleg über Uppsala nicht hätten, würden wir die taciteischen, eddischen und vor allem Snorris Triaden für Erfindung bzw. Neugliederung der antiken oder christlichen Autoren halten, da wir ja in diesen Kulturen ebenfalls Göttertriasen vorfinden (kapitolinische Trias: Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus; jünger Jupiter, Juno, Minerva; Dreifaltigkeit ...). Die weitreichende, prinzipielle Trennung der Götter in Asen und Wanen ist dagegen in den Mythen des 13. Jh. nur sehr wenig, in den wenigen älteren Zeugnissen überhaupt nicht gestützt.

Eine klare Trennung der Götter nach Funktionen, wie Dumézil sie behauptete, wird überhaupt nicht sichtbar; heute gilt Dumézil allerdings schon so allgemein als widerlegt (vgl. Schlerath in *Kratylos* 40 und 41), daß darauf kein Gewicht gelegt zu werden braucht. Der Wachstums- und Liebesgott Freyr/Fricco trägt auch Herrschaftsfunktionen, usw. De Vries stellt Balder in die Nähe der Wanen, obwohl er der Sohn von Odin und Frigg ist (er meint, Baldr sei Vegetationsgott, weil er im Winter [?!] stirbt). Solche Schwierigkeiten zeigen, daß weder die Zuordnung der Götter zu Funktionen noch die Scheidung in Asen und Wanen funktionieren.

Eine wieder ganz andere Einteilung mythologischer Wesen ergäbe sich vermutlich, wenn man sie danach gruppierte, ob sie auf gotländischen Bildsteinen im obersten oder im untersten Feld dargestellt werden. Da jedoch die Identifizierung mehrdeutig ist, kann ein solches System kaum erstellt werden: tritt Odin nur im obersten Feld auf (als Reiter?) oder auch im Untersten (beim Raub des Dichtermets als Adler?) Oder ist der Reiter, der auf dem achtbeinigen Pferd sitzt, der Verstorbene beim Ritt ins Totenreich, oder der Mensch im Vogelkleid Wieland?

Elgqvist (1955) erschloß ein Heiligtum des Gottes Ullr innerhalb der heutigen Stadt Uppsala aus dem Bezirksnamen *Ullarakers hundare* (Ulleråkers härad); unter den nach Adam von Bremen 4, 27 im außerhalb gelegenen Alt-Uppsala verehrten Göttern *Thor, Wodan, Fricco* ist Ullr nicht. Das Verhältnis von in ON häufigen Göttern wie Ullr zu Göttern in den Zeugnissen von Kulten, die wir im Fall von Uppsala schon aus heidnischer Zeit kennen, ist daher ungeklärt. Vielleicht geben die ON über die Organisation des Kultes Auskunft: sie erscheinen meist in Bezirksbezeichnungen, z. B. *Frø's hærath*, später *Frø's herred*, Name einer Harde in Südjütland; aschwed. *Frøsfjærðunger* ‚Viertel eines hærþ-Bezirks‘ in Västergötland und *Frøstolpt (tolpt* ‚Anzahl von zwölf‘), also stand wohl der Bezirk in der speziellen Obhut eines Gottes (Andersson 1992, 538f.). Die Untersuchung der ON gibt uns Auskunft über die regionale Verteilung der Kulte und die Möglichkeit der Einteilung der Götter nach dem Kriterium, ob sie als Empfänger lokaler Kulte eine Rolle spielen oder nicht. Dabei erhält man Karten von Orten, an denen bestimmten Göttern Heiligtümer

errichtet wurden, die einerseits landschaftliche Schwerpunkte ergeben, andererseits Schwerpunkte an Orten bestimmter Eigenschaften (z. B. nahe an für die Einfahrt von Wikingerschiffen geeigneten Flußmündungen sind den Namen Óðinn enthaltende ON signifikant häufig). Diese von Jan de Vries (*Altg. Relg.* Bd. 2) in ihrer Bedeutung erkannte Forschungsmethode hat seither zahlreiche Arbeiten hervorgebracht; zuletzt zusammenfassend Andersson 1992.

Die große Zahl dieser theophoren Ortsnamen, die uns annehmen läßt, daß der Kult in heidnischer Zeit das eigentlich Wichtige an der Religion war, während er in den in christlicher Zeit aufgezeichneten Denkmälern eine Zufallsrolle spielt (Belege wie der für den *Volsi*-kult in der *Ólafs saga* entspringen ja nicht der Sammlung von Kultzeugnissen, wie die Edden der Sammlung von Mythen), führt uns zurück zu der eingangs genannten Frage und bestätigt die dort gegebene Antwort: der Aspekt der Götter als Opferempfänger scheint in den heidnischen Quellen so wichtig, in den hochmittelalterlichen so unwichtig zu sein, daß man seine spärlichen Reflexe in den literarischen Texten für ein unverstandenes irisches Fremdwort halten konnte. Daß der Name von Njords Schwester in den literarischen Texten nicht erscheint, kann aus dem Ortsnamenmaterial nicht nur ergänzt werden, sondern bestätigt die alte Theorie, daß Snorri Wanen, und auch ihre Namen, eher unterdrückt als Asen. Die Rolle der Landschaftsverbände schützenden (bzw. für sie ‚zuständigen‘) Gottheiten war nicht geringer als die des für eine soziale Gruppe (Wikinger und ihren Anführer) zuständigen Odin.

Das Beibehalten von Widersprüchen seiner Vorlagen ist Methode Snorris, nicht Schlamperei. Wir sollen ihm für die Widersprüche, die er belassen hat (wie viele er hinweggebügelt hat, können wir nicht wissen) dankbar sein.

## The Advantage of Self-Possession: Knowledge and Advice in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*

Kári Reid

Department of English, University of Queensland

Fiction may be imbued with a truth to life which is equal to if not superior in value to any factual truth. But when the public demand not only human, but also historical reality, if they are to take a story and the message hidden behind the story seriously, they must have that reality too or at least the semblance of it. This consideration became one of the rules of the game, more or less difficult to obey, more or less conflicting with the pure art of story-telling, but all in all beneficial. (Nordal, *The Historical Element* 35)

The issue I have become interested in is the relationship between the problem of authorship in Old Icelandic scholarship and attempts which are made to draw a social history of medieval Iceland out of the family and contemporary sagas. The idea of a medieval Icelandic author is a difficult one to define, and it is not surprising that narrative theory has become an important component of many saga scholars' work. Narrative models shift attention away from the author, making analysis less reliant on a clearly defined conception of the author-type.

So, in Úlfar Bragason's thesis on *Sturlunga saga*, we see a strong emphasis on the structural similarities between the sagas of that compilation and the family sagas, and his discussion of changes made by the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* has helped to refocus our attention onto the artistic features of the compilation, especially structural elements which have much in common with the family sagas.

At the same time, some saga scholars have attempted to define a social reality of medieval Iceland by discussing the social and political relations embedded in the sagas: this has ranged from what may be called a contextual approach to the literary history of Iceland, evident in Theodore Andersson's paper on what he terms the saga school at Munkaþverá, to analyses of intellectual outlook, such as Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's approach, through to the social and political histories of Guðrún Nordal, Sverre Bagge and Jesse Byock, and the historical and cultural anthropology of William Miller and Kirsten Hastrup.

Despite the many differences in the approaches taken by the scholars I have mentioned, I think it is true to say that they share an emphasis on the common features which can be identified across the family and contemporary sagas, rather than their differences. As such, these scholars probably enjoy a shared resistance to the artistic status and rather sophisticated historical conception which was attributed to the saga authors by the Icelandic School, apparent, for example, in Sigurður Nordal's essay on the historical element of the family sagas. Hastrup writes that "behind genre there is life" (9), Miller insists that the "sagas for the most part ring true" (46), and together Andersson and Miller have stated that it is not "adequate to suppose that the sagas were made up by inventive writers in the thirteenth-century" (xiii): these outlooks tend to diminish our appreciation of the author as source of creation, interpretation, and emphasis. Historical approaches often seek a very close alignment of the text and narrative techniques, the author, and the actual world content of the saga.

On the other hand, Vésteinn Ólason's approach can be seen to carry on many of the underlying assumptions of the Icelandic School, in particular our ability today to unpack saga authors' individual interpretations of history and humanity. In Ólason's recent paper on *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, he discusses the search for an implicit authorial voice of that saga, and some of the difficulties of that search (163-5). Ólason's detection of a dialogue between the author of *Gísla saga Súrssonar* and past values, in which the author engages in a "sympathetic effort to investigate their meaning and limits in concrete dramatic situations" (174), is an interesting expression of an approach which connects authorial perspective and the particular stylistic features of an individual saga.

My aim in this paper is to look at *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða (ÞsH)* with this debate about the capacity of the saga authors in mind, as well as the accompanying struggle between differentiating and unifying approaches to the saga corpus. My investigation is not premised on assumptions about any

particular level of authorial capacity, but rather the conviction that if there is an author there to be seen, we must look him in the eyes. This discussion is part of a larger project regarding the historical outlook of medieval Icelandic authors, and I would stress that in this paper I am using *PsH* as a single case study, rather than as a representative work. Much of my analysis will concentrate on the author's portrayal of the character of two key protagonists, especially through the representation of the advice which is given to them by their friends and their reception of that advice. Naturally, any attempt today to define the authorial voice of a particular saga will avoid the kind of biographical search common before the narrative theory of the 1950s and 1960s. It must also carefully differentiate our values today from those of medieval Iceland: much of Stephen Tranter's analysis of *PsH* is undermined by his analysis of the saga according to modern notions of justice, disintegration, degeneration, and a confusion of the compiler's outlook with an historical reality (see 56 – 72).

I would like to abstract my approach with six overlapping questions, three regarding character and three plot, which inform my study of the saga.

Regarding character, i) how does the author position characters in relation to dialogue and events in the saga which relate strongly to social issues and historical interests; ii) do characters' decisions about social and historical issues affect the final outcomes of the plot; for instance, does the author create links between particular ethical decisions made by characters and those characters' success or failure in the dispute which is being narrated; iii) does the author allow for reflective moments, not by the author but by characters; that is, where characters momentarily step outside their function as movers of the plot to reflect on an historical, social, or ethical theme which is raised by the events around them?

Regarding plot, i) what events or types of events resonate throughout the saga after they have occurred? That is, are there events, types of events, or themes which continue to influence characters' choices for some time after they have occurred, or which form points of reference for the remainder of the action and against which the remaining action is cast; ii) how is knowledge and information about important social and historical events related, and does the method by which they are related provide any insights into the authors' conception of the past; iii) how does the author punctuate the movement of the plot? Are there repetitive methods of punctuation which are used to form focal points of social and historical analysis? For instance, are there moments when the plot is moved forward at the same time as the saga engages with important social or historical events, that is, coincidences of plot movement and important historical events which together generate a dramatic effect?

*PsH* does stand apart from the other works of *Sturlunga saga*: it is quite short, the plot is easy to follow, at the heart of the saga is a dispute between two chieftains, and it moves in clear steps towards a climactic confrontation (albeit one without a final fight [Brown "Preface" xvi]) in much the same way as

identified by Andersson in relation to the family sagas. When the dispute moves to the assembly, the author is able to slow down his narration by introducing a greater amount of dialogue, and through the dialogue to increase the references made to the ethical standards of the time. The Alþing, which in many of the sagas forms the focal point of the Icelandic commonwealth, is the natural place to set this. It is during the assembly that legal rights are asserted, laws are enacted, that the relationship between the Church and the secular is most evident, and where individual reputations can be made or lost. Indeed, the Alþing is where words, knowledge, information, and advice are most crucial. And this is an author who appreciates well-crafted words: in another part of the saga, he shows a strong interest in the stories, and insults, which take place at the famous wedding at Reykjahólar (chapter 10; see generally Bragason “Ok”), and this pleasure in words is equally apparent during the confrontations at the Alþing (Brown “Preface” xvii – xx, xxii - xxiii regarding dialogue and the perspective of those who follow the two main characters).

In the way of a family saga, the author spends some time introducing the protagonists and outlining their dispositions (Bragason *Poetics* 44 - 45): one, Hafliði Másson, is a well-known and powerful chieftain: he comes from an established kin group and enjoys considerable popularity and support in twelfth-century Iceland. Þorgils, on the other hand, is in the process of becoming a chieftain of substance; his genealogy is not as well-known, his reputation remains to be made, and his position amongst the most prominent chieftains appears to depend on his ability to agitate for power at others’ expense, much in the way of Miller’s analysis of honour-exchange.

Their quarrels, which form the basic structuring units of the saga, start with the unruly behaviour of Hafliði’s close kinsman Már, and Þorgils’ involvement in the conflicts which Már stirs up. In fact, both men have unethical allies to deal with: just as Hafliði is troubled by his kinsman Már, Þorgils’ honourable position is exposed to doubt because of his association with and use of an unpleasant figure named Óláfr. Yet the author’s construction of the past seems to accommodate contradictions like this. In a sense, the noble dispositions of Þorgils and Hafliði are contrasted with the coarser company they must at times keep: at the very least, it opens up a range of possibilities in which the author can juxtapose his picture of the past with two honourable protagonists engaged in a conflict of that time: because the author does not comment openly about his view of past, the points where the main characters negotiate the ethical standards which the author brings in are key moments of historical representation. In this instance, the plot is developed, and the conflict escalates, at the same pace as the gap widens between Þorgils’ and Hafliði’s stated desire for peace and their tolerance and encouragement of their followers’ violent tactics. The tit-for-tat killings in *Brennu-Njáls saga* come to mind, during which Njáll and Gunnarr are successful in communicating to each other that they share an ethical distance from the acts of their kin and followers. On the other hand,

in *PsH* the dispute between the chieftains moves forwards quickly enough to raise doubts about a desire for peace. The ambiguity which surrounds the chieftains' intentions is designed to sharpen our focus on the personal strengths and motivations which come into relief when ethical standards are raised.

Haflíði's nephew, Már, is described in the most unflattering terms: "He was unpopular and ill-tempered and unlike his good kinsmen, had some wealth but held onto it poorly."<sup>1</sup> Yet Haflíði is bound to Már by kinship; at least, that is the justification which Haflíði gives us for his support of Már. This tie enables the author to position Már closely to Haflíði without necessarily detracting from Haflíði's position as a character who is to be admired. What it adds to the narrative is a relationship of ethical strain and controversy. So, whilst interesting historical issues about kinship are raised, Haflíði's behaviour in dealing with his troublesome kinsman may well increase Haflíði's stature. Whilst he is portrayed as intent on protecting his position from the threat posed by Þorgils, he is seen to make attempts to right the wrongs committed by his kinsman and avoid the escalation of the matter into a wider and more damaging dispute. Haflíði's aim is to neutralize Már at the point in the disputes when his family's honour has been least affected.

Már's closeness to Haflíði provides the opportunity for us to see Haflíði condemn his kinsman for his acts and for the author to situate Haflíði's conduct of his part of the wider dispute in the context of his private disapproval of his kinsman; for example, after Már kills a minor character called Þórsteinn, we are told:

Then Már went to meet with Haflíði, his kinsman, and told him of the killing of Þórsteinn and all that had followed, such as the case now stood. Haflíði showed his displeasure at the work and declared Már long to have been completely useless and declared that such men as he were most surely called a shame to their kinsmen."<sup>2</sup>

Hneitir, who takes up the case for compensation for the killing of Þórsteinn, is compensated for the killing immediately upon making his request to Haflíði, indicating once more Haflíði's desire to moderate the extent of the problems caused by Már. Later, though, Haflíði has to deal with the killing of the same man, Hneitir, which is orchestrated by Már. He again condemns his kinsman's behaviour but honours their kinship by giving refuge to Már. Þorgils, who has been off-stage throughout the description of Már's trouble-stirring, is now seen to receive a request for help from Hneitir's widow: she turns to him for help, and he is in a position to take up a legitimate action and a strong case against Haflíði because of Haflíði's failure to control Már (chapter 7). This brings us to

<sup>1</sup> Hann var óvinsæll ok illa skapi farinn ok ólíkr góðum frændum sínum, hafði nökkurt fé ok helzt illa á (13).

<sup>2</sup> Síðan fór Már á fund Haflíða, frænda síns, ok sagði honum víg Þorsteins ok þar at allan atburð eftir því, sem málavöxtr stóð til. Haflíði lét yfir verkinu ok kvað Má lengi hafa verit mikinn ónyttung ok kallaði slíka menn helzt mega heita frændaskömm. (22)

the first legal case between the chieftains, a case which has developed alongside an historical interpretation of the ethical obligations associated with kinship.

At the legal assembly where the matter is heard and judged, both men announce their distance from the merits of the case, citing instead their obligations to kin (chapter 7). Clearly, though, Þorgils has the most to gain. When he succeeds in the case against Hafliði and Már, he wins a large judgment for the killing and, on top of the compensation to be paid to Hneitir's widow, he personally profits nine hundreds. Three verses follow the description of the case to emphasize the win (chapter 8). Þorgils has succeeded in outmanoeuvring Hafliði, and this has occurred because of Hafliði's inability to control Már, a failing which has been tied closely to a representation of the ethical world of twelfth-century Iceland.

It is interesting that even at this early stage of the saga, the characters are justifying their actions along ethical grounds: both men cite the grounds of kinship, and yet it is clear that the power relations between them are of concern to both. It may be that the author is undermining the reality of the ethical obligation to support one's kin, and indeed the characters' belief in that obligation. Yet this is an ethical issue which is cited by the characters as motivating them to produce dispute, and it is this dispute which drives the plot. I think the author is quite deliberate in creating ambiguity and tension around their motivations, partly to create dramatic suspense over what course Þorgils and Hafliði will take (Brown "Preface" xvii), but also as means of playing different interpretive schemas off one another, particularly the conceptualization of historical events either in terms of the personal strengths of key characters or as part of broader national and religious narratives. Brown has noted that *PsH* is similar to the kings' sagas in its use of dialogue to raise ethical issues ("Preface" xxiii - iv) and, more recently, Andersson ("Snorri" 15 - 20, "Politics"), Bagge, and Tómasson ("Hagiography" 52 - 54, 61 - 62) have commented on the centrality of characters' personal qualities and the question of overall historical interpretation in *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*. As in *Heimskringla*, the author of *PsH*'s success in using the theme of personal strengths as a vehicle for historical interpretation is closely linked to the way characters engage with the complex political and ethical concerns of the world the author creates for them.

The loss of family honour caused by Már is taken one step further with his clumsy attempt to ambush and kill Óláfr (Þorgils' awkward ally). When Már returns from his unfortunate expedition, having been chased away by women disguised as men, Hafliði prudently bans Már from any more forays. Óláfr and Grímr are the next associates of the central protagonists to move the plot forwards. Óláfr has already been involved in the conflict as Þorgils' hired killer. Now, in much the same way as Þorgils had earlier prompted Óláfr to kill for him, Hafliði offers his complete support to Grímr (chapter 11) if he takes up an action against Óláfr. It follows that Óláfr is killed by Grímr and, in return,

Þorgils arranges the revenge killing of one of Hafliði's men. This killing is then used by Hafliði as the basis of a legal claim against Þorgils. We see that by controlling Már and by organizing his followers in a more ordered way, Hafliði is able to regain some ground in his dispute with Þorgils.

Þorgils and Hafliði are not condemned for their association with villains: what seems to be more important, and certainly what effects the end results in their disputes, is their ability to retain control of their strategic positions and maintain their self-possession in the face of the unpredictable acts of their less scrupulous and sometimes unwanted allies. Þorgils and Hafliði are given very benign introductions<sup>3</sup> and these are not necessarily challenged by their use of violence or desire for conflict. What seems to matter is their ability to order the carriage of the dispute, and at the core of that skill, and what the author repeatedly raises to the fore of the narrative, are self-possession, decision-making, and the sound evaluation of the knowledge and advice they receive.

As with the earlier conflicts which were advancing by proxy, the author's interest here is focused on the chieftains' conduct of their feud and their responses to varying types of personalities and authorities. What we have during the second legal case is a method of narration which binds representations of ethics and reality (made by the secondary characters of the story through the advice they give) with the protagonists' response. Viewed as a whole, this collection of representations and responses tags many of the ethical and historical issues interpreted by the saga. Two examples come to mind. One is Böðvarr Ásbjarnarson's advice to Þorgils to abandon an attack:

[Böðvarr said:] "You do not view things correctly. Consider where we have come, in order to make peace with God, who we have sought in church service, and prayed to for mercy. The church peace would now be broken by this, and it would for that reason be an outrageous deed. Another thing: the holy day is binding, during which we all have hope for salvation, and God Almighty Himself lets His mildness and mercy shine so greatly and brighten this day. This is also to be said, that the truce and peace are established over the þing while the þing ground is hallowed, and so this would be the greatest of legal breaches."<sup>4</sup>

The other piece of advice I would point to is that which Rannveig gives to her husband Hafliði, in the same chapter as Böðvarr's insightful warning:

Then Rannveig his wife said: 'What is in this, Hafliði,' she said, 'that you now bear a

<sup>3</sup> Hafliði bjó at Breiðabólstað í Vestrhópi ok var bæði forvitri ok góðgjarn ok inn mesti höfðingi. (13, Hafliði lived at Breiðabólstað in Vestrhópi and was both prescient and kind and the greatest of chieftains.) Þorgils' good character is attested by his genealogy (chapter 2) and his friendship with the poet Ingimundur prestur Einarsson and the saga man Hrólfr (15-6).

<sup>4</sup> [Böðvarr mælti]: "Eigi lítr þú rétt á. Hygg at þú, hvar vér erum komnir, at þetta skal vera sáttarfundr við guð, er vér höfum á kirkjuhelgi sótt, ok biðjum oss miskunnar. Nú er í þessu ok kirkjufrið raskat, ok er þetta fyrir þá sök ódæmaverk. Hitt er ok annat, at yfir stendr dagshelgrin, er vér höfum alla hjálp af hlotit, ok sjálfr guð almáttigr lét sína mildi ok miskunn svá mikla skína ok birta á þessum deginum. Þat er ok til at telja, at grið ok friðr er settr um þingit ok þinghelgrin stendr yfir, ok er þetta fyrir því it mesta lagabrot." (47)

weapon when before you did not? Hold on to your own habits!” She was a wise woman and understood a great deal. He replied somewhat angrily and declared it had no bearing on her and threw at her various other words.<sup>5</sup>

In both instances, the chieftains are given advice which is later vindicated. Böðvarr’s warning, and it is advice which is quite out of character, is enough to put Þorgils off his planned attack. The attack, it turns out, would have been a hopeless one, and Böðvarr gave his advice as a way of making Þorgils back out of their awkward position. The ethical arguments which are cited in the warning, arguments about making peace with God and the sanctity of the church, the holy day, and the truce, are a play on the claims of the church and the assembly, and their ideals of civil order. Here, *PsH* incorporates a narrative of Christian and legal sanctity, but holds that narrative at a distance, as what makes Þorgils heed the warning is the fact of its source rather than, as Brown has suggested, the finer moral side of Þorgils’ nature (“Preface” xvii). The man least likely to raise such objections, such ethical gestures as these, has raised them, and we can safely say that it is this incongruity which guides Þorgils’ reaction because he raises this very same point with Böðvarr afterwards.<sup>6</sup> And it is Þorgils’ fine judgment, rather than moral standing, which guides us in our understanding of the social and political world being depicted in the saga, a world which the author suggests is most centrally concerned with friendship, kinship and self-possession. Þorgils is rewarded for his observance of these values: he is not swayed by the surface concerns of God and law, but he understands the urgency of his friend’s message and he takes heed of it.

In contrast, Hafliði does not have the good sense to heed the advice of his wife, although he has the good sense to repent later that he did not.<sup>7</sup> It leads to a breakdown in negotiations and a complication and extension of the dispute, neither of which is in Hafliði’s interest. Rannveig’s warning, given as it is in private (like Hafliði’s earlier rebuke of Már), is not created with a surface ethical distraction to save face. Rather, she gives the warning in words which

<sup>5</sup> Þá mælti kona hans, Rannveig: “Hvat er í þessu, Hafliði,” sagði hon, “at bera nú vápn heldr en fyrr ertu vanr at gera? Ok halt þú háttum þínum.” Hon var vitr kona ok vel at sér um margt. Hann svaraði nökkut styggliga ok kvað þat ekki till hennar koma ok kastaði at henni nökkurum orðum. (48)

<sup>6</sup> Ok er þeir gengu heim til búða, þá mælti Þorgils til Böðvars: “Þat mæla menn, at þú sér trúlauss, mágr, ok meðallagi góðgjarn, - en eigi lýstir þú nú þat.” (47-8: And when they went back to the booth, then Þorgils said to Böðvarr: “Men say that you have little faith and average benevolence - but you do not show that now.”)

<sup>7</sup> “Ok þá er hann gekk inn í búðina ok þar at, sem sat Rannveig, kona hans, mælti hann svá: “Oft hefi ek þat reynt, at ek em vel kvángaðr, ok enn hefir þar raun á orðit, at þú ert allvitr kona, ok hefir þú nær forspá verit, af því at eigi mynda ek fyrir þessum vansa orðit hafa, ef ek hefða þín ráð haft.” (50: And when he went into the booth where Rannveig, his wife, sat, he said this: ‘It has often be shown to me that I am well married, and again it has turned out that you are a very wise woman, and you have been close to prophesying, in that I would not have suffered this disgrace if I had taken your advice.’”) Both the scene of Hafliði’s regret and of Þorgils’ fuller understanding of Böðvarr’s motives for aborting the attack occur back at their booths.

are true to the ethos of this saga: stick to your own ways, maintain your self-possession. By failing to observe this message from so close and so trustworthy a source, Hafliði shows that he is not quite the chieftain Þorgils is: his weakness is that, at this point, he lacks some of the strength of character which marks Þorgils' steady and determined advancement of his case. Hafliði certainly learns by his mistake and his ability to avoid further losses in the dispute comes about because of the attention he pays to advice given during the remainder of the story. Indeed, the pleasure which the author appears to take in the various levels of representation found in advice shapes a new balance and resolution between the protagonists which the saga now moves towards.

Hafliði wins the second case, Þorgils is outlawed, and it falls to Hafliði to execute the order against Þorgils. This involves holding a court of execution at Þorgils' property, a very difficult task. At this point, Guðmundr Brandsson emerges: he is a wise man and as a force for reconciliation. He gives Hafliði a lengthy piece of advice about how to carry forward the action, and then counsels Þorgils to limit his defence to his farm property. By stressing the strengths of both men to the other, Guðmundr is able to urge them to see the honour of taking their violence only to a certain and limited point. In effect, he maps a course for both chieftains and marks a point between them where they can both honourably stop, and as a step towards the mutual self-possession which will bring about the ultimate reconciliation of the chieftains, they are both able to accept the advice.

Thus honour, and the historical nature of honour, is represented by a situation which the author has devised and by the nature of these two men as it is reflected in advice and their reactions to advice. Honour is defined in the moment by Guðmundr's words and by the measured acceptance of them by Þorgils and Hafliði. The narrative is arranged in a way which allows the author to situate his interpretation of the past in that moment of advice and response: these moments, when the idea of self-possession resonates in the acts of the protagonists, are moments when the narrative can move from its exposition of the conflict to the causal steps towards its resolution. The author demonstrates that Þorgils' and Hafliði's personal strengths, particularly an ability to measure and order their dispute through their appreciation of their relative tactical positions, is the pivot on which reconciliation rests.

As I have said, *PsH* incorporates the family sagas' most conspicuous trait, that is, a movement towards a climax, and the author orchestrates the action in a way which most effectively directs our interest towards the central climactic event. The climax is reached during the major and final stand-off of the two sides near the Alþing (chapters 22-30). We have followed the way in which precipitating disputes between Hafliði and Þorgils develop throughout the saga: these leading disputes have been carefully staged both at the legal assembly and outside it, and the characters of the protagonists have developed alongside this escalation of the dispute.

Now the dramatic tension leading into the final climax is narrated through our view of the calm resolution of Þorgils as he rides on, as an outlaw and as the lesser man in the feud, to this confrontation near the Alþing. Þorgils says: “And I wish to ride to the assembly, whatever the cost, with those men who wish to follow me, and those should turn back, who consider that more manly.”<sup>8</sup> As with much of the dialogue in this saga, it is unclear whether Þorgils himself holds to the spirit of his speech. It is more likely that Þorgils is aware of the level of hostility which must be communicated to his followers in order to develop the momentum needed to produce an honourable point of settlement. Þorgils’ decisions to keep moving forward are repeatedly described and this gives the narrative a tense and difficult forward momentum: each attempt by third parties and by his friends to temper his advance, and even false reports that his messengers have been killed are dismissed by Þorgils because of his inner strength and conviction. The incremental progress of the narrative alongside his troop has the effect of repeatedly harnessing the focus of the action to decision-making: the decision is a still frame, caught in the surrounding action of uncertainty about whether Þorgils will keep moving on, or will there be a relieving pause. The author takes a considerable interest in the attempts to temper Þorgils’ advance on the Alþing and the advance of his troop is staged in order to bring his statements of conviction into relief. On the other side, the reactions to Þorgils’ advance and the last minute negotiations to avoid a confrontation stress the role which that advance performs: it is Þorgils’ movement forward, his strength of character, which prompts the reactions of those already at the Alþing, anticipating the confrontation. We see their apprehension, their posturing, and their negotiations through Þorgils’ provocation of those things, his test of their mettle. Þorgils’ decisions are at the centre of the climax, and they bind together the saga’s interest in the supposed sanctity of the assembly, the role of the church in resolving secular feuds, and the special self-possession and resolve needed to hold a chieftaincy. Of course, Hafliði’s choices are similarly under scrutiny: he is a noble man under threat from a protagonist who is on the rise, and the way he negotiates the pressure which is put on him as a result Þorgils’ advance reveals not only his strengths and weaknesses, but his manipulation of the broader political situation and the ethical concerns of those around him.

The final instance of this interaction of advice and judgment occurs during the encounter at the Alþing, transmitted by third parties, between Þorgils and Hafliði. Just as Þorgils’ self-possession is thrown into relief by the discomfort of his supporters who want to temper his advance, so a keen sense of judgment on the part of Hafliði is made clear during the protestations of the holy man, Ketill, and by Hafliði’s bowing to them. Ketill’s *dæmisaga* is well-crafted

---

<sup>8</sup> “Ok vil ek at vísu ríða til þingsins, hvat sem kostar, með þá men, er mér vilja fylgja, - en þeir hverfi aftr, er þykkir drengiligra.” (65)

(Brown xx) but of even more importance is the timing of Hafliði's acceptance of its message. First he resists advice by refusing to be swayed towards peace under the threat of excommunication made by the Bishop (chapters 22 and 27). He then decides that he will accept Ketill's advice, which comes in the form of a story, a story of pride and of peace before God, and one which creates an opportunity for the ordered resolution of the situation at hand, in the same way as Þorgils' decision to take up Böðvarr's warning about a fight at the Alþing, and the chieftains acceptance of the advice given by Guðmundr.

The author constructs a moment of excessive ambition during which it is natural that ethical issues are raised by the protagonist's advisors. In Hafliði's case, as with Þorgils' reaction to Böðvarr's speech during the second law case, the true state of affairs is unraveled at a later point of time. At the close of the reconciliation, when Hafliði and Böðvarr exchange insults (chapter 31), we see that Hafliði has not been reformed by Ketill's wise words, but that he chose wisely to curtail the extent of his dispute with Þorgils at a point when such a solution was sensibly open to him. Hafliði does not take up Kolbeinn's message but rather the opportunity which his words have afforded. He remains antagonistic, and his enmity towards Böðvarr is, we are told, an enduring one.

This is an author who values strength of character above the ethical obligations which characters refer to during the saga. It is strength of character, in this case consisting of self-possession and resolve, which is seen to produce order, certainty, and the successful resolution of a dispute. This author is quite deliberate in his ironic use of the ethical standards at play during the time in which his saga is set. We see a gap between what characters say or accept and what they believe to be the case, and their understanding and view of the dispute is expressed by the course of their actions rather than by the ethical norms they refer to. This does not mean that we have clumsy author, but rather one who has a clear idea of the ethical tensions of twelfth-century Iceland and an even firmer view on what the true motivations for action at that time were. I think that in the case of *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, we have an author who takes pleasure in the ambiguity and dramatic tension of the gap between ethics and action.

## References

- Andersson, T. M. "Snorri Sturluson and the Saga School at Munkaþverá." *Snorri Sturluson: Kolloqium Anlässlich der 750. Weiderkehr seines Todestages*. Ed. Alois Wolf. Tübingen: Gunter Nagg, 1993, 9-25.
- . *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytical Reading*. Cambridge, Harvard U P, 1967.
- . "The Politics of Snorri Sturluson." *JEGP* 93.1 (1994): 55 – 78
- Andersson, T. M. & William Ian Miller. *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland: Ljósvetninga Saga and Valla-Ljóts Saga*. Stanford: Stanford U P, 1989.
- Bagge, Sverre. *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*. Berkeley: U California P, 1991.
- Bragason, Úlfar. "Ok þó kunna menn at telja ættir sínar til Hrómundar Gripssonar":

- Saganaskemmtun á Reykhólum og Sturlunguhófundur." *Samtíðarsögur: Proceedings of the Ninth International Saga Conference*. Akureyri, 1994, 784 – 97.
- . *On the Poetics of Sturlunga*. Berkeley PhD Thesis, 1986.
- Brennu-Njáls saga*. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslensk Fornrit 12. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1954.
- Brown, Ursula. "Preface." *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða*. London: Oxford U P, 1952.
- Byock, Jesse. *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*. Berkeley: U California P, 1982.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret. "The Intellectual Complexion of the Icelandic Middle Ages: Toward a New Profile of Old Icelandic Saga Literature." *SS* 69.4 (1997): 443-53
- Hastrup, Kirsten. "Text and Context: Continuity and Change in Medieval Icelandic 'Said' and 'Laid Down'." *Continuity and Change: Political Institutions and Literary Monuments in the Middle Ages: A Symposium*. Ed. Elizabeth Vestergaard. Odense: Odense U P, 1986, 9 – 25.
- Jesch, Judith. "Narrating *Orkneyinga Saga*." *SS* 64.3 (1992): 336-355.
- Knirk, James E. *Oratory in the King's Sagas*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1981.
- McTurk, Rory. "The Supernatural in *Njal's Saga*: A Narratological Approach." *Saga Book* 23 (1990 – 93): 28-45.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben. "Some Methodological Considerations." *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*. Ed. Gísli Pálsson. Enfield Lock: Hisarlik: 1992, 27- 41.
- Miller, William Ian. *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland*. Chicago: Chicago U P, 1990.
- Nordal, Guðrún. *Ethics and Action in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*. Odense: Odense U P, 1998.
- Nordal, Sigurður. *The Historical Element in the Icelandic Family Sagas*. Glasgow: Glasgow U P, 1957.
- Ólason, Vésteinn. *Dialogues with the Viking Age: Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*. Tr. Andrew Wawn. Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 1998.
- . "Gísli Súrssonar - A Flawless or Flawed Hero?" *Die Aktualität der Saga: Festschrift für Hans Schottmann*. Ed. Stig Toftgaard Andersen. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999, 163 - 175.
- . "The Political Element in *Íslendinga saga*." *Samtíðarsögur: Proceedings of the Ninth International Saga Conference*. Reprints. Akureyri, 1994, 799-802.
- Tómasson, Sverrir. "The Hagiography of Snorri Sturluson." *Saints and Sagas: A Symposium*. Eds. Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Birte Carlé. Odense: Odense U P, 1994, 49 – 71.
- Tranter, Stephen N. *Sturlunga Saga: The Role of the Creative Compiler*. Frankfurt: Lang: 1987.
- Þorgils saga ok Haflíða. Sturlunga Saga*. Ed. Guðni Jónsson. Vol. 1. Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1981, 13-76.

## Origin Legends and Foundation Myths in Flateyjarbók

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe

Flateyjarbók (“The book of Flat Island”) is the name given to GKS 1005, fol., a manuscript now preserved at the Árna Stofnun Magnússonar in Reykjavík, Iceland. Flateyjarbók is the largest of the extant medieval Icelandic manuscripts and is beautifully illuminated with historiated initials. It contains 225 leaves, with the text laid out in two columns to the page. The manuscript was commissioned by Jón Hákonarson, a very wealthy farmer who lived at Víðidalstunga in the Húnavatn district in the north of Iceland, and was undoubtedly written somewhere in the area, either at Víðidalstunga or at the nearby monastery of Þingeyrar, or possibly to the east of Húnavatn, in Skagafjörður. The manuscript was begun by the priest Jón Þórðarson in 1387; his hand starts on 4 verso, originally the verso of the first leaf of the manuscript, and continues through the next-to-last line of the first column of 134 verso. On these pages he copied *Eiríks saga víðförla*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, and virtually all of *Óláfs saga helga*. Jón Þórðarson left Iceland for Bergen, Norway, in the summer of 1388, and the work of continuing Flateyjarbók fell to another priest, Magnús Þórhallsson, whose hand begins on the last line of the

first column of 134 verso and goes on until the end of the manuscript (apart from 23 leaves, now folios 188-210, which were added by Þorleifur Björnsson in the second half of the fifteenth century). After finishing *Óláfs saga helga* for Jón Þórðarson, Magnús copied *Noregs konungatal*, *Sverris saga*, *Hákonar saga gamla*, excerpts from the *Óláfs saga helga* by Styrmir fróði, *Grænlandinga þátr* (also known as *Einars þátr Sokkasonar*), *Helga þátr ok Úlfs*, *Játvarðar saga*, and an annal he compiled himself. The annal seems to have been written continuously until its end in 1390, although there are fragmentary entries for 1391 through 1394, the year Jón Þórðarson returned to Iceland. After the annal was well started, Magnús added three leaves to the front of the manuscript, leaving the first one blank and beginning the two-column format on the recto side of the next. On these pages he copied the poems *Geisli*, *Óláfs ríma Haraldssonar*, and *Hyndluljóð*, followed by an excerpt from a translation of Adam of Bremen's *Historia hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, the short narratives *Þátr frá Sigurði konungi slefu* and *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, and genealogies of Haraldr hárfagri. Returning to the first leaf, he centered a brief foreword in the middle of the verso side. Magnús also illuminated the entire manuscript.

In this paper, I examine *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and the genealogies and argue that they form a response by Magnús Þórhallsson to *Eiríks saga víðförla* and *Fundinn Noregr*, two of the texts that Jón Þórðarson included in the first part of Flateyjarbók. This argument depends on the assumption that for the continuation of the manuscript Jón Hákonarson controlled the choice of kings' sagas but left Magnús free to select the other texts. It is possible that Jón may have asked that certain items written by his friends (e.g., *Óláfs ríma Haraldssonar*) or referring to his family (e.g., *Þátr frá Sigurði konungi slefu*) be included, but the remainder are far more likely to have been familiar to the priest rather than to the landowner. I believe we can see a strategy—first of matching texts and then of competing genres—in which Magnús literally surrounds the earlier part of Flateyjarbók with annals, chronicles, genealogies, and other historical records that recuperate proper linguistic and paternal relationships, all of which he uses to supplement (or even answer) Jón Þórðarson's typological history and stories in which King Óláfr Tryggvason's Icelandic retainers are portrayed as his spiritual sons. Moreover, it seems possible that Magnús did not merely choose texts in reaction to Jón's editorial program, but that he deliberately modified them to make them support his own agenda more strongly.

The last of Magnús's prefatory texts are additional prose supplements to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in the genres of mythography and genealogy. Like many of his other additions, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* ("How Norway was settled") and the *Ættartölur* (genealogies) are preserved only in Flateyjarbók. The former is a version of the origin legend that, in the words of Margaret Clunies Ross (1983:54), "traces the ancestry of certain ruling Norwegian

families to the giant Fornjótr and his sons, the latter of whom appear as anthropomorphic representations of three of the primal elements, fire, air, and water.”<sup>1</sup> It also describes how one of Fornjótr’s descendants, a king named Nórr, gave his name to Norway, the country he conquered.<sup>2</sup> The other version of this story, which is believed to be the older of the two, is found in *Fundinn Noregr*, the title bestowed on the first three chapters of *Orkneyinga saga* (Flb. I:241-243).<sup>3</sup> The *terminus post quem* for *Hversu Noregr byggðist* could thus be as late as 1225-1230, if Finnbogi Guðmundsson is correct in attributing *Fundinn Noregr* to Snorri Sturluson.<sup>4</sup> Sigurður Nordal (Flb. I:xxv) suggests that *Hversu Noregr byggðist* serves as a kind of introduction to the *Ættartölur*, which trace the ancestry of Haraldr hárfagri back through Óðinn, Priam of Troy, Saturn, and Noah to Adam. The genealogies are followed by a list of Norwegian kings and a note about the death of Olaf Hákonarson. According to Nordal, Magnús compiled all this from sources of various ages and in places expanded it himself.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the foreword to the manuscript, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and the *Ættartölur* are the last texts Magnús added, and they offer multiple connections to the rest of Flateyjarbók. With its reference to the “Skjöldungs, Buðlungs, Bragnings, Öðlings, Völsungs or Niflungs, from whom the royal families come” (Flb. I:22), the beginning of *Hversu Noregr byggðist* recalls Freyja’s request that Hyndla recount Óttarr’s legendary genealogy (*Hyndluljóð*, st. 11):<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The extant versions of the legend do not say that Fornjótr was a giant, but his name is found in the first group of giant-*pulur* that are appended to *Skáldskaparmál* in some manuscripts of Snorri’s *Edda*. Clunies Ross (1983) provides a full discussion of the problem.

<sup>2</sup> Nórr’s eponymous role is also mentioned in the *Historia Norwegiæ* and Oddr Snorrason’s saga of Olaf Tryggvason.

<sup>3</sup> Finnbogi Guðmundsson (1965:ix-xi) presents the competing positions: Finnur Jónsson held that *Fundinn Noregr* was derived from *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, which he believed to be from around 1200, but Sigurður Nordal, although assuming that the legend of Nórr was an eleventh-century creation like *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, considered that *Fundinn Noregr* was the older of the two versions, a conclusion with which Guðmundsson was inclined to agree. Further evidence for this position is cited by Clunies Ross (1983:55) in a study of the thematic and intellectual cohesion between *Fundinn Noregr* and Snorri’s *Edda*. Her persuasive analysis of how giants could function as unproblematic dynastic progenitors allows me to focus the present discussion solely in the context of Flateyjarbók.

<sup>4</sup> Guðmundsson (1965:xiv-xvi) argues that *Fundinn Noregr* was written by Snorri Sturluson after he had written most of the first third of *Heimskringla*. At this point he had been rejected by the Oddverjar as a son-in-law (Sólveig Sæmundardóttir was instead married to Sturla Sighvatsson), so he had had the genealogy of this family on his mind, and the preface to *Orkneyinga saga* provided an opportunity to make use of this information, as the Orkney earls also traced their ancestry back to the descendants of Nórr. Clunies Ross (1983:55) views this attribution as extremely suggestive but perhaps unprovable.

<sup>5</sup> See Faulkes (1978-1979:104) for a list of Magnús’s sources.

<sup>6</sup> “Nú skal segja dæmi til, hversu Noregr byggðist í fyrstu eðr hversu konungaættir hófust þar eðr í öðrum löndum eðr hví þeir heita Skjöldungar, Buðlungar, Bragningar, Öðlingar, Völsungar eðr Niflungar, sem konungaættirnar eru af komnar” (Flb. I: 22).

Nú láttu forna niðia talða,	Now count up the ancient kin
ok upp bornar ættir manna:	And the children of the races of men:
hvat er Skiöldunga, hvat er Skilfinga,	Who is of the Sköldungs, who of the Skilfings
hvat er Öðlinga, hvat er Ylfinga,	Who of the Öðlings, who of the Ylfings,
hvat er höldbörít, hvat er hersborít	Who is of the oðal-born, who is born to hersir,
mest manna val und miðgarði?	The choicest of men in Miðgarðr?

The first sentence of *Hversu Noregr byggðist* also anticipates the *Ættartölur*, which include Haraldr's Skjöldung, Buðlung, Bragning, Öðling, and Niflung ancestors (Flb. I:25-27). As the third in the series of texts supplementing *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* also looks backwards to *Ór hamborgar historíu* and forward to *Fundinn Noregr*, which Jón Þórðarson interpolated into *Óláfs saga* as part of *Orkneyinga saga*.<sup>7</sup> The *Ættartölur* are similarly relevant. They clarify the relationships of most of the names mentioned in *Hyndluljóð*, as well as providing a synopsis of the legend of Hálfðan gamli.<sup>8</sup> The genealogies of Haraldr hárfagri anticipate *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, which begins with an account of his life. Even the regnal list can be thought of as a brief yet comprehensive contextualization of *Óláfs saga*. However, the most interesting intertextual relationship is that between *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and *Eiríks saga víðförla*, almost immediately adjacent to it. The former relates how Nórr's son, Þrándr, inherited the area that was named Þrándheimr after him, and the latter begins at this point: "Þrándr was the name of the king who first ruled over Þrándheimr" ("Þrándr er nefndr konungr sá, er fyrstr réð fyrir Þrándheimi," Flb. I:30). In order to understand *Hversu Noregr byggðist*'s own textual origins, I will examine its relationship with *Fundinn Noregr* before proceeding to the relationship with *Eiríks saga*.

In their broadest outlines, the narratives of *Fundinn Noregr* and *Hversu Noregr byggðist* are the same. The family rules Finnland and Kvenland; Fornjótr's descendant Þorri is associated in some way with sacrifices, which explains the origin of the term *þorrablót*. Þorri has two sons, Nórr and Górr, and a daughter, Góa. One day she disappears, and her brothers go in search of her. After conquering Norway on his way south, Nórr meets a king, Hrólfr í Berg, who is part giant and the one responsible for Góa's abduction. In the end, Hrólfr marries Góa and Nórr marries Hrólfr's sister. The country is divided between Nórr and Górr, with the mainland going to the former and the islands to the latter, who took possession of them as he sailed south to meet his brother. Nórr is the ancestor of the Norwegian "land kings," Górr the ancestor of the "sea kings."

Within this shared framework, however, the two narratives differ in a

<sup>7</sup> Both *Ór hamborgar historíu* and *Hversu Noregr byggðist* recount how foreigners divide up Norway between them, but whereas the partitioning in the former is a low point in Norway's struggle to constitute itself as an independent country, the partitioning in the latter allows a reasonable hegemony for each of the conquerors and their descendants.

<sup>8</sup> The allusion in *Hyndluljóð* is in stanzas 14-15; the synopsis in the *Ættartölur* is taken from Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* (Jónsson 1949:232-235).

number of ways. Some are minor differences in content (e.g., in *Fundinn Noregr*, Fornjótr is the king of Finnland and Kvenland, but in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, he is described as a man and it is Þorri who is the king of Gotland, Kvenland, and Finnland) or are blind motifs in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* that make sense in the fuller narrative of *Fundinn Noregr* (e.g., in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, we are told that the Kvens' sacrificial rite is a month late, although no reason is given; in *Fundinn Noregr*, we learn that the rite that occurred a month later is an extra one that was held to ask for Góa's return). *Fundinn Noregr* closes with the genealogy of Górr's son Heiti, the ancestor of the earls of Orkney; *Hversu Noregr byggðist* omits that one line of descent (presumably to avoid repeating it, as it is already in the manuscript) and supplies the genealogies of the other sons of Górr and all the sons of Nórr. It thus appears that in some places *Hversu Noregr byggðist* abbreviates *Fundinn Noregr* but in other places expands upon it. For example, *Fundinn Noregr* explains briefly how Norway disintegrated from its original unity under Nórr into the multiplicity of districts ruled by his descendants; *Hversu Noregr byggðist* omits the explanation and instead traces the genealogy of each descendant of Nórr who gave his name to a district of Norway.

Other differences between the two narratives are more significant. In *Fundinn Noregr*, Þorri is described as devoted to the practice of holding sacrifices ("Þorri var blótmaðr mikill," Flb. I:241), whereas in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, he is described as an excellent king, and it is his people who make sacrifices to him ("Þorri var konungr ágætr... Hann blótuðu Kvenir til þess, at snjóva gerði ok væri skíðfæri gott. Þat er ár þeirra," Flb. I:22). In *Fundinn Noregr*, Nórr and Hrólfr fight each other before coming to a settlement, whereas in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, Góa intervenes immediately and Hrólfr swears fealty to Nórr. In *Fundinn Noregr*, the sons of Górr fall out with the sons of Nórr and a civil war ensues, but no such thing happens in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*.

The effect of these changes in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* is twofold. For one thing, Nórr's family and family relationships are considerably deproblematized or culturally "improved"—Þorri is no longer an active pagan, and his grandsons co-exist amicably instead of slaughtering another like Thebans. For another, greater emphasis is laid on Nórr's role as the first king of Norway and precursor to Haraldr. In *Fundinn Noregr*, Nórr's encounter with King Hrólfr í Berg resembles the episodes in the mytho-heroic sagas in which the protagonist and a worthy opponent test each other in a duel before deciding to become blood-brothers. In *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, however, Nórr is depicted much more as a king than a wandering hero or roving viking; in fact, his meeting with Hrólfr is rather like an idealized episode from the unification of Norway, in which a district king decides that discretion is the better part of valor and submits to Haraldr without a fight.

As the prologue to *Orkneyinga saga*, *Fundinn Noregr*'s function is to link

the genealogy of the earls of Orkney to the legendary Nórr, the descendant of Kári (“gust of wind”) Fornjóttson. *Hversu Noregr byggðist* seizes on the various implications of this linkage and builds on it to provide two interlocking origin legends: a “horizontal,” onomastic one to explain how the districts of Norway got their names, and a “vertical,” social one to explain the creation of the various ranks of Norwegian nobility. The latter depends on the linguistic theory presented in *Fundinn Noregr*, which asserts a unity between signifier and signified in order to identify Fornjótt’s sons with the primal elements.<sup>9</sup> In *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, it is name (i.e., title) and rank that are one.<sup>10</sup> *Jarlar* are created when Nórr’s grandson Guðbrandr refuses to be called “king” and gives himself the name “earl” instead (“ok lét gefa sér jarlsnafn,” Flb. I:24).<sup>11</sup> Three generations later, another Guðbrandr declines to take the name of either king or earl, and he gives himself the name *hersir*. The proliferation of Nórr’s descendants and their acts of self-naming create a hierarchically organized society in which the king is literally the father of his people and each member of the nobility has freely chosen his social station. The stability of such a society is thus doubly guaranteed: “natural” family ties reinforce the feudal allegiance of the aristocracy to the king, who is also of the oldest branch of their lineage, and the identity between one’s name and one’s essential nature ensures that a man with the name of “earl” can never be transformed into a man with the name of “king.”<sup>12</sup> The Norway thus constituted in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* is a mythical kingdom indeed.

*Hversu Noregr byggðist*’s assertion of the identity between name and thing, together with the genealogies documenting the “real” sons of the king of Norway, forms a myth of linguistic and social propriety that stands in absolute opposition to the metaphorical myths of spiritual genealogy that Jón Þórðarson added to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, in which Icelanders of any degree can be transformed into the “sons” of the king of Norway by coming to him for conversion and staying to serve him as a retainer (Rowe 1998).<sup>13</sup> The political

<sup>9</sup> The transparency of language is argued in the first chapter of the *Gylfaginning*; see Clunies Ross (1983 and 1987).

<sup>10</sup> The close relationship between linguistic and social structures is another characteristic of Snorri’s thinking. Clunies Ross (1987:80-96) argues that the system Snorri uses in *Skáldskaparmál* to classify kennings and *heiti* suggests that he considered the hierarchy of society to be implicit in language.

<sup>11</sup> Despite its depiction of Nórr as an earlier Haraldr hárfagri, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* does not follow Haraldr’s example here; the first chapter of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* describes how Haraldr created earls to serve as rulers for the districts that had previously been governed by kings (“Sumir [konungar] höfðu eitt fylki til forráða, en sumir nokkuru meir. Alla þá tók Haraldr konungr af lífi... Jarl setti hann í hverju fylki landi at stjórna ok lög at dæma,” Flb. I:39).

<sup>12</sup> A similar socio-linguistic theory is found in the mytho-heroic saga *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, perhaps not surprising in light of the fact that this saga, too, adapts the legend of Fornjótt, providing an account of the descendants of Fornjótt’s son Logi and the origin of Hálogaland that is missing from *Fundinn Noregr* and *Hversu Noregr byggðist* but that is a perfect imitation of their subject-matter. Rowe (1999) explores the ideological implications of *Þorsteins saga*’s use of the legend.

<sup>13</sup> We may think, for example, of *Hrómundar þáttur halta*, which ends by recounting how

implications and ideological function of each of these myths are contraries as well. Jón's þættir extend the spiritual relationships of Christianity to the political sphere and portray each subject's submission to his king as voluntary and affective. Magnús's legend of a single origin for kings, earls, and chieftains paradoxically erases every distinction but one between them, presenting them as all of royal blood. Both of these ideologies could serve Jón Hákonarson. As an Icelander, he could participate in the metaphoric relationship with the king that Jón Þórðarson proffered, and as a descendant of a *hersir*, he could claim a literal one.<sup>14</sup> Both are relationships that could potentially be turned to his advantage.

Viewed as a response to Jón Þórðarson's textual production, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* thus corresponds to *Fundinn Noregr*, but seems to speak to—indeed, to speak against—the þættir interpolated into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. However, Magnús chose to copy *Hversu Noregr byggðist* into the manuscript just before *Eiríks saga víðförla*, which Jón used to introduce *Óláfs saga*. This placement juxtaposes *Hversu Noregr byggðist* with a foundation myth of quite another sort. As has just been described, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* is an adaptation of a text that finds in northern giants the origin of the kingdom of Norway. If the author of that text was not Snorri Sturluson himself, then it was someone who articulated ideas that are “pervasive and important in the *Edda*” (Clunies Ross 1983:55). *Eiríks saga* adapts a different origin legend of Snorri's, the Æsir migration from Troy that is recounted in *Ynglinga saga*. *Eiríks saga* presents a Christianized version of this theme, telling of the *translatio* of Christian culture from Greece to Norway in the earliest days of the monarchy. By a fortuitous coincidence, both of Snorri's dynastic origin legends wound up in Jón Þórðarson's part of *Flateyjarbók* in one form or another, enabling Magnús to identify one legend and set its variant next to the other legend. Magnús may have gotten the idea for this from *Eiríks saga* itself, which grafts the two legends together. Insofar as Eiríkr is the son of Þrándr, his saga invokes the legend of Fornjótr, but insofar as he brings an eastern religion to the north, it rewrites the beginning of *Heimskringla*.

The two origin legends share a number of structural components, some of which take similar forms in the two legends and some of which appear as opposites. The most important of these components are geographical information, a journey that precedes an act of cultural foundation, the presence and loss of a brother during the journey, the role of the hero and his brother as invaders or defenders of another country, the thing of value gained during the

---

Hrómundr's son leaves Iceland to become the retainer of King Olaf and eventually dies defending him at the Battle of Svöldr. The chapter of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* that follows the þátrr begins by relating the death of Olaf's infant son. The placement of the þátrr within the matrix saga seems to underscore Hallsteinn's filial relationship with King Olaf and suggest that the acquisition of an Icelandic retainer compensates for the loss of the biological child.

<sup>14</sup> Genealogies found in copies of *Vatnshyrna*, another manuscript written for Jón Hákonarson, trace his family back to Einarr Þveræingr and his wife Guðrún, the Icelandic daughter of the Norwegian *hersir* Þorkell Klyppr (Flb. I:viii-ix, Halldórsson 1990b:198-199).

journey, the act of cultural foundation, and the role of women.

Geographical information plays a different role in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* than it does in *Eiríks saga*. In the second chapter of the latter, Eiríkr's geography lesson sets his and Óláfr's story (that is, the story of the conversion of Norway) into the universal context of Christian cosmography. In *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, however, the geographical information is an integral part of the legend itself, which tells how both the districts of Norway and the country as a whole got their names. In its main purpose, then, as the description of the creation of the political landscape, the naming of the country and its districts are not factual, as is the naming of the world and its regions in *Eiríks saga*, but constitutive or performative—the geopolitical entities spring into being as they are named by the narrator. Secondarily, the geographic information in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, limited as it is to Norway and the misty lands to the northeast of it, in effect depicts Norway as a miniature cosmos of its own. The important geopolitical entities are all internal, and as the author has changed Górr's journey to the Baltic and visit to his relatives in Denmark (in *Fundinn Noregr*) to a journey to the Polar Sea, Denmark is written out of the story, just as Rome has been erased from the map of *Eiríks saga* by having the throne of the Emperor in Mikligarðr be the seat of Christianity. Rather than locating Norway at the edge of the world, as the geographical information in *Eiríks saga* does, the geographical information in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* resituates it at the center.

The next components—the journey, the presence and loss of the brother, the role of the hero and his brother as invaders or defenders, the journey's reward, and the act of cultural foundation—can be discussed as a group. Here, too, they take opposite forms in the two texts. Eiríkr, having sworn to find the earthly paradise, stops off in Denmark, acquires a blood-brother, and travels with him to Greece, where they are baptized and serve the king by successfully defending the country from invaders. They then continue east, but the Danish Eiríkr turns back at the sight of the dragon at the entrance to Ódáinsakr, and Eiríkr proceeds without him, entering paradise, conversing with his guardian angel, and eventually returning to Norway with his new religion. Nórr and Górr, however, travel in search of their missing sister. They part ways at once, with Nórr conquering the natives as he heads west from the Keel and Górr apparently travelling by sea. Nórr's victories stop at the water's edge, where he meets up with his brother. Nórr then heads back inland and Górr out to sea again. Nórr conquers all of Norway before coming to Heiðmark, where he finds his sister and accepts the fealty of Hrólfr, the king who abducted her. After marrying Hrólfr's sister, Nórr travels to the seashore for a second time to meet his brother, who has arrived from Dumbshaf after taking possession of all the islands he passed on the way. They divide the kingdom between them, with Nórr getting the mainland from Jötunheim to Álfheim and Górr getting all the islands that lay to the larboard of his ship as he sailed south. The legends thus

differ in every respect: Eiríkr has his brother with him only for the first part of his journey, whereas Nórr and his brother travel separately yet meet periodically and end together; the two Eireks succeed in defending the land they travel to, whereas Nórr and his brother are successful conquerors; Eiríkr finds paradise and returns to the land of his father with a new religion, whereas Nórr finds his sister and returns with a wife to the land he conquered. Eiríkr serves the King of Greece and the King of Heaven and never becomes a king himself, whereas Nórr becomes a king whom other kings serve. He starts off from the ill-defined realms of the east (“Þorri... réð fyrir Gotlandi, Kvenlandi, ok Finnlandi,” Flb. I:22) and arrives in the kingdom of Norway. Eiríkr’s journey, in contrast, is a spiritual one that ends not with the return to Þrándheim but with his corporeal assumption. He starts off from the kingdom of Norway and arrives in the kingdom of Heaven.

Not surprisingly, Eiríkr and Nórr’s acts of cultural foundation are also opposites. Nórr establishes the kingdom of Norway and founds its ruling dynasty, which in turn gives rise to the ranks of the aristocracy, whereas Eiríkr lays the basis for the conversion of Norway and thus may be said to help to found the church. Far from being the father of his country, he is so uninterested in perpetuating the dynasty that he disappears bodily. Indeed, for a narrative that is in many respects modelled on the *fornaldarsögur*, *Eiríks saga* is notable for the absence of any women. Eiríkr’s mother is never mentioned, he has no sister for his blood-brother to marry, and the Greek king has no daughter to distract him from his mission. The contrast between the inescapable proliferation of noble Norwegians in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and *Eiríks saga*’s refusal of the carnal could not be more striking. *Hversu Noregr byggðist* tells of the establishment of the three axes of (secular) society—the horizontal axis of the political landscape, the vertical axis of the social hierarchy, and the temporal axis of the succession of fathers and sons. Although Eiríkr participates in two filial relationships, being the physical son of Þrándr and the spiritual son of the King of the Greeks, the historical dimension of *Eiríks saga* is marked not by the temporal succession of generations but by the typological pattern of prefiguration and fulfillment. As a fighter and a father, Nórr uses his body to establish a society that starts with him and endures long after he is gone, whereas Eiríkr transcends his body to help establish a Christian society that will not come into being until long after he is gone but that will endure until the end of time. Although his adventures take place early in Norway’s history, their ultimate goal is eschatological.

As with the competing ideologies that inform *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and the þættir added to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Hversu Noregr byggðist* and *Eiríks saga* offer their audience competing exempla or models of behavior. Jón Þórðarson describes them both in his afterword to *Eiríks saga*:

The one who wrote this book set this exemplum in it first because he wishes each man to know that there is no true faith except in God, because although heathen men may get

much fame from their deeds of valor, there is a great difference when they end the life of this world, since they have then taken their reward from men's praise for their accomplishments, but they have then the expectation of punishment for their violations and faithlessness when they knew not their Creator. But those who have loved God and had all faith and fought for the freedom of Holy Christianity have nevertheless received greater praise from the wisest men. And this, too, which is greatest, that when they have gone forward through the common door of death, which the flesh may not escape, they have taken their reward, that is to say, the eternal kingdom with Almighty God without end, like this Eiríkr, as was just described.<sup>15</sup>

Here again, it looks as though Magnús is attempting to give the lie to Jón, for *Hversu Noregr byggðist* presents a history of Norwegian kings that is as depaganized as it can be. Descendants of Fornjótr, the king and people of Norway are untainted by any connection with the Æsir, and although the Kvens sacrifice to Nórr's father, Nórr does not bring the practice to his new kingdom. Rather than portraying Nórr as a "good pagan," *Hversu Noregr byggðist* avoids the question of his religion entirely. This strategic silence enables his history of conquest, colonization, and the forcible seizure of power to avoid being condemned as "heathen... deeds of valor." That Nórr's behavior is intended to be understood as exemplary is signalled by the categorization of the text as a *dæmi* (like *ævintýr*, an Old Norse term that translates the Latin *exemplum*): "Nú skal segja dæmi til, hversu Noregr byggðist í fyrstu..." (Flb. I: 22). Just as *Hversu Noregr byggðist* displaces Práendr from the position of "first king," so too does it replace Eiríkr (and by implication Olaf Tryggvason) with Nórr (and by implication Haraldr hárfagri) as the model of kingly behavior.

It is tempting to wonder whether Magnús, with his apparent interest in genealogies, was the one who created *Hversu Noregr byggðist* from *Fundinn Noregr* in order to have a foundation myth with which to counter *Eiríks saga*. But in that case, why would he have omitted the vow to find their sister that Nórr and Górr swear at the beginning of their journey in *Fundinn Noregr*? This would have strengthened the parallelism with *Eiríks saga*, in which Eiríkr's journey also begins with a vow to find something. The omission of Górr's travels through the Baltic to Denmark is easier to understand, for to admit the existence of Denmark before the establishment of Norway would be to make a powerful concession, as superior age always confers superior authority. Moreover, Magnús may have had no wish to portray the creation of Norway as being linked in any way—or even as being geographically proximate—to Denmark, so as to avoid any implication that the Danish claims to Norway had

<sup>15</sup> "En því setti sá þetta ævintýr fyrst í þessa bók, er hana skrifaði, at hann vill, at hverr maðr viti þat, at ekki er traust trútt nema af guði, því at þó at heiðnir menn fái frægð mikla af sínum áfreksverkum, þá er þat mikill munr, þá er þeir enda þetta hit stundliga líf, at þeir hafa þá tekit sitt verðkaup af orðlofi manna fyrir sinn frama, en eigu þá ván hegningar fyrir sín brot ok trúleysi, er þeir kunnu eigi skapara sinn. En hinir, sem guði hafa unnat ok þar allt traust haft ok barizt fyrir frelsi heilagrar kristni, hafa þó af hinum vitrustum mönnum fengit meira lof, en þat at auk, at mest er, at þá er þeir hafa fram gengit um almenniligar dyrr dauðans, sem ekki hold má forðast, hafa þeir tekit sitt verðkaup, þat er at skilja eilíft ríki með allsvaldanda guði utan enda sem þessi Eiríkr, sem nú var frá sagt," Flb. I:37-38.

a historical foundation. If this seems too far-fetched, perhaps we may attribute only the first sentence of *Hversu Noregr byggðist* to Magnús. With its echoes of *Hyndluljóð* and the *Ættartölur*—and perhaps its use of *dæmi* to pre-empt Jón's categorization of *Eiríks saga* as an *ævintýr*—this sentence fits *Hversu Noregr byggðist*'s location in the manuscript as though it were made for it. The second sentence, “Fornjótr hét maðr” (Flb. I:22), is very similar to the first sentence of *Fundinn Noregr* (“Fornjótr hefir konungr heitit,” Flb. I: 241) and was probably the “original” first sentence of *Hversu Noregr byggðist*.

As well as providing additional royal Norwegian genealogies, the *Ættartölur* continue the exploration of some of the themes present in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*. The euhemerization of Óðinn in two of Haraldr's genealogies more or less supports the depaganization of the Norwegian dynasty, although of course the regnal list, with its references to St. Olaf, eventually makes it difficult to escape the historical fact that the country was originally pagan.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the synopsis of the legend of Hálfðan gamli, which Magnús borrowed from *Skáldskaparmál* (ch. 80), does not mention Óðinn. “And when [Hálfðan] became king, he held a great sacrifice at midwinter and asked to live for three hundred years... But he was told that he would live no more than one lifetime, but for three hundred years no man of low degree would be in his family, and no woman.”<sup>17</sup> This excerpt also illustrates the theory of language in which names represent the essential qualities of the things they name. Closely following Snorri, Magnús's version reads, “These nine [i.e., the first nine sons of Hálfðan and Álfný Eymundardóttir] became so renowned that their names have been treated in all records as honorific titles, equivalent to the name of king.”<sup>18</sup>

The exclusion of women from Hálfðan's descendants is a curious anticipation of the absence of women from *Eiríks saga*. At first glance, it also recalls the abduction of Góa, which is the motivation for Nórr and Górr's travels of conquest. However, the role of women in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* is quite different from both that in the legend of Hálfðan and that in *Eiríks saga*. Insofar as Góa has been abducted to be the wife of a king and her loss is compensated for by the king's sister, who becomes Nórr's wife, *Hversu Noregr*

<sup>16</sup> *Ættartala Haralds frá Óðni* (Flb. I:27) says that Óðinn Ásakonungr was the grandson of King Burri, who ruled over Tyrkland. *Ætt Haralds frá Adam* (Flb. I:28) names “Tror, whom we call Þórr” as the grandson of Priam of Troy. For a study of the genealogies that trace human descent from the pagan gods, see Faulkes (1978-1979).

<sup>17</sup> “Ok þá er [Hálfðan] tók konungdóm, gerði hann blót mikit at miðjum vetri ok blótaði til þess, at hann skyldi mega lifa þrjú hundruð vetra. En fréttin sagði honum svá, at hann mundi lifa ekki meir en einn mannsaldr, en þat mundi vera þrjú hundruð vetra, at engi mundi ótiginn maðr í hans ætt ok engi kona,” Flb. I:25.

<sup>18</sup> “Hét einn Þengill, er kallaðr var mannaþengill, Ræsir, Gramr, Gylfi, Hilmir, Jöfurr, Tiggri, Skyli ok Harri. Þessir nú, er sagt, at allir væri jafngamlir ok urðu svá ágætir, at í öllum fræðrum eru þeirra nöfn höfð fyrir tignarnöfn ok konunganöfn,” Flb. I:25. Faulkes (1987:146-147) translates these names as follows: *þengill* means “prince,” *ræsir* means “impeller, ruler,” *gramr* means “fierce one,” *hilmir* means “helmet,” *jöfurr* means “prince,” *tiggri* means “noble,” *skyli* (*skuli*) means “protector,” and *harri* (*herra*) means “lord.”

*byggðist* is describing a traditional exogamous exchange of women between different families. Moreover, women are found elsewhere in Nórr's family; his father has sisters, and he himself numbers several women among his descendants. The inclusion of *Skáldskaparmál*'s account of Hálfðan is probably due to his place in the genealogies, rather than to any overt desire to provide a further response to *Eiríks saga*. However, the proximity of the two texts encourages comparison. A typological explanation might be that the legend of Hálfðan provides the "pre-Christian" version of the Christian exclusion seen in *Eiríks saga*, especially as the sacrifice is not made to any heathen deity. However, as Magnús prefers to structure his histories in terms of genealogy rather than typology, it may be more appropriate to consider the issue as one of dynastic succession, so that whereas in *Eiríks saga*, the absence of women is a symptom of Christian theology, in the legend of Hálfðan it is a providential solution to a political problem. I say "political," because this legend gains an interesting resonance in the context of the events that may have led to Magnús's being asked to work on *Flateyjarbók* in the first place. Ólafur Halldórsson (1990a:430-431) suggests that the manuscript was originally intended as a gift for the current king of Norway, Olaf Hákonarson, who had ascended to the throne as an eleven-year-old boy when his father Hákon VI Magnússon died in 1380. Unfortunately, Olaf died in 1387, the very year that work on the manuscript began, and with him the Norwegian royal dynasty came to an end. His mother Margareta, daughter of King Valdemar of Denmark, had been ruling Norway in her son's name, and now she became the ruler of Norway in her own right. Margareta had no claim on the Norwegian throne under the official law of succession, but the only other candidate was Duke Albrecht of Mecklinburg, whose mother's mother was the daughter of Hákon V of Norway, and Margareta was able to persuade the Norwegian Riksråd to disqualify him because of his wars against Magnús and Hákon. The death of young Olaf and Margareta's consolidation of power must have been a sad blow to the Icelanders, who had no love for the Danes and who now saw the center of government move even further from them than before. There was no point in giving a manuscript glorifying the reigns of the first two Norwegian Olafs to Margareta, and so Jón Þórðarson left the project. Evidently Jón Hákonarson later decided to keep the manuscript for himself and had Magnús Þórhallsson expand it with two more kings' sagas. As Magnús copied the legend of Hálfðan into the manuscript, he may have wished that the Norwegian dynasty had been granted six hundred years' worth of noble male descendants instead of only three.

Just as Haraldr hárfagri is the ending point for the genealogies tracing his ancestry from Höðr, Álfr hinn gamli, Óðinn, Adam, and the rest, so is he also the starting point for the regnal list, which lists his descendants (not all of whom were kings) down to Olaf Hákonarson in 1387. The list then proceeds to give the kings of Norway in reverse order from Olaf Hákonarson back to Haraldr.

The lists of Haraldr's descendants and the kings of Norway reveal some of Magnús's personal biases. He does not draw any attention to Óláfr Tryggvason, whose name appears without comment between Hákon jarl and Hákon blótjarl hinn ríki. However, Magnús calls the Danish Sveinn Alfífuson, whom Knútr installed as king after the defeat of St. Olaf, *óforsynjukonungr* ("a king not to be endured"). And to King Magnús Eiríksson, whom St. Birgitta knew as having the nickname *smekki* ("the ingratiating" or "the caressing prince") and whom she eventually condemned in the strongest terms, he gives the cognomen *góði* ("the good").<sup>19</sup> Finally, we may note that Margareta's ascent to the throne as ruler in her own right does not qualify her to be listed among the kings of Norway. Although this list was written down during her reign, Magnús excludes her from it, recapitulating Hálfðan's genealogy and—in a manuscript with hundreds of pages devoted to the past rulers of Norway—relegating the information about the current sovereign to a single sentence.

Magnús's preference for chronicle, annal, and genealogy over Jón's typological interpretation of history is consonant with the theory of language that he borrows from Snorri, in which words transparently reveal the essential natures of their referents. His use of literal language and "straight" representation stands in contrast to Jón's interlaced texts, deferred meaning, and metaphorical use of language, which work by indirection and a displacement that is at once literary, linguistic, and familial. Literary displacement occurs when Jón's þættir employ the fantastic and entertaining for spiritual purposes, a risky practice that makes narratives vulnerable to being willfully misread, with audiences listening to them for their entertainment value alone and ignoring their ethical content. Linguistic displacement occurs when the þættir recount the process by which two unrelated men metaphorically become "father" and "son," and familial displacement occurs when Icelandic sons are substituted for Norwegian princes. This substitution interrupts both lineages when Óláfr Tryggvason is defeated at Svöldr, and the failure of the proper royal succession ensures that extending typological relationships into the past is the only way in which writing can continue. Thus *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* may be (metaphorically) said to engender *Eiríks saga víðförla*, a story of a royal Norwegian who prefigures Óláfr, just as Óláfr Tryggvason prefigures St. Olaf. Magnús escapes these dangers by his insistence on the mimetic nature of language and is thus able to write "forwards" history, updating the Icelandic church annals with current events and the royal genealogies with the last of the Norwegian kings.

Magnús's avoidance of metaphor and his insistence on proper linguistic and familial relations may be read as symptoms of an anxiety aroused by the ending of the Norwegian royal dynasty. This anxiety does not appear to be felt by

<sup>19</sup> This is apparently derived from the annal; Flateyjarannáll is the only annal that adds to the notice of King Magnús's death in 1375 "ok kalla menn hann helgan" (Storm 1888:411).

Magnús himself, who seems to have identified most strongly with the historians of Þingeyrarklaustur rather than having any sort of personal attachment to the monarchy. Magnús instead seems to have been provoked by what he found in the first part of *Flateyjarbók*. However, his strong answer to Jón Þórðarson foregrounds questions of dynastic failure and female rule that were unescapable for Icelanders involved in the power plays and politics of the royal appointees controlling their country. The gesture of recuperation of origins and “real” genealogy that is the second generation of *Flateyjarbók* would thus seem to be evoked by feelings of loss on the part of Jón Hákonarson, whose grandfather, Gizurr galli, was a retainer of Hákon V. Not only does this layer of the manuscript memorialize the great Norwegian kings of more recent times, but it provides them with an origin legend that looks to neither European classical historiography nor Christian typology for its authorization. Such cultural independence is all the more unusual for its defiance of late-fourteenth-century realities. While Magnús was imagining a Norwegian monarchy gloriously independent from the rest of Scandinavia and the church, Margareta was forging Norway, Denmark, and Sweden into the Kalmar Union and promoting the canonization of her foster-mother’s mother, Birgitta of Vadstena.

## References

- Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1983. “Snorri Sturluson’s use of the Norse origin-legend of the sons of Fornjótr in his *Edda*.” *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 98:47-66.
- . 1987. *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson’s “ars poetica” and medieval theories of language*. The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization, vol. 4. Odense: Odense University Press.
- Faulkes, Anthony. 1978-1979. “Descent from the gods.” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11:92-125.
- , ed. and trans. 1987. *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*. London: Everyman.
- Flb., see Nordal.
- Guðmundsson, Finnbogi. ed. 1965. *Orkneyinga saga, Legenda de Sancto Magno, Magnúss saga skemmri, Magnúss saga lengri, Helga þáttir ok Úlfs*. Íslenzka fornrit, vol. 34. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka fornritafélag.
- Halldórsson, Ólafur. 1990a. “Af uppruna *Flateyjarbókar*.” In *Grettisfærsla: Safn ritgerða eftir Ólaf Halldórsson, gefið út á sjötugsafmæli hans, 18. Apríl 1990*, ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Stefán Karlsson, and Sverrir Tómasson. Rit 38. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Pp. 427-431.
- . 1990b. “Á afmæli *Flateyjarbókar*.” In *Grettisfærsla: Safn ritgerða eftir Ólaf Halldórsson, gefið út á sjötugsafmæli hans, 18. Apríl 1990*, ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Stefán Karlsson, and Sverrir Tómasson. Rit 38. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi. Pp. 196-214.
- Jónsson, Guðný, ed. 1949. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar. Nafnaþulur og Skáldatal*. Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.
- Nordal, Sigurður, et als., eds. 1944-45. *Flateyjarbók*. 4 vols. Akranes: Flateyjarútgáfan.
- Rowe, Elizabeth Ashman. 1998. “Cultural Paternity in the *Flateyjarbók Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.” *Alvíssmál* 8:3-28.
- . 1999. “Absent Mothers / Abducted Princesses / Ensorcelled Sisters: Monarchist Ideology in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*.” In *Cold Counsel: The Women of Old Norse Literature and Myth*, ed. Karen Swenson and Sarah M. Anderson. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Storm, Gustav, ed. 1888. *Islandske annaler indtil 1578*. Christiania: Det norske historiske kildekriftfond.

## Myter som kilder til ritualer - teoretiske og praktiske implikationer

Jens Peter Schjødt

Institut for Religionsvidenskab, Aarhus Universitet

I årtierne omkring år 1900 var den mest indflydelsesrige religionshistoriske skoledannelse den såkaldte *Myth and Ritual school*. Med Jane Harrison i spidsen udviklede der sig navnlig i Cambridge en gruppering af forskere (bl.a. A.B. Cook, F. Cornford og G. Murray), der primært arbejdede med klassisk græsk religion. Jane Harrison mente, at hovedparten af de myter, vi finder i den klassiske litteratur var bearbejdnings af gamle rituelle temaer, hovedsageligt ritualer, der drejede sig om død og genfødsel i forbindelse med naturens årlige regeneration. Hun var således influeret af J.G. Frazer, der i sit imponerende værk *The Golden Bough* forsøgte at vise, at dette tema var kernen i de fleste ritualer (og myter) over hele verden. Dette syn på, hvad ritualer “drejede sig om”, og synspunktet, at der altid er en forbindelse mellem myte og ritual, som kan siges at være minimumsdefinitionen på myte-ritual-teorien, blev dominerende i forskningen inden for græsk og nærorientalsk religion, sådan som det også blev mere generelt i de følgende års teorier om “primitiv”

religion.<sup>1</sup>

Der var forskellige vurderinger af forholdet mellem myte og ritual, men langt den mest udbredte opfattelse var, at myter opstår fra ritualer. På den måde blev det afgørende formål - især når man arbejdede med kulturer, der ikke længere eksisterer - at rekonstruere de ritualer, som man måtte antage, lå bag myterne, der ofte fremtrådte som literære bearbejdnings. De ritualer, der kunne rekonstrueres på denne måde var oftest relateret til frugtbarhed, men andre rituelle temaer blev der også fokuseret på, ikke mindst initiation (fx Hocart 1927).

Vi kan således hævde, at medens den generelle religionshistorie frem til 1880'erne primært var interesseret i myterne, var man fra denne periode og frem til 1950'erne hovedsageligt optaget af ritualer, som opfattedes som det primære religiøse udtryk. Fra da af vendte interessen imidlertid igen til myterne, ikke mindst gennem de forskellige strukturalistiske skoler, hvis analyser egnede sig bedre til blotlæggelse af myters semantik end ritualers. I løbet af de sidste par årtier ser det dog ud til, at ritualerne igen er kommet til ære og værdighed gennem en række meget inspirerende værker (fx Grimes 1982, Bell 1992 og 1997, Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994 og Rappaport 1999).

Men uanset hvilket fænomen, der er i fokus, har man ikke i nævneværdigt omfang eksplicit beskæftiget sig med forholdet mellem de to kategorier. Det er måske heller ikke noget stort problem, når vi har at gøre med eksisterende religioner; men det er klart et problem, når vi vender os til ikke mere eksisterende religioner (og det gælder både, når vi ser på det mediterane område i klassisk tid, Den nære Orient, og ikke mindst det gamle Norden). Her er relationen mellem myte og ritual langt mindre gennemskuelig, end i levende kulturer, og ritualbeskrivelserne ofte meget mangelfulde.

Dette problem accentueres, når vi beskæftiger os med førkristen nordisk religion og ønsker at opnå et helhedsbillede af den, idet vores viden om ritualer her er væsentlig mere begrænset, end vor viden om myterne. Disse kan, trods betydelige lakuner ses som dele af et større mytologisk system, som vi i et vist omfang er i stand til at rekonstruere<sup>2</sup>.

Når det drejer sig om ritualer i det førkristne samfund, er kildematerialet langt mere sparsomt. Der vil der være to veje, man kan gå. Man kan for det første prøve at samle de informationer, som sagaer og andre kilder giver, angående rituel praksis, og ad den vej søge at rekonstruere rituelle forløb ved at inddrage sammenlignende materiale, hvormed lakuner kan søges udbedret. Det er vanskeligt, både fordi oplysningerne er så få, og fordi de ofte har en tvivlsom

<sup>1</sup> Vurderinger af myte-ritual-skolen er ofte blevet foretaget. Blandt de mere vægtige bidrag skal nævnes Fontenrose 1966, der er meget kritisk, og Versnel 1990, der er mere nuanceret.

<sup>2</sup> Det seneste forsøg er Clunies Ross 1994, som tilfulde viser, hvilke muligheder, der ligger i det overleverede materiale, selv om det også bliver klart, at der i forhold til mange faktorer er store usikkerhedsmomenter.

kildeværdi<sup>3</sup>, og vurderet på de forsøg, der har været gjort i denne retning, synes der ikke at være udsigter til at det vil lykkes i større omfang. For det andet kan man vælge den fremgangsmåde, som består i, at man gennem læsning af myter og andre fortællinger søger at rekonstruere bagvedliggende ritualer, som fortællingerne på forskellig vis har været relateret til. Enkelte eksempler, der paradoksal nok stammer fra værker, man normalt ikke forbinder med nogen høj kildeværdi (fornaldarsagaer snarere end konge- og islændingesagaer), viser, at der findes materiale, der kan hjælpe os. Det gælder fx drabet på Vikar i *Gautreks saga* kap. 7, hvor ingen kan være i tvivl om, at vi har at gøre med et offerritual, der, selv om det er indsat i en eventyrlig ramme, har rødder i en hedensk rituel praksis, hvilket forfatteren givetvis har været helt bevidst om. En anden type materiale, som også kan findes i fx foraldarsagaer, er narrative forløb - mytiske eller af eventyrmæssig karakter - som fremstår helt uden antydning af, at sagaforfatteren har set noget rituelt i det, som beskrives. Det gælder bl.a. Sigmunds og Sinfjotles oplevelser i skoven i *Völsunga saga* kap. 8, hvor vi tydeligt ser en række elementer fra et initiationsforløb (jf. Höfler 1934,190 ff. og Schjødt 1999, 202 ff.). Sådanne forløb, som vi nedenfor skal give et eksempel på, vil i visse tilfælde kunne påvises at have en relation til førkristne ritualer, men kun hvis forskellige kriterier er opfyldt:

For det første må vi have så fyldige beretninger, at det er muligt i det mindste at skimte en forløbsstruktur. Det kan forekomme banalt, men er ikke desto mindre vigtigt. Et eksempel på, at dette kriterium ikke er opfyldt udgøres af den handling, vi møder i *Gísla saga* kap. 14, hvor det siges, at der skal bindes Helsko i forbindelse med højtlægningen af Vésteinn. Dette element har eller har ikke hørt med til en hedensk praksis, men under alle omstændigheder er konteksten for utilstrækkelig til at vi kan sige noget om betydningen af det.

For det andet skal der være nogle træk i beretningerne, der på den ene side ikke kan forklares alene med henvisning til det mytiske eller episke tema, teksten opruller, og som på den anden side bliver fuldt forklarlige, hvis de ses i relation til en rituel praksis. Behovet for dette kriterium skyldes ganske enkelt, at der kan være fælles forløbsstruktur i fx eventyr og ritualer (jf. Propp 1983, 22 ff.), men at dette fællesskab ikke nødvendigvis skyldes, at de første er derivet af de sidste (eller omvendt for den sags skyld). Mange elementer vil kunne indgå i begge typer sekvenser, fx at en aktør besøger dødsriget eller opvækker en død. Hvis dette træk imidlertid ikke er ledsaget af andre elementer, der er

---

<sup>3</sup> Sandsynligheden for, at vi står over for oplysninger, der faktisk har gyldighed i forhold til den hedenske periode, varierer naturligvis fra saga til saga, og også inden for den enkelte saga må man vurdere hver enkelt oplysning for sig. Beskrivelsen af Balderhelligdommen i *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* kap.1 og den dyrkelse, der fandt sted der, er alle således med rette enige om at se bort fra i forbindelse med Balders rolle i nordisk religion. Derimod er det mere usikkert, hvilken status fx sejdseancen i *Eiríks saga rauða* har som kilde. Her er det sandsynligt, at visse oplysninger faktisk har rod i hedensk tid, medens andre må vurderes som rene anakronismer (Schjødt 2000,35 f.).

overflødige for den narrative udfoldelse, er der intet, der tyder på, at noget rituelt skulle ligge bag.

For det tredje må man gøre sig klart, hvad der overhovedet konstituerer det ritual, som det narrative forløb hævdes at relatere sig til. Hvad indebærer eksempelvis en ofring eller en initiation rent strukturelt? Når en aktør dræbes i en fortælling, er det ikke nødvendigvis et offer i rituel forstand, vi står overfor.

Og for det fjerde må man være bevidst om den måde, som et sammenlignende materiale bør inddrages på. For at der altid vil være tale om et sammenlignende materiale er indiskutabelt - også uden at andre myter, eper eller ritualer eksplicit inddrages: Det overhovedet at beskrive en handling (eller en serie af handlinger) som et *ritual* indebærer naturligvis, at vi har en forestilling om, hvad et ritual er; og denne forestilling kan kun etableres ved en bevidst eller ubevidst sammenligning af en række handlinger, der betegnes som ritualer, og som derfor har en fælles semantisk og /eller morfologisk kerne, der er forskellig fra en række handlinger, som vi derfor *ikke* betegner som ritualer. Afgørende i den forbindelse er det, at man, som allerede antydte, ikke forveksler en række løsrevne elementer med en struktur. Det er strukturen, dvs. de relationer, som de forskellige elementer har til hinanden, der er konstituerende for at foretage en meningsfuld klassifikation, og dermed for at foretage en acceptabel rekonstruktion, der opfylder kriterierne for at kunne klassificeres i en bestemt kategori. Netop dette fjerde kriterium udgør det afgørende problem i forhold til diskussionen af sådanne ritualer, som hævdes at ligge til grund for visse myter, fordi man ofte trækker enkelte elementer frem, som kan findes i forskellige typer af ritualer og hævder, at fortællinger, der indholder de tilsvarende elementer må have en basis i ritualerne<sup>4</sup>. Det er metodisk uacceptabelt, og fører ofte mærkværdige resultater med sig, der bestemt ikke kan hævdes at være modsigelsesfrie i forhold til de myter, på basis af hvilke ritualerne rekonstrueres. Vi skal i det følgende nærmere diskutere og kritisere en analyse af denne type, og derefter foreslå en alternativ fremgangsmåde, der opfylder de ovenfor opstillede krav.

Som eksempel på en sådan fremgangsmåde skal vi kort diskutere Jan de Vries' berømte artikel fra 1955 "Der Mythos von Balders Tod". Den har haft stor betydning for opfattelsen af Balder, og den er for nylig blevet kaldt "the

---

<sup>4</sup> Af sådanne elementer kan nævnes kærlighed og seksualitet, der kan have noget med frugtbarhedsritualer at gøre. I Norden kan man tænke på opfattelsen af *Skírnismál*, der siden Magnus Olsens artikel fra 1909 ofte har været sat i forbindelse med sådanne frugtbarhedsritualer, selv om indiciene mildt sagt er beskedne. Et andet eksempel er, når fortællinger, der indeholder "prøver" som en helt må aflægge, før han opnår sit mål, opfattes som reminiscenser af initiationsritualer, selv om det i sig selv forekommer ret forståeligt, at en helt må vise sig som en helt, i en episk fortælling. At sådanne træk kan være forbundet med forskellige ritualer er indlysende, men det burde være lige så indlysende, at de også kan indgå i andre sammenhænge, ikke mindst af rent narrativ art, hvorfor man også må kræve mere end deres blotte tilstedeværelse, for at tolke mytiske og halvmytiske beretninger som rituelle derivater. Men det har ikke altid været tilfældet.

most lasting contribution to recent Baldr research” (Lindow 1997, 30), selv om den også har været udsat for alvorlig kritik (fx Schröder 1962,329 ff. og Lindow 1997, 33-37).

Detaljerne i den argumentation, de Vries anvender, kan vi ikke af omfangsmæssige begrænsninger komme nærmere ind på her, men som det vil være de fleste bekendt indeholder artiklen dels en afvisning af de forskellige varianter af teorien om Balder som døende og genopstående frugtbarhedgud, primært fordi han ikke (i det mindste i dette verdensforløb) vender tilbage<sup>5</sup> (de Vries 1955,45), og dels en argumentation for en ny teori, som nok hænger sammen, men som med analytisk fordel kan splittes op i to, nemlig én der ser myten etiologisk - som en forklaring på dødens uigenkaldelighed, og én der fortsat knytter myten tæt til et ritual, men nu et initiationsritual i stedet for et frugtbarhedsritual. Af disse to dele, er det givetvis den sidste, der har vakt størst interesse - måske fordi den første er almindelig accepteret.

De Vries inddrager i forbindelse med mytemet om dødens uigenkaldelighed Hainuwele-myten, der er kendt fra Indonesien, og som også drejer sig om døden som uafviselig kendsgerning. I forbindelse med denne myte forklares så forskellige ting som menneskeofring og initiationssymbolik. At der er betragtelige forskelle på dette religiøse kompleks fra Indonesien på den ene side og Baldermyten på den anden, er de Vries fuldt på det rene med, men finder det alligevel og med rette umagen værd at undersøge, om initiationssymbolikken også skulle være til stede i den nordiske myte. Et mytologem, der har dødens problem i centrum, vil, siges det, ofte kredse om relationen mellem død og genfødsel, en relation, som netop ofte indgår i initiationssymbolikken. Med henvisning til Otto Höflers undersøgelser (1934,188 ff.) inddrages derefter episoden fra *Völsunga saga*, der omhandler Sigmunds og Sinfjotles oplevelser frem til hævn drabet på Siggeir<sup>6</sup>. Ligesom denne fortælling drejer sig om hævn, er hævn motivet også på spil i Baldermyten. Vale, der hævner Balder én nat gammel, før han har redt og vasket sig, er et træk, der viser den initierede som nyfødt, og Balder og Vale bliver altså én og den samme (s. 56). Friggs spørgsmål til Loke om, hvad aserne foretager sig, da de skyder på Balder, viser også, at kvinder var udelukket fra de prøver i mod, initianden måtte udvise - igen et træk, der er kendt fra mange initiationsritualer. Den blinde Hød er i virkeligheden Odin selv i forklædning (s. 48), og misteltenen er livets plante (s.

---

<sup>5</sup> Siden de Vries' artikel er opfattelsen af døende og genopstående guder blevet problematiseret væsentligt, idet det ikke kun er Balder, der er problemer med i henseende til ikke at vende tilbage. Selve kategorien "døende og genopstående guder", har man vist, er overordentlig tvivlsom på både empiriske og teoretiske grunde. En kritisk fremstilling af kategorien udgøres af Smith 1987.

<sup>6</sup> At denne episode faktisk indeholder reminiscenser af initiationsritualer er givetvis rigtigt, men at det skulle have noget specifikt med hævnen at gøre, er næppe tilfældet. Initiationssekvensen er her sat ind i en narrativ ramme, hvor hævnen er afgørende, uden at man kan postulere en oprindelig sammenhæng. Andre tilsvarende sekvenser, fx beretningen om den unge Sigurd Fafnersbane (Schjødtt 1994) har ikke hævn motivet som noget centralt.

58), der samtidig også bringer døden. For initiationstemaet er det nok at have Hød som drabsmand, men når hændelsen skal forklares, har det været nødvendigt at inddrage Lokeskikelsen. Snorres beskrivelse af gråden for Balder er sandsynligvis kristeligt inspireret. Endelig er det vigtigt for de Vries, at Balder i virkeligheden er en menneskelig helt og ikke en gud (s. 50). Han er en skikkelse, hvis død (og genfødsel) vil gøre ham til kriger i et krigerforbund, der har særlige relationer til Odin.

Når det ovenfor blev hævdet, at de Vries' teori med fordel kan splittes op i to dele, hænger det bl.a. sammen med, at de to dele sine steder modsiger hinanden rent logisk<sup>7</sup>. En myte, der er afledt af et initiationsritual, hvor død og genfødsel er centrale elementer, kan ikke samtidig tematisere dødens uigenkaldelighed; med andre ord, hvis Vale er den genfødte Balder viser det netop, at døden ikke er uigenkaldelig, men følges af et nyt og bedre liv. Teoriens to dele passer simpelthen ikke sammen. Der kunne let rette andre indvendinger, som her må udelades af omfangsmæssige grunde.<sup>8</sup>

Men forudsætningen for hele konstruktionen er måske det mest problematiske ved teorien, idet det er nødvendigt for at få tingene til at gå op, at foretage en dobbeltidentifikation: Odin er den samme som Hød, og Vale er den samme som Balder. Begge dele er uholdbare og tåler ikke, at man udvider identifikationen ud over selve Baldermyten, hvilket i sig selv er metodisk betænkeligt: Hvis Hød er Odin, er det denne, der dræbes af Vale, som altså slår sin egen far ihjel - den far, der ellers har måttet stride så meget for at undfange ham, hvis Saxos version på dette punkt står til troende. Men Odin lever tilsyneladende i bedste velgående til han bliver dræbt af Fenrir ved Ragnarok. Vale og Balder kommer begge tilbage efter Ragnarok, hvad man i høj grad må undre sig over, hvis de er den samme. Det korte af det lange er, at Hød ikke kan være Odin, og Balder ikke kan være Vale. Og når det sidste ikke er tilfældet, har de Vries et endnu større problem, end Schröder og fortalene for frugtbarhedsteorien. For medens de i det mindste kan henvise til Balders

<sup>7</sup> Jeg kan stort set tilslutte mig Lindow's kritik af de Vries opfattelse af "døds"-tematikken (Lindow 1997, 33 f.), som helt sikkert er problematisk. Selv om det er initiationsdelen, der her skal diskuteres, bør det dog anføres, at selve uigenkaldeligheden forekommer så stærkt tematiseret i Snorres version, at enhver tolkning, må kunne forklare dette aspekt. Derimod synes hverken menneskeofret eller ligbrændingen at kunne tolkes som ritualindstiftende. Selv om det ofte er fremført, er der ikke noget der tyder på, at Balderdrabet, skal ses som et offer (hvis der, som de Vries hævder, er tale om et Odinsoffer (s.44), så mangler hængningen eller kvælingen, der synes at være et fast træk i ofre, der kan forbindes med Odin; og i tilfældet Balder kan der ikke bare være tale om en manglende information fra Snorres og de øvrige kilders side: Balders døds måde levner simpelthen ikke plads for nogen form for kvæling). Og hvis det alligevel skulle være tilfældet, kan det næppe være det første af slagsen, da Odin vel selv har indstiftet det i *Háv* 138. Hvad ligbrændingen angår, henviser de Vries til *Yng.s.* kap. 8, hvor Odin indstifter bål sætningen, men det er udtrykkeligt med henblik på at den døde skal til Valhal, og hvis Balders bål færd skulle have paradigmatisk status, kan den vel ikke på dette centrale punkt være inverteret.

<sup>8</sup> En lidt fyldigere kritik af de Vries' teori vil kunne læses i en artikel, som vil udkomme i et mindeskrift for G. W. Weber, der formentlig vil udkomme senere i år.

tilbagekomst ved Ragnarok som et udtryk for den eftersøgte genfødsel, hvor årets cyklus altså paralleliseres med kosmos' - et træk som ikke er usædvanligt - så kan en initiand ikke vente med at blive genfødt til efter Ragnarok, hvis der skal være nogen mening i symbolikken.

Bortset fra, at der altså er mange problemer med de Vries' analyse i detaljerne, så lider den af tre helt overordnede metodiske skavanker i forhold til de fire kriterier, vi ovenfor opstillede. Det første, at det skal være muligt at se en forløbsstruktur i materialet, er naturligvis opfyldt, idet Baldermyten i Snorres version er en af de længste og mest detaljerede myter, der overhovedet findes i vort materiale. Derimod er kriterium nummer to ikke opfyldt: Nok er der detaljer, der ikke kan forklares inden for beretningens egen logik (fx episoderne med Hyrrokin og Lit), men de bliver heller ikke tilfredsstillende forklaret med de Vries' tolkning, hvorimod andre detaljer, som er fuldt forklarlige ud fra de narrative præmisser (fx gudernes "spil" med Balder) tvinges ind i en initiationssymbolisk ramme. Heller ikke det tredje kriterium er på nogen måde opfyldt, idet de Vries ikke gør sig nogen ulejlighed med at forklare, hvad der egentlig konstituerer initiationsritualer. Det er ikke nok at konstatere, at for at blive rigtig kriger krævedes der en art optagelse, som var betinget af mod og våbenduelighed, og at optagelsen nok var ritualiseret. Det var den givetvis, men *hvad* det er, der karakteriserer netop denne type ritualer, får vi ikke noget samlet bud på. Endelig for det fjerde er det netop en samling løsrevne elementer, de Vries fokuserer på, og som nævnt ovenikøbet elementer, der for fleres vedkommende kun er tilstede via tvivlsomme rekonstruktioner, ligesom det overordnede initiationsforløb, der rekonstrueres (eller postuleres) kun har meget lidt at gøre med den myte, Snorre fortæller. Rekonstruktionen er ganske enkelt i modstrid med den myte, der skal forklares<sup>9</sup>, og dens forklaringsværdi er derfor begrænset i forhold hertil.

Den problematik, der ovenfor er skitseret, findes ikke kun hos de Vries eller kun i forbindelse med Baldermyten. Hvis det var tilfældet, var den vel næppe være værd at drage frem; men vi møder den faktisk i betydelige dele af især den ældre religionshistoriske forskning inden for området<sup>10</sup>.

Alt dette betyder imidlertid ikke, at man ikke kan finde initiationsstrukturer i kilderne til nordisk religion; det betyder blot, at hverken de Vries eller nogen anden for den sags skyld har sandsynliggjort, at Baldermyten skulle have noget med initiation at gøre, hvad den formentlig heller aldrig har haft - et forhold, der

---

<sup>9</sup> At der kan være elementer, som ikke kan forklares med den viden, det overleverede materiale giver os, må naturligvis accepteres, men at rekonstruere et forløb, som er i direkte modstrid med den tekst, der er det analytiske udgangspunkt, forekommer ikke tilforladeligt.

<sup>10</sup> Det gælder således også en række forsøg på at finde frugtbarhedsritualer, som vi har berørt ovenfor (fx Olsen 1909, Phillpotts 1920, Schröder 1953), initiationsritualer (fx Danielli 1945, Polomé 1970) og kult mere generelt (fx Grønbech 1912). Der er naturligvis variationer i den metodiske problematik og også i overbevisningskraften, men grundlæggende forekommer de rekonstruktioner, der er på tale, at være baseret på noget tvivlsomme præmisser.

ved siden af den negative kritik, som her er fremført, også kan finde positiv støtte i bedre og mere adækvate tolkningsforsøg<sup>11</sup>, som vi dog ikke skal komme nærmere ind på her.

Den passage, jeg vil tage frem som eksempel på en anden måde at rekonstruere ritualer - eller som vi skal se snarere rituelle semantikker - ud fra narrative forløb, stammer fra *Hrólf's saga kraka*. Det er den, der drejer sig om Bødvar Bjarke, altså fra den såkaldte *Bödvars þáttur bjarka*. Den episode i sagaen, der må påkalde sig størst opmærksomhed, når det drejer sig om ritualer, nemlig Høts transformation fra forskræmt dreng til vældig kriger, som udgør en regelret initiationssekvens, har jeg behandlet andetsteds (Schjødt 2000), hvorfor den i det følgende kun kort skal omtales. Det er nemlig den episode, der kan sætte os på sporet af den rituelle struktur, der her skal analyseres. I fortællingen om Høt er det tydeligt, at den person, som vejleder den unge initiand, er den veletablerede kriger Bødvar, der stiller ham prøver og giver råd om, hvordan han skal tilegne sig mod. Men for at kunne fungere som vejleder eller initiator, må det naturligvis være en forudsætning, at man selv er initieret. At det er tilfældet behøver ikke nødvendigvis at fremgå af fortællingen, men spørgsmålet er, om der ikke i Bødvars opvækst og tidlige karriere er i det mindste spor af et initiatorisk forløb og dermed af initiationsritualer.

Inden vi skal gå til selve analysen skal vi imidlertid kort se på de fire kriterier, vi opstillede ovenfor som nødvendige for at kunne tale om en fortælling, der - om ikke i sin helhed er derivet fra et ritual - så dog indeholder så mange træk, at vi med nødvendighed må antage en mere eller mindre uspecifiseret relation til et ritual, der næppe har været udført i over 300 år, da sagaen er nedskrevet.

Det første kriterium er til fulde opfyldt: Vi har at gøre med en lang og sine steder detaljeret beretning. Det andet kriterium er også opfyldt, hvilket vil fremgå nedenfor af selve analysen.

Det tredje kriterium, at man skal gøre sig klart, hvad der konstituerer det ritual, som postuleres at være parallelt det narrative forløb, som analyseres, skal vi kort opholde os ved. I dette tilfælde er der som nævnt tale om en initiation af en kriger.

En præcis definition af fænomenet initiation, som der er almindelig konsensus om, findes ikke. Men der er i hvert fald fire elementer eller karakteristika, der hver især skal være til stede, for at vi skal kunne tale om initiation. De består i 1) at et subjekt gennemgår et rituel forløb, der bringer det til en irreversibel højere status; 2) at det rituelle forløb består af tre faser, nemlig én hvor subjektet udskiller sig fra den tilværelsesmodus, det tidligere har haft,

---

<sup>11</sup> Man kan her tænke på dels de rene "mytiske" tolkninger som Dumézil 1959 og Stjernfelt 1990 og dels de mere sociologisk orienterede som Clunies Ross 1994 og Lindow 1997, som alle er betydeligt mere konsistente, end de Vries' og hans mest direkte efterfølger, nemlig Edgar Polomé (1970), der kun i mindre detaljer afviger fra de Vries.

én, som man normalt kalder den liminale fase, hvor subjektet symbolsk befinder sig i en helt anden verden, end den, hvor dets tilværelse normalt udspiller sig og endelig én, hvor subjektet reintegreres i den kendte verden, men i en ny tilværelsesmodus<sup>12</sup>; 3) at denne ny tilværelsesmodus er karakteriseret ved, at subjektet besidder en viden eller nogle evner, som er tilegnet i løbet af ritualet og især i den liminale fase, og som altså har forbindelse til en anden verden; 4) at forholdet mellem denne anden verden eller det liminale rum på den ene side, og den verden eller det rum, der karakteriserer tilværelsen før og efter ritualet på den anden side udtrykkes gennem en række semantiske oppositionspar, der ofte har spatiale konnotationer og ofte også indeholder modsætningen mellem liv og død. Og dette sidste er naturligvis årsagen til den udbredte død/genfødselssymbolik, som vi møder i initiationsritualer over hele verden<sup>13</sup>, uden at den dog kan hævdes at være allestedsnærværende og dermed konstituerende.

Denne karakteristik er generel, som den må være, eftersom det fænomen, vi har at gøre med, er kendt i alle religioner. Der kunne nævnes langt flere karakteristika, som ofte følger disse ritualer, og hvoraf jeg skal komme ind på nogle i det følgende.

Det fjerde kriterium, at man gør sig bevidst om den måde man inddrager sammenligninger på fremgår af det ovenstående: I initiationskarakteristikken er der tale om en struktur, dvs. om en række elementer, der indgår i bestemte relationer til hinanden og som tilsammen konstituerer den struktur, vi må lede efter. Der er således ikke tale om en række elementer, som vi nogle gange, og nogle gange ikke, kan finde i forskellige initiationsritualer. Det er altså i sidste instans denne struktur, vi bør lede efter.

Et kort referat af Bødvars løbebane går som følger: Bjørn hed en kongesøn, som er forelsket i kongedatteren Bera. Da han afviser sin stedmoders tilnærmelser, engang faderen er på krigstogt, forvandler hun ham til en bjørn (dog således, at han er mand om natten men bjørn om dagen). Hun var finnekongens datter og troldkyndig. Bera finder ud af, hvordan det hænger sammen og besøger Bjørn om natten. En nat fortæller han, at han forventer, at han den følgende dag vil blive dræbt og giver hende nogle instruktioner og forudsigelser. Bl.a. fortæller han, at hun skal føde tre sønner, og at hun, selv om dronningen vil presse hende til det, ikke må spise noget af den dræbte bjørns (hans eget) kød, fordi sønnernes udseende i så fald vil falde uheldigt ud. Han siger også, at sønnerne skal hedde Elgfrode, Thore og Bødvar. Det går

---

<sup>12</sup> Modellen her er i store træk identisk med van Gennep's model for *rites de passage*, hvor der skelnes mellem tre kategorier af riter i det overordnede rituelle forløb, nemlig *rites de séparation*, *rites de marge* og *rites d'agrégation* (van Gennep har også en serie parallelbetegnelser, nemlig præliminale, liminale og postliminale riter), hvor hver kategori svarer til en af de faser, der her er nævnt (van Gennep 1909,14).

<sup>13</sup> En mere detaljeret diskussion af initiationen som religiøst fænomen og en argumentation for i definitionsmæssig henseende at operere med de fire nævnte karakteristika kan læses i Schjødt 1986 og 1992.

naturligvis som forudsagt, og han bliver dræbt næste dag. Bera kan ikke helt undslå sig for at spise det kød, som dronningen sætter for hende, og hun spiser en bid, og en lille del af en anden. Konsekvensen af det er, at den første søn er elg fra navlen og ned; den næste har hundepoter i stedet for fødder, men den tredje er der intet i vejen med, og ham elskede hun mest.

De vokser op og er ustyrlige, og Elgfrode ønsker at drage væk fra områder, hvor der lever mennesker. Inden da skal han, som senere også hans to brødre, hente den arv, som hans fader havde bestemt for ham i hulen, hvor faderen levede som bjørn og de tre brødre blev undfanget. Også Thore drager ud og bliver siden konge i gøternes land. Bødvar bliver hjemme endnu et stykke tid og hævner sin fader ved at dræbe den troldkyndige stedmoder. Bødvars arv består bl.a. af et sværd, der har den egenskab, at det ikke kan trækkes op af skeden uden at det bliver en mands død. Derefter drager han først til sin broder Elgfrode, men inden det går op for ham, hvem gæsten er, kommer de op at slås, og Elgfrode viser sig at være den stærkeste. Han giver Bødvar det råd, at han skal tage til kong Rolf og blive hans mand. Da de skal skilles, lader han Bødvar drikke blod fra sin læg, så broderen vil øge sin styrke. Bødvar besøger også sin anden broder, Thore. Han er ikke hjemme, men da de to brødre ligner hinanden meget, tror alle, at det er Thore, der er kommet hjem, og bl.a. lægger Bødvar sig med dronningen, men dog ikke under samme tæppe. Hvilket undrer hende, og han fortæller hende sandheden. Derefter taler de sammen hver nat, til broderen kommer hjem. Da han kommer hjem er gensynsglæden stor, men Bødvar drager snart videre og kommer til Danmark. Her søger han ly hos en bonde, som fortæller om sin søn Høt, der holdes fangen i kongsgården.

Herefter følger historien om, hvordan Bødvar kommer til Lejre og straks sætter sig i respekt, og hvordan han på forskellig vis får gjort Høt til en stor kriger. Bødvar forbliver hos kong Rolf resten af sit liv, hvor han bl.a. kæmper i en bjørns skikkelse og til slut dør heltedøden.

Isoleret set er der ikke umiddelbart meget, der leder tanken hen på initiation i forbindelse med Bødvars indtræden i Rolfs hird. Men ved nærmere analyse er der flere træk, der i lyset af hvad vi ellers ved om initiation, dels ud fra ovenstående karakteristik og dels ud fra andre narrative sekvenser i det nordiske kildemateriale<sup>14</sup>, lader sig se som typiske elementer i en initiationsstruktur.

For det første falder det i øjnene, at Bødvar er søn af en kvinde og en bjørn, eller i hvert fald en figur, der er halvt bjørn og altså uden videre kan karakteriseres som en liminal aktør. Desuden bliver han undfanget, medens faderen befinder sig på grænsen mellem liv og død, altså i en liminal situation. Bjørneafstamningen fornægter sig ikke, idet Bødvar i Rolfs sidste kamp kæmper i en bjørns skikkelse (kap. 50). For det andet drikker han blodet fra et væsen, der er stærkere end han selv og øger dermed sin styrke - et træk, vi flere

---

<sup>14</sup> Af omfangsmæssige hensyn skal jeg blot henvise til en række artikler, hvori jeg tidligere har behandlet temaer fra fornaldarsagaerne og påvist klare initiationsmønstre (1994, 1999 og 2000).

gange støder på i forbindelse med initiationsscenarier (fx i Saxos beretning om Hadingus), og som går igen i forbindelse med Høt. Man kan altså konstatere, at Bødvars fødsel og ungdom, inden han kommer til Lejre, har forberedt ham på den tilværelse og den position, han indtager resten af sit liv, og som er irreversibel: Han er kriger i en hird hos en konge, der tydeligvis har en særlig affinitet til Odin (kap. 39 og 46), som først udsætter dem for prøver og derved hjælper dem, men som siden sviger dem, fordi de afslår hans gaver.

En treledssekvens, der er parallel med initiationens kan også være umiddelbart vanskelig at se, fordi de forskellige faser ikke er klart adskilte, men sekvensen synes dog i en vis udstrækning at følge hans fysiske bevægelsesmønster: Hans ophold hjemme hos moderen udgør naturligvis initialfasen, rejsen til hulen, hvor han får sit overnaturlige sværd, separationsfasen, opholdet hos brødrene, der indeholder kamp og tilegnelse af styrke hos Elgfrøde<sup>15</sup> og en tematisering af seksualiteten hos Thores kone<sup>16</sup>, som vi straks skal vende tilbage til, liminalfasen. Den videre rejse til Rolf udgør reintegrationsfasen og tilværelsen i Lejre finalfasen.

Binære oppositionspar er der ikke mange af, men der fremtræder dog en, der er meget udbredt i forbindelse med initiationscenarier, nemlig civiliseret vs. uciviliseret: I initial- og finalfasen lever han i kongsgårde, medens han i de mellemliggende faser mest opholder sig i huler og hytter, hvor numinøse objekter tilegnes (i faderens hule sværdet og i Elgfredes hytte blodet). Begge steder er karakteriseret som liminale, fordi de tilknyttede aktører er halvt mennesker og halvt dyr. Hulen indeholder desuden et sexuel element (brødrenes undfangelse) og hytten er hinsides menneskelig tilstedeværelse. Men også et andet oppositionspar, der er analog til det ikke-liminale vs. det liminale, og som ofte er til stede i initiationsscenarier er antydnet i sekvensen. Det gælder oververden vs. underverden, i og med hulen må betragtes som chthonisk. Ellers er oppositionsparene ikke fremtrædende - formentlig fordi sagaen søger at fremstille et relativt "realistisk" scenarie, der ikke levner plads til fx rejser til dødsriget eller kontakt med døde.

Men inden Bødvar kommer til Danmark, har han som sagt også besøgt sin anden broder, hvis kone han ligger med, og som han taler med hver nat til Thore kommer hjem. Det seksuelle element, der ofte er til stede, når numinøse objekter eller råd angående det numinøse skal tilegnes<sup>17</sup>, synes altså også her at

---

<sup>15</sup> Elgfrøde kan her ansues som initiator for den unge Bødvar: Han er den, der sætter prøverne, og den der forsyner subjektet med det middel (blodet), der skal til for at opnå den nødvendige styrke. Desuden er Elgfrøde tydeligvis selv en liminal person: Halv elg og halv mand, der lever langt fra mennesker og den civiliserede verden. I den forstand udgør han et redundant træk i forhold til brødrenes fader.

<sup>16</sup> Det seksuelle element møder vi adskillige steder, hvor vi på tilsvarende vis har at gøre med en initiationssekvens. Det gælder fx for Sigurd i hans møde med Sigrdriva, hvor han tilegner sig viden.

<sup>17</sup> Man kan som nævnt ovenfor tænke på Sigurd og Sigrdriva, men også Odin og Gunnlød og Sigmund og Signy i *Volsunga saga* er det her nærliggende at parallelisere med

være til stede, selv om det betones, at de ikke lå under samme tæppe. Dette træk udgør næsten en nøjagtig parallel til Sigurds besøg hos Brynhild, hvor der lægges et sværd i mellem dem, fordi Brynhild skal giftes med Sigurds blodsbroder Gunnar. Hvadenten der er tale om et litterært træk, der skal vise heltens stålsatte karakter, og som kan være en manipulation et mere oprindeligt træk, hvor heltene var knap så stålsatte, eller der faktisk fra begyndelsen var tale om om afholdenhed, så er sexualiteten i hvert fald tematiseret og det liminale betonet ved det "unormale" i situationen: Hvis det første forslag er rigtigt er der både for Sigurds og Bødvars vedkommende tale om et samleje med en broders (kommende eller nuværende) kone, og hvis det sidste er tilfældet, må selve afholdenheden betragtes som ret usædvanlig og viser dermed også et ræk, som vi ofte møder i det etnografiske materiale vedrørende initiation, nemlig liminalfasens seksuelle afholdenhed.

Vi har altså en liminalfase, der trods den episke ramme indeholder flere træk, der er oppositionelle i forhold til subjektets "normale" tilværelse. Endelig er såvel sværdet med de overnaturlige egenskaber og blodet fra en person, som subjektet har haft en (ganske vist fingeret) kamp med, tilstrækkeligt til at gøre det ud for numinøse objekter. Og udelukkes kan det heller ikke, at den tale, der finder sted mellem Bødvar og Thores kone har karakter af vidensformidling, parallelt med Sigrdrivas belæring af Sigurd, om end teksten ikke er eksplicit i så henseende.

På denne måde er det muligt i forhold til Bødvar at se en næsten komplet initiationssekvens, der gør subjektet til en anden, end den han var før - en ny person. På denne måde bliver det meningsfuldt med de mange mærkelige træk, som sekvensen opruller. Det gælder fx faderens dobbelte fremtrædelsesform; det gælder besøgene hos de to brødre, der indeholder fingerede kampe, sexualitet og tilegnelse af blod og "tale".

Nu kan man med rette stille spørgsmål ved, om den analyse, der her er foretaget, kan siges at rekonstruere noget ritual. Om en egentlig rekonstruktion er der ikke tale. Vi kan ikke hævde, at initiander i alle til fælde har skullet bevæge sig ud i ødemarken og indtage blod fra et stærkere væsen etc. Det, vi kan hævde, er, at det semantiske univers, som er til stede i Bødvarsekvensen, må være det, som også initiander (formodentlig initiander, der skulle indlemmes i et krigerforbund bestående af berserker eller i hvert fald beslægtet med berserkerne (jf. Bødvars bjørneafstamning og bjørneskikkelse)) har været sat i. Der er tale om en ung mand, der via en ritualiseret bjørneafstamning og via en tilegnelse af numinøse objekter gennem et møde med liminale aktører (Elgfrøde og Thores kone) bliver en stor kriger, der på et eller andet symbolsk niveau må opfattes som en bjørn.

I forhold til den problemstilling, der blev skitseret i indledningen kan vi altså sige, at en egentlig rekonstruktion af faktisk opførte ritualer næppe er mulig ud fra narrative forløb. Til gengæld kan vi, når de anførte kriterier inddrages og indfries, sige en del om den semantik, som har været på spil også i

ritualerne, fordi det kan sandsynliggøres, at visse narrative forløb må have et forlæg i gamle ritualer. Det er ikke den konkrete handlingsgang, men den betydning, som handlingerne har refereret til, der således vil kunne rekonstrueres.

### Bibliografi

- Bell, C.: *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York, Oxford 1992.
- Bell, C.: *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York, Oxford 1997.
- Clunies Ross, M.: *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Icelandic Society*. Vol. 1. Odense 1994.
- Danielli, M.: "Initiation Ceremonial from Norse Literature". *Folklore* 56, 1945.
- Dumézil, G.: *Les dieux des Germains. Essai sur la formation de la religion Scandinave*. Paris 1959.
- Fontenrose, J.: *The Ritual Theory of Myth*. Berkeley, Los Angeles 1966
- Gennep, A. van: *Les rites de passage. Étude systématique des rites*. Paris 1909.
- Grimes, R.L.: *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. Columbia 1982.
- Grønbech, V.: *Vor folkeæt i oldtiden*. Vol 4. København 1912.
- Hocart, A.M.: *Kingship*. Oxford, London 1927.
- Höfler, O.: *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*. Frankfurt a. M. 1934.
- Humphrey, C. and J. Laidlaw: *The Archetypical Actions of Ritual. A theory of ritual illustrated by the Jain rite of worship*. Oxford 1994.
- Lindow, J.: *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods. Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology* (=FF Communications 262). Helsinki 1997.
- Olsen, M.: "Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus". *Maal og Minne*, 1909.
- Phillipotts, B.S.: *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*. Cambridge 1920.
- Polomé, E.C.: "The Indo-European Component in Germanic Religion". *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans* (ed. by J. Puhvel e.a.). Berkeley, Los Angeles 1970.
- Propp, V.J.: *Les racines historiques du conte merveilleux*. Paris 1983 (1946).
- Rappaport, R.A.: *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge 1999.
- Schjødt, J.P.: "Initiation and the Classification of Rituals", *Temenos* 22, 1986.
- Schjødt, J.P.: "Ritualstruktur og ritulklassifikation". *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 20, 1992.
- Schjødt, J.P.: "Heltedigtning og initiationsritualer. En religionsfænomenologisk analyse af den "unge" Sigurd Fafnersbanes historie". *Myte og ritual i det førkristne Norden. Et symposium*. Red. J. P. Schjødt e.a.. Odense 1994.
- Schjødt J.P.: "Krigeren i førkristen nordisk myte og ideologi". *Religion och samhälle i det förkristna Norden. Et symposium*. Red. U. Drobin e.a. Odense 1999.
- Schjødt, J.P.: "Forskelle i anvendelsen af islændingesagaer og fornaldarsagaer som religions historiske kilder". *Artikler. Udgivet i anledning af Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's 60 års fødselsdag 1. marts 2000*. Red. T. Buhl e.a. Aarhus 2000.
- Schröder, F.R.: "Balder und der zweite Merseburger Spruch". *Germanisch-Romanisch Monatschrift* 34, 1953.
- Schröder, F.R.: "Balder-Probleme". *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 84, 1962.
- Segal, R.A.: *The Myth and Ritual Theory. An Anthology*. (ed. by R.A. Segal). Malden, Oxford 1998.
- Smith, J.Z.: "Dying and Rising Gods". *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. by M. Eliade e.a.) Vol 4, New York, London 1987.
- Stjernfelt, F.: *Baldr og verdensdramaet i den nordiske mytologi*. København 1990..
- Turner, V.W.: "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de passage" 1964. Udgivet i V.W. Turner: *The Forest of Symbols* 1967.
- Versnel, H.S.: "What's Sauce for the Goose is Sauce for the Gander: Myth and Ritual, Old and New". *Approaches to Greek Myth* Ed. L. Edmunds. Baltimore and London 1990.
- Vries, J. de: "Der Mythos von Balders Tod". *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 70, 1955.

## Rich and Powerful: The Image of the Female Deity in Migration Age Scandinavia

Rudolf Simek

University of Bonn

In the archeological sources that we have for the first millenium, there is no shortage of depictions of the human figure in the Germanic areas of Western and Northern Europe. The breadth of material ranges from carved wooden figures to metal figurines, cast figures on brooches and pendants, imprinted realisations in precious metal such as on gold bracteates and guldgubber, paintings and reliefwork on picturestones and gravestones, as well as wooden carvings and textile weavings with figurative patterns. In many cases we can easily distinguish between depictions of the male and the female, in others it is possible but less obvious.

A greater number of these human representations are pictures of armed people of various kinds, which have so far always been interpreted as male warriors. They are not necessarily always living humans, but sometimes corpses, sometimes they are part-human, sometimes heroic and sometimes divine, and this is a distinction we should keep in mind.

Weapons are not the only possible way of identifying males, and other more obvious attributes may suggest male divine figures: one-eyed figures are

normally interpreted as a male god, and, although this divinity is less obvious with a little bronze figurine from Rällinge in Södermannland (10<sup>th</sup> century) which is usually identified as the god Freyr, its masculinity is beyond doubt whether god or not. An amulet-like figurine of a capped and bearded figure from Iceland is normally considered to be Thor with his hammer, although scholars have identified the object he holds in various ways as his beard (Gjærder; Eldjárn), or, by Lotte Motz, as a double flute, and most recently by Richard Perkins as his rather outsize moustache. All three interpretations are somewhat unsatisfactory, but one thing is fairly certain, namely that the beard implies the depiction of a male<sup>1</sup>, even if its divinity is somewhat doubtful.

In an attempt to approach the problem of a definitive distinction between male and female figures in a systematic way, we have, as seen from the criteria used above - theoretically - the following possibilities for distinction:

- primary sexual characteristics
- secondary sexual characteristics
- hair style
- dress
- attributes
- context

It is obvious that the lower down the list we get, the less valuable the criteria for distinction are, but they might help in combination with other criteria. Unfortunately, however, it is a rare occasion that the primary sexual characteristics are clearly discernable on representations of human figures in the first millenium. An exception from this rule are the very early and crude wooden idols repeatedly found in Germany and Southern Scandinavia, such as the statues from Braak near Eutin and also those from Oberdorla. The anthropomorphism in these cases is nearly exclusively limited to the parallel growth of two branches representing the lower human extremities, and gender specification is achieved in a very rudimentary, but nevertheless effective, way.

More commonly, however, the decision as to the sex of a human representation is limited to secondary sexual characteristics, such as breasts or the growth of a beard. Fortunately, there is an iconographic tradition running through Germanic art of the entire first millenium to depict females, as long as they are shown in profile, with extremely long hair that is invariably tied into a knot at the back of the head with the remainder of the hair reaching down to at least the middle of the spine, sometimes to its lower end, and sometimes even to

---

<sup>1</sup> Per Gjærder: The Beard as an Iconographical Feature in the Viking Period and the Early Middle Ages. In: *Acta Archaeologica* 35 (1964), 95-114; Kristján Eldjárn: The Bronze Image from Eyrarland, (*Speculum Norroenum. Studies G. Turville-Petre*) Odense 1981, 73-84; Lotte Motz: New Thoughts on an Archaic Artifact. In: *The Mankind Quarterly* 32 (1992), 231-240; Richard Perkins: The Gateway to Trondheim. In: *Saga-Book* 25/2 (1999), 179-213.

the floor. This so-called Irish ribbon-knot always seems to consist of a simple half-turn only. Only rarely does the hair seem to be tied into some sort of bunch below the knot, in which case it only reaches shoulder level (as on the silver gilt figure from Köping, Öland<sup>2</sup>). Such a bunch of hair - but without the knot visible - that reaches down to just over the shoulders seems to mark all the female figure of the Oseberg tapestry, whilst the contemporary wood carving on the Oseberg wagon shows a female with hair tightly combed back, the usual knot and hair nearly as long as her whole body flying behind her, where the end of the hair seems to be gathered back in a sort of loop, signifying even longer hair.

I shall pass on human depictions on bracteates for the moment, which are less easy to interpret than those on the guldgubber, and where, I believe, serious blunders have been made concerning the identification of males and females. It is simply inadmissible to interpret any figure with open, shoulder-length hair as female<sup>3</sup> when all the evidence for the centuries in question shows females have only been depicted with long hair tied in the Irish ribbon knot.

This feature is also shown clearly on the guldgubber, which show figures in profile. A Bornholm single gubbe of a female carrying a beaker has long hair hanging from a rather elaborate knot<sup>4</sup> and the eight different double gubber from Klepp in Norway<sup>5</sup> show a very clear knot and very long hair of either knee-length or floor-length. The double gubber from Slöinge<sup>6</sup> in Sweden that could (with the help of accompanying finds) dendrochronologically be dated to around 710 all show the knot with hair of varying length from good shoulder length to about the middle of the back. All the double gubber from Lundeberg on Fyn in Denmark show females with the knot and usually very long hair.

The main result from such an investigation is that female hair style is surprisingly constant from at least 600 to 900 A.D., all the more surprising, as male hair is shown as being anything from more than shoulder length or shoulder length and always worn open, to a rather short fashion clip which ends above the ears. That the standard length of hair of those males depicted on the guldgubber was about shoulder length is confirmed by the somewhat older gold A-and B-bracteates that show the protagonist with wavy, open hair of approx. shoulder length, only rarely shorter. The C-bracteates, however, show the head of a figure with usually much longer hair (Aversi group<sup>7</sup>) that is sometimes

<sup>2</sup> David M. Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen: *Viking Art*. Minneapolis 1980, Pl. XIV c; Eva Koch Nielsen: *Kvinden med Hornet*. In: *Skalk* 1986/6, 16-17: 17.

<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Enright: *The Goddess Who Weaves*. In: *FmSt* 24 (1990), 54-70.

<sup>4</sup> Koch Nielsen 1986, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Hakon Shetelig & Magnus Olsen: *Runestenene fra Tu og Klapp paa Jæderen*. Bergen 1909 (= *Bergens Museums Arbog* 1909, Nr. 11), Fig. 3 - 10; Fig. 7 also enlarged as Fig. 11 and a drawing by Watt 1999, Fig. 15a.

<sup>6</sup> Lars Lundqvist: *Slöinge - en stormansgård från järnåldern*. In: *Slöinge och Borg. Stormansgårdar i öst och vest*. Stockholm 1996 (= *Riksantikvarämbetet. Arkeologiska undersökningar. Skrifter nr. 18*), 9-52, Fig. 10, a-h.

<sup>7</sup> Mærít Gaimster: *Vendel Period Bracteates on Gotland. On the Significance of Germanic Art*.

(Ravnstorp group<sup>8</sup>) gathered in a knot-like loop, although it is difficult to tell if that is actually a knot or not. We may thus conclude that the male hair style depicted was more open to regional and/or temporary change, whilst the female hair style is very strictly dictated by tradition which seems to change, if only slightly, in the Viking Age.

Actual secondary sexual characteristics are rarely shown, although the interesting bronze pendant from a grave in Norsborg, Södermannland<sup>9</sup> (which shows quite distinctly two embracing females - Shetelig interpreted them as dancing, although the two figures seem totally static), rather stresses the heavy bosoms of the two figures. They, too, have their hair in a knot and hanging down to the same length, namely their shoulderblades. We know nothing of the date nor the function of this pendant, although in most respects it closely resembles the female figures of the *guldgubber*.

Our next means of distinction is by dress, which does not differ overly during the Vendel age and early Viking Age, and shows only two major variants of female dress, namely the type of cape or coat worn over an undershirt and the long, decorated or vertically folded skirt worn between. The cape is richly patterned in most cases and held together at the neck with a large button-bow fibula (*rygknapp* fibula) and cut round to a point at no lower than knee height in the back. The alternative - usually shown with the vertically folded dress skirt - is a full length coat that leaves the dress visible in the front, but otherwise goes down straight or in a very slight curve to reach floor length at the sides, thus covering the women's backs completely all the way to the floor, and can be found on Norwegian as well as Danish *guldgubber* (such as those from Lundeberg<sup>10</sup>).

A close investigation in regional variants and chronological distribution of *guldgubber* with the varying dress style<sup>11</sup> makes it very unlikely that the differences in dress show a difference in regional fashion. The question whether we are dealing with a different style of dress for different social occasion also has to remain open, although the long coat appears without exception on Norwegian and Danish double *gubber*, but the incidence on single female figures in Sweden and the occurrence of the short cape on Swedish double *gubber* show that there is no simple answer here either. The relation of dress style to attribute and context also remains inconclusive; the female bearers of horns can be dressed in either way, as can be the women who are depicted in the company of men. On the other hand, women without any attributes

---

Lund 1998 (= Acta Archaeologica Lundensia Ser. In 8<sup>o</sup>. No. 27.), 27.

<sup>8</sup> Gaimster 26.

<sup>9</sup> Shetelig & Olsen 112.

<sup>10</sup> Henrik Thrane: *Guld, guder og godtfolk - et magtcentrum fra jernalderen ved Gudme og Lundeberg*. København 1993, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Simek: *The iconography of migration age deities in Scandinavia*. In: *The image of the female deity in the first millennium*. Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz, Vienna 2001, in print.

whatsoever, like some of the silver pendants from Sweden, the Norsborg pendant, the Oseberg tapestry and the stylistically different *en face*-female figure-pendant from Hagebyhöga, Östergötland in Sweden<sup>12</sup>, all show the long coat with the points at the side and the somewhat shorter back. Are only these real, alive women? Are all the other, especially the caped women, mythological figures? I have my doubts about such a simplification, but maybe we can conclude (from the Oseberg tapestry) at least that the sideways pointed coat over a trained dress was indeed a formal dress of real women in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century, even though it may, of course, be applied to mythological figures, too.

A further category of distinction mentioned above was by attribute. This proves an astonishingly poor field when investigating female representations of the Migration Age, as the only implements to be found are the horn, usually carried as if full, and only once held with the opening downwards<sup>13</sup>. The only other attribute is extremely rare, namely a type of a plant-like object born by the woman in question.

But why were females wearing what seems to be quite secular types of dresses shown on pendants, brooches, and rather luxurious implements at all? Whilst the *guldgubber* may be explained with their possible function as sacrificial payment and the figures depicted on them as humans, dedicating these metal pictures, the other silver figures and implements defy such interpretation. In most cases where we have figures of men depicted or shaped from precious metal, they are clearly distinguished by attributes: cap and phallus, one-eyedness, a cryptic tool, and in most cases they seem to have been used as amulets. The female silver figures from Sweden and Öland, on the other hand, were either of unknown function or could serve as brooches. But who would make, carry, wear or display such a figure if it was a case of a human female only? On the other hand, they were not used in the same amulett-function as the male divine statues. It is therefore possible that even if they were not divine, these figures were at least semi-divine. But who were they?

Karl Hauck, when he started to work on gold-bracteates several decades ago, was certainly choosing his words carefully when he, for lack of a more distinct name, called the main god of the bracteates simply "He". I would like to follow this useful tradition and call the female depicted on the *gubber*, on silver implements, and possibly in the mythological context of the Gotland picture stones simply "She". This does not extend to all depiction of females, as the Oseberg tapestry quite clearly shows human figures of both sexes. I also don't imply that She is always the same one.

"She" is depicted, when shown alone on *guldgubber* anywhere, a long rich

<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Holmqvist: The dancing gods. In: *Acta archaeologica* 31 (1961), 101-127, fig.26.

<sup>13</sup> Margarete Watt: Kings or Gods? Iconographic Evidence from Scandinavian Gold Foil Figures. In: *The making of Kingdoms. Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 10. Oxford 1999, 173-183.

dress with an ornate short cape and a major brooch at the neck (cf. Sylten, Ibsker, Denmark<sup>14</sup>). She may, when dressed that way, proudly wear a heavy chain (Tuna, Uppland<sup>15</sup>) or bear a horn (Hjorthammar, Blekinge, and Birka<sup>16</sup>). She may even, as on a single example from Helgö<sup>17</sup> stand close up to a man on one of the double gubber.

In other cases, She is differently, but also richly dressed. On the silver figure from Sibble (Grödinge, Södermannland<sup>18</sup>) She wears the sideways pointed coat, which is decorated, and her richly patterned dress underneath has a train and this trained dress figures also on the above mentioned two silver pendants from Birka and one from Klinta on Öland<sup>19</sup>. On one of the two only *en face*-pictures we have of Her, on a guldgubbe from Sorte Muld, she wears a very rich cape and dress and seems to be holding a horn, but sideways and mouth downwards. On the other example, the named silver pendant from Hagebyhöga, Östergötland, She is richly dressed, seems to be enthroned on a silver ring and wears a quadruple necklace and a big fibula at her neck to hold her sideways pointed coat.

She is not a woman of simple and cheap taste. She does, however, like to appear in different shapes, dresses, coats or capes, either with or without necklaces, fibulae, or horns. It is thus hard to say if She is always the same woman.

We may distinguish, in a more systematic iconography of the females on guldgubber, between the following:

- She -A1: Dress, coat, no attribute
- She -A2: Dress, cape, no attribute
- She -B1: Dress, coat, horn
- She -B2: Dress, cape, horn
- She -C: Dress, coat, 2<sup>nd</sup> woman
- She -D1: Shift and coat, together with a man
- She -D2: Shift and cape, together with a man
- She -E: Dress, with any other attribute.

When trying to explain what a single women on guldgubber and on silverfigures, women on double gubber and those horn-bearing women actually signify, I shall try to exemplify my thoughts with groups B and D only and, in doing so, limit myself to three case studies.

I think that the females on the double gubber (D1 and D2) are the ones

<sup>14</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 23

<sup>16</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 25 and 19.

<sup>17</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 22.

easiest to interpret, and this is the first one of my three case studies; we may safely pass over Holmqvist's interpretation of dancing scenes, as the figures seem totally static, as opposed to the cut out figures and some single gubber of men from Bornholm, which portray the act of movement in dance quite vividly. On the other hand, I agree with Holmqvist in the observation that "The men and women which occur together on the plaques were, as far as can be seen, portrayed with unexceptionable modesty. In most cases both persons are clad in showy, ceremonial attire and it is doubtful if they can even as much as kiss each other, as several of them keep a short but respectful distance apart. They have their arms about each other's waist or shoulder, indeed now and then it would actually seem that with one hand the woman is caressing the man's chin; but there is no erotic or bacchanalian intoxication about these scenes"<sup>20</sup>.

Indeed, there isn't. Rather, these people make a very serious impression despite their festive attire, which in my opinion points far less to a scene of dancing but much rather towards a ceremony, a scene of marriage, which would not be the bacchanalian scene of unleashed sexual desires as some historians seem to picture it for archaic society, but rather what marriage was in the early Middle Ages: a serious contract between not only man and woman but also two families with major economical, political and dynastic consequences, whatever the social class. This was no occasion for frolics, but at the decisive moment an occasion for asking divine assistance with the contract, whatever festivities took place afterwards.

It is therefore clear that the different positions of hands<sup>21</sup> are not incidental. Apart from sometimes obviously holding each other round the middle and by the shoulders - thus perhaps embracing or hugging - the couples on the double gubber hold each other by the lower arms, sometimes even by the front of the rich coats they wear. These are by no means dancing gestures, but rather legal gestures of taking into possession and into care. The central point in early Germanic marriage of the early and high Middle Ages was that the husband took the wife into his munt, by which both his family, his care and his jurisdiction are meant. From that moment onwards, he is his wife's only legal representative. I think it is fairly safe to interpret at least those gestures in such a legal way, although even the embrace may have some legal background, although I cannot prove this.

The same gesture as shown on some of the guldgubber is still shown on illustrations in a 13th century manuscript of the German *Sachsenspiegel*, a legal codification of Germanic laws, albeit with its Christian continuation. But the conservative nature of legal gestures allows us to assume that especially the secular aspect of the church wedding was symbolised by this gesture, whilst the exchange of the rings stands for the religious aspect of the same ceremony.

---

<sup>20</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, 108.

<sup>21</sup> Watt, *Kings or Gods*.

I should stress the fact that I see the pictures on these double gubber not primarily as a mythological marriage, but if anything the mythological equivalent of the earthly marriage, and more likely, simply a dynastic wedding of some importance.<sup>22</sup>

Of the mythological marriages we have the rather loose marriage between Odin and Frigg to talk of, possibly not an ideal examples for a marriage in this life, and Thors well-balanced marriage with Sif as well as the rather unlucky one between Njörðr and Skaði. The much quoted union between Freyr and Gerðr, as described in *Skírnismál* and misinterpreted by Snorri is not a marriage, but an attempt at rape, and *Skírnismál* does not even state the consumption of it, so that this scene can be discarded as a marriage once and for all.<sup>23</sup> Thus, of all the mythical marriages only the one between Thor and Sif, and, although far less likely, Odin and Frigg could be seen as role-models for actual earthly marriages.

In fact, if we list the instances where marriages between mythological figures are mentioned in the Eddas and other literary source texts, the most frequently named are Thor's marriage to Sif (Gylf 30; Skaldsk 4, 14, 27; Hym 3, 15, 34, Harb 48; Þrk 24, and Skaldic Poetry) and, surprisingly enough, the marriage between Odin and Frigg (SnE Prol; Grm Pr. 1; Yng 3; Saxo Gesta Danorum I, 25f and Paulus Diaconus, Hist. Lang.), which was already mentioned in the 8th century. Thus, Odin, the greatest womanizer among the gods, is also the one in the best known marriage. Otherwise it is Óðr and Freyja, who are mentioned repeatedly (Vsp 25; Hym 47; Grm 14; Gylf 35) and have like Njörðr and Skaði (Grm; Gylf 22; Skaldsk 1) some claims to ancienité, whilst Freyr and Freyja as well as Skjöldr and Gefjon are only mentioned by Snorri.

It is therefore absurd to associate, of all things, the so-called marriage of Freyr and Gerðr that is only mentioned once by Snorri as archetypal for the heathen marriage rite. If we are looking for a mythological model, it is far more likely that the solid marriages of Thor or perhaps Odin served as a role model rather than a rape or possibly shot-gun marriage like Freyr's.

My second case study concerns the horn-bearing women.

Iconographical images of women with a horn have, in almost all handbooks, been identified as valkyries. This seems to be solely based on the fact that women with horns in their hands are not only to be found on Danish and Swedish guldgubber, pendants, and brooches, but also on some of the Gotland picture stones. Here, they are shown to offer a horn, filled with drink, we assume, to the rider of the 8-legged horse, who may either be interpreted as

<sup>22</sup> We may possibly draw a parallel to a tradition which still continues today with the minting of celebratory coins to mark special occasions.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf Simek: Lust, Sex and Domination. *Skírnismál* and the Foundation of the Norwegian Kingdom. In: Sagnaheimur. Festschrift Hermann Pálsson. Vienna 2001 (in print).

Odin or as a dead warrior arriving at Valhöll on Odin's horse. Snorri Sturluson does indeed talk of valkyries offering the slain arriving in Valhöll a drink of mead (Gylf 38) and he bases his description of Valhöll on the Eddic *Grímnismál* (25 and 36) as well as two 10th century skaldic poems, namely *Eiríksmál* and Eyvind's *Hákonarmál*<sup>24</sup>.

While the similarity between the horn-bearing women on pendants, gubber, and Gotland picture stones may be striking, the interpretation as valkyries is by no means as obvious as that. Germanic mythological and heroic literature is full of women offering drinks in horns, and the examples are not even limited to Germanic literature alone. It is therefore necessary to categorize the occurrences of mead-proffering ladies further.

1. As shown above, Snorri (Gylf 38, based on Grm 25 and 36), talks of the valkyries offering mead to the *einherjar*. In fact, Grm 36 only mentions a group of women, most likely valkyries, doing this, whereas Grm 25 talks only about the provenience of the mead (from the udders of the cow Heiðrun). *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* do not mention any mead being offered, so that the only apparent source for Snorri's assumption must have been *Grímnismál*.
2. In *Skírnismál*, Gerðr offers Skírnir a cup of mead when she finally has to give in to his threats: *ok tak við hrímkálki, fullom forns miaðar!* "Accept this frosty (?) cup of ancient mead", she says, as a sign of finally bowing to his bullying. This gesture of peace - albeit forced upon her - is quoted in *Lokasenna* 53, where Sif offers Loki a cup in exactly the same words, but is instantly demasked as having committed adultery with him. Therefore both cases have an underlying sexual connotation, even though the gesture is overtly one of peace-offering.<sup>25</sup>
3. The similarity of offering Peace with a cup of mead in *Skírnismál* and *Lokasenna* on one hand and *Beowulf* on the other has been noted before, both by Magnus Olsen and Carol Clover.<sup>26</sup> Whether the peace offering by queen Wealhðeow (*Beowulf* v. 624b) to Beowulf is really to be seen in the context of the two young Eddic Poems, or rather with other mead-offerings in *Beowulf* must remain open for the time being. However, James Enright has shown in a couple of publications that the serving of mead to the heroes

<sup>24</sup> Klaus von See: Zwei eddische Preislieder: *Eiríksmál* und *Hákonarmál*, In: Festgabe U. Pretzel. Berlin 1963, 107-117; Edith Marold: Das Walhallbild in den *Eiríksmál* und *Hákonarmál*, In: *Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (1972), 19-33; Tor Ulset: Merknader til en del skaldedikt, Oslo 1975; Joseph Harris: *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, In: *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* 4, New York 1984, 414-415.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Hauck: Die bremische Überlieferung zur Götter-Dreiheit Altuppsalas und die bornholmischen Goldfolien aus Sorte Muld (Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten, LII) In: *FmSt* 27 (1993), 409 - 479: 429.

<sup>26</sup> Magnus Olsen: *Edda- og skaldekvad II. Lokasenna*, Oslo 1960, 54ff, and Carol J. Clover: The Germanic context of the Unfer\_ episode, In: *Speculum* 55 (1980), 444-468: 465f N. 72.

has an important function in the linking of the Germanic comitatus to their lord, in this case via their queen.<sup>27</sup>

4. Many Old Norse prose texts show the offering of drinks by women at a feast in a more or less secular setting: the men are simply being served by the women of the household, just as they could be served by servants. It should be noted, however, that this secular setting does not provide a single example of women serving mead in horns, it is usually beer or ale if a drink is mentioned. An investigation in any functional difference between the two possible settings 3 and 4 is still lacking
5. There is yet another literary reference to horn-bearing women, namely in Saxo Grammaticus, when he talks about the Rugian cult of the Slavonic god Sventovit (Svanovit) (*Gesta Danorum*, XIV, 39), which is used to predict the fortune of the new season - we would say, *ár ok friðr*, by pouring wine into a horn which a four-faced stone idol held: if it remained full over night, it would be a good harvest. Both William of Malmesbury (*Gesta Regum Anglorum*, II, XII; written before 1143) and later, Helinand de Froidmont (*Chronicon*), refer to a similar cult of the (Polish) tribe of the Vindelici, who, they say, worship the goddess Fortuna, who has a horn in her hand which they fill with a beverage made from honey and water and called *hydromelium* by the Greeks, i.e., mead. Otherwise he describes the ceremony in a very similar way to Saxo, namely that the full horn symbolizes a fruitful year, an empty one a bad year. Thus, the horn in the hand of this Slavonic deity can be interpreted as the horn of plenty.<sup>28</sup> These references seem to refer to a Slavonic four-faced idol with a horn that belongs to a much larger and well known type of idol, to be found in Slavonic, Baltic and northern Turkish areas and normally known as Baba-stones. These full-size stone idols are characterized by one or more attributes, among which there is, however, always a drinking horn. In addition, there are several examples of stone statues of a Slavonic goddess called Sviatovid (e.g. the statue from Zbruch<sup>29</sup>), which is sometimes shown as male, sometimes as a female deity.

Whilst one should not fall into the trap of equating the Slavonic representations with the Germanic ones - because related representations need not reflect related ideas - the similarities help us to look at the horn-bearing women from a

---

<sup>27</sup> Michael J. Enright: Lady with a Mead Cup. Ritual, Group Cohesion and Hierarchy in the Germanic Warband. In: *FmSt* 22 (1988), 170-203; Michael J. Enright: Lady with a Mead Cup. Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from la Tène to the Viking Age. Dublin 1996, part. 2-37 and 69-96.

<sup>28</sup> Slupecki, Leszek Pawel and Roman Zaroff: William of Malmesbury on Pagan Slavic Oracles: New Sources for Slavonic Paganism and its two Interpretations. In: *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 2 (1999), 9-20.

<sup>29</sup> Slupecki, Leszek Pawel: Slavonic pagan sanctuaries, Warszawa 1994, 215ff.

different perspective: they probably should not be totally separated from cupbearing males in contemporary iconography. However, it must be noted that the consistent distinction between males holding cups of a particular type, namely the *Sturzbecher*-type glasses of Franconian origin, and females who always bear horns, might very well suggest a similar difference in the type of liquid contained or else that a completely different meaning is attributable to the scenes.

My third set of considerations concerns the differences and the similarities in the iconography of women in the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

I have claimed that there may be a correspondance between the actual dress of the day and the women on the *guldgubber* and pendants, but whether that is the case or not, it is obvious that there are significant distinctions, which are only partly attributable to regional variation, whilst chronological development seems to have played very little role between 600 and 800 or even 900 A.D. Therefore, the distinctions in the iconography may point either to a variety of functions of one person or to a variety of persons actually depicted.

If we assume, as has been done in the past, that the *guldgubber* play a cultic role of some sort, whereby the double *gubber* are seen to have a cultic role especially in marriage ceremonies, then their relative rarity suggests that this was only the case in places of affluence. So, looking at marriages, we may only be talking of dynastically important marriages, and then the role of the few single *gubber* with depictions of Her may be seen in a similar light. We know from Snorri's descriptions that he understood some minor goddesses (whom he lists among the *asynjur* but who are far from that), namely Lof, Sjófn (Gylf 34) and perhaps Vár (Prk 30) to be in charge of love and marriage, just as was the case with the 4<sup>th</sup> century Germanic Goddess Hæva who was venerated on the lower Rhine. Her name is cognate to \*hiwan "marry". These deities, like their predecessors from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, the *matronae*, one could not call *asynjur* of the same standing as Freyja or Frigg. Rather, they were helping female deities which were in the north might have been identified with the *dísir*. In Old High German, where we hear about their function in times of war in the First Merseburg charm, they were called *idisi*; they bound fetters, they hemmed the enemies' progress, and they helped prisoners of war to escape. I cannot go here into the functions and sources for the *dísir*, this has already been done, if to date albeit not sufficiently. Let me just say that when She was venerated, depicted, or called upon, this was in the early Middle Ages not only a matter of the female domain, but rather a family domain. It should be noted that, with the many hundreds of altars erected by members of the Germanic tribes in the second to fourth centuries A.D. inside the Roman empire to the mother goddesses "pro se et suis", that is to say, for themselves and their families, every single dedicant was a man.

Whenever She was venerated or a sacrificial gift made to Her, in whatever form She took, and for whatever purpose this gift was made, it was certainly not

only women who venerated her. It was men and women together, and to ascribe their veneration to the female sphere alone is to mistake grossly the social situation of the younger Iron Age in Northern Europe. However, I think it fairly safe to conclude from what we have seen, namely a wide variety of representations and iconographical realisations, that She is not the Great Goddess of the North<sup>30</sup>, as she has been called, if there was such a thing, but rather one of the many manifestations of minor deities which were later in ON called the *dísir*.

Thus, I may sum up and formulate three conclusions:

1. Double gubber represent the legal-ritual aspect of marriage, whether the couple depicted is human, semi-human or divine. If the scene has indeed to be related to a divine union, the only possible ones are the marriages between Thor and Sif or the somewhat liberal marriage between Odin and Frigg, and not one of the other ill-fated marriages from Eddic mythology and certainly not the supposed union between Freyr and Gerðr.
2. Horn-bearing women can be interpreted in a whole series of ways, and the interpretation as valkyries is the least likely: rich dress, rich jewellery and a matron-like appearance make it most likely that “She” is either the lady of the hall, either in her secular or divine appearance, or else a Nordic goddess of fortune and plenty, which might be loosely associated with the *dísir*, the older Rhenian matronae and the Slavonic manifestations of Fortuna.
3. As becomes clear from conclusions 1 and 2, that when we are confronted with HER, these are not manifestations of the Great Goddess, but rather of a wealth of female deities or semi-deities. Just as Christian female iconography does not (only) centre on the Virgin Mary despite her importance in mythology and cult, but also on a wide variety of female saints for different purposes and personal needs, the heathen iconography shows a wide variety of female deities, even in such a limited area as southern Scandinavia in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, let alone in the wider context.

---

<sup>30</sup> cf. Britt-Mari Näsström: Freya. The Great Goddess of the North, Lund 1995.

## Om dateringen av Eddans hjältedikter

Daniel Sävborg

Stockholms universitet

Under 1800-talet och början av 1900-talet diskuterade många forskare dateringen av eddadikterna. Nu är det länge sedan den frågan diskuterades. En del forskare menar idag att frågan är irrelevant eller teoretiskt omöjlig att besvara, men framför allt beror detta ointresse på att flertalet forskare idag anser att dateringsfrågan är löst, åtminstone i stort. Det finns en etablerad standarduppfattning inom norrönforskningen, och den dateringsdiskussion som trots allt har förts de senaste åren har handlat om enstaka dikter och om justeringar inom denna accepterade helhetsbild, inte om grundläggande ifrågasättanden eller om dateringsmetodik överlag. Jag skall här försöka ta upp frågan från grunden igen. Syftet är primärt att föra en principdiskussion, inte att fastslå dateringar. Då principresonemang har en tendens att bli vaga och i praktiken oanvändbara kommer jag även med ett antal betydligt mer konkreta påståenden om vad jag menar vara användbart respektive förkastligt vid datering av eddadikterna. Det blir handfasta påståenden om olika kriterier, påståenden som man bör kunna godta eller förkasta, inte självklara principer. Jag vill inledningsvis också nämna att det är Eddans hjältecykel jag mest har ägnat mig åt, varför det är den jag kommer att tala om.

I min doktorsavhandling från 1997 kom jag i ett kapitel in på frågan om datering av eddadikterna. Jag ville veta om den etablerade dateringen var såpass säker att jag kunde förutsätta den mina följande analyser, och jag började därvid undersöka vad som var grunden för dessa allmänt etablerade dateringar. Många böcker gav inledningsvis listor med dateringskriterier som tycktes mig ypperliga, då de stödde dateringarna på jämförelser med fasta, daterbara punkter utanför eddadiktningen: på språkutveckling, historiska fakta, annan litteratur o.s.v. (så t ex Jan de Vries, *Altnord. Lit.gesch.* I, Berlin 1964, s 35-37 och Jón Helgason, *Norges og Islands digtning*, 1952, s 92-95). Men flera av dessa kriterier betonades redan i de aktuella böckerna som i praktiken oanvändbara – t ex arkeologiska kriterier, ”Brauchtumskriterien” och språkdrag som de synkoperade ordformerna, kriterier som Jan de Vries i sin litteraturhistoria först listar och sedan avfärdar (a a s 35-37). Och de övriga språkdrag som har aktualiserats inom forskningen (t ex hos Joseph Harris i *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol 4, New York 1984 s 389) ledde, liksom de jämförelser Vries förordar med utomnordisk litteratur, inte alls tydligt till de dateringar som samma forskare sedan presenterar. Den idag gängse eddakronologin kunde m.a.o. inte primärt vila på de av de ledande eddaforskarna förordade dateringskriterierna. Och när jag gick från dessa principlistor till själva argumentationen för de specifika dateringarna fann jag mycket riktigt att det ingalunda var de listade kriterierna som normalt användes vid dateringarna. Här dominerade i stället ett helt annat slags argumentation.

Den helhetsbild av eddadiktningen som än idag är rådande grundlades av Andreas Heusler i början av 1900-talet. I denna helhetsbild ingick en relativ datering, grovt sett en uppdelning i ’genuina’ germanska hjältedikter från vikingatiden och en ’efterblomning’ från kristen högmedeltid. Heuslers dateringsmetod går ut på att rekonstruera en ’urtyp’ för forngermansk hjältediktning i allmänhet och sedan skapa en relativ kronologi för eddadikterna utifrån likheten med urtypen. Utgångspunkten för denna utvecklingskedja är fem eddadikter som Heusler hävdar ligga nära den germanska urtypen. Den urtyp han fastställer har vissa yttre karaktäristika: det var en ’händelsedik’ som bestod av främst berättande partier men också av dialog, den hade en längd på 80-200 långrader och en ’hoppande stil’ (*Die altgerm. Dichtung*, Potsdam 1941, s 153). Detta stämmer förvisso någorlunda in på de eddadikter Heusler pekar ut som gamla, men också på flera av dem han betraktar som unga. Och hur Heusler kommer fram till att de nämnda dragen är gamla, ja på vilken grund han fastställer sin urtyp, är oklart. Han hänvisar vid ett tillfälle allmänt till den västgermanska diktningen, men denna diktning ser huvudsakligen helt annorlunda ut och det finns där *inget* säkert belägg för någon dikt som liknar Heuslers urform. Det finns således inget komparativt stöd för att de s.k. fem gamla eddadikterna skulle vara exempel på den äldsta formen. Det är i Eddan formen dyker upp första gången, främst i just de fem dikter som skulle dateras. Den påstådda urformen tycks i verkligheten ha rekonstruerats just utifrån dessa

fem dikter, varför deras likhet med samma urform saknar bevisvärde i dateringshänseende. Heusler förutsätter det som sedan bevisas. Heusler argumenterar inte bara för en relativ kronologi, utan också för mer precis datering av de påstått unga eddadikterna, främst de s.k. eddaelegierna. Han hävdar ett de har den "Geist" som utmärker Islands *fridðaröld*, den förhållandevis fredliga tiden mellan vikingatid och sturlungatid (a a s 187). Han preciserar dock inte denna *Geist* eller motiverar varför den måste knytas till just den aktuella perioden.

Men Heusler är inte den ende 1900-talsforskare som nyttjat eddadikternas förmenta "Geist" som dateringsargument. Några få exempel: Gustav Neckel daterade Gudrun-dikterna med följande argumentation: "Und nicht bloss stofflich, auch in geist und stimmung geben sie sich als mittelalterliche dichtungen zu erkennen. Weiche gefühle, liebe und trauer, und seelisch verfeinte motive spielen in ihnen eine rolle, die in heidnischer zeit unerhört wäre" (*Beiträge zur Eddaforschung*, Dortmund 1908 s 234). Han motiverar inte påståendet. Jón Helgason påstår att *Hamðismál* är "meget gammelt" med huvudargumentet "det er gennemtrængt af en lidenskabelig, heroisk ånd" (a a s70). Hans argument för att de s.k. eddaelegierna är unga är att "Stemningen er ofte sentimental eller vemodig" (s 63). I Jan de Vries' litteraturhistoria dominerar helt detta slags dateringsargument. Det faktum att "das seelische Erlebnis der handelnden Personen" är viktigt i en dikt daterar den t ex som ung (vol I, s 303), och de s.k. eddaelegierna dateras som grupp med följande argument: betonandet av "das Innere der Personen ist gewiss eine Folge des vom Christentum angeregten Interesses für das seelische Leben" (vol II, 1967, s 128). Peter Foote och David M Wilson hävdar om "eddaelegierna" att "the softness seems indicative of a later age" (*The Viking Achievement*, London 1980 s 357). För Dietrich Hofmann är "psychologisches Interesse für die Motive der Handelnden" och "eine weichere Stimmung" argument för sen, högmedeltida datering av några eddadikter (i *Kurzer Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, vol II, utg. L. E. Schmitt, Berlin 1971 s 81). Gabriel Turville-Petre sendaterar Gudrun-dikterna med hänvisning till "Their motives and their 'spirit'" och hävdar vidare: "the earliest poets were seldom inspired except by action" (*Nine Norse Studies*, London 1972 s 132). Inget stöd ges för dessa påståenden. Enligt Klaus von See är avsaknaden av (och förmenta polemiken mot) "die starre, gefühlsharte Haltung des Heldenpersonals in der älteren Dichtung" ett argument för att räkna en dikt "zur jüngsten Schicht der Eddadichtung" (*Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung*, Heidelberg 1981 s 258).

Jag vill påstå att den etablerade eddakronologin till övervägande del är grundad på det slags argumentation jag här har givit exempel på (se betydligt fler exempel på detta slags dateringargument i min avhandling *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjältediktning*, Stockholm 1997 s 41-57). Dessa hänvisningar till "Stimmung", "stemning", "ånd", "Geist", "Haltung", "Gesinnung", "spirit" eller "softness" är problematiska redan därigenom att det rör sig om så diffusa

fenomen. Men det mest problematiska är att denna sorts dateringar inte stöder sig på några fasta punkter, på några belägg för att den aktuella 'andan' eller 'stämningen' hör hemma i en viss tid och inte i en annan. De är obestyrkta postulat om vad som är ungt respektive gammalt. Detta slags dateringar är grundade på fördomar. Min uppfattning är att de är ovetenskapliga och måste förkastas.

Slutsatsen ovan innebär att den hittillsvarande forskningen inte har givit oss någon säker dateringsgrund att stå på. Det var med denna negativa slutsats jag avslutade dateringskapitlet i min avhandling för att i stället ägna mig åt att diskutera litterär tradition utan att ta ställning till dateringen. Och visst är det lockande att nöja sig med detta: att helt enkelt avstå från dateringar och i stället undersöka sådant som klart kan undersökas. Ty behöver vi egentligen eddadateringar? Finns det några egentliga skäl till att ens försöka gå vidare?

Även bortsett från att tidsfästning av eddadikterna vore en intressant kunskap i sig skulle en sådan tidsfästning ha värde för forskningen överlag. Jag skall ta upp några huvudsynpunkter. En datering av eddadikterna vore önskvärd för ämnesföreträdare från annat håll än de rena eddaforskarna. För religionsforskare, mentalitetshistoriker och historiker i allmänhet är det exempelvis betydelsefullt om en dikt är tillkommen före eller efter trosskiftet, under vikingatid eller under högmedeltid, om eddadikterna alltså kan användas som källor till kunskap om genuin asatro eller om de bara är uttryck för kristna författares antikvitetsintresse och deras tolkning av förfädernas religion, om eddadikterna skänker genuin kunskap om vikingatidens mentalitet, ideal, moral, seder och bruk eller om de utgör en flera århundraden yngre 'fortidsrekonstruktion' av samma slag som islänningasagorna. Är eddadikterna ett parallellfenomen med islänningasagorna eller kan de nyttjas för att s.a.s. kontrollera deras uppgifter om den förkristna vikingatiden? För att besvara sådana frågor behöver man ovedersägligen en datering av eddadikterna. Men något liknande gäller givetvis för litteraturforskarna. Eftersom eddadiktningen kan antas ha blommat under lång tid vore det av stort intresse att veta hur en och samma genre utvecklas under nya kulturella och religiösa förhållanden; vad förändras och vad blir kvar? Eddadikterna och deras innehåll får i litterärt hänseende olika 'mening' om de är vikingatida eller om de är högmedeltida, om de är direkta utlöpare av en forngermansk tradition eller om de är långt senare pastischer, tolkande en sedan länge svunnen tid och anda. En analys av *Völsungasagan* påverkas starkt av om den är samtida med eller från en helt annan tid än de dikter den bygger på. För undersökningar av den germanska hjältesagans utveckling och för jämförelser mellan eddadikterna och t ex *Nibelungenlied* är det viktigt om en eddadikt är äldre än den tyska dikten och därmed kan belägga ett äldre stadium, eller om eddadikten och *Nibelungenlied* i själva verket är samtida fenomen.

Slutsatsen blir att det finns många angelägna forskningsuppgifter som

kräver kunskap om eddadiktens ålder. En datering av eddadiktningen är verkligen starkt önskvärd.

Jag har hittills talat om otillräckligheten hos den argumentation som använts för att datera eddadiktarna. Men det finns också principiella skäl att avstå från att ens försöka datera dem. Som en konsekvens av Parrys och Lords teorier har forskare under de senaste decennierna hävdat att eddadiktarna i egenskap av muntliga dikter inte har haft tillstymmelse till fast form, utan att de måste ha varit starkt föränderliga fenomen. I stället för färdigkomponerade dikter som sedan memorerats skulle det ha rört sig om ett slags ämnen, vilka improviserats på olika sätt i olika framföranden, så olika varandra att det för oss skulle ha framstått som helt olika dikter (som exempel kan nämnas att Gísli Sigurðsson föreslagit att de för oss så grundskilda *Atlaqviða* och *Atlamál* inte egentligen varit olika dikter, utan bara olika framföranden för olika publik; i "On the Classification of Eddic Heroic Poetry", *The Seventh International Saga Conference*, Spoleto 1990 s 247). Om detta är riktigt kan ingen eddadikt ha levt genom århundradena med någon ursprunglig individuell egenart i behåll. Det enda vi ens teoretiskt skulle kunna datera vore alltså nedskrivningstillfället – "A poem in an oral tradition is [---] only as old as its latest performance", skriver Gísli Sigurðsson (a a s 247) – och i så fall kan vi aldrig komma särskilt långt bakåt i tiden.

Men det är inte alls säkert att denna uppfattning av eddadiktarna är riktig eller att det som gäller Parrys och Lords utgångspunkt, jugoslaviska muntliga dikter, också måste gälla för norröna muntliga dikter. Redan 1971 påpekade Lars Lönnroth att eddadiktarna är betydligt kortare, "more tightly structured" och episodinriktade än de jugoslaviska dikterna, vilket antyder "carefull artistic planning rather than improvisation"; ordsikten är rikare med många ovanliga uttryck, och formlerna är snarare ornament än "basic building block of composition" (i "Hjálmar's Death-Song and the Delivery of Eddic Poetry", *Speculum*, vol 46, Cambr. Mass. 1971, s 2). Lönnroth menar att eddadiktarna memorerades snarare än improviserades; vi har i några fall olika muntliga versioner bevarade där det finns många identiska versrader, och han påpekar att västnordiskan skilde klart på ord för 'dikta' och 'recitera' samt att den isländska prosalitteraturen ger flera skildringar som visar att man klart skilde på diktande- och framförandesituation (s 3). Sistnämnda belägg gäller skaldediktningen, och jag tror att vi kan utveckla analogin med just skaldediktningen ytterligare, då ju denna också är norrön muntlig diktning, tillhör samma kultur och i grunden samma poetiska system som eddadiktningen. Detta talar för att dessa båda norröna genrer har traderats på likartat vis. Det är viktigt att notera att 1100- och 1200-talets islänningar nyttjar skaldediktarna som genuina källor till kunskap om såväl specifika fakta (så i t ex konungasagorna) som poetiska grepp och specifika formuleringar (så i Snorris *Edda*) i gammal tid (ofta vikingatiden). Det visar att man åtminstone då – i en tid då diktningen fortfarande var fullt

levande i muntlig tradition – ansåg att dessa dikter hade i behåll såväl det detaljinnehåll som den poetiska och språkliga utformning de ursprungligen fått. Man måste ha menat att den befintliga dikten var något relativt fast och färdigkomponerat som skapats för flera århundraden sedan och som sedan kunnat överleva mer eller mindre ordagrant fram till nedskrivningstiden. Om denna uppfattning hos 1100- 1200-talets lärda islänningar åtminstone *i princip* var riktig är det rimligt att anta att detsamma gällde eddadikterna (sedan är det klart att man ändå alltid måste räkna med förvanskningar av texten; det visar redan det faktum att de olika handskrifterna har delvis olika ordalydelse). Ett stöd för medeltidskällornas syn på skaldediktningen som poesi som tillkommit vid bestämda tillfällen i det förflutna och som behåller sin ursprungliga form någorlunda intakt får vi genom statistiken för ett språkdrag, partikeln *offum*. Statistiska frekvensundersökningar visar på en succesiv minskning av *offum*-frekvenserna över tid i skaldediktningen från 800-talet till 1200-talet (utförligare nedan). Då det handlar om statistiska *frekvenser* för varje skald (inte om *antalet* belägg hos honom) och då minskningen över tid är succesiv och regelbunden är detta en utveckling som blir synlig först med den moderna statistiken framför sig – något som eliminerar risken för att partikeln i någon högre grad skulle vara en följd av senare manipulation. Därmed torde *offum*-statistiken visa att även mindre språkliga detaljer, och följaktligen specifika formuleringar, i gamla norröna dikter levde kvar i den muntliga traditionen alltifrån diktandet fram genom århundradena.

Visst måste vi räkna med förändringar av en text över århundraden av muntlig tradering. Men i ljuset av exemplen ovan synes det ändå sannolikt att eddadikter nedskrivna på 1200-talet *kan* ha skapats redan flera århundraden tidigare i en form som vad gäller såväl detaljinnehållet som den språkliga utformningen var mycket närstående den befintliga texten. Och utifrån denna slutsats vill jag påstå att datering av eddadikter är åtminstone teoretiskt möjlig. Vi övergår därför till frågan hur en sådan datering kan genomföras.

Dateringskriterier som bygger på statistiska och/eller språkliga undersökningar har en tydlig fördel framför många andra kriterier såtillvida att de minimerar inslaget av subjektivitet från forskarens sida. Många språkdrag kan rent objektivt fastställas som gamla respektive unga utifrån våra kunskaper om de nordiska språkens förändring, och eddadikterna relateras därmed till ett tidsbestämt fenomen.

Ändå är de flesta av dessa unga/gamla språkdrag i realiteten föga användbara för datering av eddadikterna. Framför allt är det de 'gamla' språkdragen som inte nödvändigtvis är tecken på hög ålder för en dikt. Språkutvecklingen gick olika fort i Norden. En del drag bevarades längre i vissa områden än i andra, varför en del av de utpekade 'gamla' dragen för många nordbor kan ha varit fullt levande långt in i högmedeltiden; således kan vissa av de förment gamla språkdragen i själva verket vara skandinaviser (t ex

bibehållet *v* framför ord som (*v*)*reka* och (*v*)*reiði*). Vidare använder norrön poesi generellt sett ett ålderdomligt språk; man erinre sig t ex ålderdomliga, specifikt poetiska ord i även relativt ung skaldediktning (*heitin*, äldre grammatiska former mm). En viss arkaisering kan m.a.o. ha setts som en del av det poetiska språket. Däremot är bevisligen *unga* former i några fall användbara för (relativt sett) sen datering, men dessvärre är materialet här mycket litet. Ty ett annat problem, som drabbar både de unga och de gamla språkdragen, är att de flesta av dem dyker upp enbart på ett enstaka ställe i någon eller några få dikter. Därför uppstår ingen *tendens* för vare sig dikten eller det språkliga draget. Vi får ingen helhetsstatistik som ens teoretiskt skulle kunna ge en kronologi för eddadikterna.

Det slags språkdrag jag här har diskuterat är alltså svåra att använda som dateringskriterier. De har, framför allt de bevisligen unga dragen, ett visst värde som indicier för datering, men de kan bara användas som komplettering till eller kontroll av andra, mer övergripande dateringsmetoder. Det finns emellertid ett språkdrag för vilket vi har tillräckligt många belägg för att vi skall kunna få en statistik för alla eddadikterna och för vilket dessutom statistiken för skaldediktningen, som omfattar flera hundra belägg, visar upp en klar tendens. Det är den redan nämnda partikeln *oflum*.

Statistiska frekvenser används redan av Heusler som ett stöd för dateringen. Det är inte i sig något nytt. Men Heusler relaterade inte de frekvenser han utnyttjade, mängden direkt tal i eddadikterna (a a s 183 f och "Der dialog der altgerm. erz. dichtung", *Z. f. d. A.*, vol 46, 1902 s 190-191), till frekvenser för någon diktning vars ålder eller relativa kronologi vi säkert känner. Han kunde m.a.o. inte styrka att det fanns en korrelation mellan frekvens och tillkomsttid; detta var ett obestyrkt antagande från hans sida, varför denna statistik enligt mitt synsätt inte är ett godtagbart dateringskriterium. Men på denna punkt är *oflum*-statistiken helt annorlunda: här finns en tydlig korrelation mellan frekvens och tillkomsttid.

*Oflum*-statistiken har varit känd länge och flera gånger omnämnts som ett möjligt dateringskriterium (Hans Kuhn, *Das Füllwort uflum im Altwestnordischen*, Göttingen 1929 s 87, Harris a a, s 389 och Bjarne Fidjestøl, "Ekspelivpartikkelen som dateringskriterium", *Festskrift til Finn Hødnebo*, Oslo 1989 s 58). Jag kommer här att bygga på den statistik som presenterats av Hans Kuhn och Bjarne Fidjestøl. Men ingen av dem har egentligen använt statistiken, fastslagit vad den mer konkret kan antas visa eller gått närmare in på dess konsekvenser för dateringen av eddadikterna. Jag vill här ställa mig på de stora föregångarnas axlar och försöka klättra vidare och visa hur jag menar att man kan använda sig av *oflum*-statistiken i samband med eddatering. Men först en presentation av denna statistik.

*Oflum*-statistiken för skaldediktningen visar vederbörligen högst frekvenser för 800- och 900-talsskalderna Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, Egill, Víga-Glúmr, Bragi och Kormákr, medan redan 1000-talsskalderna har klart lägre frekvenser, succesivt

sjunkande under seklet. Under 1100-talet fortsätter frekvenserna att bli markant lägre; under seklets andra hälft är frekvenserna huvudsakligen mycket låga, och hos flera skalders saknas belägg helt. (jag använder mig av statistiken i Fidjestøl, a a, s 56). I Hans Kuhns statistik för varje sekel får vi följande genomsnitt för antalet belägg per 10 sidor: 27 för 800-talet; 10 för 900-talet; 3,1 för 1000-talet; 1,4 för 1100-talet (a a s 84).

Vilken betydelse kan en motsvarande frekvensstatistik för eddadiktningen ha för våra dateringsförsök? Det stora antalet belägg för ett och samma språkdrag gör som sagt att vi eliminerar ett av problemen med de tidigare nämnda språkliga dateringskriterierna. Men hur är det med den andra stora felkällan för språkliga dateringskriterier, möjligheten av arkaiseringar? Statistiken för skaldediktningen visar att *oflum* är mycket sällsynt, och hos flertalet skalders saknas helt, under 1100-talet. Detta torde kunna ses som ett indicium för att partikeln inte sågs som ett allmänt poetiskt drag. Mot tanken på medvetna arkaiseringar talar också det faktum att reglerna för partikelns placering (se Kuhn, a a s 12-13) var komplicerade (att däremot åstadkomma ett *vreiði* i st.f. *reiði* måste ha varit lätt för vilken islänning som helst), och högmedeltidens islänningar besatt knappast de grammatiska kunskaper som skulle göra det möjligt att korrekt använda partikeln i en tid då den inte längre var levande språkbruk (jfr Fidjestøl, a a s 63-64). Einarr Skúlason, en av de få 1100-talsskalders som har ett antal belägg för partikeln (om än själva frekvensen blir låg), har påfallande nog ett belägg för felaktig användning av partikeln, det enda i hela materialet. Här kan man väl tala om ett slags arkaisering. Med Kuhn kan man nog anta att detta visar att partikeln då, vid 1100-talets mitt, inte längre var levande (a a s 33), men belägget torde också indikera att förekomst av korrekt använt *oflum* åtminstone inte i någon större utsträckning kan vara en följd av medveten arkaisering; till detta saknades uppenbarligen kunskaper.

Men det avgörande är förstas att den statistiska *tendensen* är så tydlig – inte ens enstaka arkaiseringsbelägg skulle kunna påverka själva utvecklingskurvan, den markanta men successiva minskningen av frekvenser över tid. En korrelation mellan frekvens och ålder får i skaldediktningens fall betraktas som säkerställd. Och skaldediktning och eddadiktning är till sitt ursprung besläktade poetiska traditioner som odlades i samma land, i samma kultur och under samma tid; de påverkar varandra och flyter ofta rentav samman – man tänke på skaldedikter på fornryðislag eller på eddadikter med starka inslag av kenningar och heitin. Det är därför rimligt att anta att det i eddadiktningen bör finnas en korrelation mellan frekvens och tillkomsttid liknande den i skaldediktningen (samma tanke möter hos Kuhn och Fidjestøl, vilka dock inte egentligen fullföljer tankegången). Man torde rentav kunna säga: det är nästan orimligt att denna statistiska korrelation helt skulle saknas i eddadiktningen.

Men även den som godtar tanken att det finns ett samband mellan *oflum*-frekvens och norröna dikters tillkomsttid måste ha klart för sig kriteriets begränsningar. *Oflum*-frekvens kan helt enkelt inte bevisa datering för enskilda

dikter. Det finns felkällor. En möjlig sådan gäller en punkt där edda- och skaldediktning faktiskt skiljer sig principiellt åt. Formler, ofta hela formelverser, är vanliga i Eddan, medan skaldediktningen inte alls nyttjar detta slags formler. Detta bör leda till att partikeln i Eddan kan dyka upp i sena dikter i högre grad än i skaldediktningen. När man i en dikt använde vissa formler från äldre diktning fick man s.a.s. *offum*-belägget 'på köpet'. Partikeln förekommer verkligen i flera välbelagda formelverser, t ex *oc hon þat orða allz fyrst um qvað*. Detta fenomen torde dock inte i någon högre utsträckning kunna påverka en *övergripande* statistik. Man skall trots allt inte överdriva mängden formelverser inom eddadiktningen, och de flesta *offum*-beläggen möter inte heller som inslag i formler. Men härtill kommer att det redan i statistiken för skaldediktningen finns klara avvikelser för enskilda skaldar eller dikter vad gäller korrelationen mellan *offum*-frekvens och utpekad tillkomsttid, mest markant i fallen Þorbjörn hornklofi (800-talsskald med låg *offum*-frekvens) och Gamli kanóki (1100-talsskald med ett antal *offum*-belägg). Det må kunna förklaras med individuellt språkbruk, modernisering respektive arkaisering, rena slumpen eller annat, men sådana statistiska avvikelser för enskilda dikter måste man givetvis kunna räkna med även i fallet eddadiktningen. Men det som skaldestatistiken visade var en klar *övergripande tendens*, och detta är vad vi i första hand bör kunna använda *offum*-statistiken till för Eddans del.

Det är så tid att presentera *offum*-statistiken för Eddan; jag inskränker mig nu som tidigare till hjältediktningen. I Fidjestøls lista utifrån frekvenser för partikeln där hög placering markerar hög frekvens kommer dikterna i följande ordning: 1)Od, 2)Sd, 3)Gör I, 4)Hm, 5)Brot, 6)Vkv, 7)Ghv, 8)Sg, 9)Hlr, 10)Rm, 11)Gör III, 12)Gör II, 13)Akv, 14)Fm, 15)HHv, 16)Grp, 17) HH I, 18)HH II, 19)Am (efter Fidjestøl a a s 54). Flertalet av eddadikterna uppvisar relativt sett höga frekvenser, vilka snarast motsvarar skaldedikterna från tiden före 1100. Men vad kan vi nu få ut av denna statistik?

En viktig forskningsuppgift där jag menar att statistiken kan användas är att *pröva stödet för* redan framlagda dateringshypoteser. Eftersom kriteriet har *övergripande* giltighet bör man kunna pröva just övergripande teorier, såsom föreslagna relativa kronologier för alla eddadikter, helhetsbilder med typologisk-kronologisk gruppindelning mm. Det är som sagt Andreas Heuslers och hans efterföljares helhetsbild som ligger till grund för den idag etablerade uppfattningen om eddadikternas ålder. Mest markant i denna kronologi är det skarpa åtskiljandet mellan en grupp på fem påstått mycket gamla eddadikter och ett 'elegiskikt' på ca 7 påstått betydligt yngre eddadikter. Forskare idag (Sprenger m fl) menar ofta att dessa förment unga s.k. elegier kan ha diktats först på 1200-talet, dvs många århundraden efter de förment gamlas tillkomst. När vi nu betraktar *offum*-statistiken kan vi således pröva om vi här har tendenser som stöder eller åtminstone antyder att denna relativa kronologi, denna gruppindelning med dess våldsamma tidsåtskillnad och denna mycket sena datering för 'elegiskiktet' skulle vara riktig. Emellertid möter i statistiken

*inga som helst* tendenser till uppdelning i de heuslerska åldersskikten. Tvärtom hamnar ”elegierna” Od och Gǫr I i toppen av statistiken, före *alla* de av Heusler utpekade ’gamla’; också andra dikter i ”elegiskiktet”, Ghv och Sg, hamnar i den övre hälften, och ingen av dikterna i detta skikt hamnar bland de sju med lägst frekvens; här hamnar i stället en av Heuslers ”gamla”, Akv. Denna totala frånvaro av stöd för den heuslerska kronologin är säkert ett viktigt skäl till varför *oflum*-kriteriet i realiteten inte använts vid datering av eddadiktningen, trots att flera forskare sedan länge varit inne på att det borde kunna ha betydelse för just detta. Men om man antar, som jag gjort ovan, att det i fråga om övergripande tendenser torde finnas en korrelation mellan tillkomsttid och frekvens i eddadiktningen som åtminstone grovt motsvarar den i skaldediktningen bör man också ta konsekvenserna av denna prövning av det heuslerska synsättet. Jag vill påstå att *oflum*-statistiken som helhet innebär ett mycket starkt indicium för att Heuslers typologiskt grundade helhetsbild och kronologi, och till följd därav den etablerade uppfattningen om den relativa eddakronologin överlag, är felaktig och icke kan användas som utgångspunkt vid analyser.

Men statistiken bör också kunna utnyttjas mer positivt, vid framläggandet av dateringshypoteser. Vi bör här liksom tidigare hålla oss till övergripande tendenser. Det synes vara värt ett försök att utifrån *oflum*-statistiken söka efter tendenser som skulle kunna indikera äldre respektive yngre tradition vad gäller t ex stil, struktur, berättarteknik eller tematik. En hypotetisk kronologi som uppstått på detta sätt skulle kunna nyttjas som ett uppslag att sedan pröva i kommande undersökningar utifrån andra dateringskriterier. Eller man skulle omvänt kunna använda *oflum*-statistiken för en kontroll av sådana övergripande kronologiska tendenser som man utvunnit ur undersökningar utifrån andra kriterier, en kontroll av det slag jag nyss genomförde av Heuslers kronologi.

Att använda *oflum*-statistiken som dateringskriterium för enskilda dikter är som nämnts högst problematiskt, men en viss roll torde statistiken kunna spela även i sådana fall. Förutsatt att man beaktar den felkälla som formelverser kan utgöra menar jag att man kan använda *oflum*-frekvensen som ett komplement till andra dateringskriterier även vid tidsfästandet av enskilda dikter. Om *oflum*-frekvensen tydligt pekar mot samma tid (utifrån en jämförelsen med frekvenserna i skaldediktningen) som andra daterbara språkdrag anser jag att resultatet kan ses som ett indicium för en bestämd tillkomsttid, en hypotes att pröva mot resultaten från andra, ickelingsvistiska, dateringskriterier.

Det är tydligt att det finns stora svårigheter i att använda *oflum*-kriteriet som ett positivt dateringskriterium. Likväl vill jag som nästa påstående hävda att kriteriet utifrån de förutsättningar jag nämnt är ett indicium att, i kombination med andra kriterier, fästa vikt vid i samband med datering av eddadikterna, betydligt större vikt än vid sådana språkdrag och statistiska kriterier som hittills haft betydelse för forskningen, såsom förekomst av v-alliteration i ord som (*v*)*reiði* eller den av Heusler betonade frekvensen direkt tal.

Mycket är ännu oklart, men vi har ändå funnit ett kriterium som under vissa preciserade förutsättningar är både vetenskapligt acceptabelt och användbart i praktiken. Vi kommer nu till nästa dateringsmetod som jag finner vetenskapligt acceptabel och praktiskt användbar. Det rör sig om datering utifrån litterär komparation, d.v.s. datering grundad på likheter (och ibland olikheter) i förhållande till sådan litteratur vars tillkomsttid vi redan känner. Vi får här avsevärd hjälp av det faktum att litteratur alltid har haft sina moden, att den litteratur från olika perioder som teoretiskt kan ha utövat inflytande på eddadiktningen uppvisar sina tidsbundna egenheter vad gäller såväl form som innehåll. Denna metod har de stora fördelarna att den kan göras högst konkret, att den kan omfatta en nästan obegränsad mängd infallsvinklar samt att den relaterar eddadikterna till ett säkert tidsfäst jämförelsematerial – d.v.s. just det som jag saknade i de inledningsvis nämnda dateringarna utifrån deras 'anda'.

Komparativa undersökningar för att fastställa eddadiktningens ursprung är naturligtvis inte okända inom forskningen – "Das Verhältnis zu außernordischen Gedichten" är således ett av de dateringskriterier Jan de Vries inledningsvis listar i sin litteraturhistoria (vol I s 37) och ett av de få av dem han rentav använder ibland. Men på det hela taget är det slående att förutsättningslös litterär komparation har spelat en så liten roll vid dateringen av eddadikterna; jag menar att man inte alls utnyttjat metodens stora möjligheter. Jag har härtill principiella invändningar mot den komparativt grundade dateringsargumentation som trots allt har ägt rum. För att komparation skall kunna ge klara och hållbara slutsatser om tillkomsttid måste den uppfylla vissa krav, krav som jag menar alltför sällan har uppfyllts. Jag vill till att börja med hävda att det finns två i grund och botten ganska olika typer av komparation. Man bör skilja på 1) isolerade likheter vad gäller enstaka fenomen och detaljer (såsom ord, formuleringar, stilfigurer, topoi, metaforik och enstaka motiv) och 2) övergripande, kontextuella likheter vad gäller tematik, struktur etc. Båda dessa typer är i och för sig relevanta och bör vägas in vid dateringen, men jag anser att de bör värderas olika. I tidigare forskning är det nästan uteslutande den första sortens komparation, utifrån isolerade likheter, som har spelat någon roll i dateringsdiskussionen. Fördelen med detta slags komparation är att den som regel laborerar med klara, konkreta fenomen. Men den har också betydande nackdelar som knappast tillräckligt har uppmärksamats.

Ett problem är att detta slags enstaka likheter ofta kan tolkas på många olika sätt. I de flesta fall dyker det aktuella draget/fenomenet upp i flera olika litterära traditioner, varför likheten egentligen inte knyter eddadikten mer till en tid och tradition än till en annan. Detta blir tydligt i Wolfgang Mohrs undersökningar, utifrån vilka han lägger fram tesen att det s.k. elegiskiktet i Eddan har ett ursprung i dansk-tysk balladdiktning från 1100-talet. Men hans många enstaka detaljbelägg antyder egentligen enbart en utomisländsk bakgrund och pekar i väl så hög grad mot fornengelsk eller fornhögtysk litteratur som mot

medeltidsdansk; enbart Mohrs utgångspunkt i den heuslerska kronologin gör att han kan uppfatta de belägg han ger som stöd för ett ursprung just i dansk högmedeltid. Klaus von See argumenterar att *Oddrúnargrátr* är en mycket sen dikt bl a med hänvisning till "daß der Wortschatz z. T. auf kontinentalem [:tyskt] Einfluß beruht" (i "Der Phantom einer altgermanischen Elegiendichtung", *Skandinavistik* 28, Glückstadt 1998, s 98). Men varför ett tyskt inflytande på ords-katten skulle belägga att dikten är just ung förklarar inte See; ett sådant tyskt inflytande kan lika klart spåras även i sådana dikter som Heusler (och därmed See) anser vara mycket gamla (t ex *Völundarqviða* str 2 och 32, *Hlöðsqviða* str 8, 9 och 11).

I andra fall kan enstaka likheter böttna i 'allmänna' litterära fenomen som uppkommer oberoende av varandra i olika kulturer. Ett exempel på detta är konstruktioner av typen *mær meyia*, som möter i bl a *Gör* II. Detta har beskrivits som ett ungt drag då det ansetts förutsätta kännedom om bibliska formuleringar av typen 'konungarnas konung' (så t ex i *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, vol. 2, utg. Klaus von See m fl, Heidelberg 1997, s 172). Men konstruktionen finns redan i en skaldedikt från 900-talet (*sverð sverða* hos Hallfrøðr, lv 11), och möter därtill även i fornindisk, klassisk grekisk och förkristen romersk litteratur (se Rolf Pipping, "Potenserande genitiv", *Studier i nordisk filologi*, vol 27, Helsingfors 1937, s 67-68), där den uppenbarligen uppkommit oberoende av den hebreiska bibeln. (Jfr också Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages*, Oxford 1979, s 8-22, vilken anför många exempel på *topoi* och litterära figurer som nyttjats av såväl antika/antikinspirerade som folkspråkliga diktare under medeltiden oberoende av varandra.). Men inte heller om man antar en koppling mellan ett enstaka element i Eddan och kontinental, kristen litteratur är det självklart att detta måste bevisa 'sen'-datering till kristen högmedeltid. Kontinental, kristen tradition vandrade dock till Norden redan under vikingatiden och dessförinnan. Någon 'ren' hednisk-särnordisk kultur, fri från yttre påverkan, har inte funnits. Man kan notera att något så fundamentalt som den eddiska hjältesagan har rötterna i kristna germankulturer. Norge hade starka politiska kontakter med det kristna England under 900-talet, och såväl Danmark som Norge hade ett antal kristna kungar redan då. De arkeologiska beläggen för ett kristet-kontinentalt inflytande under den hedniska vikingatiden är talrika, och vikingatiden var överhuvudtaget en tid då nordborna mötte kontinenten. En mängd lånord från t ex latin, franska, engelska och lågtyska kommer in i västnordiskan redan under (och före) vikingatiden (se Veturliði Óskarsson, "Om lånord og fremmed påvirkning på ældre islandsk sprog", *Scripta Islandica*, vol 49, Uppsala 1998, s 3). Det är följaktligen rimligt att anta att sådant kontinentalt inflytande på Norden också bör ha påverkat den inhemska diktningen redan under vikingatiden. Enstaka influenser av såväl stilistiskt som motiviskt slag är därmed sannolika. I så fall behöver inte element i Eddan med kontinentalt, kristet eller antikt ursprung automatiskt ses som kriterier för högmedeltida tillkomsttid, utan enbart för ett allmänt kulturellt

inflytande, oberoende av tid. Likheter vad gäller enstaka detaljer är vanligen inte särskilt exakta, och även om de verkligen är följden av inflytande från kontinental litteratur behöver inflytandet inte ha varit direkt. Många av de enstaka drag i eddadikterna som forskare har ansett belägga kännedom om t ex biblisk eller antik litteratur bör ha varit ett slags kulturellt allmångods på kontinenten, och de kan därmed lätt ha blivit bekanta för nordbor som ingalunda hade läst Bibeln eller de antika klassikerna. Flera forskare (bl a Sprenger och Lönnroth) har hävdad biblisk bakgrund för str 18 i GÖr I, där Gudrun hyllar Sigurd på gjukungarnas bekostnad; han är som en ”geirlaucr ór grasi vaxinn” etc. Sådan s.k. relationsmetaforik är bekant från Höga visan, där en kvinna jämförd med andra kvinnor liknas vid ”en lilja bland törnen”, men metafortypen tränger också in i kontinental folkspråklitteratur, där den är belagd sedan 1000-talet. Likheten mellan eddadikt och bibeltext är varken särskilt exakt eller kontextuellt omfattande, men även om det skulle finnas ett samband mellan de två liknelserna kan detta knappast belägga vare sig ett direkt inflytande eller någon datering. Denna slutsats stöds också av det faktum att detta slags element som påminner om – och kanske rentav har rötterna i – kontinental litteratur ofta möter även i sådana eddadikter som genomgående dateras som mycket gamla; i Akv möter vi t ex vindrickande, harpospel, en klassisk Tereus-måltid och en hel episod, Gunnars triumf efter Högnes död i str 25-27, som i detalj är oerhört lik skildringen av motsvarande skeende i *Nibelungenlied* (str 2368-70) – allt detta är drag som pekar mot ett kontinentalt inflytande, men när inflytandet ägt rum och om det är direkt eller indirekt är lika oklart här som i GÖr I.

Det främsta problemet med detta slags komparation av enskildheter är dock atomismen: det enstaka belägget, isolerat från sitt sammanhang och ofta enbart förekommande i någon enstaka eddadikt, har inte stark beviskraft. Forskarna har ofta bortsett från att det likartade elementet har helt olika kontext i respektive verk och rentav kan ha helt olika betydelse. Som exempel här kan nämnas hur Wolfgang Mohr vill knyta beskrivningen i GÖr II 14 – Tora ”gullbócaði”, dvs broderade med guld – till danskt balladursprung med hänvisning till en dansk ballad som i en grundskild historia bl a berättar ”die lerede hinnde lesse i bog” (DgF 475; Mohr 1938 s 237). Ordet bok ingår förvisso i båda fallen, men såväl kontext som själva betydelsen av ordet är fullständigt olika. Enstaka formuleringsslikheter i en eddadikt respektive en skaldedikt har ibland haft betydelse vid dateringen av eddadiktningen, men då den likartade formuleringen är isolerad är det oftast omöjligt att fastslå påverkansriktningen, och inte ens om detta är möjligt behöver ett rent detaljlån belägga närhet i tillkomsttid, något som t ex Jan de Vries stundom förutsätter (1964 s 77).

Litterär komparation av den andra typ jag nämnde ovan, utifrån övergripande drag, har inte alls spelat samma roll inom forskningen. Detta är dock vad jag här vill förorda. Det som skall beläggas med komparationen är ju en tidsfästning, ett inflytande på eddadikten från en annan litteratur vid en

bestämd tidpunkt. Isolerade överensstämmelser kan bero på slumpen eller, som jag visat ovan, förklaras på ett flertal likvärdiga sätt, men om likheterna ingår i ett större sammanhang är det lättare att begränsa antalet möjliga förebilder. Enstaka element, ord, formuleringar eller motiv kan mycket väl vara övertagna från litteratur tillhörig en helt annan tid, eller också kan de ha nått eddadikten på indirekta, krokiga vägar, eller de kan rentav vara gripna ur ett slags allmän, 'tidlös', litterär reservoar; om däremot likheterna bildar ett mönster eller omfattar också själva kontexten finns skäl att anta direkt influens, varvid sannolikheten ökar för att det också skall finnas ett tidsmässigt samband. För den komparativa forskningen har följaktligen likheter störst bevisvärde ju mer omfattande de är och om de likartade elementen möter i ett likartat sammanhang. Om en eddadikt uppvisar likheter med diktning från en annan litterär tradition väger dessa likheter tyngre om de omfattar både framträdande tematik och litterär gestaltning av denna tematik än om den endast består i enstaka ord eller detaljer. Men om likhet i kontexten finns är också mindre likheter av intresse. Komparation av enskilda ord, motiv, poetiska grepp m fl detaljer har därför också en roll att spela, men måste underordnas den övergripande komparationen och sättas in i sin kontext.

Som exempel på vad detta slags komparation innebär i kontrast mot den som helt inriktas på enskilda element kan vi ta två olika sätt att söka fastställa de s.k. eddaelegiernas ursprung. Att härvid använda sig av övergripande komparation innebär, vare sig man håller sig till gruppen som helhet eller till en enstaka dikt, att man till att börja med måste försöka fastställa vad som är karaktäristiskt för gruppen/dikten, vad som är dominerande eller framträdande tematik, hur denna gestaltas, hur dikten/dikterna struktureras och berättas etc. Man torde då få en övergripande beskrivning av ungefär denna typ: 'en kvinna i hjältesagan mister sin make och sina nära i familjekonflikt och sörjer starkt och gör hämndutfall mot mördarna'. Man kan därefter söka bestämma de mest typiska dragen inom detta övergripande sammanhang och undersöka sorgens roll, situation och gestaltning, ordsfatt, gester och poetiska medel att skildra sorgen, tekniken i framträdande drag som olycksåterblickar, kopplingen mellan sorg- och hämndmotivet, kvinnans roll etc. Och härefter bör man söka efter de drag man har fastställt i annan litteratur, varvid det är centralt för bedömningen av eventuella likheter om flera av de nämnda dragen möter i samma kontext eller är kopplade till varandra på samma sätt som i eddadiktningen. Finns här andra framträdande drag i någon av dikterna bör de undersökas på samma vis. Men Wolfgang Mohr, som hävdar "eddaelegiernas" ursprung i dansk-tysk balladdiktning, lägger upp sin argumentation på ett helt annat sätt ("Entstehungsgeschichte und Heimat der jüngerer Eddalieder südgermanischen Stoffes", *Z.f.d.A.* 75, 1938 och "Wortschatz und Motive der jüngerer Eddalieder mit südgermanischem Stoff", *Z.f.d.A.* 76, 1939; Mohr förutsätter Heuslers kronologi och ägnar sig egentligen inte åt datering, men då hans förmenta paralleller senare har nyttjats som dateringsargument, så t ex Vries

1964 s 38, har hans argumentation ändå relevans här). Han ägnar sig i första hand åt att notera enstaka ord som han menar stöder hans tes om dikternas ursprung. Ord som *dróttning* (1939 s 168) och *búr* (1938 s 239) pekats ut som danismer, ett ord som *fyrmunna* har parallell i fornsachsiska *farmunan* (1939 s 251) etc. Dessa ord saknar all koppling till något för de aktuella "eddaelegierna" utmärkande; de flesta förekommer där bara någon enstaka gång och rör helt skilda områden. Han noterar även motiv som har paralleller i danska ballader eller tyska dikter, men också här är det fenomen som ingalunda är *typiska* för någon eddadikt, utan som förekommer enbart någon enstaka gång – t ex motivet att kalla på någon genom harpospel (1938 s 264). Såväl orden som motiven är lösryckta från sin kontext. Det som är mest karaktäristiskt för "eddaelegierna", sorgen/smärtan, är Mohr bara ett motiv bland andra (1938 s 251-57), och även hans undersökning av detta motiv är inriktat på paralleller i fråga om lösryckta ord, inte på likheter i kontexten, såsom gestaltning av sorgen, dess roll i helheten etc. Mohr visar genomgående i sina komparativa undersökningar intresse endast för de enskilda elementen i sig, och han isolerar dem konsekvent från deras sammanhang.

Jag vill sammanfattningsvis påstå att vi i den övergripande, kontextuellt inriktade litterära komparationen har ett mycket viktigt och praktiskt högst användbart medel vid försöken att datera eddadiktningen. Vi har här en dateringsmetod som hittills använts i alldeles för liten utsträckning. (De – påfallande få – undersökningar som finns av hela eddadiktningen vad gäller framträdande tematik och stil har normalt genomförts inom ramen för den heuslerska helhetsbilden och dess kronologi. De har därmed inte syftat till att försättningslöst söka efter vare sig tillkomsttid eller litterär tradition. Det bör dock nämnas att ansatser till sådana undersökningar har gjorts av Carol Clover och Joseph Harris, arbeten som jag räknar till de viktigaste i de senaste decenniernas eddaforskning.) I min avhandling valde jag *sorgen* som ett tema att utgå från i detta slags komparation, låt vara att jag höll mig till tal om litterär tradition, inte datering. Men det finns många andra motsvarande övergripande fenomen att undersöka på detta sätt – man skulle t ex kunna tänka sig kärleken, döden, kvinnobilden, stridsskildringen. Det skulle bli underökningar som skulle komplettera dem om sorgen och som tillsammans förmodligen skulle kunna leda till tendenser som antydde något slags hypotetisk kronologi. Och denna hypotetiska kronologi bör sedan prövas mot de resultat som de språkliga dateringskriterierna ledde fram till. Även därefter kvarstår naturligtvis ett oundvikligt inslag av värdering av resultaten – t ex hur man skall ställa sig till de fall då de olika här godtagna dateringskriterierna talar klart emot varandra – men vi torde ändå kunna nå resultat med en högre grad av vetenskaplig sannolikhet än de hittills dominerande dateringarna utifrån 'anda' och 'stämning' har kunnat skänka.

Det är tid att sammanfatta vad jag anser vara mina nya slutsatser. Jag har sökt

visa att många av de kriterier som hittills spelat en avgörande roll vid dateringen av eddadikter är högst problematiska eller inte alls uppfyller vetenskapligt godtagbara krav. Min slutsats är att den gängse (heuslerska) kronologin vilar på så tvivelaktig grund att dateringsfrågan måste omprövas från grunden. Jag har menat mig kunna finna två – men också bara två – grundkriterier som både uppfyller vetenskapliga krav och är praktiskt användbara. Det är 1) Språkliga kriterier, främst *offum*-statistiken, vilken jag har försökt omvandla från en förvirrande lista till ett användbart dateringskriterium, och 2) Den övergripande, kontextuellt inriktade litterära komparationen, vilken bör tydligt överordnas den traditionella komparationen av isolerade element. Jag menar också att de inledningsvis nämnda 'Geist'-dateringarna bör förkastas fullt ut, medan vi däremot kanske inte helt bör bortse från möjligheten att andra fenomen, som t ex historiska drag eller isolerade likheter med annan litteratur, kan ha betydelse som indicier vid enstaka dateringar. Men under alla omständigheter menar jag att huvudtyngden i en dateringsargumentation bör vila på mina två grundkriterier. En kombination av de två bör kunna leda till nya, säkrare dateringar.

\*

Jag sade inledningsvis att jag primärt ville föra en principdiskussion, låt vara med konkreta exempel och med handfasta påståenden. Men något bör ändå nämnas om de resultat som mina här föreslagna dateringskriterier kan tänkas ge. I vilken utsträckning leder till samma dateringar som tidigare och i vilken utsträckning innebär de nya synsätt? Jag skall här ta upp fyra eddadikter, vilka jag menar visa på olika konsekvenser av mina här förordade dateringsmetoder. Inför detta appendix till mitt föredrag vill jag dock lägga fram några reservationer. Jag vill i samband med dessa dateringsförslag inte påstå något bestämt – dels har jag inte gjort den *mångfald* av komparativa undersökningar som jag menar krävs för bestämda påståenden, dels vill jag inte låta eventuell diskussion fixeras vid en enstaka datering på bekostnad av ett ställningstagande till principerna, bedömningen av de här diskuterade dateringskriteriernas värde. Vidare tvingar mig utrymmet att bli så kortfattad att det mesta av själva argumentationen saknas. Jag är bara ute efter att ge en antydning om vart mina dateringsprinciper kan leda i förhållande till de hittills använda.

*Gripisspá* har i str 27-36 en kärleksskildring som såväl tematiskt som till sitt utförande – dvs både kontext och element – erinrar mycket påtagligt om kontinental hövvisk diktning från 1100-talet, och detta slags kärleksskildring är väl belagd även i norrön litteratur från 1100-1200-talet (såväl skaldedikter som prosaverk). Utförlig kärleksskildring är å andra sidan påtagligt sällsynt i både äldre skaldediktning och västgermansk hjältediktning, och de element som bygger upp skildringen är överhuvudtaget inte belagda där (utförligare beskrivning i min avhandling, a a s 75-77, 155-156, 197-200 och 406). Denna

komparativa undersökning talar m.a.o. entydigt för en tillkomsttid vid slutet av 1100-talet eller början av 1200-talet. Jämför vi så resultaten av denna hypotetiska slutsats med resultaten av de språkliga kriterier jag godtagit finner vi att dikten hör till dem med lägst *offum*-frekvens av alla eddadikter och att den därtill har ett belägg för ytterligare ett ungt språkdrag, allitteration som kräver den yngre formen *reiði* i stället för den äldre *vreiði* (str 49). De två dateringsmetoderna som jag ovan har godtagit – den språkliga och den litterärt-komparativa – stöder alltså varandra och pekar åt samma håll. En datering till denna tid är också vad den hittillsvarande forskningen samstämmt hävdar utifrån andra skäl, och på denna punkt leder alltså mina kriterier till alldeles samma resultat.

*Oddrúnargrátr* har också den en utförlig kärleksskildring, ja detta är diktens helt dominerande tema. Redan detta är som sagt något som pekar mer mot högmedeltid än vikingatid. Men även här finns dessutom ett antal element i denna övergripande kärlekskontext som mycket tydligt pekar mot högmedeltiden, och avvikelserna från det vi möter i forngermansk hjältediktning, äldre skaldediktning och flertalet övriga eddadikter är rentav ännu kraftigare, vilket sammantaget talar starkt emot en vikingatida tillkomsttid (utförligare i mitt pågående projekt *Höviskt och heroiskt*). Men i detta fall får en högmedeltida datering inte stöd i några språkliga kriterier; fråga om *offum*-frekvenser hamnar dikten rentav högst av alla hjältedikter. De två av mig godtagna dateringsmetoderna tycks i detta fall peka åt olika håll. Här tror jag att vi i vår värdering av resultaten bör låta den komparativa metoden – som i detta fall pekar ovanligt tydligt åt ett visst håll – fälla utslaget. Den påfallande höga *offum*-frekvensen kan också, om man beaktar en av de felkällor jag tidigare nämnde, få en naturlig förklaring. Jag betonade ovan att man vid bedömningen av *offum*-frekvenserna måste väga in i vilken utsträckning partikeln möter i formler övertagna från äldre tid. Och i fallet *Oddrúnargrátr* visar det sig att ca hälften av dess belägg för partikeln möter i just formler, i fyra fall regelrätta formelverser (t ex ”oc hon inn um gecc endlangan sal” och ”oc hon þat orða allz fyrst um qvað”; str 3). Dikten har därefter alltså relativt många belägg för partikeln, men frekvensen är kraftigt dämpad. Den markanta motsägelsen mellan resultaten från den litterärt-komparativa undersökningen och *offum*-statistiken tycks åtminstone delvis vara skenbar. Tillkomsttiden torde även i detta fall vara sent 1100-tal eller tidigt 1200-tal. Också för denna dikt överensstämmer min slutsats med den gängse, men jag menar definitivt att jag stöder min slutsats på starkare bevisning än t ex den som Klaus von See presenterat för samma datering (1998 s 98).

I dessa två fall har mina metoder endast bekräftat den rådande uppfattningen. Men låt oss avslutningsvis betrakta två andra eddadikter som hade påtagligt höga *offum*-frekvenser, *Guðrúnarqviða I* och *Guðrúnarhvöt*. För dem gäller inom den rådande uppfattningen samma sena datering som i fallen ovan. Men här möter partikeln inte i första hand i formler – i *Gör I* ingår endast

ett av de åtta beläggen i ett slags formel (str 25). Och om vi avstår från att automatiskt anta att utförlig sorgskildring måste vara ett ungt drag, dvs det antagande på vilket den gängse tidsfästningen vilar, och i stället genomför en litterärt-komparativ undersökning, finner vi att kvinnors sorg som ett viktigt tema möter också i annan forngermansk hjältediktning som t ex *Beowulf* (se Sävborg 1997, bl a s 159-160, 424-425 och 438); det tycks f.ö. vara ett normalt inslag i nästan all hjältediktning. Och själva den teknik, den struktur och de enskilda element (ordskatt, gester, formler etc) som bygger upp denna sorgskildring är likaledes väl belagd i äldre germansk tradition och vikingatida skaldediktning (Sävborg 1997 s 235-236 och 244-291, i synnerhet s 246-250 och 283-284). Motsvarande likheter i såväl element som kontext möter däremot inte i någon högmedeltida litteratur. Det ser alltså ut som om den språkliga statistiken och den litterära komparationen i detta fall pekar åt samma håll. Jag vill upprepa att jag på detta stadium inte är beredd att *fastslå* några nya dateringar, men jag menar ändå att det är värt att åtminstone överväga en omdatering av dessa dikter. De argument som hittills har lett fram till en högmedeltida datering har trots allt handlat om obestyrkta postulat om vad som är gammal respektive ung karaktär, dvs vad jag här har betecknat som fördomar. Och för den som godtar mitt förkastande av detta slags dateringsmetoder bör den här antydda dateringen vara värd åtminstone ett övervägande.

# The Adaptability of Myth in Old Norse and Finnish Poetry

Clive Tolley

## I

In 1817, K. A. Gottlund wrote in a review in the *Svensk Literaturtidning*:<sup>1</sup>

Thus the youth of Finland, writers who care more about the products of their fatherland (for in this respect little may be expected of their elders), should try to cherish and nurture the literature of their homeland — in whatever field of work should help in their endeavour! They would encounter passages such as they would search for in vain in foreign literature — indeed, the reviewer will go so far in his claim, that if it should be desired to gather the ancient folk-poems and to form from them an orderly whole, be it an epic, a drama, or whatever, it would be possible for a new Homer, an Ossian, or a Nibelungenlied to arise; and a Finnish nationhood would awake, famed for the lustre and glory of its own particularity, conscious of itself, the admiration of contemporaries and aftercomers, made fair by its own aura. The reviewer asserts that in his view he has never used his time better than in sacrificing it to the gathering of the incomparable remains of the songs and poems of our forefathers, poems which contain so much philosophy and beauty.

---

<sup>1</sup> No. 25, 21.6.1817, p. 394. I have translated from the Finnish translation cited in Kaukonen 16.

Elias Lönnrot probably never read these words, but within a few years he had realized Gottlund's desire. By publishing the *Kalevala* in 1835 he not only won fame for himself as Finland's Homer, but also provided the nation with a symbolic focus for its growing self-awareness. With an echo of the resurrectional activity of Lemminkäinen's mother in the poem as she gathers the remains of her son from the river of Tuonela, the Finnish Literature Society's assessment of Lönnrot's achievement records that:<sup>2</sup>

The sharp-sighted recorder and arranger has assembled the shattered pieces of this ancient Finnish song and thus saved it from imminent destruction, or more correctly: he has brought to light what was already lying as scattered fragments in the grave of oblivion.

Lönnrot himself does not indulge in such extravagant rhetoric as Gottlund or the Finnish Literature Society. These quotations however reveal a good deal about the context in which the composition of the *Kalevala* took place. I list some points of note:

1. There was a growing sense of nationalism (Finland was under Swedish rule until 1809, then under a resented Russian rule).
2. There was a desire for a native expression of this nationalism, in the people's language, Finnish,
3. It would, however, be modelled on other comparable national expressions such as the *Nibelungenlied*, Homer, or the *Edda*.
4. The work would secure its credentials as an expression of national identity by being formed from traditional folk-poetry.
5. The composer of the epic was seen more as a recorder than an original artist; he was responsible for reassembling the supposedly corrupt and fragmented remains of the people's epic.<sup>3</sup> Implicit here is the notion of a lost golden age of the nation, the restoration of which is signalled by the reconstitution of the lost epic.
6. The emphasis of the epic is upon heroic deeds; although many early recorders and we today regard the historical basis for the heroes of the *Kalevala* as close to non-existent, it was common for most of the nineteenth century to see a historical basis to the poem, which was regarded as extolling the deeds of the ancestors.
7. A mythological background to the heroic events was however necessitated by the fact that mythological poems existed in the folk tradition, and Lönnrot desired to include all possible poems in his all-encompassing scheme.
8. Lönnrot's endeavours would not have been possible without the work of

<sup>2</sup> Trans. from Kaukonen 89; the original would have been in Swedish.

<sup>3</sup> This forms a rather crude interpretation of what we now know to be a characteristic feature of oral poetry production: the oral poet has one or several 'mental texts' encompassing the range of poetic narrative themes at his disposal, but on any particular occasion he would only put a portion of this into a poem; Lönnrot specifically set out to include the whole mental text, of all the poets he could find, in one all-encompassing written text.

predecessors; chief among these may be mentioned the work of G. Porthan, *De poesi fennica*, published in 1766, which is a guidebook to improve Finnish poetics with many examples from folk poetry, and C. Ganander's *Mythologia Fennica* of 1789, an encyclopedia of folk beliefs illustrated with copious quotations of actual mythological poems.

I have focused on the *Kalevala*, but similar points could be made about other nineteenth-century epics, such as the Estonian *Kalevipoeg*, or the Latvian *Lacplesis* (Bear-slayer).

I turn now to Iceland, and specifically to the Codex Regius of the Eddic poems. The manuscript dates from the latter half of the thirteenth century, but it is clear that an extended period of written transmission and composition lies behind it;<sup>4</sup> the recording of the poems in writing from orally transmitted versions may have begun in the last years of the 12th century (a date earlier than 1150 is anyway unlikely).<sup>5</sup> Clearly the purposes in recording the Eddic

---

<sup>4</sup> This is the conclusion of Lindblad. His study was made possible largely through the good fortune that the scribe of CR was conservative, unlike many other scribes (such as that of the other MS of Eddic poems, AM 748 I 4<sup>o</sup>), and therefore preserves many of the features of his exemplars. Thus it is clear that the CR falls into two distinct portions, mythological poems and heroic, marked by orthographic differences great enough to suggest that they were brought together only in the extant manuscript. The division is recognized by the scribe, who starts the heroic section with an exceptionally large initial. It would appear also that earlier scribes, of antecedents of CR, must also have been conservative, though perhaps to a lesser extent, in so far as it seems to be possible to trace separate groups within the overall two-fold division, certainly within the heroic poems (at least the Sigurðr and the Helgi poems form two groups; other groups are more arguable) and possibly within the mythological. Thus clusters of poems already existed as written texts when the heroic collection, and perhaps too the mythological, was formed: CR was based on these two larger collections. In reality, the picture may have been more complex. For example, within the mythological poems *Háv* is so distinct in its orthography that it may have been joined to the mythological collection only in CR itself.

<sup>5</sup> I am not here concerned with the motivation for recording vernacular literature in the first place. Kurt Schier has offered some interesting thoughts on this subject, comparing the very different situations in Iceland and Sweden. Of note are the facts that in Iceland Christianity was introduced amicably (more or less) and patronage remained in the hands of the same families as before the conversion; the monks and clerics were largely Icelandic; the monasteries were Benedictine or Augustinian, which supported the writing of history, as opposed to Cistercian or Dominican, as in Sweden, which supported the production of sermons or spiritual works. I would argue that familiarity with Eddic mythological verse in orally transmitted form disappeared in the mid-thirteenth century, and heroic verse perhaps a little later. Its position was taken by *rímur*, which are first mentioned in *Sturlunga saga*. Snorri at least knew more Eddic poems than are extant, perhaps indicating access to oral versions. All of the evidence after Snorri seems to me to point to a literary tradition. Thus, if there were a rich oral culture preserving these poems in the 13th century, why did the scribes involved in the transmission of the Eddic poems not refer to a singer to correct mistakes? In *Norna Gestir þáttur* (c. 1300) there is an oral presentation of *Helr* and *Regm*, but the texts derive from a literary tradition, not an oral one. I do not count the Hauksbók version of *Völuspá* as evidence of oral transmission taking place in the 14th century, other than in a few details (additional verses in H may have been supplied from other poems, possibly oral, though possibly written): see Ursula Dronke's arguments for the written basis of the Hauksbók variants in *The Poetic Edda II*; basically, it appears that H forms a jumbled version derived from a revision undertaken at Snorri's instigation, and which he has used in part in *Gylfaginning*. The Sturlunga age was one of rapidly changing political control and social upheaval, which would not have favoured the cultivation of traditional oral poetry; the literary tastes moved increasingly towards the romantic Continental tales, and the tradition of Icelandic court skalds in Norway came to an end by 1300 (see Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ch. IV for an outline of the rise of romance in 13<sup>th</sup>-century Iceland). Part of the changing social scene centred around the Church, which became

poems and then gathering them into collections or cycles may have differed at different stages along this route. It seems likely that the heroic and mythological portions were joined only in CR itself, and the transmission of the two types of poetry may have been differently motivated.

The twelfth century was a period of antiquarian interest in Iceland. Most obviously Ari's *Íslendingabók* signifies the growing historical interest which led in the succeeding century to works such as *Sverris saga* or *Heimskringla* (reflecting a more general Scandinavian perspective), as well as the *Íslendinga sögur* (which are to be seen in this context as historical works reflecting a specifically Icelandic interest). However, the historical interest stretched back also to earlier days, and gave rise to works such as *Skjöldunga saga* and *Hrólf's saga kraka*.<sup>6</sup> Snorri regarded skaldic verse as the best source of information about Norwegian kings; heroic Eddic verse, though seemingly ignored by Snorri, could be viewed as a historical source for earlier periods, and it is in this context that it may well have been first recorded.

The recording of the mythological poems was the outcome of a more tenuous tradition. It is I think unlikely that we would have the mythological section of the *Poetic Edda* had it not been for Snorri's *Edda*. His aim was to preserve the myths for the use of poets, rather than to preserve the traditional poems themselves, but his citation of these poems must have acted as a spur to their full recording; this would be all the more clearly urgent if these poems were disappearing: the fact that Snorri felt the need to record the myths at all indicates they were being forgotten, and more specifically his references to at least six Eddic poems no longer extant, and probably forgotten by the time of the CR, indicate a pressing need to record what was left.<sup>7</sup> Some points of

---

both more powerful and more foreign during the 13th century; Icelandic bishops were imposed by the Norwegian authorities after 1236, and they sought to overthrow secular control of church lands and to establish the precedence of ecclesiastical over secular law. The resulting loss of standing of the *goðar* may have lessened the patronage of traditional poetry, but this would be difficult to trace, especially as we know almost nothing of the practitioners of Eddic verse and how they might have been affected. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (100–101) believes that Eddic verse was still known in the region of Miðdalr in 1255, since Jóreiðr then had a premonition of the battle at Pverá, in which a dream-woman appeared and uttered Eddic verse (*Sturlunga saga* IV. 43–47). But as Einar points out, 'everything about this dream-woman is cloaked in an air of antiquity', which may include her uttering of Eddic verse. The verses are moreover mainly 'loosely constructed', which implies a faltering tradition.

<sup>6</sup> *Skjöldunga saga* survives only in a Latin paraphrase, and the extant version of *Hrólf's saga* is later than the 12th century. Nonetheless, both these works appear to derive from 12th century originals; the unlucky turns of fate in manuscript preservation should not blind us to the importance of the interest in early as well as later Scandinavian history at this time.

<sup>7</sup> The particular Eddic poems known to Snorri seem to have differed considerably from our present canon. He quotes from the following: *Háv*, *Vsp*, *Grm*, *Vm*, *Fáfm*, *Skm*, *Ls* (in an adulterated form, probably Snorri's own adaptation), and from two poems not preserved in CR, *Grott*, *Vsp in skamma*. In addition, there is evidence of at least six further no longer extant poems in *Gylfaginning*:

a. Stattu fram meðan þú fregn,  
sitja skal sá er segir

This is reminiscent of *Háv*, which has just been cited. It may simply be an ad hoc versification, however.

interest here are that the non-extant poems are not named, except *Heimdallargaldr*, and that they are either not quoted, or are quoted only briefly. The citations from extant poems usually identify their source, and the citations are mostly longer (in particular with *Vsp*, *Grm*, and *Vm*). The question must arise how far Snorri originally quoted his sources and named them, and how far the present state of Snorri's text is the result of later interpolation, at a time when various poems known to him were no longer available (and hence his text could not be interpolated with citations). In the Uppsala MS the citations, and much else besides, are indicated in an abbreviated form, and the distortions found in the Eddic verses there probably reflect writing from memory. It is tantalizing to speculate whether we here see Snorri's working methods: to what extent was the *Edda* written in a hasty manner, with citations unchecked, or indicated only by tags, which in the other MSS have been filled in soon afterwards by scribes checking a text, and perhaps filled in with longer quotations than Snorri intended? If many of Snorri's citations proved to be interpolations, it would still show that other texts of Eddic poems were available, but it would affect our perception of when they were available, and hence of our view of the manuscript transmission. Similarly, in Finland, the initial forays into folk poetry research in the eighteenth century soon aroused comment that the folk poems would be lost if not recorded quickly; in fact they had largely disappeared by 1914. It took the perception of *literati* — Snorri in Iceland; Porthan, Ganander, and others in Finland — to instigate the first impetus to record the traditional folk poetry. Snorri's *Edda*, a discourse on traditional poetic technique, with citation from poetic sources, stands to the CR as the works of Porthan and Ganander stand to the *Kalevala*.

The CR is presented as a cycle of poems; it is the culmination of a process which had been ongoing for some time, evidenced by the adding of linking prose passages between and in the midst of poems.<sup>8</sup> The cyclic tendency is

b. The complaints of Njörðr and Skaði, interposed amongst summary of *Grm*: why does not Sn quote st. on Nóatún here? These stanzas appear to come from a longer poem.

c. *Heimdallargaldr*: Snorri gives a short quotation, very much like something remembered. Note this is only one of these lost poems that is named.

d. A couple of short verses on the goddess Gný. It is difficult to imagine a context for these.

e. What may be termed *Skrýmiskviða* must be the origin of the long section detailing Þórr's adventures with the giant Skrímir. This occurs in a long passage with no Eddic citations, but which is highly alliterative, and has been shown therefore to be probably a prose rephrasing of a poem.

f. The adventures of Hermóðr and Baldrs death, occurring in the same long prose section; here one verse on Þökk is cited.

<sup>8</sup> Whilst it is theoretically possible that the prose frameworks might derive from accounts given by the original oral singers of the Eddic poems, this scarcely seems to be the case, certainly with the mythological poems, despite analogues for such practices from elsewhere (e.g. Mongolia, where narrative portions of stories were often summarized in prose). The prose, especially in heroic poems, often distances itself from the poem, and is academic (e.g. *HH* II, after 51: 'it was believed in ancient times that people were reborn, but that is an old wives' tale'). The information contained in them is either derived from the poems themselves, or else may be paralleled in Snorri's accounts (e.g. in the case of *Ls* or *Skm*). The possible exception is the framework of *Grm*, which may have a different origin. Since the passages occur in both CR and A, they are likely to

widespread: manuscripts of sagas, for example, and indeed the structures of individual sagas are often cyclic; the trend reaches its climax in works such as *Flateyjarbók* in the early fourteenth century. The influences are Continental, the most obvious comparisons being with the French Arthurian cycles; needless to say, both the *Íslendinga sögur* and the Poetic Edda retain a distinctly Icelandic character, without close Continental parallels, despite this structural influence.<sup>9</sup> In composing the *Kalevala* Lönnrot adopted the rudimentary cycles of poems the folk poets produced, but welded them together into one poem with the aim of being all-encompassing, covering the whole of cosmic history from the creation to the appearance of Christ, and incorporating a version of nearly all the traditional non-Christian poems into this scheme. The CR does not go this far, for the traditional poems are not transmuted into a lengthy single composition, but the tendency to overstep the merely cyclical and attempt to be all-encompassing is nonetheless there. Thus we begin with *Völuspá*, which covers the whole of cosmic history, then we are given a wide range of poems covering the deeds of the gods, and move on to cover the great heroic cycles. It is no accident that poems of an anomalous nature, such as *Grottasöngur*, to say nothing of *Sólarljóð*, were not included.

There is no precise model on which the CR could have been based. We may suspect a familiarity with the *Nibelungenlied*, composed around 1200 and no doubt known in the northern lands through the activities of the Hanseatic League.<sup>10</sup> That German versions of the heroic legends were known is stated explicitly in the prose introduction to *Guðrúnarkviða I*. The Icelandic compiler may have wished to emulate something of the scale of the German epic, but the promulgation of the Icelandic poems with their huge stylistic differences from the German and the inclusion of the mythological poems must indicate a consciousness of the value of the more archaic poetry of the north.

The CR was compiled within the turbulent time of Iceland's loss of independence, made final in 1262 after a long seepage of power to Norway. It was the period when the Icelandic commonwealth was at its most vulnerable that it produced the greatest literature, as if in a final flowering of what was to be lost; we might compare Malory's great work of chivalry the *Morte Darthur*, produced at the dusk of the chivalric age. The emphasis of the CR, like that of

---

have been added rather early in the manuscript transmission, soon after Snorri. It might be argued that the prose passages and Snorri's accounts derive from a common source used by both, but since there is no evidence of any mythological works other than Snorri's this seems unlikely. Since Snorri shows only a vague knowledge of the poetic forms of *Ls*, *Skm*, *Fáfm*, whereas the prose found in these poems is very close to what Snorri says, it is reasonable to conclude that the prose and poetry were not yet united c.1220 (Gunnell 221).

<sup>9</sup> See Clover on the influence of Continental cycles on Icelandic literature in the thirteenth century. Kurt Schier declares that the sagas indicate Icelandic innovation while the Eddic poems indicate conservatism, but in fact both are innovative and conservative at the same time: they both use traditional materials handed down orally, and shape these under the influence of Continental cyclicism into a new and distinctly Icelandic form.

<sup>10</sup> De Vries §168.

national epics such as the *Kalevala* but not necessarily like that of cyclic collections of traditional poetry in general, is very much on heroic verse: eleven of the poems are mythological, whereas at least nineteen (depending on what was lost in the Great Lacuna), and these the longer poems, are heroic. The mythological poems provide a backdrop to this, in the way the creation story does for the *Kalevala*.<sup>11</sup> Might we then view the CR text as an embryonic national epic produced at a time when the nationhood of Iceland was most threatened?

To pose this question, after presenting the circumstances of the formation of the *Kalevala*, implies that I believe there can be a fair degree of similarity in thinking and approach between thirteenth-century Iceland and nineteenth-century Finland. Naturally, there are many differences too. The most important in this context is nationalism. This is commonly regarded as a nineteenth-century phenomenon; I do not wish to enter the historians' debate on the rise of nationalism, but it seems reasonable to accept that forms of nationalism, perhaps more amorphous than in the nineteenth century, can exist in many times and places. Nationalism may be defined as a desire for political independence and security based on a perception of cultural worth and individuality; a national epic is one which is seen (whether by its author or by its audience) as expressing this ideal. It is not necessarily free of the influence of foreign models: indeed it will often emulate earlier models from elsewhere. Problems arise if we start thinking of a national epic as exclusive (that no more than one may exist for each nation) and therefore selected by some process, which may have been feasible in the nineteenth century but not earlier: no such presupposition is to be entertained. The *Aeneid*, based overtly on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is thus clearly a national epic; however, an example of greater weight here is Layamon's *Brut*. This is a long work (around 16,000 lines), composed in the early thirteenth century. Layamon sets out to write an epic telling how the English acquired their land:

Hit com him on mode & on his mern þonke  
þæt he wolde of Engle þa æðelan tellen  
wat heo ihoten weoren & wonene heo comen. (lines 6–8)

Yet his subject matter is British, not English: it tells of King Arthur. Moreover, the main model was French (the work of Wace). Despite this, Layamon manages to produce a distinctly English work by adhering to the tradition of alliterative verse in the face of the increasing influence of French-inspired verse patterns. The example of Layamon demonstrates also that differing literary values can exist in one age: similarly, the CR shows an adherence to the

---

<sup>11</sup> Lönnrot of course knew the *Edda* and used it as a model. Nonetheless, the fact that an essentially heroic work with a mythological introduction was found to meet the demand in the nineteenth century may imply a similar demand in the thirteenth, whatever the level of structural influence.

traditional forms of literature, like Layamon, whilst contemporary works such as the *riddara sögur* illustrate a more wholesale adoption of foreign tastes.

The *Brut* and the *Aeneid*, however, both concern at least the land (if not the people) whence they sprang; this indicates a perception of cultural individuality which is a necessary part of the definition of nationalism. The Poetic Edda does not concern Iceland. It is in fact unclear how far the Icelanders of the thirteenth century regarded themselves as having a culture very distinct from the Norwegians. There was an obvious lack of enthusiasm for enforcing Norwegian rule in Iceland, and when it came the Icelanders were insistent on keeping their own laws. Occasionally differences from Norway are commented upon, such as when Snorri, after returning from a visit there, is said to have celebrated Christmas in the Norwegian fashion (*Sturlunga saga* II. 142). Such instances show at least the rudiments of cultural distinctness, I think. And if we are to judge the Icelanders by their literary works, then an intellectual culture quite distinct from that of Norway is apparent in the thirteenth century, one which largely succumbed to Norwegian political control. The subject matter of the Poetic Edda may not in fact be of great significance: the Eddic poems would have been seen as the oldest poetry of the people, such as is characteristically used in the formation of national epics such as the *Kalevala*, but most of it was composed at a time before there could be any consciousness of Icelandic identity: the lack of Icelandic focus is therefore accidental. Although the Eddic poems are the last remnants of a common Germanic heritage, by the time of the CR it is possible — but cannot be demonstrated — that the Icelanders regarded traditional poetry as particularly their sphere; at least the court skalds of Norway were Icelandic after the tenth century. I have suggested a cultural and even political motivation for the composition of the CR, in some respects comparable with that underlying the *Kalevala*; however, it is ultimately not so much the Icelanders' desire to demonstrate their cultural acumen as their actual possession of that acumen that produced the CR.

## II

Different questions arise when we consider the role of individual poems. The poems could in principle have been composed at any time up to their appearance in the CR or Snorri's *Edda*; however, I take it as my starting point that most of the mythological poems were composed before or shortly after the conversion to Christianity. Given that the older poems would have been transmitted for most of their existence in oral form, it is necessary to spell out my conviction that memorization played a greater part than extemporization in the performance of Norse poetry, and in this respect it differed from Finnish and much other oral poetry. Had we a text of *Völuspá* from 1020, for example, it would be recognizable as the same poem we find in the CR, though it would no doubt differ in many details.

It is therefore clear that any poem may have served one purpose at the time of its composition and another at its recording in CR. I welcome Margaret Clunies Ross's call for a greater synchronic understanding of the myths in the context of the Middle Ages, but am less happy at the implications of her regret over the tradition of philological and literary explication that has occupied much of the last century and a half<sup>12</sup> — there are good reasons to justify the traditional approach: the original authors of the poems were also working within a system of belief and artistic technique which by the christianized thirteenth century was alien. Is it more legitimate to try to uncover the world of the scribe than of the author? I think not.

Moreover, our extant records of Norse myth are almost exclusively literary. Any approach which does not acknowledge that the primary form of interpretation must be literary is in my view misplaced. Religious or anthropological research can be highly illuminating, but in these fields poems are secondary, not primary sources. In general terms the purpose of the myths, as we have them, is to provide material for literary elaboration, which may be approached according to the well-established principles of literary criticism, supplemented, but not supplanted, by other approaches.

It is important, as Clunies Ross points out, to consider particular myths as part of an overall system;<sup>13</sup> circumstances preclude the possibility of doing this here, and I present merely one mythologem in a regrettably isolated fashion. I consider both Norse and Finnish poems; I am not here suggesting borrowing, but wish to show how a definable mythological motif may be variously used in different societies and in different places within an individual society. The observation of the adaptability of a myth may further our efforts to frame questions about why myths take particular forms in particular circumstances, even if answers are not immediately forthcoming.

Many mythologies imagine a concrete entity holding up the cosmos; most often this is a mountain, a pillar, or a tree. In Norse, there are indications of all three of these, but the tree is the most prominent. The initial choice between these images already implies adaptation to a particular purpose. A mountain is something vast and impenetrable, a symbol of permanence apparently unaffected by the ravages of time. It tends to contrast the puny nature of man

<sup>12</sup> 'There has been a strong and persistent tendency in the study of Old Norse myth, which is still by no means dead, to value the supposedly 'original' form and meaning of a myth more highly than what the text and medieval context tell us was its likely meaning or meanings in the Middle Ages' (16).

<sup>13</sup> 'What seems certain now . . . is that myth is rarely, if ever, merely an explanation of a religious usage. It has independent life even when closely associated with ritual and needs to be considered as a cognitive system in its own right that has its own communicative and affective dimensions. Above all, individual myths need to be considered in the context of the whole complex of myths that a society gives expression to at any particular time, if the richness of their meanings is to be perceived' (14). 'The spirit of this new analysis of Old Norse myth requires us to move away from the study of individual myths and individual texts as discrete entities without much connection with the rest of the mythic system, towards a kind of analysis that respects individual myths but sees their meanings in a larger textual and contextual frame' (17).

with that of the cosmos. Óðinn's victorious retrieval of the mead of poetry from the depths of Suttungr's mountain is made all the more glorious for choosing such a setting. The tree is a living being, which clearly does suffer from the ravages of time. It is a more unifying symbol: the cosmos has a life, like man, and suffers and will come to an end. The pillar is found only in vestigial form in Norse,<sup>14</sup> though it appears to have been the main representation of cosmic support among the Saxons in the form of the *irminsul*; it is halfway between mountain and tree, emphasizing the holding up of the world, but without emphasis on its life. In many Siberian shamanic societies the symbolic world-tree is in fact reduced to a pillar by lopping off branches and turning it into a ladder by which the shaman climbs to other worlds.

It was as a link between worlds, such as is exploited by shamans, rather than primarily as a structural support of the cosmos, that the ancient Finns must have regarded the great oak tree. In the recorded poems, the tree is ambivalent: in its natural state it is a threat which has to be dealt with, because it grows so huge it blocks out the light of sun and moon. This may originally have reflected the disappearance of most light for a large part of the winter in the far north, but this is not stated in the poems. The situation is resolved by felling the tree; it appears that its fallen trunk became the Milky Way, and is said to have acted as a soul-bridge to the other world. None of the recorded poems however is cosmological in intent, and the earlier cosmological system can only be gleaned from remaining hints in the poems and from comparative research involving neighbouring peoples' beliefs. The poems themselves reflect different, more practical considerations;<sup>15</sup> thus in one Ingrian variant the motif of the tree blocking the light has disappeared, and hence the cosmic significance of the tree. The emphasis is entirely on beer drinking: the tree springs from beer froth, and when felled it is used to make mugs for drinking beer. A ritual association of this type of poem may once have existed: the brewing was associated at least by the neighbouring Balts with rituals centred round an oak. Beer represented a major source of nourishment, and its brewing was probably associated with the new life which emerges in the spring, i.e. when the tree's felling frees the light, but this is not explicit in the poem. In a Karelian variant the tree poem forms part of an incantation to exorcize illness. Illnesses were typically banished to the central cosmic pillar, often simply called the stone, in Finnish folk practices, and the tree is a variant of this. The reason appears to be that the passage to the otherworld takes place at this one spot, so the illness is in fact banished out of this world. The felling of the tree is therefore necessary in order to form the soul-bridge for the illness to cross.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Arguably in the high-seat pillars dedicated to Þórr, the *ǫndvegissúlur*; the image may be echoed in *Þórdrápa*'s designation of Þórr as *himinsjóli*, if *sjóli* here means 'pillar'.

<sup>15</sup> Examples of the poems may be found in Finnish and English in Kuusi et al., nos. 49, 50.

<sup>16</sup> A brief account of the Finnish tree poems is found in English in Kuusi et al. pp. 546–547. I have also used Polttila's useful consideration of the tree mythologem (written in Finnish).

Ritual associations for Eddic poems are impossible to demonstrate, and indeed seem unlikely, given that there is little hint of them in the poems themselves. Thus, while we may for example imagine that some form of poem celebrating the recovery of Þórr's hammer may have accompanied a rain-welcoming ritual — for fertility and weather considerations surely underlie this myth — it is difficult to think that *Þrymskviða* corresponds very closely with this ritual verse. In Finland, especially in the Orthodox east where most of the poems were recorded, a considerable body of ritual practice and accompanying verse survived the arrival of Christianity; in Iceland, although the stories about the gods were not deemed offensive, poems focusing on actual pagan ritual clearly were, and have not survived. In the case of the world-tree, there is in fact the hint of a medicinal use for the tree in *Fjolsvinnsmál* 22, where its fruit helps sick women.<sup>17</sup> The poem is a late composition, but reflects folk developments of traditional beliefs; it is in fact more directly comparable with the Finnish examples.

There is no Norse poem devoted just to the world-tree. Indeed, it is not always clear when a world-tree is being described: for example, is 'Hoddmímis holt' in *Vafþrúðnismál* a variant of the world-tree in which the human couple shelter at the end of the world, or is it a grove? The main appearances of the world-tree are in *Hávamál*, *Grímnismál*, and *Völuspá*, poems very different from each other. The windy tree on which Óðinn hangs himself in *Háv* is essentially the tree connecting the worlds: he is acquiring wisdom from the otherworld, accessible only via this axis. This at least would be the interpretation for shamanic societies where the world-tree constitutes a central ritual object. But in Norse the tree is transformed into a gallows, is the very instrument of death; this marks a departure from the possibly older image such as the shamans used. The tree here is truly Yggdrasill, the Óðinn steed, a name in which the god is called The Terrible (Yggr); it must surely have been this myth which gave rise to this particular designation of the tree, though the few lines of *Hávamál* do not use it: we have lost the original poetic context for the birth of Yggdrasill. *Hávamál*, no doubt following some earlier poem, adapts the life-giving tree of the cosmos to the deathly instrument of a god's acquisition of supernatural knowledge: and the tree becomes terrible like the master and victim who swings on it. The image of the tree in *Háv* cannot be considered apart from the overall image of the god Óðinn, or of Scandinavian attitudes to death penalties: and in these respects there were notable differences from more primitive shamanic societies.

*Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* bear some superficial resemblance, in that they are both collections of mythological information. However, *Vm* might loosely be characterized as a cosmic history, whereas *Grm* is a cosmic description. Of the two *Grm* comes closer to *Háv*: it shows Óðinn's revelation

<sup>17</sup> See Robinson 118–123 for the interpretation of this stanza.

of his own wisdom and power under duress, the fires here taking the place of the tree. Again, comparisons may be made, with the provisos already mentioned, to a shamanic revelation. Typically, a shaman would have the picture of the cosmos revealed to him after a painful experience of imagined dismemberment, and this revelation would be repeated by him whenever he went into trance and visited these other worlds.<sup>18</sup> The graphically described repetition of the cosmic picture confirmed for his audience that he was truly visiting these realms and had power there. It is clear that the purpose of the revelation in *Grm* is likewise to demonstrate Óðinn's power; on the basis of shamanic texts it may be suggested — but cannot of course be proved — that *Grm* alludes to practices of *seiðr* where a seeress would visit other worlds to demonstrate her power (I stress alludes: the poem is not itself an example of such a ritual text). Given the concentration upon cosmic structure, it is not surprising that the world-tree Yggdrasill features prominently in *Grm*, whereas it is absent from *Vm*. The emphasis of the description is upon the tree's suffering; this is a specifically Norse feature, reflecting concerns of the society which produced it (it is difficult in this case to say that it represents a concern specifically of this poem).

The subjection of the tree to fate is exploited in literary terms most forcibly in *Völuspá*. This is a poem of greater creative power than either *Grm* or *Vm*. Like *Vm* it presents a cosmic history, but one which is much tighter, where one event is consequent upon another. The poet is able to reflect the course of events by describing the world-tree at crucial points in the cosmic development: in st. 2 it is 'the famed tree beneath the ground'; in st. 19, immediately following the creation of man, Yggdrasill is said to stand tall and green over the well of Urðr: the tree is thus associated with man's life, and his fate and that of the cosmos. The world is at its zenith here, represented by the green and tall tree. In st. 27–28 the seeress links the hearing of Heimdallr and the sight of Óðinn with the tree: they are buried beneath or near it. The gods have pledged away what they most need, have pledged themselves to fate who resides at the tree. In st. 47 Yggdrasill is mentioned as shuddering as the giant is released, marking the imminent culmination of *ragnarøk*. *Völuspá* I believe shows a more detailed awareness of *seiðr* and the *völur* who practised it than any other source; in so far as *seiðr* bears comparison with shamanism, the world-tree may have formed a focus of ritual. Be that as it may, the poet has manipulated the potential of the tree, already associated with suffering, as seen in *Grm*, to form an essentially literary use of the image as a symbol for the developing fate of the gods, the *ragnarøk*.

Thus we may see how the basic mythologem of the world-tree is developed in different ways. The early Finnish emphasis on the tree as a soul-bridge is a

---

<sup>18</sup> There are many such descriptions; a particularly graphic and substantial one is to be found in Siikala 175–183.

natural development in an originally shamanic society, where the tree was above all the path along which the shaman travelled to the otherworld in trance. The necessity of felling the tree was a particular Finnish development, originally perhaps reflecting a cosmological perception of the seasons. The cosmological or shamanic element has been forced into the background in the existing poems, however; these are semi-ritualistic texts which reflect the concerns of everyday life, be it drinking beer or banishing illness. It is important to realize that Norse texts are very different. An everyday use of the world-tree (or its physical representative) is hinted at only in *Fjölsvinnsmál*; our other texts are neither religious nor ritualistic. A basic image of the tree as sustainer ravaged by fate, as seen straightforwardly in *Grm*, is developed to literary ends in *Vsp*. The darker image of the tree as gallows appears in *Háv*. The various presentations of the tree illustrate, I think, that myth was open to adaptation by the poets: the poems do not so much reflect an inert belief system, as foster a perpetual development of mythological imagery, the demise of which is marked, amongst other things, by the prosaic freezing of the stories in Snorri's *Edda*.

### References

- Clover, C., *The Medieval Saga*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1982.  
 Clunies Ross, M., *Prolonged Echoes*, vol. I. Odense University Press, 1994.  
 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *The Age of the Sturlungs: Icelandic Civilization in the Thirteenth Century*. Trans. Jóhann Hannesson. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1953.  
 Gunnell, T., *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1995.  
 Kaukonen, V., *Lönnrot ja Kalevala*. Finnish Literature Society, Helsinki, 1979.  
 Kuusi, M., Bosley, K., and Branch, M. (eds. & trans.), *Finnish Folk Poetry: Epic*. Finnish Literature Society, Helsinki, 1977.  
 Layamon, *Brut*, ed. G. L. Brook, R. F. Leslie. 2 vols. Early English Text Society os 250, 277. Oxford University Press, 1963, 1978.  
 Lindblad, G., *Studier i Codex Regius av äldre Eddan*. Gleerup, Lund, 1954.  
*The Poetic Edda*, vol. II, ed. U. Dronke. Oxford University Press, 1997.  
 Polttila, B., *Pohjan portit*. Tammi, Helsinki, 1982.  
 Robinson, P., 'An Edition of *Svipdagsmál*'. DPhil. thesis. Oxford, 1991.  
 Schier, K., 'Anfänge und erste Entwicklung der Literatur in Island und Schweden: Wie beginnt Literatur in einer schriftlosen Gesellschaft?', *Nordlichter*. Diederichs, Munich, 1994, 210–265.  
 Siikala, A.-L., *The Rite Technique of the Siberian Shaman*. Folklore Fellows Communications 220. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Helsinki, 1978.  
*Sturlunga saga*. 4 vols. Reykjavík, 1908–15.  
 de Vries, J., *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1941.

I wish to thank the British Academy and the Viking Society for grants enabling me to present this paper at the Saga Conference.

## Contextualising the *Knútsdrápur*: Skaldic Praise-Poetry at the Court of Cnut

Matthew Townend

Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York, UK

It is generally recognised that during the reign of Cnut the Danish king's court came to represent the focal point for skaldic composition and patronage in the Norse-speaking world. According to the later Icelandic *Skáldatal*, no fewer than eight poets were remembered as having composed for Cnut,<sup>1</sup> and the works of five of them survive (some, admittedly, in fragmentary form): Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Knútsdrápa*;<sup>2</sup> Óttarr svarti's *Knútsdrápa*;<sup>3</sup> Hallvarðr háreksblei's

---

<sup>1</sup> For the *Skáldatal* list see *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Sveinbjörn Egilsson et al, 3 vols in 4 (Copenhagen, 1848-87), III, 251-86: 282-3.

<sup>2</sup> For text see *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 4 vols (Copenhagen, 1912-15), IB, 232-4. For (almost complete) translation see *English Historical Documents: Volume I c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock (London, 1955), 310-11 (No. 16, where the poem is titled *Tøgdrápa*).

<sup>3</sup> For text see *Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 272-5; Margaret Ashdown, *English and Norse Documents Relating to the Reign of Ethelred the Unready* (Cambridge, 1930), 136-9 (text and translation). For translation see *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, 308-9 (No. 15).

*Knútsdrápa*;<sup>4</sup> Þórarinn loftunga's *Höfuðlausn*<sup>5</sup> and *Tøgdrápa*;<sup>6</sup> and (probably) a fragment by Arnórr jarlaskáld.<sup>7</sup> Of the other poets cited in *Skáldatal*, no verse in honour of Cnut is extant by Bersi Torfuson, and none at all by Steinn Skaptason and the obscure Óðarkeptr. However, an extant anonymous poem in honour of Cnut is *Liðsmannaflakkr*,<sup>8</sup> and one is justified in also bringing into general consideration an extant poem in honour of one of Cnut's earls, namely Þórðr Kolbeinsson's *Eiríksdrápa*.<sup>9</sup> In addition to a number of *lausavísur* believed to have been addressed to Cnut, there is also a good deal of poetry which either mentions Cnut or is, at some remove, composed about him, the most important of which is Sigvatr's *Vestrfararvísur*;<sup>10</sup> but the discussion that follows is concerned only with the poetry composed directly for and in honour of him.

As an initial observation, such an extant collection of skaldic praise-poetry is remarkable in terms of its sheer quantity: Cnut can be ranked alongside Earl Hákon Sigurðarson, Óláfr Haraldsson, and Haraldr harðráði as one of the most prominent of patrons for extant skaldic verse, and without question he is the most important non-Norwegian according to such terms. As has been acknowledged, therefore, skaldic verse associated with Cnut represents a substantial, and reasonably discrete, subject for investigation - a body of poetry which I shall collectively refer to by the shorthand label of 'the *Knútsdrápur*'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For text see *Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 293-4; Roberta Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. Alexander R. Rumble, Studies in the Early History of Britain (London, 1994), 106-24: 119-21 (text and translation).

<sup>5</sup> For text see *Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 298. For translation see Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', 116.

<sup>6</sup> For text see *Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 298-9. For translation see *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, 312 (No. 19).

<sup>7</sup> For text see *Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 326 (strophe 3); Diana Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld: An Edition and Study*, Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies 8 (Turnhout, 1998), 134, 308-10 (text and translation). For the grounds for believing this fragment is from a poem on Cnut see Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 34-5.

<sup>8</sup> For text see *Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 391-3; Russell Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016', *Speculum* 62 (1987), 265-98: 281-3 (text and translation); R.G. Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative*, Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations 8 (Toronto, 1991), 86-90 (text and translation); also Ashdown, *English and Norse Documents*, 140-3 (partial text and translation).

<sup>9</sup> For text see *Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 203-6. For (partial) translation see *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, 307 (No. 14).

<sup>10</sup> For text see *Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 226-8; for translation of the stanzas relating to Cnut see *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, 311 (No. 17).

<sup>11</sup> The most important studies are Dietrich Hofmann, *Nordisch-Englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, Bibliotheca Arnemagnæana 14 (Copenhagen, 1955), 59-101 (ää52-109); Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History'; and Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds'. See also Alistair Campbell, *Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture (London, 1971); and Matthew Townend, *English Place-Names in Skaldic Verse*, English Place-Name Society Extra Series 1 (Nottingham, 1998).

In what follows I wish to consider in particular the context or contexts in which these poems in honour of Cnut were originally produced and received, and in doing so to explore more generally the role of original context in the generation of literary meaning for skaldic praise-poetry; in particular I shall endeavour to contextualise the poems in terms of their geographical and physical place of delivery.

Cnut was king of all England from 1017 to 1035. With the possible exception of Sigvatr's poem there is no reason to believe that any of the *Knútsdrápur* are *erfidrápur* or memorial lays, and so by the very fact of Cnut's regnal dates one can position these poems within a fairly narrow eighteen-year band. Such ready datability may seem an obvious and fortuitous quality of praise-poetry, but in the study of early medieval vernacular poetry such a quality is all too rare and therefore not at all to be taken for granted. There is unfortunately no space here to engage in an exploration of the more precise dating of the *Knútsdrápur* according to internal and external indicators, but following the opinions of earlier scholars I would propose the following likely chronology for the poems: *Liðsmannaflakkr* c.1016-17; Þórðr's *Eiríksdrápa* c.1016-23; Óttarr's *Knútsdrápa* c.1027; Sigvatr's *Knútsdrápa* c.1027 (probably); Þórarinn's *Höfuðlausn* c.1027-28 and *Tøgdrápa* c.1029; Hallvarðr's *Knútsdrápa* c.1029; and Arnórr's fragment c.1031-35. For a number of these poems - especially, perhaps, Hallvarðr's and Arnórr's - it is the *terminus ante quem* that is lacking or weakly established, with Cnut's death forming the only real end-point. Sir Frank Stenton famously remarked that Cnut's reign in England was 'so successful that contemporaries found little to say about it';<sup>12</sup> and while this may or may not be true for chronicles and other documentary sources, the observation is quite aptly applicable to the genre of praise-poetry. Peaceful times give little cause for celebration in such a competitive and militant literature, and the *Knútsdrápur* mention no event later than the 1028 expedition to Norway: in terms of Cnut's own activities these years are blank too in all manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.<sup>13</sup> Hence the poets look back to the empire-making battles and wars, either to the most recent campaign or (presumably) the most important: Óttarr's *Knútsdrápa*, perhaps the most militant of all of the praise-poems for Cnut, looks back some ten years to the winning of the English throne.

The literary and cultural implications of this chronology for the *Knútsdrápur* will be discussed in more detail after consideration has been given to the geographical and physical contexts for the poems; but one or two points

<sup>12</sup> F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn, Oxford History of England 2 (Oxford, 1971), 399.

<sup>13</sup> For ease of reference see M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: the Danes in England in the early eleventh century* (London, 1993), 231-2. The entry for 1031 in MSS 'DE' is very probably misplaced from 1026, though the one event which may be correctly dated to 1031 is the submission of the Scottish kings.

are worth observing at this stage. Above all, it is notable how the poems fall into two groups, with *Liðsmannaflokkur* and *Eiríksdrápa* coming soon after the conquest of England, but the rest of the poems after the battle of Holy River in 1026 and (in some cases) the Norway expedition in 1028. One might also suggest that the two early poems are in some sense by insiders, those who had already thrown in their lot with Cnut's assault on England (especially *Liðsmannaflokkur*), whereas the later poems are by outsiders, those who came seeking Cnut's court at a subsequent point. And chronologically that point is clearly Cnut's establishment of a pan-Scandinavian hegemony, after Holy River (against the Swedes) and the Norway expedition: it is this creation of a wider Scandinavian empire that shifts the centre of skaldic culture to Cnut's court and that makes the Danish king the crucial patron for poets to seek out and cultivate. There is only a tiny amount of Viking Age verse extant for any Danish kings other than Cnut; but the events of 1026 and 1028 re-orientate the axis of skaldic composition, and so lead to the type of chronology proposed above. In or around 1030 it clearly made sense for a poet launching his international career to seek out Cnut first of all as the most important of patrons - as, from Diana Whaley's chronology, Arnórr appears to have done when leaving Iceland for the first time.<sup>14</sup> Cnut's political hegemony in Scandinavia thus led to a poetic one.

In turning to the geographical and physical contexts of the *Knútsdrápur*, the first question is whether one should locate the activities of Cnut's poets to England rather than to Denmark (or even Norway), and the usual ascription to England seems securely based on a number of convergent strands of evidence: above all, on the historical record of Cnut's movements, the centrality of England in his Anglo-Danish empire, and the marked linguistic influence on the poems from Old English. The first two of these factors point to the localisation of Cnut's court, while the third would seem to indicate that such a localisation is correct with regard to the composition of court poetry. Between 1017 and 1035 there is record of Cnut being absent from England on no more than four or five occasions, and each time fairly briefly. What is apparent therefore is the dominant proportion of his reign which Cnut spent in England, and how this would appear to signal England rather than Denmark as the centre of his empire. The linguistic evidence of Old English influence on the Old Norse of poems, catalogued by Dietrich Hofmann,<sup>15</sup> is indeed, as Roberta Frank remarks, the 'most persuasive' indicator that the poems were originally 'addressing Danes resident in England',<sup>16</sup> and it suggests also that the poems should not be ascribed to Cnut's few occasions of campaign in Scandinavia: the

<sup>14</sup> Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 41-7. Arnórr's choice of destination may also have been governed by the earlier career-successes of his father, Þórðr Kolbeinsson.

<sup>15</sup> Hofmann, *Nordisch-Englische Lehnbeziehungen*, 59-100 (ää52-108).

<sup>16</sup> Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', 108.

poems are coming out of an Anglo-Scandinavian milieu, rather than one that is wholly Scandinavian.

More intriguing is the question of whereabouts in England one should locate this culture of courtly patronage. Frank assumes without discussion that London was the prime location of Cnut's court and therefore in Cnut's reign constituted 'the centre in the North for the production and distribution of skaldic poetry'.<sup>17</sup> However, courts of late Anglo-Saxon kings were still to a significant degree itinerant,<sup>18</sup> and during his reign Cnut is variously recorded engaged in legal or political activity in Kingston, Oxford, Abingdon, Cirencester, Ashington, Canterbury, and Shaftesbury.<sup>19</sup> In essence, though, the search for the centre of poetic patronage in Cnut's reign comes down to a straight choice between the two other places where Cnut's presence is recorded, namely London (as Frank assumes) and Winchester - that is, between the emergent economic powerhouse of eleventh-century England and the ancient ceremonial seat of the West Saxon monarchy.

As usual, this is not really a case of either/or, and in fact the two cities appear to have been in what might be termed complementary distribution. Russell Poole has demonstrated persuasively that *Liðsmannaflokkr* 'is what it purports to be, an expression of rank and file jubilation at Knútr's conquest, composed almost contemporaneously with the events it describes',<sup>20</sup> and the geographical centre of the poem is London (referred to in stanza 7 in Poole's ordering, as is the Thames in stanzas 3 and 6). *Liðsmannaflokkr*, then, appears to be coming directly out of the newly-occupied city, and the poem's concerns are thus emblematic of London's status under Cnut: on account of its successful resistance in the preceding wars it became a guarded and garrisoned city, the main focus for Cnut's punitive measures in terms of geld-raising and forceful political action. So, for example, it was in London (according to John of Worcester) that Cnut in 1017 executed the dangerous Eadric streona;<sup>21</sup> it was upon London that Cnut placed the burden of a distinctive geld of £10,500 in

<sup>17</sup> Roberta Frank, 'Skaldic Poetry', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica* 45 (Ithaca, 1985), 157-96: 179.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978-1016: A Study in their Use as Historical Evidence*, *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought*, 3rd series 13 (Cambridge, 1980), 269-73; David Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), 90-1, 94 (maps 160-3 and 167-9); Martin Biddle, 'Seasonal Festivals and Residence: Winchester, Westminster and Gloucester in the tenth to twelfth centuries', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 8 (1986), 51-72: 56, 69-72.

<sup>19</sup> Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England*, 91 (map 163); reprinted in David Hill, 'An urban policy for Cnut?', in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble, 101-5: 103.

<sup>20</sup> Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History', 286.

<sup>21</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. R.R. Darlington and P. McGurk, 3 vols, *Oxford Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 1995-), II, 504-5; Lawson, *Cnut*, 83-4.

1018;<sup>22</sup> and it was from London that Cnut removed the relics of the martyred Archbishop Ælfheah in 1023.<sup>23</sup> Above all, and quite apart from individual events such as these, London was a city under careful military occupation. It never fell in the Anglo-Danish wars, and its citizens had preferred Edmund Ironside to Cnut in 1016;<sup>24</sup> post-1017, therefore, it could not be relied upon to support the new Danish king, and might potentially become the crucible of anti-Danish rebellion. Hence the punitive taxes and political gestures of potency; hence also it appears to have been the base for Cnut's *liðsmenn* or standing fleet,<sup>25</sup> one of whom may be commemorated by two of his comrades in the Ringerike-style St Paul's rune-stone,<sup>26</sup> while the appearance of strategically-positioned churches dedicated to Scandinavian saints may well indicate that they functioned as garrison chapels.<sup>27</sup> The signs therefore are that London was a closely guarded city in the reign of Cnut, and that presumably the king had some sort of base there.<sup>28</sup> As early garrison-poetry, *Liðsmannaflakkr* - the *flakkr* of the *liðsmenn* - should clearly be localised there; but it must be doubtful whether London represented the centre of court culture for the Danish king and his followers.

Instead it is to Winchester one should look, and in Winchester, arguably, that one should primarily contextualise the *Knútsdrápur*. David Hill has observed that 'any ... punishment of London would also explain the efforts to embellish Winchester as 'capital', a policy that is certainly discernible in the reign of Cnut'.<sup>29</sup> So it was in Winchester at Christmas 1020 or 1021 that Cnut

<sup>22</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MSS 'CDE' (though MS 'E' states £11,000); Lawson, *Cnut*, 83; Hill, 'An urban policy for Cnut?', 103.

<sup>23</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MSS 'CDE' (with a particularly lengthy account in MS 'D'); Lawson, *Cnut*, 140-2, 180-2; Alexander R. Rumble, 'Textual Appendix: *Translatio Sancti Ælfeigi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et martyris* (BHL 2519): Osbern's account of the translation of St Ælfheah's relics from London to Canterbury, 8-11 June 1023', in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble, 282-315.

<sup>24</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MSS 'CDE'.

<sup>25</sup> James Campbell, 'Some Agents and Agencies of the Late Anglo-Saxon State', in *Domesday Studies*, ed. J.C. Holt (Woodbridge, 1987), 201-18: 204-5; Nicholas Hooper, 'Military developments in the reign of Cnut', in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble, 89-100: 98-100.

<sup>26</sup> The inscription reads (in normalised form) *Ginna lét leggja stein þensi auk Tóki* 'Ginna and Tóki had this stone raised'. See David M. Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* (London, 1966), 135-6; Signe Horn Fuglesang, *Some Aspects of the Ringerike Style: A phase of 11th century Scandinavian art*, *Mediaeval Scandinavia Supplements* 1 (Odense, 1980), 189 (No. 88); *The Vikings in England and in their Danish Homeland*, ed. Else Roesdahl, James Graham-Campbell, Patricia Connor and Kenneth Pearson (London, 1981), 136, 163 (No. I 19); Lawson, *Cnut*, 206-7; Michael Barnes, 'Towards an Edition of the Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions of The British Isles - Some Thoughts', in *Twenty-Eight Papers Presented to Hans Bekker-Nielsen on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday 28 April 1993* (Odense, 1993), 21-36: 33 (No. E 2).

<sup>27</sup> Pamela Nightingale, 'The Origin of the Court of Husting and Danish Influence on London's Development into a Capital City', *English Historical Review* 102 (1987), 559-78: 566-9.

<sup>28</sup> Alan Vince, *Saxon London: An Archaeological Investigation* (London, 1990), 57.

<sup>29</sup> Hill, 'An urban policy for Cnut?', 103-4.

promulgated the law-codes now known as I and II Cnut,<sup>30</sup> and it was in the Old Minster at Winchester that Cnut was to be buried.<sup>31</sup> It is also, of course, from Winchester that the supreme image of Cnut derives, in the form of the frontispiece to the New Minster *Liber Vitae*, commemorating his and his wife Emma's donation of a gold cross to be placed on the foundation's altar.<sup>32</sup> For Emma herself the evidence is more extensive, in that she held property in Winchester from 1012 up till her death in 1052: there are documentary records of Emma's presence there, and her house in the High Street was still able to be identified in the twelfth century.<sup>33</sup> She too was buried in the Old Minster, as was her and Cnut's only son, Harthacnut,<sup>34</sup> so confirming its status as (in Pauline Stafford's phrase) a 'dynastic mausoleum'.<sup>35</sup>

To this discussion of Cnut (and Emma) in Winchester one should add two other more general factors: the status of Winchester as late West Saxon 'capital', and evidence for a Danish presence in late West Saxon Winchester. Our extensive knowledge of Winchester derives substantially from the programme of excavations conducted there in the 1960s (led by Martin Biddle) and the accompanying publication project.<sup>36</sup> Winchester's trajectory involves its development as the ceremonial royal centre of Wessex in the seventh to ninth centuries, its urban renovation in the late ninth-century burghal system, and its confirmation as the royal and cultural centre of the unified kingdom of England in the tenth and eleventh centuries, before it declined in status at the

<sup>30</sup> Felix Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1898-1916), I, 278-371; Lawson, *Cnut*, 61-3; M.K. Lawson, 'Archbishop Wulfstan and the homiletic element in the laws of Æthelred II and Cnut', in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble, 141-64: 157-61; Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume I Legislation and Its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), 345-66.

<sup>31</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MS 'E' 1036. See John Crook, '“A worthy antiquity”: the movement of King Cnut's bones in Winchester Cathedral', in *The Reign of Cnut*, ed. Rumble, 165-92.

<sup>32</sup> For discussion see Robert Deshman, 'Benedictus Monarcha et Monachus: Early Medieval Ruler Theology and the Anglo-Saxon Reform', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988), 204-40: 223-5; Jan Gerchow, 'Prayers for King Cnut: The Liturgical Commemoration of a Conqueror', in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Carola Hicks, Harlaxton Medieval Studies 2 (Stamford, 1992), 219-38: 222-30; Richard Gameson, *The Role of Art in the Late Anglo-Saxon Church* (Oxford, 1995), 22, 74, 82-3, 230-1, 263; *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey Winchester*, ed. Simon Keynes, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 26 (Copenhagen, 1996), 38-9, 79-80. On the gold cross itself see *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster*, ed. Keynes, 35-7.

<sup>33</sup> See *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster*, ed. Keynes, 34; Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), esp. 252 (Figure 9); Simon Keynes, 'Introduction to the 1998 Reprint', *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. Alistair Campbell, Camden Classic Reprints 4 (Cambridge, 1998), xix, xxvi-xxviii, lxxv.

<sup>34</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* MSS 'EF' 1041, MS 'C' 1051.

<sup>35</sup> Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 96.

<sup>36</sup> See Martin Biddle, 'The Study of Winchester: Archaeology and History in a British Town, 1961-1983', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 69 (1983), 93-135; revised version reprinted in *British Academy Papers on Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. E.G. Stanley (Oxford, 1990), 299-341.

rise of Westminster.<sup>37</sup> So for instance Winchester appears to have been the central repository of the king's treasure,<sup>38</sup> and upon Cnut's death in 1035 *ealle þa betstan gærsaman þe Cnut cyng ahte* were taken from Emma there by Harold Harefoot.<sup>39</sup> The royal palace itself (in which, one may assume, the treasury was located) was positioned directly to the west of the Old Minster and south of the New Minster cemetery, though the form of the buildings themselves is unknown as the area itself has not been excavated;<sup>40</sup> nonetheless, Biddle and Keene suggest that 'the evidence available for rural palaces, and the illustrations in the Bayeux Tapestry of the Confessor's palace at Westminster, may lead us to suppose a considerable complex of stone structures, probably not out of scale beside the two great churches of the Old and New Minsters'.<sup>41</sup> For of the form of the monasteries abutting the palace, on the other hand, a very great deal is known, and in the Benedictine reforms of the late tenth century, a mere generation before Cnut, both had experienced ambitious building programmes: the tower of the New Minster was completed sometime between 980 and 987, while the Old Minster was wholly rebuilt between 971 and 994, with its westworks in particular being completed in 980.<sup>42</sup> These were formidably impressive structures: the Old Minster westworks, centred upon the tomb of St Swithun, was probably over thirty-five metres in height, while the New Minster tower comprised six storeys, and its exterior was decorated with different carvings at every level.<sup>43</sup>

In such an environment it is perhaps surprising to find a variety of forms of evidence for a conspicuous Danish presence in the early eleventh century.<sup>44</sup> Funeral evidence is supplied in the form of a number of 'essentially

<sup>37</sup> Martin Biddle, 'Winchester: the development of an early capital', in *Vor- und Frühformen der europäischen Stadt im Mittelalter*, ed. Herbert Jankuhn, Walter Schlesinger and Heiko Steuer, 2 vols (Göttingen, 1975), I, 229-61.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Biddle and D.J. Keene, 'Winchester in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', in Frank Barlow, Martin Biddle, Olof von Feilitzen and D.J. Keene, *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages: An Edition and Discussion of the Winton Domesday*, ed. Martin Biddle, Winchester Studies 1 (Oxford, 1976), 241-448: 290-1; Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 99.

<sup>39</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS D*, ed. G.P. Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition 6* (Cambridge, 1996), 65 ('all the best treasures which King Cnut owned').

<sup>40</sup> Martin Biddle, '*Felix Urbs Winthonia*: Winchester in the Age of Monastic Reform', in *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia*, ed. David Parsons (London and Chichester, 1975), 123-40: 132-3.

<sup>41</sup> Biddle and Keene, 'Winchester in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', 292.

<sup>42</sup> Biddle, '*Felix Urbs Winthonia*', 134-9.

<sup>43</sup> R.N. Quirk, 'Winchester New Minster and its Tenth-Century Tower', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd series 24 (1961), 16-54; *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster*, ed. Keynes, 29-30. For artists' reconstructions see *The Vikings in England*, ed. Roesdahl et al, 167, 170 (No. J 14); Tom Beaumont James, *Winchester*, English Heritage (London, 1997), 49 (Figure 25).

<sup>44</sup> For summaries see Barbara Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, Studies in the Early History of Britain (London, 1995), 143-5; *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster*, ed. Keynes, 40 n. 227.

Scandinavian' burials in the New Minster cemetery,<sup>45</sup> and in the hogback-shaped gravestone from the east of the Old Minster bearing the inscription HER L[I]P G[VN]N[I :] EORLES FEOLAGA 'Here lies Gunni, the earl's [or possibly 'Eorl's'] comrade'.<sup>46</sup> Beside this stone one can set the rune-stone found at St Maurice's church in Winchester but almost certainly coming originally from the New Minster cemetery.<sup>47</sup> The stone is only fragmentary, and the inscription correspondingly difficult to read, but it is plainly in Scandinavian runes and enough is extant to indicate that the language of the inscription is Old Norse:<sup>48</sup> the writing of Old Norse in eleventh-century Winchester would thus seem to presuppose an audience for the reading thereof, and also an Old Norse speech community.

To this epigraphical evidence one may add visual evidence in the form of the controversial frieze sculpture found amongst the rubble resulting from the demolition of the Old Minster in 1093.<sup>49</sup> This has been interpreted as deriving from a narrative stone frieze depicting episodes from the legend of Sigmundr in the Völsung cycle, and Biddle suggests that 'it was Cnut who had this frieze erected', since 'it celebrate[s] the shared traditions of England and Denmark'.<sup>50</sup> Less speculative is the so-called Winchester 'weathervane' - now relabelled as a 'decorative casket mount' - which was found beneath the south transept of the present cathedral and exemplifies the Ringerike style of decoration.<sup>51</sup> Half a dozen bone spoons also show influence from the Ringerike style,<sup>52</sup> while other small Scandinavian-style artefacts include over a dozen combs and an isolated (and possibly pre-Cnut) silver-gilt strap-end in the Jellinge style.<sup>53</sup> Finally, and more generally, one may note the unusually high number of Old Norse personal

<sup>45</sup> Martin Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1962-63: Second Interim Report', *The Antiquaries Journal* 44 (1964), 188-219: 211.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1965: Fourth Interim Report', *The Antiquaries Journal* 46 (1966), 308-32: 325; Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle and R.I. Page, 'A Scandinavian Rune-Stone from Winchester', *The Antiquaries Journal* 55 (1975), 389-94: 390-2; Elisabeth Okasha, *Hand-list of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (Cambridge, 1971), 126-7 (No. 138).

<sup>47</sup> Kjølbye-Biddle and Page, 'A Scandinavian Rune-Stone from Winchester', 389.

<sup>48</sup> Kjølbye-Biddle and Page, 'A Scandinavian Rune-Stone from Winchester', 392-4; Barnes, 'Towards an Edition of the Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions', 33 (No. E 12).

<sup>49</sup> Martin Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1965', 329-32 ('Appendix: a late Saxon frieze sculpture from the Old Minster'); *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966-1066*, ed. Janet Backhouse, D.H. Turner and Leslie Webster (London, 1984), 133-5 (No. 140).

<sup>50</sup> Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1965', 331.

<sup>51</sup> Wilson and Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, 141; Fuglesang, *Some Aspects of the Ringerike Style*, 170-1 (No. 54); *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art*, ed. Backhouse, Turner and Webster, 107 (No. 102).

<sup>52</sup> *The Vikings in England*, ed. Roesdahl et al, 168 (No. J 5); *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art*, ed. Backhouse, Turner and Webster, 129 (No. 134).

<sup>53</sup> Kjølbye-Biddle and Page, 'A Scandinavian Rune-Stone from Winchester', 390; *The Vikings in England*, ed. Roesdahl et al, 168-9 (Nos. J 6, J 8); *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art*, ed. Backhouse, Turner and Webster, 106 (No. 101).

names recorded in Winchester: in the surveys of the city made in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, approximately one in twenty of the persons recorded bore Old Norse personal names.<sup>54</sup> This cumulative collection of evidence therefore leads Barbara Yorke to conclude that in the reign of Cnut ‘Winchester was probably the place in Wessex where the greatest concentration of Danish settlers was to be found’,<sup>55</sup> and there are indications that in the post-Cnut years also Winchester continued to be regarded as the centre of Danish (or Anglo-Danish) interests.<sup>56</sup> What all these signs of Scandinavian culture in Winchester have in common, however, is their high or aristocratic status: as Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle observes, ‘[the] finds showing Scandinavian influence do not occur among common household goods, but reflect the upper ranges of the social hierarchy, as might be expected with a Danish king on the throne and his men at court’.<sup>57</sup>

I would suggest therefore that Winchester is the physical location in which one should contextualise the *Knútsdrápur* - in particular, in which one should contextualise the main group of poems from the late 1020s, after Cnut’s establishment of a Scandinavian hegemony. In fact, such a context was proposed long ago by L.M. Larson, who suggested that Sigvatr and Óttarr came to Winchester in 1027, Þórarinn in 1029.<sup>58</sup> Larson’s dates may need a little fine-tuning (though not much), but he appears to have been correct in believing that it was most probably the court at Winchester that briefly, in the reign of Cnut, came to be the prime centre for skaldic composition in the Norse-speaking world. After Holy River and the Norway expedition, it was to Winchester that the poets came, and so in this respect it is worth briefly recalling Sigvatr’s *Vestrfararvísur*, supplying as they do a contemporary account of a skald’s visit to Cnut’s court: in the course of his report Sigvatr draws particular attention to the processes of etiquette required to gain access to the king (*Útan varðk, áðr Jóta / andspillir fekk stillis, ... / ... húsdýrr fyrir spyrjask*), and to the king’s great generosity (*Knútr ..., mætra / mildr ... / ... hringa*), especially as a benefactor to the poets who seek him (*Knútr hefr okr ... / ... böðum / hendr, es hilmí fundum, / ... skrautliga búnar*).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Olof von Feilitzen, ‘The Personal Names and Bynames of the Winton Domesday’, in *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Biddle, 143-229: 179-91.

<sup>55</sup> Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, 144.

<sup>56</sup> *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster*, ed. Keynes, 39-40. In Harthacnut’s reign the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* may well have been written at Winchester in the service of precisely such interests: see Keynes, ‘Introduction to the 1998 Reprint’, xxxix-xli, lxx-lxxi.

<sup>57</sup> Kjølbye-Biddle and Page, ‘A Scandinavian Rune-Stone from Winchester’, 390.

<sup>58</sup> Laurence Marcellus Larson, *Canute the Great 995 (circ)-1035, and the Rise of Danish Imperialism during the Viking Age, Heroes of the Nations* (London, 1912), 294.

<sup>59</sup> *Skjaldedigting*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 226 (*Vestrfararvísur* 2.1-2, 4: ‘I had to engage in inquiries outside, before the hall door, before I obtained conversation with the governor of the Jutes’), 227 (7.1-3: ‘Cnut, generous with precious rings’; 5.1-4: ‘Cnut has splendidly adorned the arms of both of us [i.e. Sigvatr and Bersi] when we met the prince’).

We return, therefore, to the role of context in the generation of meaning for praise-poetry. The royal palace at Winchester, right up close to the enclosure and tower of the New Minster, and directly over-shadowed by the Swithun-centred westworks of the Old Minster, seems an astonishing place for the Norse poets to be saying what they do: for Sigvatr to be declaring that ‘Cnut soon killed the sons of Ethelred or drove out every one’ (*Ok senn sonu / sló, hvern ok þó, / Aðalráðs, eða / út flæmði, Knútr*);<sup>60</sup> for Óttarr to be reminding the king that ‘Lord of the Jutes, you struck the race of Edgar on that expedition’ (*ætt drapt, Jóta dróttinn, / Játgeirs í för þeiri*);<sup>61</sup> for Hallvarðr to be describing him as ‘the Freyr of the noise of weapons’ or ‘the tree of the Midgard serpent’s path’ (*jalm-Freyr ... malma, bör ... / ... holmfjöturs leiðar*).<sup>62</sup> The precincts of the royal palace are a remarkable location for Sigvatr and Óttarr to be celebrating Cnut’s triumph over named West Saxon kings, the skyline of the monastic complex an unlikely backdrop for Hallvarðr’s mythological kennings. For those who have ears to hear, this is a radically different image of King Cnut: in praise-poetry like this, context is an essential part of meaning.

Naturally, therefore, the question of audience arises: to whom are these poems speaking in such a culturally-charged environment? Roberta Frank suggests that Cnut’s poets were directing their message ‘to one identifiable group at court’ - namely, of course, the king’s Danish followers.<sup>63</sup> Localising the poems to Winchester, the presence of such a group is indicated by the archaeological and anthroponymical evidence cited earlier, and one may justifiably employ here the contested term ‘housecarls’. From the work of Nicholas Hooper it has become clear that the housecarls should not, unlike the *liðsmenn*, be conceived of as some kind of bodyguard or standing army, but rather as Cnut’s aristocratic followers and courtiers,<sup>64</sup> and Hooper observes that ‘[i]f a prince was to maintain fitting dignity and keep around him a retinue he would have to provide food and lodging, entertainment and, by this time, a monetary stipend’:<sup>65</sup> one may therefore suggest that the *Knútsdrápur* should be ranked among the entertainments for Cnut’s Danish followers at court. Names can be put to some of these followers, as can be readily seen from Simon Keynes’ prosopographical survey of Scandinavians who attest Cnut’s

---

<sup>60</sup> Sigvatr, *Knútsdrápa* 2.1-4 (*Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 232). For the reality behind this phrase see Simon Keynes, ‘The Æthelings in Normandy’, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 13 (1991), 173-205: 174.

<sup>61</sup> Óttarr, *Knútsdrápa* 3.5-6 (*Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 273).

<sup>62</sup> Hallvarðr, *Knútsdrápa* 6.6, 4.1-2 (*Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, IB, 294).

<sup>63</sup> Frank, ‘King Cnut in the verse of his skalds’, 110.

<sup>64</sup> Nicholas Hooper, ‘The Housecarls in England in the Eleventh Century’, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 7 (1985), 161-76; Hooper, ‘Military developments in the reign of Cnut’; see also Campbell, ‘Some Agents and Agencies of the late Anglo-Saxon State’, 203-4.

<sup>65</sup> Hooper, ‘The Housecarls in England’, 170-1.

charters;<sup>66</sup> and one may also note the four benefactors entered into the New Minster *Liber Vitae* who each receive the label *Danus*, apparently indicating the perception of a distinctive group at the court in Winchester.<sup>67</sup>

In Cnut's Winchester one should therefore predicate a thriving Scandinavian culture at the higher levels of court society, and this includes verbal culture: the *Knútsdrápur* clearly indicate that the Old Norse language continued to be spoken at Cnut's court, and Old Norse literary traditions to be highly prized, while the writing of Old Norse is demonstrated by the runic inscription cited earlier; however, that none of the manuscript documents from Cnut's reign is in Old Norse is not significant, as there is no evidence that Old Norse was ever written in the Roman alphabet in Viking Age England, and one must therefore imagine the co-existence of written English (and Latin) and spoken Norse (and English).<sup>68</sup> M.K. Lawson suggests that the law-codes I and II Cnut 'were perhaps read out by Wulfstan at a Christmas court at Winchester';<sup>69</sup> in such a society, in which two vernaculars were being spoken, and literary works in those two vernaculars being recited, one may reasonably postulate a variety of different audiences, correlating, in some degree, with different court-groupings. The question of the possible intelligibility of skaldic verse to monolingual Anglo-Saxons is an old imponderable,<sup>70</sup> but even here one may propose a scale of difficulty: Hallvarðr's *Knútsdrápa*, for example, is especially dense in terms of language and allusions,<sup>71</sup> but Sigvatr's verse is much less intractable, and Russell Poole has even suggested with regard to Óttarr's *Knútsdrápa* that '[t]he relative simplicity of the style may indicate a special effort toward intelligibility in a mixed English-Scandinavian milieu'.<sup>72</sup> If this is so, then the poem's stance and subject would seem to presuppose that any such English audience must have aligned their interests with the Danish perspective of the conquerors.

For the chronology proposed earlier is significant here, in that most of the *Knútsdrápur* are from the latter half of Cnut's reign: except for *Liðsmannaflokkur* and *Eiríksdrápa*, they indicate that skalds came seeking

<sup>66</sup> Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', 54-66.

<sup>67</sup> *Liber Vitae: Register and Martyrology of New Minster and Hyde Abbey Winchester*, ed. Walter de Gray Birch, Hampshire Record Society (London, 1892), 55 (nos. xlvii-1); *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster*, ed. Keynes, 40, 94.

<sup>68</sup> See Matthew Townend, 'Viking Age England as a Bilingual Society', in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. D.M. Hadley and J.D. Richards, Studies in the Early Middle Ages (Turnhout, forthcoming).

<sup>69</sup> Lawson, 'Archbishop Wulfstan and the homiletic element', 161.

<sup>70</sup> See Matthew Townend, 'Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England', *The Review of English Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>71</sup> See Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', 119-23, who writes of its 'decidedly *ancien régime* iconography' (119).

<sup>72</sup> Russell Poole, 'Óttarr svarti', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York, 1993), 459-60: 459.

Cnut's court after Holy River and the Norway expedition, and could expect a profitable reception when they arrived. In other words, these poems would seem to indicate that on Cnut's part there was no jettisoning of Norse traditions - whether suddenly or gradually - as his reign in England progressed: on the contrary, Cnut's reputation in the Scandinavian world as a patron of Norse culture appears to have been at its height in the late 1020s. The earliness (or otherwise) of the *Knútsdrápur* is therefore not the issue here, as it would be if one were primarily interested in the poems as historical sources: Alistair Campbell, for instance, had no very high opinion of Óttarr's *Knútsdrápa* as a source since it probably dates from some ten years after the Anglo-Danish wars it describes and may be dependent in some of its details on earlier skaldic verse;<sup>73</sup> but if one is concerned, as here, with tracing the continuing literary culture of Cnut's court, then it becomes extremely interesting to see what forms the telling of those wars had assumed at Cnut's court a decade later, and what stories about the gaining of the throne the conqueror was pleased to hear. Much modern historiography on Cnut's reign stresses the care with which an Anglo-Danish *rapprochement* was achieved: it is therefore salutary to note that Óttarr's *Knútsdrápa* is instead concerned with celebrating the Danish military triumph over the English, even ten years after the accession.

Another strand in recent historiography on Cnut emphasises the degree to which the king assumed an English persona, and the rapidity with which he did so: this is especially apparent in his dealings with the church, in which his conspicuous acts of pious patronage earned the famous praise from Fulbert of Chartres that '[Y]ou, whom we had heard to be a pagan prince, we now know to be not only a Christian, but also a most generous donor to churches and God's servants'.<sup>74</sup> So, for instance, Lawson notes that '[i]n matters of religion he was largely obliged to play an English game, with English men, and by English rules',<sup>75</sup> and Susan Ridyard has suggested that in his dedication to the cult of St Edith, Cnut appears as 'almost more West Saxon than the West Saxons'.<sup>76</sup> T.A. Heslop has sought to explain the increase in the number of sumptuous illustrated manuscripts in eleventh-century England by attributing their production to the patronage of Cnut and Emma.<sup>77</sup> In the light of such an

<sup>73</sup> Campbell, *Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History*, 12-14.

<sup>74</sup> *The Letters and Poems of Fulbert of Chartres*, ed. and trans. Frederick Behrends, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1976), 66-9 (te quem paganorum principem audieramus, non modo Christianum, uerum etiam erga ecclesias atque Dei seruos benignissimum largitorem agnoscimus). For Cnut's relations with the church see Lawson, Cnut, 117-60.

<sup>75</sup> Lawson, Cnut, 130.

<sup>76</sup> Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th series 9 (Cambridge, 1988), 195.

<sup>77</sup> T.A. Heslop, 'The production of *de luxe* manuscripts and the patronage of King Cnut and Queen Emma', *Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (1990), 151-95; however, for important reservations see Gameson, *The Role of Art in the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, 258-9.

ecclesiastical emphasis, the *Knútsdrápur* therefore constitute an invaluable re-assertion of the continuing ‘Norseness’ of Cnut’s court, and of the continuing importance to Cnut of his Scandinavian inheritance: as praise-poems they can ‘imply much about the ways in which [Cnut] wanted to be seen’,<sup>78</sup> and this was as the gold-giving warrior-king, proud of his Danish origins and by no means metamorphosing into an honorary Englishman. This sense of the continuing importance to Cnut of his Scandinavian inheritance is of course observable in other ways: for example in the way in which Cnut does not choose to give his children English names - which would have been an obvious gesture of *rapprochement* - but rather names his three sons Sveinn, Harald and Harthacnut, following in sequence the names of his father, grandfather and (probably) great-grandfather.<sup>79</sup> But it is the *Knútsdrápur* that provide the fullest and clearest evidence for this alternative image of a Scandinavian Cnut. It is not that the image of the ‘English Cnut’ is incorrect - clearly it is not - but simply that such a portrait is partial, and privileges one perspective on Cnut’s reign over other possible views. It is therefore interesting to return again to the chronology of the *Knútsdrápur*, and to note that the supreme images of both the Scandinavian and English Cnuts co-exist exactly in time and space: the Norse poems derive from Winchester in the late 1020s or early 1030s, and the frontispiece to the New Minster *Liber Vitae* was produced in Winchester in 1031.<sup>80</sup>

To conclude: in this paper I have not endeavoured to give a close reading or stylistic analysis of the *Knútsdrápur*, not least on account of the excellence of Roberta Frank’s 1994 undertaking to that effect;<sup>81</sup> and nor have I attempted to probe them for historical information, as has been done for some of the poems in Russell Poole’s invaluable studies.<sup>82</sup> Rather, I have attempted to recover something of the immediate physical context in which these poems were originally delivered, and to sketch out some of the ways in which context and meaning are inseparable in an emphatically social type of literature such as praise-poetry. It is worth closing, therefore, with the observation that the *Knútsdrápur* are remarkable, even unique, in the degree to which one can specify the circumstances of production and reception. For these poems can be dated to particular phases in the reign of the king, and some of them to a particular year or two; they can be localised not just to a region or place, but perhaps even (for the Winchester poems) to a particular, locatable building,

<sup>78</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 75; see also 130, 221-2.

<sup>79</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 114-15; Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 86-7, 233. That Cnut’s great-grandfather Gorm was also called Harthacnut is stated by Adam of Bremen (Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum: Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, 3rd edn (Hanover, 1917), 56).

<sup>80</sup> For the date of the *Liber Vitae* see *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster*, ed. Keynes, 37-8.

<sup>81</sup> Frank, ‘King Cnut in the verse of his skalds’.

<sup>82</sup> Poole, ‘Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History’; Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*.

surrounded by other identifiable and well-recorded buildings; they can be attributed to named poets, for some of whom we have biographical information and by nearly all of whom we have other works; and their genesis can, of course, be ascribed to a particular patron, whose court-followers can be postulated as the wider audience for the poems' oral delivery.

There is more or less no other vernacular poetry from Anglo-Saxon England - and certainly no other corpus of poetry - that can be contextualised as well as this; and this, as I have tried to suggest, is fortuitously for a type of poetry that is deeply dependent on original context for generating its meaning, and for which we must attend to context if we are to re-capture its effects. The *Knútsdrápur* might thus arguably be ranked amongst the most important of poetic remains from Anglo-Saxon England, and so I would conclude by asserting that these Old Norse poems from Cnut's court are just as much a part of Anglo-Saxon England's literary history as, say, Latin works composed at the time - though one may look in vain for them in the standard handbooks of Anglo-Saxon literature.

## Saga as a myth: the family sagas and social reality in 13<sup>th</sup>-century Iceland

Torfi H. Tulinius

University of Reykjavík

In the second volume of *Prolonged Echoes*, Margaret Clunies Ross's penetrating and important study of myth in Old Norse society of the Middle Ages, she argues that the sagas are a special genre within European medieval literature. She also argues that all of the sagas constitute one single genre, albeit with sub-genres, rather than the sagas being constituted of several distinct genres as we have been accustomed to viewing them (Clunies Ross 1998, 50-51). I agree with what I believe to be her major arguments in favor of this idea, i.e. that all types of sagas (legendary sagas, king's sagas, family sagas or sagas of Icelanders, contemporary sagas) have respective positions within a shared historical continuum and that all of them are to different extents multi-modal, i.e. blend different modes of narration, mainly fantastic and more realist modes (Clunies Ross 1998, 100-102). However, I think it is more useful to consider the sagas as belonging to different genres rather than a single one, and that these different genres interact in what could be called a literary system. If this is not done, what I believe to be the specificity of the family sagas does not become sufficiently clear.

In the following paper I will attempt to describe this literary system as it is organised on the basis of five principles: genealogy, geography, religion, relation to the supernatural and social status of the protagonists. I will then examine a certain number of family sagas as they fall into this system. This will reveal what I believe to be a specific trait of these sagas distinguishing them from others: their predilection for what I have called ontological uncertainty, i.e. the uncertain religious, supernatural and social status of their protagonists.

I will then relate this to what was going on in Icelandic society in the first half of the 13th century, which is when family sagas seem to have appeared. This is a period when the dominant group in society seems to be recomposing itself. On the one hand, a hitherto more or less homogeneous chieftain class is dividing itself into a class of overlords dominating the others: on the other hand, church officials, until then a part of this homogeneous dominant class, define themselves increasingly as a separate group with its own identity, inducing the remaining chieftain class to define itself as laymen. It is my contention that this social redefinition is the main drive behind the appearance of the family sagas, and that they express the uncertainty that necessarily accompanies such a redefinition.

The following ideas are also presented in my contribution to *Old Norse Literature and Society* (ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, forthcoming).

## I. A literary system

Genres are an important element in the communication between authors and readers, since the generic markers tell the reader into what kind of world he is being led and — in consequence — how he is to interpret the work (Todorov 1970, p. 12). The notion of “world” is important in this context and has been elaborated upon by several theoreticians of literature (Eco 1979; Pavel 1986). Each genre evolves in a different “possible” (Eco) or “fictional” (Pavel) world. As soon as the reader commences reading, he more or less unconsciously interprets the generic signs which tell him in what kind of world he is and thus what to expect. For example, if he is reading a *fornaldarsaga* he will expect to find supernaturally strong characters evolving in a world of wonders, whereas if he is reading a historical account, as in *Sturlunga saga*, he will expect people like him evolving in the same world as his own.

These are only two of the infinite number of possible worlds, but as can be seen, the notion is intimately related to that of genre and can throw light on how genres interact in what could be called a literary system, and which can in many ways be compared to a language. In the same way as in the latter, the difference between its elements — phonemes or words — signifies: in a system of synchronic genres the differences between them can also engender meaning, when there is any kind of interaction between them. This interaction can be of different types: narrative structures originating in one of the genres can be

adapted to the world of another, there can be a coexistence of different worlds within the same work and there can be intertextual allusions within one genre to the world of others. We have already seen an example of the first type in how the principal plot of *Laxdæla saga* seems to have been borrowed from heroic legend, making the characters and their destiny slightly “larger than life”. Chapter 5 of the family saga *Bjarnar saga Híttdælakappa* gives us an example of the second, when, during his travels abroad, Björn encounters a dragon which he kills with one blow of his sword. This shows what a hero he is and puts his subsequent not so glorious life in Iceland into strange perspective. An example of the third can be found in the contemporary saga *Íslendinga saga*, when one of Snorri Sturluson’s men compares him to Hrólfr *kraki* in a verse, implicitly drawing a comparison between the legendary king who was betrayed by his son-in-law and Snorri, whose men were complimenting him on how powerful his own sons-in law were (*Sturlunga saga*, p. 305).

An interesting feature of these three genres is that they are genealogically ordered and that many thirteenth-century Icelanders claimed descent from characters in the two other saga groups (Clunies Ross 1993, p. 382). Despite this fact, the world of the *fornaldarsögur* is not the same as the world of family sagas which in turn is not the same as that of the contemporary sagas.<sup>1</sup>

The worlds of these three genres are, however, not the only ones in the literary system. There are several others, among whom the world of romance, which began to be known at the latest in the third decade of the thirteenth century via the translation of *Tristrams saga* in 1226. Here the genealogical ordering does not apply. Instead, a kind of geographical organisation can be perceived. Despite structural and thematic similarities between the romantic *fornaldarsögur* (the adventure tales, sometimes called *lygisögur*) and romances, there seems to be have been an awareness that the worlds of these two genres were not quite the same, and that different things happened there to different characters. *Samsons saga fagra* is a romantic saga from the fourteenth century which reveals in an interesting way this awareness, because the author plays on the difference between the *matière de Bretagne*, which provides the setting for the main story, and the Matter of the North, which provides very different themes and situations for a trip undertaken to the North by one of its main characters (Torfi H. Tulinius 1990, p. 147-48).

Still other textual worlds were part of the literary system, those of pagan mythology as well as of hagiography and Scripture, these last two being of considerable importance, since narrative structures were borrowed from saint’s lives and allusions could be made to biblical stories or themes. Icelandic authors

---

<sup>1</sup> See Edwards and Pálsson 1971, p. 8-13 for an attempt to classify Icelandic medieval literature on the basis of Northrop Frye’s principles. The difference between their approach and the one attempted here is that theirs is based on the nature of the hero, rather than that of the world in which he evolves.

and readers would have been particularly prepared for intertextual play between different textual worlds, because part of their poetic heritage, skaldic poetry, was based on just such interplay, mainly between the world of the skald and that of Norse mythology, but also that of Christian thought and symbolism (Clunies Ross 1987, p. 93; Torfi H. Tulinius 1995, p. 204-09).

For several decades scholars have been accustomed to using Sigurður Nordal's chronological division of the corpus of prose narrative literature into *samtidssagaer*, *fortidssagaer* and *oldtidssagaer* (Sigurður Nordal 1953, p. 181). Taking into account this interplay between the different genres, I believe the saga corpus could be described in a more dynamic way as a generic system organised by five principles. As will be seen, the first two, genealogy and geography, are spatio-temporal and therefore quite concrete, whereas the three remaining principles are less tangible: religion, the supernatural and social status.

The genealogical principle results from the chieftain class's endeavour to ground its identity in the past. It is implicitly a chronological one like Nordal's since genealogy is a way of structuring time, but it is through genealogy that the passing of time is perceived rather than a more chronological time-reckoning such as ours. The geographical principle separates *fornaldarsögur* from romances, i.e. the Matter of the North from the other *matières*, but also kings' sagas from family sagas, their respective geographical locations being Norway or Denmark for the former and Iceland for the latter. A combination of the genealogical and geographical underlies the usual classification of sagas into *samtíðarsögur*, *biskupasögur*, *konungasögur*, *Íslendingasögur*, *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*.

## II. Ontological uncertainty

The third organising principle is religious, the world of pagan myth on the one hand, Christian stories of conversion, saints and miracles on the other. *Fornaldarsögur* and myths happen in a heathen world, *vitae* of saints, bishops and missionary kings in a Christian one. Heathenism is absent from the world of the contemporary sagas except through accounts of dreams and intertextual allusions in poetry. However, the world of the kings' sagas and the family sagas is interesting because it represents a transition from one of these worlds to the other, from paganism to Christianity.

The religious principle highlights the "in-between"-ness of these two groups of sagas. They take place in a transitory period between paganism and Christianity and they are constantly, often discreetly though, being opposed in the texts. From a literary point of view, this is particularly interesting in the case of the family sagas. The fact that their textual world is a world in transition results in what could be called an ontological uncertainty about the characters they portray. Some remain pagan all their lives but can be what Lars Lönnroth

has called “noble heathens” (Lönnroth 1969), i.e. someone who has a natural understanding of Christianity without having been exposed to the Gospel. Some characters are obviously not and would not have been seen in a positive light by thirteenth-century Icelanders. Other pagans are converted, but in a more or less ambiguous way. The case of Egill Skalla-Grímsson is very interesting from this point of view, because he is not quite a convert and not quite a heathen either, having been prime-signed and his earthly remains taken from a pagan burial mound and moved to hallowed ground after the Conversion (Torfi H. Tulinius 1997). Hallfreður is a convert but has many relapses and is only redeemed by the mutual bond between him and King Ólafur Tryggvason (Kalinke 1997). While Njáll and Þorsteinn Egilsson can be seen as unambiguous converts to Christianity, a figure such as Guðrún Ósvífursdóttir is interesting because she is portrayed as a convert who learns to feel deep contrition for her past sins.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the life of Grettir Ásmundsson, though only a child when Iceland was converted to Christianity, takes place in an ambiguous transitory period where, as is said in the saga itself, “many vestiges of heathendom remained” (*Grettis saga*, p. 245).<sup>3</sup>

The nature of Grettir’s world is therefore not quite that of the author of the saga, which brings us to the fourth organising principle of the literary system: the representation of the supernatural. There is a distinct difference between the way the supernatural appears in *fornaldarsögur* on the one hand and contemporary sagas on the other. The latter are historical chronicles and it is rare to read about anything outside of the realm of the natural. This does not mean that thirteenth-century Icelanders had the same attitude to the supernatural as our contemporaries (Bayerschmidt 1965, p. 39-53). Medieval Christianity certainly allowed for the intervention of the supernatural in human affairs, divine or diabolical, and there were also many surviving beliefs from pagan times which people probably did not know whether to classify under the former or latter category (Torfi H. Tulinius 1999). When the supernatural intervenes in the contemporary sagas, however, it is usually in the form of dreams or visions, and its direct impact on human affairs is very rare.

In the *fornaldarsögur*, on the contrary, direct contact with the supernatural is the rule. The same applies to the world of the adventure tales, whether they are *riddarasögur* and exploit the matters of the South or younger *fornaldarsögur* building on that of the North. Despite the differences between the two, the supernatural seems to be handled in the same way. In the world of

<sup>2</sup> That is the sense of the Herdís Bolladóttir’s dream near the end of the saga (*Laxdæla saga*, p. 224). The bones of the *völva* who comes to visit her are burned by Guðrún’s tears. As Bjarni Guðnason has elucidated in an as yet unpublished work, this confirms that they are signs of true contrition, holy and therefore active against pagan remains.

<sup>3</sup> “En þó at kristni væri á landinu, þá vǫru þó margir gneistar heiðninnar eptir.” The English version is taken from Bernard Scudder’s translation (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders II*, p. 168).

religious texts, the supernatural also intervenes freely. Here, however, a distinction must be made, because in these texts its presence is characterised as either divine or diabolical, while in the pagan world of the *fornaldarsögur*, these categories seem rarely to apply.

This distinction must, however, be qualified for the *vitae* of more recent saints, whose miracles were considered a proof of their holiness. Here, the supernatural is in general less spectacular and treated in a more circumspect way. This is probably due to the fact that the cult of the saints had economical and political dividends. Everybody wanted his saint and the Church had to institute a system of verification in which accounts of the life and miracles of the proposed saints were investigated (Geary 1983). This fostered a debate in medieval society — not on whether miracles happened, which no one seems to have doubted, but on whether individual accounts were true or not.

This questioning may have been encouraged by political uses of “proofs” of sanctity current in Norway and Iceland in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century (Foote 1974). It can be seen in a dialogue between Sighvatur Sturluson and Arnór Tumason reported in *Íslendinga saga*. Arnór tells his brother-in-law that he had been sick all winter until he was asked to take part in the battle in which they were engaged, at which moment his illness suddenly disappeared. In an implicit mockery of their opponents, Bishop Guðmundur’s men who were convinced of his ability to work miracles, Sighvatur asks whether he believes this to be a miracle. Arnór answers: “I call this an event and not a miracle” (*Sturlunga saga* 1988, p. 261; Foote 1974, p. 43-44).<sup>4</sup> This same attitude can also be seen in the way King Sverrir (d. 1202), in one of his speeches, ridicules the archbishop’s promise to King Magnús’s men that those who would fall in the battle against Sverrir would immediately enter Paradise (*Sverris saga*, p. 42-3; Foote 1974, p. 38-41).

In their representation of the supernatural, the family sagas again seem to occupy an intermediate position in the generic system. The fact that the sagas take place in historical time and in places their authors knew seems often to have inhibited them from allowing such events in their stories, even though they are more frequent than in contemporary sagas and there are distinct differences in this between individual sagas. But there remains a reluctance to describe direct contact with the supernatural.

An example of this attitude is the account of Þórólfur *bægifótr*’s haunting in *Eyrbyggja saga*. He is never shown actively pursuing his victims. We are only shown the effect of his activity and the fact that his remains have become hideous to look at (*Eyrbyggja saga*, p. 94-5). The literary result of this reluctance to describe direct contact is that the accounts become more compelling than in the *fornaldarsögur*. Blanks are left for the imagination to fill in, like in a modern horror film. This technique is mastered to perfection in the

---

<sup>4</sup> “Slíkt kalla eg atburð en ekki jartegn.”

chapters on Glámur in *Grettis saga*, whose author was obviously inspired by the tale of Þórólfur bægifótr. He likewise delays describing direct contact with Glámur, increasing progressively the tension by showing what the ghost can do to men and animals, until Grettir is alone with him, making this one of the most genuinely hair-raising episodes in the family sagas (Torfi H. Tulinius 1999).

*Eyrbyggja* and *Grettla* contain more than an average amount of supernatural material. Elsewhere this element can be more discreet but still has to be accounted for. *Hrafnkels saga* may be one of those with the least interest in such things. However, one should consider more carefully the mysterious disappearance of the flock of sheep and the subsequent tempting of young Einar by the only horse he wasn't allowed to ride. Indeed, Freyfaxi holds unnaturally still while all the other horses, who usually are very tame, can't be caught. There is a definite suggestion that there might be some thing out of the ordinary going on — possibly related to the pagan god the horse is consecrated to (*Hrafnkels saga*, p. 101-03).

In the same way as for the religious principle, the supernatural is used to show ontological uncertainty. This trait can be seen in the way Glámur is portrayed in *Grettis saga*. The author willingly creates a hesitation in his reader's mind about the nature of his haunting of *Forsæludalur*. Is he a ghost, originating in pagan times, like the *vættir* he was killed fighting, or is he diabolical? This, in turn, leads to doubt about the status of Grettir himself (Torfi H. Tulinius 1999). Just as enigmatic though less overtly involving the supernatural is the description of Skalla-Grímur's death in chapter 58 of *Egils saga*. The upright position of the body and the way Egill avoids looking his dead father in the eyes while taking him out of the house through a hole in the wall, strongly suggests he is trying to prevent his returning as a ghost. This aspect must be taken into account when interpreting the saga (Torfi H. Tulinius 1999).

### III. Social ambiguity

This ontological uncertainty in the family sagas can be extended to other fields, the most interesting one being that of social status, the fifth principle organising the literary system. Characters in legendary fiction, be it those of *fornaldarsögur*, chivalrous tales or even hagiography, are ideal figures who are representatives of a certain social status which transpires in how they look or what they do. A good example of this is Áslaug in *Ragnars saga* who becomes a ravishing beauty despite her step-mother's efforts to make her ugly. On the other end of the spectrum, the people who are portrayed in the contemporary sagas are also determined by their social status, even when they are not ideal representatives of their class. The family sagas seem, however, rather to focus on changing or unclear social status of the characters. *Hrafnkels saga* is an example among many, being the story of its eponymous hero's fall from his

position of *goði* of Hrafnkelsdalur and his reclaiming of it. *Gísla saga* is another, the main hero losing his status of free farmer to become a tracked outlaw. *Egils saga* is of particular interest here because it deals in so many respects with degraded or threatened social status: the regional kings of Norway who must submit to Harald Fine-Hair, the sons of Hildiríður who do not receive what they consider their rightful inheritance, Egill himself whose claims to wealth and status are threatened by Berg-Önundur's allegations that his wife Ásgerður is illegitimate, Þorsteinn Egilsson's dealings with Steinar Sjóónason whose ultimate goal was to supplant his neighbour's position as chieftain of their area. In many of these cases the rightful positions of the respective protagonists are unclear.

A case of ambiguous social status is that of Ólafur Höskuldsson in *Laxdæla saga*. He is the son of a slave-girl, as his future wife arrogantly remarks when she is courted (*Laxdæla saga*, p. 63). He should therefore be considered inferior to his brothers and his children inferior to his nephews. In fact, because of Ólafur's qualities and the love his father has bestowed upon him after learning of his mother's royal origins, things are more or less the other way around and this creates tensions within the family.

An example of loss of social status through loss of respect is that of Ólafur's half-sister Hallgerður in *Njáls saga*. She is a chieftain's daughter and jealous of her position in society, as can be seen in the episode when she and Bergþóra argue about the respective seating of Hallgerður and Bergþóra's daughter-in-law (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 91). The theft of the cheese and her betrayal of her husband Gunnar among other actions, gradually lead to her losing the consideration of her equals, as can be seen in Skarphéðinn's remark to her later in the saga: "Your words don't count, for you're either a cast-off hag or a whore" (p. 228).<sup>5</sup> Her life has proved the ambiguity her uncle saw in her as a child when he asked Höskuldur from where thief-eyes had come into their family (p. 7).

If the genealogical principle organising the literary system of medieval Iceland places the family sagas in a central position situated between the distant and highly stylised past and the present in all its complexity and opacity, the following three: religion, the supernatural and social status, bring to light their intermediary status. Indeed, they are set in a period when heathen times, as they are represented with their cluster of themes which belong to the "Matter of the North", meet the new era of Christianity, and when the supernatural, often of same origin, intrudes into a world almost identical to that of the authors and audience of the sagas. This creates a hesitation about the ontological status of what is portrayed which seems also to apply to the social position of the protagonists.

---

<sup>5</sup> "Ekki munu mega orð þín, því at þú ert annathvært hornkerling eða púta." The english version is taken from Robert Cook's translation (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* III, p. 109).

We can now take another look at the principle of geographical organisation according to which the family sagas are not intermediary but are placed on one of the extremities of the scale, nearest to their authors and audience: home. Indeed, they are about the ancestors of leading Icelandic families and must therefore have something to do with who they are. It is very tempting to link this uncertainty about identities in the family sagas with some kind of ambiguity, questioning or doubt concerning the identity of the social class which seems to have created them: the leading families of early thirteenth century Iceland.

Indeed, when we look at a variety of sources, we see evidence that the identity of this ruling class was being questioned, especially in Norway. A significant example is the taunting of Páll Sæmundarson in Bergen in 1216 (*Sturlunga saga*, p. 254-5). He was the eldest son of the leading family in Iceland at the time, the Oddaverjar, a family which prided itself on links with the Skjöldung dynasty and of close family ties with the Norwegian royal house, since Páll's great-grandmother was said to be a daughter of King Magnús Barefoot. When Páll arrived in Bergen, the merchants there made fun of him, pretending to believe that he was going to make a claim to the Norwegian throne. Implicit in their mockery is doubt concerning the truth of the Oddaverjar's nobility, since Páll is allusively being compared to a number of royal pretenders of questionable birth who arrived from countries across the sea to Norway in the twelfth century. Among these was king Sverrir himself, grandfather to the then reigning king, Hákon Hákonarson.

Another sign of this questioning can be found in the historical synopsis of Norwegian history, *Historia Norwegiae*, which probably dates from the same period (Santini 1993). It is manifestly Norwegian and gives a different account of the settlement of Iceland from Icelandic sources: the first settlers had to flee Norway because they had committed murder (*Historia Norwegiae*, p. 92-3).<sup>6</sup> What appears to be a response to this is to be found in the version of *Landnámabók* attributed to Styrmir Kárason (ca. 1170-1245) and thought to date from the same period (*Landnámabók*, p. civ). In its epilogue it gives as reason for composing such a work the necessity to answer foreigners who call Icelanders descendants of criminals and slaves (*Landnámabók*, p. cii-ciii).<sup>7</sup> Whether or not these two texts and the Bergen incident are directly linked, they bear witness to a debate about the origins of the Icelandic aristocracy in the first decades of the thirteenth century, the exact period literary fiction is flowering.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "ob reatus homicidiorum patriam fugentes"

<sup>7</sup> "at vér séim komnir af þrælum ok illmennum"

<sup>8</sup> In a recent article Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (1995, p. 50) discusses the origin of this supposed epilogue to Styrmir's version of *Landnámabók* and comes to the conclusion that it is more likely to be from the seventeenth century because of flimsy manuscript evidence and similar statements in *Crymogæa* by Arngrímur Jónsson (1568-1648). She therefore believes this epilogue to be more consistent with seventeenth-century attitudes she describes in the article than what can be known

It may be that doubts about the legitimacy of the aristocracy's claim to supremacy were also shared by Icelanders themselves. *Sturlunga saga* tells us that in 1255 farmers in Eyjafjörður and Skagafjörður said, when asked to accept Þorvarður Þórarinnsson and Þorgils skarði as *höfðingjar* or overlords of their districts, that it would be best to have none at all (*Sturlunga saga*, p. 706-07).<sup>9</sup> This might not mean that they doubted the legitimacy of the two's identities but it does imply a doubt about the *höfðingjar*'s usefulness as a class.

It would not come as a surprise to find that the complexification of Icelandic society from the mid-twelfth century onwards, when aristocrats with pretensions to overlordship lifted themselves above the ranks of a former class of *goðar*, created friction within society. In a recent thesis Orri Vésteinsson has shown that bishop Þorlákur in the late twelfth century and bishop Guðmundur in the early thirteenth were both members by birth of the ruling class but were marginalised by poverty in the case of Þorlákur and illegitimacy in Guðmundur's (Orri Vésteinsson 1996, p. 254-58). It is tempting to consider the two bishops' respective attacks on the aristocracy's authority in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries as having not only been motivated by Church policy but also by their own backgrounds. As powerless members of the ruling class, they had grudges against those who wielded power. Whether this explanation is correct or not, Vésteinsson convincingly shows that by the last third of the thirteenth century, the Icelandic higher clergy had established a separate identity, distinct from that of the lay aristocracy it had been part of since the beginnings of Christianity in the country (Orri Vésteinsson 1996, p. 260-91).

Vésteinsson's thesis also shows that while some of the former *goðar* families disappeared during the period in which *höfðingjar* flourish, others maintained local authority and rose to influence again after the weakening of the aristocratic families in the conflicts of the Sturlung age (Orri Vésteinsson 1996, p. 304). This class shared ancestry and a similar culture with the *höfðingjar* and had more or less the same values and ideas about itself. It did not, however, have the family links to royalty most of the latter claimed to have and which were a key aspect of aristocratic identity. Indeed, both the Oddaverjar and the Haukdælir were blood-relations of the Norwegian kings. I suspect that Sturla Sighvatsson's marriage to Solveig Sæmundardóttir of the Oddaverjar family was important in making him eligible for becoming *jarl* of Iceland. This seems to have been a condition of the deal he struck with king Hákon if he managed to bring the country under Norwegian rule (*Hákonar saga*, p. 91).

---

of medieval attitudes. She does not however seem to make the connection with *Historia Norwegiae*.

<sup>9</sup> See also the debate about how to interpret this refusal between Gunnar Karlsson (1972 and 1980) and Helgi Þorláksson (1979 and 1982).

Though more research has to be done, it does seem that there were a number of social factors in medieval Iceland which could question the identity of the families in power in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. This scepticism would also have fostered a critical attitude towards — or at least doubt about — the tales of the past which established this identity. It is therefore interesting to consider the remarks of the author of *Porgils saga og Hafliða* in the often cited description of literary entertainment at the wedding feast at Reykjahólar. It is said that the stories of Hrómundur Gripsson were called *lygisögur* (fictional tales) by King Sverrir but however people claimed descent from this hero of ancient times (*Sturlunga saga*, p. 22).<sup>10</sup> Though *Porgils saga* is now thought to date from after 1237 (Brown 1952, p. xxix), this split attitude about the truth of the “Matter of the North” seems somewhat older. It is tempting to connect such ambiguity with the changes going on in Icelandic society during the whole period. What comes out of this is that the development of fiction in Iceland seems to accompany the slow disintegration of a social model based on an ideological construct which is being questioned.

#### IV. Conclusion: fiction and uncertainty

Uncertain ontological status is perhaps a common feature of sophisticated fiction in the Western tradition. Chrétien’s romances have been read as the expression of an identity crisis of the chivalry in the second half of the twelfth century (Köhler 1956). The fictions of Cervantes in early seventeenth-century Spain show an interest in ambiguities of social position and the gap between ideological representations and reality. Nineteenth century French novels, from Balzac to Proust, deal with the instability of the social order after the Revolution and the uncertainty of identities after the downfall of the *ancien régime* and the rise of a bourgeois industrial society. The most important novels of our century are grounded on metaphysical doubt which affects not only individual identities but also the nature of perception, memory and even the coherence of the self. It could be said that the evolution of narrative fiction has accompanied that of Western humankind’s perception of itself and the world, from a mythical-religious world-view necessarily founded on some metaphysical truth to an open and scientific attitude which has learned to live with ontological uncertainty.

It is therefore interesting to note that the rise of fiction in early thirteenth-century Iceland seems intimately linked to a crisis of the identity which had been established by the historiographers of the preceding century, an identity in many ways built on an image of the distant past constructed with the “Matter of the North”. As its treatment became more elaborate and thus more fictional, two

---

<sup>10</sup> “En þessari sögu var skemmt Sverri konungi og kallaði hann slíkar lygisögur skemmtilegar. Og þó kunna menn að telja ættir sínar til Hrómundar Gripssonar.”

genres appeared more or less simultaneously. The *fornaldarsögur* are set in a mythical prehistorical world where ideal figures play out the fears and preoccupations of thirteenth-century Icelanders. The family sagas take place in the same physical world as theirs but during the Conversion period two centuries before the appearance of the genre, an age of transition and shifting identities in which authors and audience seem to have believed their social world originated. The characters represented are religiously, socially and morally ambiguous, which is what makes them so interesting as creatures of fiction. An example of this are the main characters of *Egils saga*, perhaps the first major family saga. As settlers they founded Icelandic medieval society but they also had blood-ties with Norwegian nobility, with whom they had shared roots in the pagan past. They are ambiguous for they belong to two different worlds, the one of the saga's audience and the one of the "Matter of the North".

The interest in the ambiguities of identity might be the reason for the international success of the family sagas over the last century and a half. With them we are already in the world of the novel, because saga society is much like ours: a stratified yet mobile society where identities are unstable and where there is an ongoing struggle between individuals climbing the social ladder. Such a premature development of novelistic discourse is due to an unusual historical situation: political instability in Norway during most of the twelfth century allowed the ruling class of Iceland to use medieval humanism to forge its own identity as an independent aristocracy through the constitution of genealogies and historiography. The strengthening of the royal state, however, attracted the Icelandic aristocracy into the king's orbit, provoking competition for status. This new situation acted as a revelator of tensions within the upper layers of society and led to a symptomatic questioning of the ideological foundations of the social system. This questioning is at the heart of the genre which is closest to the identity of authors and audience of saga literature: the family sagas.

If sagas are myth in the sense that they are the product of a particular group of humans' need to make sense of who they are and what is going on around them, they are also history because they try to find this meaning within a Christian world-view based on a linear conception of time. The type of society that produced myths such as the family sagas would thus have been a medieval Christian society. However, this society was experiencing rapid change as well as doubt about its identity and of those who lived and had lived in it. That is why it also needed a special type of myth, myth which involved itself with the uncertainty of identities. I believe that this type of myth can also be called the novel, and that among the different types of sagas, only the family sagas are myths in the same way novels are.

## References:

### Texts

- Brennu-Njáls saga* (1954) ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslensk fornrit XII, Reykjavík.  
*Eyrbyggja saga* (1935) ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, Íslensk fornrit IV, Reykjavík.  
*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* (1829-30) ed. by Carl Christian Rafn, Copenhagen.  
*Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (1977) ed. by Marina Mundt, Norske Kjeldeskriftfondet, Oslo.  
*Historia Norwegiae* (1880) *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae*, ed. by Gustav Storm, Kristiania.  
*Hrafnkels saga* (1950) in *Austfirðinga sögur* ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Íslensk fornrit XI, Reykjavík.  
*Laxdæla saga* (1934) ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslensk fornrit III, Reykjavík.  
*Sturlunga saga* I-II (1988) ritstj. Örnólfur Thorsson et al., Reykjavík.  
*Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4E* (1981 [1920]) ed. by G. Indrebø, Oslo.

### Secondary literature

- Andersson, Theodore M. (1967) *The Icelandic Family Saga. An Analytic Reading*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass.  
 Auden, W. H. (1968) "The World of the Sagas", *Secondary Worlds*, London, p. 49-84.  
 Bayerschmidt, Carl F. (1965) "The Element of the Supernatural in the Sagas of Icelanders", *Scandinavian Studies. Essays Presented to Dr. Henry Goddard Leach on the Occasion of His Eighty-fifth Birthday*, ed. by Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Erik J. Friis, University of Washington Press, Seattle, p. 39-53.  
 Bjarni Guðnason (1969) "Gerðir og ritþróun Ragnars sögu loðbrókar", *Einarsbók. Afmæliskeðja til Einars Ól. Sveinssonar 12. des. 1969*, Reykjavík, p. 28-37.  
 Brown, Ursula (1952) "Introduction", *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. i-lxii.  
 Clover, Carol J. (1986) "Völsunga saga and the Missing Lai of Marie de France", *Sagnaskemmtun. Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*, Wien, p. 79-84.  
 Clunies Ross, Margaret (1987) *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's 'ars poetica' and medieval theories of language*, Odense.  
 Clunies Ross, Margaret (1993) "The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organization in Early Iceland", *Journal of English and German Philology*, Vol. 92 no. 3, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, p. 372-85.  
 Clunies Ross, Margaret (1998) *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse myths in medieval Northern society. Vol. 2: The receptions of Norse myths in medieval Iceland*. Odense University Press. Viking Collection 10.  
 DUBY, Georges (1961) "La noblesse dans la France médiévale", *Revue historique*, 226, Paris, p. 1-22.  
 DUBY, Georges (1967) "Remarques sur la littérature généalogique en France aux XIe et XIIe siècles", *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 1967*, Klincksieck, Paris, p. 335-45.  
 DUBY, Georges (1968) "Les origines de la chevalerie", *Ordinamenti militari in Occidente nell'alto medioevo*, Presso La Sede des Centro, Spoleto, p. 739-61.  
 DUBY, Georges and Mandrou, Robert (1968) *Histoire de la civilisation française*, Armand Colin, Paris.  
 Eco, Umberto (1979) *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.  
 Finch, R. G. (1993) "Völsunga saga", *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia* Garland, New York & London, p. 711.  
 Foote, Peter G. (1974) "Secular attitudes in early Iceland", *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 7. 1974, Odense University Press, Odense, p. 31-44.  
 Geary, Patrick (1983) "Canonization", *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 3, Scribner's, New York, p. 67-69.  
 Gottzmann, Carola L. (1979) "Völsunga saga. Legendary history and textual analysis", *Papers of the Fourth International Saga Conference. München*, p. 1-18.

- Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir (1995) "Fornar menntir í Hítardal. Eilítið um íslenska tignarmenn og ættartölurit á 17. öld", *Ný Saga* 7. Reykjavík, p. 43-52.
- Gunnar Karlsson (1972) "Goðar og bændur", *Saga* X, Reykjavík, p. 5-57.
- Gunnar Karlsson (1980) "Völd og auður á 13. öld", *Saga* XVIII, Reykjavík, p. 5-30.
- Helgi Þorláksson (1979) "Stórbændur gegn goðum. Hugleiðingar um goðavald, konungsvald og sjálfræðishug bænda um miðbik 13. aldar", *Söguslóðir. Afmælisrit helgað Ólafi Hanssyni*, Reykjavík, p. 227-50.
- Helgi Þorláksson (1982) "Stéttir, auður og völd á 12.. og 13. öld", *Saga* XX, Reykjavík, p. 63-113.
- Hermann Pálsson (1985) "Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda", *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 5, Scribner's, New York, p. 137-43.
- Hermann Pálsson and Edwards, Paul (1971) *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland*, *Studia Islandica* 30, Menningarsjóður, Reykjavík.
- Kalinke, Marianne E. (1997) "Stæri ek brag: Protest and Subordination in Hallfreðar saga", *Skáldskaparmál* 4, Reykjavík, p. 50-68.
- Köhler, Erich (1956) *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der hofischen Epik. Studien zur Form der fruhen Artus- und Graldichtung*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie 97, Niemeyer, Tübingen.
- Leach, Henry Goddard (1921) *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.).
- Lönroth, Lars (1969) "The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas", *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 41 no. 1, p. 1-29.
- Orri Vésteinsson (1996) *The Christianisation of Iceland. Priests, Power and Social Change 1000-1300*, Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D. in History of the University of London 17 May 1996, University College London.
- Pavel, Thomas G. (1986) *Fictional Worlds*, Cambridge, Mass. and London.
- Santini, Carlo (1993) "Historia Norwegiae", *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, Garland, New York and London, p. 284-5.
- Sigurður Nordal (1953) *Sagalitteraturen*. [Nordisk Kultur VIII:B. Litteraturhistorie. Norge og Island], Stockholm, Oslo, København, p. 180-274.
- Todorov, Tzvetan (1970) *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.
- Torfi H. Tulinius (1990) "Landafraði og flokkun fornsagna", *Skáldskaparmál* 1, Reykjavík, p. 142-56.
- Torfi H. Tulinius (1993) "Kynjasögur úr fortíð og framandi löndum", *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* II, Mál og menning, Reykjavík, p. 165-245.
- Torfi H. Tulinius (1995) *La "Matière du Nord". Sagas légendaires et fiction dans la littérature islandaise en prose du XIIIe siècle*, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne.
- Torfi H. Tulinius (1997) "Le statut théologique d'Egill Skalla-Grímsson", *Hugr. Mélanges d'histoire, de littérature et de mythologie offerts à Régis Boyer pour son soixante-cinquième anniversaire*, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, p. 279-88.
- Torfi H. Tulinius (1998) "Merveilleux et violence contre les femmes dans les sagas islandaises", *Revue des langues romanes* t. CIII (n° 1).
- Torfi H. Tulinius (1999) "Framliðnir feður. Um forneskju og frásagnarlist í Eyrbyggju, Eglu og Grettlu", *Heiðin minni. Greinar um fornar bókmenntir*, ed. by Baldur Hafstað and Haraldur Bessason, Heimskringla, Mál og menning, Reykjavík, forthcoming.
- Zumthor, Paul (1972) *Essai de poétique médiévale*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.

A Toponymic Aspect of the Euhemeristic  
Concept. Comments on Snorri's Interpretation of  
Asgarðr, Miðgarðr and Útgarðr in the *Prose  
Edda* and *Ynglingasaga*

Fedor Uspenskij

Institute for Slavonic Studies

The Scandinavian names of European towns were usually formed with the help of Old Norse *borg* “town”, e.g. *Rómaborg*. As opposed to these, some Eastern European places were characterized by the component *garðr*, literally “country estate” (*Holmgarðr*, *Miklagarðr*, *Kænugarðr*). The same component was also used to denote abodes of gods as in *Ásgarðr*, *Miðgarðr* and *Útgarðr* as large towns, which is contrary to the meaning of *garðr*. This may reflect Snorri Sturluson's intention to localize mythological places somewhere in the East. We attempt to demonstrate how Snorri models the mythological toponyms after the names of some East European localities in Old Norse.

## Mythic Elements in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*: Prolonged Echoes and Mythological Overlays

Lars van Wezel

Germanic Languages and Literatures, Urbana, IL

Most earlier scholars discussing *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*<sup>1</sup> focus on the cultural climate of the thirteenth century, when the saga is thought to have been written, in order to place the text in a specific context. The legitimacy of this approach need not be doubted. What does need to be questioned, however, is which aspects of thirteenth-century Icelandic culture one chooses to address and emphasize. Hermann Pálsson, for instance, looks primarily at the Christian side of the culture. The outcome of his approach is well-known: *Hrafnkels saga* is a *dæmisaga* based on Christian ethics and morals, a view that after a period of increasing criticism has lost a great deal of its initial convincing force. A political interpretation of *Hrafnkels saga* seems to be more satisfying and

---

<sup>1</sup> For quotations from the text, given between square brackets, see “Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða,” *Austfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson. Íslensk fornrit 11 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska Fornritafélag, 1950) 95-133.

successful, although it is difficult to establish a general *consensus*.

A critical assessment of all the prevailing theories will not be essayed in the present paper. It cannot be claimed that the Christian interpretation is fundamentally ‘wrong,’ nor that the political one is ‘correct,’ or *vice versa*. What can be claimed, though, is that to focus on one particular aspect of the cultural context limits the possibilities of interpreting *Hrafnkels saga* and is bound to result in a one-sided and, therefore, questionable conclusion. In this respect, it should be mentioned that Theodore Andersson is able to offer one of the more satisfying interpretations so far, by taking both the Christian and the political side of medieval Icelandic culture into account.<sup>2</sup> In the present essay emphasis will be placed on an aspect of thirteenth-century culture that, in the discussion of *Hrafnkels saga*, has not been taken into consideration at great length, namely the one that relates to mythology. Admittedly, this is a one-sided approach as well, but in order to embark upon a long journey, a first step needs to be taken. In the course of the present paper, a combined political-mythological approach will be offered based on Andersson’s contribution. It needs to be emphasized that this is merely one of the many ways to come to terms with *Hrafnkels saga*, and moreover not the most complete and comprehensive one; such an enterprise cannot be endeavored within the scope of a single, short presentation. It is to be hoped, though, that this contribution opens new doors and initiates a further discussion.

A number of earlier studies of *Hrafnkels saga* deal with mythology. These studies, however, mainly focus on isolated elements related to Freyr, and mostly on the authenticity of these elements, such as Hrafnkell’s nickname *Freysgoði*, and the part Freyfaxi plays within the cult of Freyr.<sup>3</sup> Up to the present day, no study has offered a summarizing overview of the considerable number of mythic elements in the saga.<sup>4</sup> Before turning to the meaning these elements can evoke and their function, based on the findings of, among others, Clunies Ross,<sup>5</sup> that will be discussed below, the mythic climate in *Hrafnkels saga* needs to be described, for which it is necessary to review and combine earlier research results.

Georgia Kelchner poses the hypothesis that the man appearing in Hallfreðr’s dream [97] is Freyr. However, since in *Landnámabók* the dream is dreamt by Hrafnkell himself, but his relationship to Freyr is not mentioned, she

---

<sup>2</sup> Theodore M. Andersson, “Ethics and Politics in *Hrafnkels saga*,” *Scandinavian Studies* 60 (1988): 291-309.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John Lindow, *Scandinavian Mythology. An Annotated Bibliography* (New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1988) entries 838, 1468, and 2150.

<sup>4</sup> For the term ‘mythic elements,’ see John Lindow, “*Íslendingabók* and Myth,” *Scandinavian Studies* 69 (1997): 454-64.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse myths in medieval Northern Society*. Volume 1: *The Myths*, Viking Collection 7 (Odense: Odense UP, 1994), and Volume 2: *The reception of Norse myths in medieval Iceland*, Viking Collection (Odense: Odense UP, 1998).

concludes that it is not possible to identify the dream man as Freyr.<sup>6</sup> Marco Scovazzi, though, strongly argues that the man indeed is Freyr, albeit not explicitly stated in both *Landnámabók* and *Hrafnkels saga*.<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Hofmann and Óskar Halldórsson have argued that the fact that *Landnámabók* was written down before *Hrafnkels saga* does not necessarily prove that *Landnámabók* offers the better version of the accounts of Hrafnkell and his family.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Kelchner's argument and conclusion can be questioned. In the present essay, it can be claimed that the dream does not become "interessanter, weil Hallfreðr statt Hrafnkell ihn träumt" (Hofmann 22). It suffices to state that the dream itself is a mythic element with a possible reference to Freyr, which will be discussed below in a larger context.

Directly after the dream, a landslide takes place in which two animals are killed [97-98].<sup>9</sup> In all the extant manuscripts of *Hrafnkels saga* and *Landnámabók*, the animals are identified; therefore, Finn Hansen assumes an underlying intention, namely "en sammenkobling mellem sagaens første kapitel og den øvrige text...."<sup>10</sup> Problematic, however, seem to be the different names given in the accounts of the landslide. *Landnámabók* offers the most logical alternative, *göltr ok griðungr*, since both animals are associated with Freyr.<sup>11</sup> The manuscripts of *Hrafnkels saga* give two versions: *göltr ok hafr*, and *geit ok hafr*.<sup>12</sup> The discrepancies between the manuscripts of *Hrafnkels saga*, however, need not trouble us.<sup>13</sup> Hansen's further remarks and final conclusion are worth mentioning: in the landslide-passage the words *týndusk* and *gripir* are used in relation to the two animals. Freyfaxi is also called *gripir* [100, 123], and when the Þjóstarssynir throw the horse of a cliff, *týna* is used [124], hence:

<sup>6</sup> Georgia Dunham Kelchner, *Dreams in Old Norse Literature and Their Affinities in Folklore* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1935) 33.

<sup>7</sup> Marco Scovazzi, *La Saga di Hrafnkell e il problema della saghe islandesi* (Arona: Editrice Libreria Paideia, 1960) 11.

<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Hofmann, "Hrafnkels und Hallfreðs Traum: Zur Verwendung mündlicher Tradition in der Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða," *skandinavistik* 6 (1976): 19-36; cf. Óskar Halldórsson, *Uppruni og þema í Hrafnkels sögu*, *Rannsóknastofnum í bókmenntafræði við Háskóla Íslands*, Fræðirit 3 (Reykjavík: Íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1976) eps. 70-71.

<sup>9</sup> Worth mentioning is a parallel in *Víga-Glúms saga*; Glúmr, formerly devoted to Freyr, but at the present time to Óðinn, has - after having killed Sigmundur on the sacred land Vitazgjafi - a dream in which an aggravated Freyr appears. Later in *Víga-Glúms saga*, a landslide destroys his farm. For Glúmr's relationship with Freyr and Óðinn, cf. Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe* (London/New York: Routledge, 1993), 103.

<sup>10</sup> Finn Hansen, "Hrafnkels saga: del og helhed," *Scripta Islandica* 32 (1981): 23-29, 25.

<sup>11</sup> See Hansen 27, with references to Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970) I: 370, and II: 189. It should be mentioned, though, that Scovazzi was the first one to notice this allusion: "e' noto che i due animali, di cui parla la *Landnámabók*, il cinghiale e il bue, sono sacri ai *Vani*: bastere' ricordare il cinghiale *Gullinbursti*, caro a *Freyr*..." (13).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Hansen for manuscript-references.

<sup>13</sup> See Hansen 27-28.

Freyr's *indirekte repræsentation* i 1. kapitel er endvidere negativ ved dyrenes ødelæggelse. Heri ligger et fremadpegende vink mot sagaens videre forløb, at der vil komme et eller andet om den negative relation, der består mellem denne gud og de(n) involverende, i sagaen parallelt udtrykt ved, at et tredje dyr (hingsten Freyfaxi) også dræbes. (28, my italics).

according to Hansen a “mytologisk allusionsteknik” (28). His interpretation of this mythic element will be discussed below.

In 1992 Preben Meulengracht Sørensen discussed a number of Freyr-related mythic elements in four *Íslendingasögur*: *Gísla saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*, and *Hrafnkels saga*.<sup>14</sup> In this study he did not discuss *Hrafnkels saga* at great length,<sup>15</sup> but the conclusions based on an investigation of the other sagas, especially *Vatnsdæla saga*, can be applied to it, which will be made clear below.

Based on Meulengracht Sørensen's conclusion concerning *Vatnsdæla saga*, it is possible to claim that also the *landnám* in *Hrafnkels saga* is “divinatorisch vorherbestimmt” (Meulengracht Sørensen 728): the dream-man urges Hrafnkell's father to move away and to cross the Lagarfljótr because of his *heill* [97].<sup>16</sup> The landslide causing the death of the two animals indicates that Hrafnkell and his family do not belong in Geitdalr.<sup>17</sup> When Hrafnkell rides out looking for a place to found his own farm, it is said that Jökulsdalr was *albyggðr* [98]. However, when he proceeds, Hrafnkell suddenly enters an *eyðidalr* that is *byggiligri en aðrir dalir* [98].<sup>18</sup> After Hrafnkell has built Aðalból, he marries Oddbjörg, who gives him two sons bearing mythic names: Þórir and Ásbjörn [98].<sup>19</sup> Immediately thereafter, *þá efldi hann blót mikill*, and

<sup>14</sup> Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, “Freyr in den Isländersagas,” *Germanische Religionsgeschichte. Quellen und Quellenprobleme*, ed. Heinrich Beck et alii (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992) 720-735.

<sup>15</sup> Meulengracht Sørensen, “Freyr in den Isländersagas” 728: “Die Zeit erlaubt es nicht, daß ich näher auf die Verwendung des Freyr-Motivs in den folgenden Kapiteln der Saga [= *Hrafnkels saga*] eingehe.”

<sup>16</sup> Pointed out by Meulengracht Sørensen, without further elaborating a parallel with *Vatnsdæla saga*. Cf. *Vatnsdæla saga*, where Ingimundr in Norway receives a *hlutr* with Freyr's image on it. This *hlutr* disappears mysteriously, but re-emerges when Ingimundr is looking for a place to stay in Iceland; Ingimundr's emigration receives a religious meaning that is emphasized with “Ausdrücke, die mit „Schicksal“ wiedergegeben werden können... .” (Meulengracht Sørensen 722). Cf. for a discussion of *heill*, Hans Hartmann, ‘*Heil' und Heilig' im nordischen Altertum* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1943); *heill* (adj.) means “vom Schicksal begünstigt, glücklich” (6). *Heill* (subst.) means “Wirkung der Schicksalsmacht” (62). Cf. also: “Als ganz besonders wichtig erkennen wir, daß in dem Wort „heill“, ... , ein durchaus aktiver, energiegeladener, fast magischer Sinn liegt.” (6-7). Marco Scovazzi had already pointed out the importance of *heill* in *Hrafnkels saga* (11-12).

<sup>17</sup> Briefly pointed out by Meulengracht Sørensen, but not further elaborated.

<sup>18</sup> Not pointed out by Meulengracht Sørensen, but cf. his discussion of *Vatnsdæla saga* (723).

<sup>19</sup> Not pointed out by Meulengracht Sørensen, but cf. *Vatnsdæla saga*, where Ingimundr's wife gives birth to a girl named Þórdís as soon as they have reached the designated place to live (Meulengracht Sørensen 723).

he has built a *hof mikit*. It is said then that *Hrafnkell elskaði annat goð meir en Frey*, and that he gave the god the half of his most precious possessions [98]: he consecrates the land to which Freyr, perhaps through Hallfreðr, has (implicitly) directed him. Although not explicitly stated, it is clear that Hrafnkell's *landnám* fits the pattern that Meulengracht Sørensen has been able to detect in *Vatnsdæla saga*, and that he believes to represent a topos traditionally linked to the practices of Freyr-worshippers; this will be further discussed below. Equally implicit, but no less clear, is Hrafnkell's sanctifying land for himself.<sup>20</sup>

For the moment being, it needs to be stressed that the *landnám*-pattern connected to Freyr does not surface as explicitly in *Hrafnkels saga* as it does in *Vatnsdæla saga*. In fact, the *landnám* fits a larger, traditional mythic pattern, but this, too, is not explicitly stated: the phrase *at helga sér land* is not used.

After the *landnám*, it is said that Hrafnkell *gaf Frey, vin sínum, þann hest [= Freyfaxi] hálfan* [100]. This makes Freyfaxi a mythic element. Aslak Liestøl placed the horse in a larger (Indo-Germanic) context.<sup>21</sup> Within the scope of the present essay, Freyfaxi's historical reliability need not be established. It is more useful to point out, that because of the important part the horse plays in Hrafnkels saga - without Freyfaxi the story would not have been able to develop as it does -, it is reasonable to assume "that there was an oral tradition about him" (Halldórsson, 71). Besides that, Hrafnkell is not the only *Freysgoði* who had a relationship to a (Frey)faxi.<sup>22</sup> It might very well be that 'Freyfaxi' was a traditional element in a larger Freyr-pattern Meulengracht Sørensen discerned that will be discussed below. In *Hrafnkels saga*, however, this element is more dominant, in all likelihood due to the local oral traditions assumed by Knut Liestøl and Halldórsson.

Significant is the description of Hrafnkell and his situation after Sámr has driven him away from Aðalból: he buys a small farmstead in an area not well suited for farming, but it is said that after only half a year *nálíga væri tvau höfuð á hverju kvikindi* [122]. This phrase appears almost verbatim in *Vatnsdæla saga* concerning Ingimundr's pigs that had disappeared during the previous summer (Meulengracht Sørensen 724). The phrase also occurs in *Víga-Glúms saga*, when the land Vitazgjafi is described (see footnote 9): the land itself is dedicated to Freyr, to whom the name Vitazgjafi refers (Meulengracht Sørensen 730).<sup>23</sup> In other words, it can indeed be seen, daß

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Clunies Ross 1988, 149: "The act of claiming for oneself while declaring that one had some form of supernatural backing for it was expressed in Icelandic by the idiom *at helga sér land*, 'to sanctify land for oneself', that is, to appropriate land for oneself by resort to supernatural. Those settlers who are represented as believing in pagan gods are said to have dedicated their lands to a specific deity." Scovazzi had already pointed out the concept of *at helga sér land* in combination with *heill* (11-12).

<sup>21</sup> Aslak Liestøl, "Freyfaxi," *Maal og Minne* (1945): 59-66.

<sup>22</sup> See Edgar C. Polomé, "Freyr," *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. Heinrich Beck et alii, vol 9 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995) cols 587-594, col 589-590.

<sup>23</sup> Meulengracht Sørensen does not point out this parallel between *Hrafnkels saga* and *Víga-*

Hrafnkels Erfolg nach der Vertreibung ... mit den Symbolen des Frey-kultes beschrieben wird” (Meulengracht Sørensen 728).<sup>24</sup> Hrafnkell’s person gets a mythic dimension with Freyr, the god of rebirth and regeneration, as a model; Hrafnkell experiences a rebirth, and his presence has a positive influence on the surrounding area. This can be derived from the saga text, although it is not explicitly stated. Noteworthy is that the mythic description of Hrafnkell’s rebirth comes before his statement, *[e]k hygg þat hégóma at trúa á goð* [124].

At the end of the saga, Hrafnkell is buried in a *haugr* [133]. True, this need not be more than an example of “the author’s antiquarianism” (Pálsson 1971 18), but it is no less true that *haugar* were associated with Freyr, and that they were typical for those, “who, in pagan time, are specially close to the god Freyr and share his power to produce rich crops and ensure the fertility of beast and soil ....” (Clunies Ross 1998 37).

All the elements discussed above relate to Freyr, which need not surprise us, since this god is explicitly mentioned in the saga. Two elements in *Hrafnkels saga*, however, might refer implicitly to Óðinn, namely Hrafnkell’s hanging and Þorkell’s character, which will be dealt with first.

While discussing a mythic model in *Bandamanna saga*, John Lindow remarks in passing that Þorkell in *Hrafnkels saga* resembles Óðinn: “... his cloak is described and we learn what he has in hand and a few tantalizing details of his appearance.”<sup>25</sup> With regard to appearance, however, this similarity is rather doubtful; Þorkell’s cloak is *laufgrænn* [111], whereas Óðinn’s is ominously *blár*; Þorkell has *búit sverð í hendi* [111], but the attribute typical for Óðinn is the spear, to which I shall return below; When Óðinn enters the human world, he usually wears a large hat, hereby concealing his identity.<sup>26</sup> Compared to this, Þorkell’s appearance can be called extravagant.

Lindow is more convincing when he points out the similarity in (literary) function between Þorkell and Óðinn: both appear suddenly and unexpectedly when their help is needed (253). It can be added, that both are *einhléypingar*, wandering homeless men.<sup>27</sup> Lindow compares Ófeigr, one of the protagonists in *Bandamanna saga*, with Óðinn (and Loki):<sup>28</sup> “... the spellbinding quality of ... speech, the sowing of discontent among kinsmen - these are important

---

*Gláms saga*.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. also Polomé, “Freyr” col 587.

<sup>25</sup> John Lindow, “A Mythic Model in *Bandamanna saga* and Its Significance,” *Sagas of the Icelanders. A Book of Essays*, ed. John Tucker (New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1989) 241-256, 253 [originally in *Michigan Germanic Studies* 3 (1977): 1-12].

<sup>26</sup> For Óðinn’s characteristics, see Rudolf Simek, *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1995) 302-303.

<sup>27</sup> Cf., with regard to Óðinn, Lotte Motz, *The King, The Champion and The Sorcerer. A Study in Germanic Myth* (Wien, 1996) 85-86 [III.2.2.7 The Visitor and Wanderer].

<sup>28</sup> Lindow looks at Loki as a hypostasis of Óðinn, cf. also: “... the duality of the Óðinn-Loki model need not trouble us, since the relationship between the gods was a close one and, indeed, Óðinn shares certain aspects of the trickster.” (254).

characteristics of Óðinn's which Ófeigr uses to his advantage." (254). The same can be said about Þorkell; his little *oratio* to convince his brother Þorgeirr to take up the law-suit [113-115] is a good example of "spellbinding quality of speech." Þorkell even deviates from the truth by saying that Hrafnkell has killed Einarr *saklausan* [114].<sup>29</sup> When he realizes his efforts remain without success, he threatens Þorgeirr to look for help somewhere else, hereby endangering his family relationship - "to his own advantage," namely to acquire fame and prestige, Þorkell is willing to "sow discontent among kinsmen."

Hanging is not an unusual motif in Old Norse literature; in the *Íslendingasögur* it occurs four times.<sup>30</sup> The hanging in *Hrafnkels saga*, however, is unique with regard to how Hrafnkell is hanged, namely upside-down. In *Hrafnkels saga* the hanging is described as a part of *féránsdómr*, which is, according to Kari Ellen Gade, unhistorical (179). It is remarkable to see that Hrafnkell is not mutilated for life, since Sámr and his men cut a hole in his ankles and pull a rope through it [120]. Hrafnkell's hanging has puzzled many a scholar. One of the more challenging views is offered by Dietrich Hofmann, who believes it is "ein Stück echter Tradition," and mentions the possibility of "eine Maßnahme von Óðinsverehrern."<sup>31</sup> In passing he refers to an article by Jere Fleck, without further discussing it.<sup>32</sup> Fleck uses *Hrafnkels saga* as source material, but does not elaborate a possible link between Hrafnkell's and Óðinn's hanging. For the description of the mythic climate in *Hrafnkels saga*, the similarities on the surface need to be pointed out: both Óðinn and Hrafnkell are hanged upside-down, without the intention of being killed; both are severely wounded through piercing, and afterwards they experience a rebirth. A similarity in imagery can be established. A comparison on a deeper level of meaning will be addressed below.

Significant might be Hrafnkell's spear, a typical Odinic attribute,<sup>33</sup> which is mentioned twice, namely first directly after Hrafnkell's hanging [121], i.e., after his symbolic death, and secondly after his actual death as a grave-gift in his *haugr* [133]. Klaus von See pointed out the consciously and skillfully made, structural function of the spear, a part of "[d]ie Ausgewogenheit der dreiaktigen Komposition," that underlines the "Rückkehr zum status quo."<sup>34</sup> A meaning cannot be ascribed to the spear; Hrafnkell does not use it, for instance, to kill Eyvindr, which would have been an ironic statement, since the spear was the only weapon the Þjóstarssynir and Sámr allowed Hrafnkell to take with him. A

<sup>29</sup> For Hrafnkell's four (legitimate) reasons to kill Einarr, cf. Jan G. Johansen, "The Hero of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*," *Scandinavian Studies* 67 (1995): 265-286.

<sup>30</sup> Kari Ellen Gade, "Hanging in Northern Law and Literature," *Maal og Minne* (1985), 159-188.

<sup>31</sup> Hofmann 33 with references to earlier research.

<sup>32</sup> Jere Fleck, "Óðinn's Self-Sacrifice - A New Interpretation," *Scandinavian Studies* 43 (1971): 119-142 [I: The Ritual Inversion], 385-413 [II: The Ritual Landscape].

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Motz 73; Ellis Davidson 98.

<sup>34</sup> Klaus von See, "Die Hrafnkels saga als Kunstdichtung," *skandinavisk* 9 (1979): 47-56, 50.

mythic meaning will be taken into consideration below.

The summarizing overview of earlier research shows that the mythic climate in *Hrafnkels saga* is not limited to a superficial description of a man who is said to be a *Freysgoði*. Both explicit and implicit mythic elements can be discerned, and it is clear that *Hrafnkels saga* belongs to those texts that have a potential to “utilise myths and mythic references in their larger discourse” (Clunies Ross 1998 11). Clunies Ross argues that “... a knowledge of the Old Norse mythic world and its workings was an expected cultural resource and point of reference for the original readers or audience of Old Icelandic literature and that without it one cannot fully understand the semiotics of these texts” (Clunies Ross 1998, 12). In other words, overlooking the mythic elements in *Hrafnkels saga* means losing one of the important possibilities for interpretation the saga itself might offer.

Mythic elements, however, do not necessarily have to be a part of the “text’s main action or plot,” and it should be pointed out that they “... operate on the medieval Icelandic audience ... at a level that was *not fully conscious* all of the time” (Clunies Ross, 1998 12-13; my italics). Mythic elements that traditionally had a prominent role in heathen society continue to exist in Christian Icelandic society, albeit not always equally prominently. It is possible that such elements have been used by thirteenth-century saga-authors in their narratives, either deliberately or unconsciously. These mythic elements will here be labeled “prolonged echoes.” Not taken into account by Clunies Ross, but no less significant, are Haraldur Bessason’s “mythological overlays.”<sup>35</sup> According to Bessason, the use of mythic signifiers can be seen as “a stylistic technique by which the authors of both *Konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur* could gradate their characters, i.e. elevate or lower their levels of performance according to the degree of emphasis they wished to achieve” (275).<sup>36</sup> The similarities between Clunies Ross’ and Bessason’s theories need not be underlined; it is more useful to point out a subtle, yet important, difference. “Prolonged echoes” are primarily cultural manifestations that, nevertheless, can find their way into literary narratives. “Mythological overlays,” however, are mythic elements whose occurrence is confined to a literary framework that exists as such, for instance, as or within an Eddic lay.

“Mythological overlays” could therefore be labeled as pure intertextuality, whereas “prolonged echoes” should be called a form of cultural intertextuality that not necessarily has to be a part of a narrative discourse that exists in

<sup>35</sup> Haraldur Bessason, “Mythological Overlays,” *Sjötú ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*, ed. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1977) I: 273-292.

<sup>36</sup> This calls to mind Clunies Ross *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse myths in medieval Northern Society*. Volume 2: *The reception of Norse myths in medieval Iceland* 25: “... those humans whose behaviour is most extreme in saga literature are often tagged as god-like by a variety of myth-based signifiers.”

writing, such as the mythic knowledge that is alluded to in scaldic stanzas, but that is not represented in, for example, the *Poetic Edda* or *Snorra Edda*. In other words, if we do not have a literary text at our disposal that might have been used as an example for a mythic element in an other (literary) text, the mythic element in question cannot be called a “mythological overlay.” A theoretical objection should be made: it is of course possible that a saga author has used a text that is no longer extant. Although it is difficult to make the distinction between a “prolonged echo” and a “mythological overlay,” it should nevertheless be endeavored, for as soon as it is possible to call a certain mythic element a “mythological overlay,” it can be assumed in all likelihood that the author in question consciously intended to make a statement or to embellish his narrative, which cannot be claimed in the case of a “prolonged echo.”

With regard to the Freyr-elements he investigated, Meulengracht Sørensen comes to the following conclusion:

Elemente von Mythen und Riten werden in den Erzählungen benutzt, die wir in den Isländersagas vorfinden; aber es ist eine Wiederverwendung in einem neuen historischen Kontext. In einigen Zusammenhängen sind die Mythos-Elemente organische Teile der historischen Erzählung geworden; aber in anderen Fällen ist der tradierte Mythos sozusagen „unverdaut“ mit aufgenommen. (735).

In other words: during the pagan time mythic narratives connected to rites, cults, and actual myths came into being.<sup>37</sup> In the course of time these narratives developed into historical-literary topoi that continued to exist even when the phenomena to which they were originally related disappeared from the cultural life. The extent to which these narratives surface in the *Íslendingasögur* varies. This can be seen from the *landnám*-accounts in *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Hrafnkels saga*: a similar pattern can be discerned in both sagas, but in *Hrafnkels saga* this pattern is not explicitly connected to Freyr.<sup>38</sup>

One thing that can be determined with certainty is the fact that compared to, for instance, *Vatnsdæla saga*, the Freyr-elements in *Hrafnkels saga* largely remain ‘undigested;’ in *Vatnsdæla saga* it is made clear that it is indeed Freyr who directs Ingimundr and his family to Iceland, and the birth of Þordís is regarded as a sign given by the god of fertility (Meulengracht Sørensen 723). This is not the case in *Hrafnkels saga*. In all likelihood, it can be assumed that the saga-author either used mythic elements belonging to an oral traditional Freyr-narrative, that he did not understand completely, and that therefore surface implicitly, or that he deliberately chose not to emphasize or elucidate

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Halldórsson 71: “It is known ... that ancient and obsolete religious customs tend to be forgotten unless they are linked with incidents that survive in narrative.” Cf. also Polomé, “Freyr” 589.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Meulengracht Sørensen (with regard to *Vatnsdæla saga*) 725: “Wenn man nun diese Züge, ... , zusammenfaßt, zeigt sich ein Bedeutungsmuster unterhalb der Sagaerzählung, ein Muster, das die Erzählung Punkt für Punkt auf Freyr und seine Verehrung bezieht.”

these elements. Less likely, but also possible to assume, is that the Freyr-elements disappeared to the background during the oral transmission of the stories about Hrafnkell, or that in the course of the copying history of the thirteenth-century saga these elements were (increasingly) neglected and left out. In any case, it is fairly legitimate to exclude the possibility that we are dealing with purely fictional thirteenth-century examples of antiquarian interests; if it had been the intention of the saga-author to create nothing more than just a literary image of the heathen past, he surely would have seized the opportunity to exploit the traditional material at hand and render it more explicitly.

The saga-author's literary and rhetorical skills have been discussed by scholars.<sup>39</sup> The author's ability to connect the landslide-passage with the killing of Freyfaxi in a subtle way, as Hansen showed, need not be doubted. His use of a mythic allusion, however, may seem somewhat surprising, since he either overlooked the elements of the traditional Freyr-narratives or chose not to render them explicitly. It should be pointed out, though, that this allusion is not likely to have been a part of the larger Freyr-narrative that Meulengracht Sørensen discerned in several sagas. It need not be regarded as contradictory and hence unlikely that an author who renders traditional mythic material in a fragmentary way, is able to consciously make a mythic reference - that is not related to the traditional material - at the same time.

Hansen gives an interpretation of the mythic allusion: he believes that it shows "at der vil komme et eller andet om *den negative relation*, der består mellem denne gud og de(n) involverede ..." (28; my italics). However, there is no mention of a negative relationship; on the contrary: Hrafnkell and his family are urged to move because of their *heill*; Hrafnkell himself finds a valley *byggiligri en aðrir dalir*, and after his expulsion by Sámr he still seems to enjoy Freyr's support. It can be argued that there is no evidence of all this in the saga. This is a valid argument. Explicitly, Freyr's goodwill towards Hrafnkell and his family is not mentioned, but it can be reasonably assumed based on the striking similarities between the mythic Freyr-elements in *Hrafnkels saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga*. Hansen's mythic allusion is in all likelihood nothing more than a structural subtlety that is not relevant to (the meaning of) the story. This should be kept in mind when discussing the Odinic elements in *Hrafnkels saga*.

For Þorkell's Odinic character, no underlying larger mythic discourse should be assumed. Lindow's plausible conclusion at the end of his discussion of *Bandamanna saga* is relevant for interpreting and understanding Þorkell too: "I ... suggest that the figure of Loki and Óðinn appealed to the narrator and

---

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Anne Saxon Slater, "From Rhetoric and Structure to Psychology in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*," *Scandinavian Studies* 40 (1968): 36-50, 36: "... highly developed sense of literary craft ...," Kathleen Dubs, "The Discourse of Persuasion in *Hrafnkatla*," *Scandinavian Studies* 49 (1977): 464-474, 456: "... means of subtle and skillful persuasion ...." See also von See, "Die Hrafnkels saga als Kunstdichtung."

audience of *Bandamanna saga* because of the deepseated psychological appeal of the trickster figure..." (256). Porkell's mythic appearance can be seen as a mythological overlay. His "level of performance" is elevated. Porkell's cunning nature cannot be compared in great detail to the elaborated and obvious trickster-nature of Ófeigr, but they both do have some Odinic characteristics in common, and it can be argued that these characteristics intensify Porkell's appearance and behavior too; it is an apt literary embellishment.

An attempt to prove Hrafnkell's hanging to be "ein Stück echter Tradition" is bound to remain fruitless, since a larger Odinic narrative does not emerge in the saga. The only vague indication of the Þjóstarssynir's Æsic affinities are their names,<sup>40</sup> which excludes the possibility of the hanging being "eine Maßnahme von Óðinn verehrern" (Hofmann 33; my italics).

Gade is surely right when she states that "[h]anging must have been an intended outrage and a symbol of ultimate degradation" (167). But Hrafnkell's hanging is unusual<sup>41</sup> and bears a mythic connotation; it is a potential "mythological overlay" that could have been recognized by the thirteenth-century audience familiar with, for example, *Hávamál* and *Gautreks saga*, where Víkarr's hanging up-side-down is part of a mock-Odinic rite. It is a potential "prolonged echo," when the idea behind Óðinn's hanging can be applied to Hrafnkell's. This needs to be established in order to consider Hrafnkell's hanging as a convincing mythic element.

Óðinn's "suffering is always linked with gaining or disclosing knowledge," and his "dangling from a tree ... allowed him to attain ... the growing of his person ..." (Motz; 75 and 82). The early Óðinn was a lesser deity who in the course of mythic time acquired a prominent position.<sup>42</sup> According to Fleck, "... it was through the self-sacrifice that Óðinn achieved his position of preëminence in the Germanic pantheon. To use Dumézil's terminology, Óðinn rises to power by virtue of the fact that he assumes responsibility for all three functions of the Indo-European trinity" (400). Hrafnkell starts as a ruler with religious power, designated by Freyr himself. After his hanging, his presence has a positive influence on the surrounding area, and since he has acquired social skills, he is to become an improved and even more powerful ruler.

Of course, it cannot and will not be claimed that it could have been Sámr and the Þjóstarssynir's intention to enable Hrafnkell to grow and become a better ruler. In the same vein, a detailed comparison between the development of Óðinn's life and character and that of Hrafnkell should not be undertaken; Hrafnkell is not Víga-Glúmr whose conversion to Óðinn is reflected in his

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Edgar C. Polomé, "Germanic Religion: An Overview," *Essays on Germanic Religion*, ed. Edgar C. Polomé, Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph 6 (Washington, 1989) 68-138, 105-106.

<sup>41</sup> It needs to be called to mind, that, in a historical context, hanging was primarily a punishment for theft and not for murder (Gade 162-164).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Motz 67-70 (with references to earlier research).

character, appearance, and behavior.<sup>43</sup> What can and will be taken into consideration, though, is the possibility that the saga-author has used the mythic image of Óðinn's hanging and its general underlying thought in order to underline and intensify an intention of his narrative, namely the intention of which Andersson offers an interpretation.

Andersson's starting-point is that "Hrafnkell is and remains the chieftain, while Sámr is by no means a right-minded alternative, but an imposter and something of a fool who needs to be put in his place" (301). Then, he argues, "that the saga author was participating in a general medieval dialogue on the limits of authority, one that oscillated between forceful expressions of divine right and an increasing emphasis on royal responsibilities" (302); *Hrafnkels saga* advocates the Christian doctrine "that even wicked kings should be obeyed" (303). Within the scope of the present essay, Andersson's view need not be discussed at length. Worth mentioning is that in the line of his interpretation Hrafnkell's hotly debated (change of) character need not be explained and justified: "Pride was, to be sure a moral flaw, but in the long run it could not justify the deposing of a king or even a chieftain. Moral failings were subject to political consideration and were not sufficient to disqualify legitimate power" (306).

During the thirteenth century the Icelanders were increasingly forced to start thinking about the implications of royal power, since the Norwegian kings made their presence felt (Andersson 304-305). In order to come to terms with the concept of kingship, they could not fall back on a continuous native tradition dealing with monarchs. The Icelanders were, however, familiar with their own 'monarchs,' the *goðar*, and with the impending Norwegian rule in mind, the legitimacy of their power could be put under discussion and, more importantly, it should be established, too. For this, the historical past could not offer any arguments. The mythic past, however, was able to draw to a link between the power of the *goðar* and that of the *god*.

The mythic past enabled the thirteenth-century Icelanders to provide their "noble-heathen" ancestors with a divine right with which their institution of power could be legitimized; the Icelanders could participate in the larger Scandinavian tendency to explore its mythic past, an effort of which for example Snorri's *Ynglinga saga* is an offspring.

Óðinn was a suitable point of reference, since he was the "Ancestor of Kings" (Motz 77). The thirteenth-century Icelanders can be expected to have been familiar with mythic stories about Óðinn that show the legitimacy of his status as ruler, for example, *Snorra Edda*, and *Hávamál*, and especially the

<sup>43</sup> Cf. footnote 9 above. Cf. also, for Glúmr's Odinic features, Ursula Dronke, "Sem jarlar forðum. The influence of *Rígsþula* on two saga-episodes," *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke et alii (Odense: Odense UP, 1981) 56-72, 57-64. Cf. also Polomé, "Freyr" col 593.

hanging scene and its connotation as pointed out by Fleck and Motz. If *Hrafnkels saga* was indeed intended to address the legitimacy of power, the possibility should be taken into consideration that Hrafnkell's hanging is an intended mythic element. Hrafnkell's spear could be considered as a structural device with a mythic connotation: it underlines the mythic allusion of the hanging, and as a part of his *regalia* at the end of the saga it affirms the legitimacy of Hrafnkell's leadership. It should be mentioned that Freyr is no less a ruler, albeit a different one, than Óðinn:

Óðinn represents the king in relation to his retainers, frequently landless men who follow in his wake. Freyr, himself the owner of a hereditary estate, represents the king in relation to the land, as he was seen by men of hereditary property. Freyr and Óðinn may have evolved in different social and possibly regional traditions which were blended, imperfectly, at some time in the Middle Ages. (Motz, 30)

The elements in the mythic narratives Meulengracht Sørensen showed to have existed all relate to Freyr as a fertility god. Since these Freyr-narratives are thought to have originated in connection with the actual ritual practices, it can be assumed that Freyr was indeed a god traditionally associated with fertility. In Iceland, his status as a ruler is therefore likely to reflect a later interpretation and extension of his divine responsibilities. This multifunctionality of Freyr deserves more attention.

If it has been the saga author's intention to address the legitimacy of power, it can be assumed that Freyr as a divine ruler appealed to him. In this respect Hrafnkell *Freysgoði* was a suitable character for exactly the story he wanted to tell. This raises an interesting question: did the saga author want to impose an idea on the stories about Hrafnkell that were orally transmitted and that he decided to write down, or did he start with an initial idea for which he then had to find the narrative frame and material most suitable to address this idea? This question is not likely to be answered in a conclusive way, and a discussion will not be initiated. Suffice it to say, that for the argument made in the present essay, the option that the saga author started with an idea first is appealing, since it might explain why the 'historical' account of Hrafnkell that contained (at least a residue of) traditional material relating to Freyr as a god of fertility, is as fragmentarily rendered as it is in *Hrafnkels saga*.

According to Lotte Motz, the notion of Freyr's role as a "king and ruler among gods and men" originated on the Scandinavian continent, where it in the course of time was emphasized (Motz 16, 22-32). It is possible that certain families devoted to Freyr brought this tradition to Iceland (Motz 24). For the discussion of *Hrafnkels saga*, however, is it more likely that in thirteenth-century Iceland Freyr became known as "The King as Giver of Peace and

Fertility” - with an emphasis on his status as a ruler<sup>44</sup> - due to the influence of texts such as *Snorra Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*, because of the fact that it conflicts with the traditional presentation of Freyr as a fertility god.

Since it is not possible to establish a literary connection between texts such as *Snorra Edda* on the one hand and *Hrafnkels saga* on the other, the mythic elements related to Freyr should be labelled as “prolonged echoes” rather than as “mythological overlays;” the thirteenth-century ‘mythological’ texts such as *Ynglinga saga* and *Snorra Edda*, are expressions of mythic ideas, and exactly these ideas, and not the texts as literary artifacts, might bear a specific relevance for the interpretation of the mythic elements in *Hrafnkels saga*; an author intended to discuss power and its legitimacy could very well have used mythic elements relevantly corresponding to these topics.

In summary, the following concluding remarks can be made. Meulengracht Sørensen’s findings indicate the existence of a mythic narrative discourse that, to some extent, is historically reliable. These findings combined with earlier results of, among others, Knut Liestøl and Halldórsson give reason to believe that *Hrafnkels saga* as it exists in the transmitted manuscripts was preceded by a historically more reliable account in which the mythic elements could have played a more prominent role and in which these in all likelihood were expressed more explicitly and coherently. A reconstruction of the ‘original’ fable is an exciting endeavor indeed, but because of its speculative nature, such an effort is not to be favored. It suffices to point out the plausibility of its existence.

With regard to the manuscripts of *Hrafnkels saga* that are actually attested, it can be concluded that the mythic elements in the earlier accounts of Hrafnkell have survived in a distorted and fragmentary way. One possible explanation is to assume that it has not been the author’s intention to render these accounts faithfully; it is possible that he did not ‘understand’ the mythic elements that were transmitted to him orally, but it is more likely to assume that his knowledge of Freyr was primarily derived from literary narratives – such as *Ynglinga saga* – that in their presentation emphasize the deity as a ruler and a “divine model of the king,” an idea appealingly suitable to utilise in the discourse of his own narrative. This specific knowledge obscured the older traditional representation of Freyr as a fertility god.

The Odinic reference of Hrafnkell’s hanging in combination with the mention of the spear is, admittedly, not overtly clear, but it can be discerned and it is possible to assign a thematic meaning and relevance to it, something which could have been noticed as well as appreciated by a contemporary audience.

In order to come to terms with texts such as *Hrafnkels saga*, as many aspects as possible of the culture that produced them should be taken into account. It is a positive and legitimate assumption that the contemporary

---

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Motz 29: “Freyr is not only a divine ancestor but also the divine model of the king.”

audience of *Hrafnkels saga*, familiar with all the aspects of their own culture, was able to experience the saga as a coherent and recognizable whole, offering a straightforward rather than an ambiguous message. It remains to be seen whether this can be achieved by a twenty-first century audience as well. A first step to include a mythological interpretation in the discussion of *Hrafnkels saga* has been taken; a first attempt to combine it with an already established one, has been made.

# Myth and Religion in the Poetry of a Reluctant Convert

Diana Whaley

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

## Introduction

Great exceptions - great expectations. As Wolfgang Lange pointed out, the Icelanders are the great exceptions (*die grosse Ausnahme*) to the rule that the Germanic peoples leave no direct accounts of their conversion to Christianity (1958, 13), and the uniqueness of their evidence gives it particular value. Among Icelandic skalds it is surely Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld who is most dramatically affected by the conversion. In a central scene in *Hallfreðar saga* ch. 6, which according to the saga chronology would be set c. 996, the hero conducts an antiphonal prosimetrum conversation with his new patron, the missionary king Óláfr Tryggvason. The skald's three *dróttkvætt* stanzas and two half-stanzas voice the difficulty with which he accepts the new religion, and are punctuated by prose comments from the king, who reacts at first with indignation, then with shades of grudging acceptance as the poet distances himself increasingly from the old gods. The verses (which I will refer to as the

Conversion verses) are, with one exception,<sup>1</sup> the only ones attributed to Hallfreðr that are squarely about religion. They are printed as Hallfreðr's *lausavísur* 6-10 in *Skjaldedigtning* (henceforth *Skj*),<sup>2</sup> and as vv. 9-13 in the Möðruvallabók ('M') version of *Hallfreðar saga*, and vv. 7-11 in the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ('O') version. The text reads as follows:<sup>3</sup>

9. Fyrr vas hitt,\* es harra  
Hliðskjalftar gat'k sjalfan  
– skipt es á gumna giptu –  
geðskjótan vel blóta.

It was different in former days, when \*v.l. Hitt vas fyrr  
I could worthily sacrifice to the mind-swift  
– there is change in the fortunes of men –  
Lord of Hliðskjölf [Óðinn] himself.

10. Qll hefr ætt til hylli  
Óðins skipat ljóðum  
(algildar man'k) aldar  
(iðjur várra niðja);  
en trauðr, því't vel Viðris  
vald hugnaðisk skaldi,  
legg'k á frumver Friggjar  
fjón, því't Kristi þjónum.

The whole race of men to win  
Óðinn's grace has wrought poems  
(I recall the exquisite  
works of my forebears);  
but with sorrow, for well did  
Viðrir's [Óðinn's] power please the poet,  
do I conceive hate for the first husband of  
Frigg [Óðinn], now I serve Christ.

11. Hœfum\*, hólða reifir,  
hrafnblóts goða nafni,  
þess's ól við lof lýða  
lóm, ór heiðnum dómi.

I am neutral, patron of heroes, \*vv.ll. hœfum, hœfum  
towards the name of the raven-rite's priest [Óðinn],  
of him who repaid men's praise  
with fraud, from heathen times.

12. Mér skyli Freyr ok Freyja  
– fjörð lét'k qðul\* Njarðar;  
gröm við Grímnir –  
gramr ok Þórr enn rammi.  
Krist vil'k allrar ástar  
– erum leið sonar reiði;  
vald á frægt und foldar  
feðr– einn ok goð kveðja.

Against me Freyr and Freyja  
– last year I abandoned Njörðr's offspring; \*mss adul, af  
dul  
let fiends ask mercy from Grímnir [Óðinn] –  
will bear fury, and the mighty Þórr.  
From Christ alone will I beg all love  
– hateful to me is the son's anger;  
he holds famous power under the  
father of earth– and from God.

13. Sá's með Sygna ræsi  
siðr, at blót eru kviðjuð;  
verðum flest at forðask  
fornhaldin skop norna.

It's the custom of the Sogn-men's  
sovereign [Óláfr] that sacrifices are banned;  
we must renounce many an  
anciently held decree of norms.

Láta allir ýta  
Óðins ætt\* fyr róða;  
verð'k ok\* neyddr frá Njarðar\*  
niðjum Krist at biðja.

All mankind casts Óðinn's  
clan to the ?winds;  
and I am forced to leave Njörðr's \*v.l.nu em'k; \*v.l. Freyju  
kin and pray to Christ.

<sup>1</sup> The 'last verse' of Hallfreðr, discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> *Skj* AI, 168-69, *Skj* BI, 158-59, also in *Skald* I, 86.

<sup>3</sup> Text and translation are based on an edition which I am currently preparing. Textual problems of particular significance for the religious and mythological content of the verses, and for the question of authenticity, are discussed below. References to other skaldic and eddic poetry follow the conventions of *LP*. Skaldic texts can be found in *Skj* and *Skald* and eddic in *Edda*, ed. Neckel and Kuhn. In order to save space, page references to *Skj* are only given for brief fragments, not for longer and better-known poems.

A closer glance at one of these verses, v. 12, will serve to introduce the group as a whole. There is a striking balance between the two *helmingar*, in terms of both layout and content. In each case line 1 and (all or most of) line 4 together constitute a single clause, into which are intercalated two independent clauses, one in each of lines 2 and 3. The first *helmingr*, meanwhile, refers to two father-and-son pairs, Njörðr and Freyr (with Freyja) and Óðinn (Grímnir) and Þórr, who are matched by God and Christ in the second. The poet dreads the anger of both types of deity. But the balance is one of opposition, and the parallels are a foil to contrast as the skald abandons the old gods in the first *helmingr*, and in the second commits himself to the Christian God, the sole source of divine love.<sup>4</sup> Ohlmarks calls this renunciation ‘den formelle *abjuratio*’ (1957, 492).

Collectively, the five verses enact a process of conversion very much like the one attributed to the whole Icelandic people in Ari’s *Íslendingabók* ch. 7 and elsewhere: confrontation between pagan and Christian factions, reluctance to abandon the old ways, and vilification of the heathen gods, all giving way at last to the realisation that a decisive choice has to be made. The whole world is in flux: *Skipt es á gumna giptu* ‘there is change in the fortunes of men’, v. 9; and in v. 13 it is hyperbolically ‘all mankind’ who reject Óðinn’s words. What is exceptional about these verses, however, is their intense subjectivity, expressed grammatically through first-person verbs and pronouns, and lexically especially through the ‘reluctance’ words *trauðr* v. 10, and *neyddr* v. 13. If they are what they seem, they are a powerful and precious record of mythological and religious thinking at the end of the first millennium. If not, they are a triumph of verbal artistry and historical imagination.

The most urgent question, then, is, with what confidence can these verses be accepted as genuine? - defining ‘genuine’ or ‘authentic’ as having been composed by Hallfreðr at the close of the tenth century, though not necessarily in the circumstances described in the saga. Bjarni Einarsson finds them simply ‘too good to be true’ (1981, 218), ‘mjög hæginn grundvöllur ályktana um trúmálhugmyndir og sálarástand siðaskiptamannsins Hallfreðar’ (1961, 162). This question of authenticity is the principal focus of the following discussion, though the hope is also to demonstrate the interest of these verses, irrespective of their date and authorship. The discussion will cover mythological and religious content, style and metre (briefly), and circumstantial or contextual evidence.

### Mythological & Religious Content

---

<sup>4</sup> Textual problems in the verse are discussed below.

The pantheistic nature of Nordic heathendom is captured in v. 12a, already discussed, where no less than five gods are named in the space of four lines. All but Óðinn, referred to as *Grímnir*, are spoken of by their most familiar names: *Freyr*, *Freyja*, *Njörðr*, and *Þórr enn rammi*, the only one to receive an epithet. V. 13 contains a reference to *Njarðar / Freyju niðjum*.

All other references to individual deities in these verses are to Óðinn. The god is referred to by three *heiti* and three kennings. The *heiti* used are *Óðinn* (v. 10), *Viðrir* (v. 10), and *Grímnir* (v. 12), all of which are compatible with a date at the end of the tenth century.<sup>5</sup> *Viðrir* appears in mostly skaldic sources, for instance *Rdr* 16, *Hfl* 1 and 3, and it is frequent as a determinant in certain types of military kennings. *Viðris kvæn* ‘Óðinn’s wife’ appears as a kenning for Frigg in *Lok* 26. *Grímnir* is less common, but occurs, of course, in *Grímnismál* (47 and 49). *Óðinn* is, curiously, the most suspect of these words, in terms of dating. According to Jan de Vries, no skald uses this name between c. 1000-1150, and it is rare before that period (1934, 11). However, instances of the name are abundant in poems of the Edda such as *Völuspá* and *Grímnismál*, including *Óðins hylli Grí* 51, cf. v. 10 above.

Óðinn is also referred to by the kennings *harri Hliðskjalftar* (v. 9), *frumver Friggjar* (v. 10), and *hrafnbólts goði* (v. 11), all of which are puzzling in some way. The antiquity of *frumver Friggjar* is supported by early references to Óðinn as the husband of Frigg, such as *Friggjar faðmbyggvir*, lit. ‘dweller in Frigg’s embrace’ in *Harkv* 12, c. 900. The precise mythological thinking behind the phrase is, however, somewhat elusive. Whether *frum* here implies ‘chief’ or chronologically first, the phrase is suggestive that Frigg has more than one partner. Although Frigg, as wife of the philandering Óðinn, had several rivals,<sup>6</sup> she has no known husband other than Óðinn, though she is accused in *Lok* 26 of being a nymphomaniac (*æ vergjorn*) who took Vé(i) and Vili into her embrace (cf. *Ynglinga saga* ch. 3, *ÍF* 26, 12). If the phrase is to be taken strictly, therefore, it seems to encapsulate a rather esoteric mythological reference, which is perhaps more likely to date from the conversion period than later; and if the promiscuity of the goddess is the point, it is paralleled by Hjalti Skeggjason’s abusive couplet against Freyja (*Íslendingabók* ch. 7, *ÍF* 1, 15).

There is nothing like *hrafnbólts goði* ‘priest of the raven-sacrifice’ (v. 11) among known skaldic kennings, despite the wealth of expressions for ‘Óðinn’ in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 10 (*Snorra Edda* pp. 88-92). The raven as an attribute of Óðinn is, of course, frequently mentioned in the older poetry (e.g. *hrafnáss*, *Haustl* 4 and *Refr* 2,2) as is his association with sacrifice, but reference to raven sacrifice as such is, to my knowledge, unique,<sup>7</sup> and to use the word *goði*

<sup>5</sup> Kuhn regarded *Viðrir* and *Grímnir* as typical of poetry from the oldest period (1942, 137).

<sup>6</sup> Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 9 cites from five poets to prove that Jörð is known as Óðinn’s wife (*Snorra Edda* pp. 89-90), while Frigg can, among other things, be called co-wife (*elja*) of Jörð, Rindr, Gunnlög or Gerðr (ch. 28, *Snorra Edda* p. 110).

<sup>7</sup> References to Óðinn, ravens and sacrifice seem to co-exist in v. 9 of Úlfr Uggason’s

‘priest’, which in any case is rare in the poetry, to denote a god seems somewhat eccentric. This is a small item, but a tantalising one. Do these phrases betray a pseudo-Hallfreðr at work, and if so is he careless with mythological detail, or is he, artfully and succinctly, euhemerising the Æsir as priests rather than gods, just as he emphasised their promiscuity in *frumver Friggjar*? Or on the other hand, is this the real Hallfreðr at work, making subtle reference to matters that are no longer fully understood?

The Óðinn kenning (*geðskjótan*) *harra Hliðskjalfar* ‘(mind-swift) Lord of Hliðskjólfr [Óðinn’s high seat]’ in v. 9 is one of Bjarni’s Einarsson’s main specific targets for suspicion (1961, 192, 1981, 218-19). The word *harri* seems to be an adoption from OE *h(e)arra* ‘lord’ (Hofmann 1955, 23-24). Its most common usage in OE poetry is in kennings for God as lord of heaven, and it is used that way in Icelandic poetry from the twelfth century onwards, including *Geisli* 19, which also contains the phrase *Fyrr vas hitt* (cf. v. 9/1 of the Conversion verses). Bjarni Einarsson thinks that that makes it an unlikely word in a tenth-century kenning for Óðinn, but what he does not mention is that Anglo-Saxon poets, and skalds such as Egill, Sigvatr and Arnórr, use it to refer to secular rulers. Surely it has become part of a lexical set referring to lordship which, like *gramr* or *dróttinn*, can be readily applied to pagan gods, human sovereigns or, after the Conversion, to Christian gods.<sup>8</sup> An elusive poet called Þóralfr or Þorvaldr, for instance, in an undatable verse preserved only in *Snorra Edda*, uses the phrase *gramr Hliðskjalfar* presumably for Óðinn (*Skj* AI, 418, *Skj* BI, 385). I do not think, therefore, that we need assume a twelfth-century Christian model for *harri Hliðskjalfar*.

A group of intriguing phrases in these verses appear to refer to the old religion as a whole, and to encapsulate attitudes to it, though the exact intention, in terms of both denotation and connotation, is in some cases quite obscure. (*Ór*) *heiðnum dómi* in v. 11 is the most straightforward of these - so downright that one might wonder whether a neophyte would really refer to the faith he is discarding as ‘heathendom’,<sup>9</sup> and the occurrence of the phrase in the *Gulapingslög* (see Fritzner, I, 753a) in reference to baptism might sow seeds of doubt, especially when there is another possible legal echo: *blót eru kviðjuð* in v. 13, cf. *blót er oss kviðjat* in *Gulapingslög* (pointed out by Bjarni Einarsson, 1961, 193). However, the fact that Sigvatr only two or three decades after Hallfreðr speaks of baptism as a rescue *ór heiðnum dómi* provides some measure of reassurance, and the phrase *heiðin goð* is used c. 961 in the impeccably heathen *Hák* 21.

---

*Húsdrápa*, but the exact interpretation of the verse is problematic.

<sup>8</sup> On kingship terms in early skaldic expressions for God see, e.g., Paasche 1914, 54 and 68.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *kristindómr*, a loan from OE *crīstendōm*, which appears, as *kristin tumr*, on the early eleventh century runestone at Kuli, Norway (Abrams 1998, 111, citing Hagland). To examine the Conversion verses in the light of runic evidence would be rewarding, but space unfortunately does not permit here.

Verse 12, as already seen, refers to abandoning the ‘something of Njǫrðr’, which seems likely to stand for rejection of the pagan religion in general. Even if this is a secure assumption, what is the ‘something’? The reading in all mss – representing several branches of transmission – is *adul*, except that AM 61 fol. has the tempting reading *af dul* (*Njarðar*). ‘From the deceit (of Njǫrðr)’ would be a perfect phrase for a proselyte struggling manfully to shun the old gods. But perhaps this is precisely an illustration of the ‘too good to be true’ quality of these verses, and the 61 scribe might well have taken the opportunity to improve on the original from the Christian point of view. Given the weight of the ms. evidence, I think we have to make the best of the *adul* reading, but what does this mean? Normalisation to *ǫðul*, pl. of *aðal*, normally ‘nature, something inborn’ is preferred by Finnur Jónsson in *Skj* B and by Kock in *Skald*. This course, however, runs into semantic difficulties. The Cleasby-Vigfusson entry suggests ‘offspring’, a plausible meaning though one I am not able to parallel, and especially suitable as a reference to Njǫrðr as progenitor of Freyr and Freyja (cf. *Njarðar niðjum* in v. 13). The translation in *Skj* B has *Njords templer*, while the gloss in *LP*, s. v. *aðal*, is ‘*hjem, odel*’, as though the word was actually *óðal* ‘patrimony’. Even accepting this semantic sleight of hand, one would perhaps expect the sea-god Njǫrðr’s realm to be the sea, although to assume a looser ‘Njǫrðr’s realm’, referring metonymically to the old religion, is an attractive possibility. To read *adul* as actually being the word *óðal* is another route to the same conclusion, but it too involves sleight of hand, now in the form of normalisation which amounts to emendation, and this seems perverse when there are two viable readings already. The sad result of all of this is that it is not clear what this intriguing phrase actually means. I find the Cleasby-Vigfusson solution ‘offspring’ marginally preferable.

In v. 13 mankind is said to reject *Óðins ætt*. If this refers to the Æsir, it makes an admirable counterpart to *Njarðar / Freyju niðjum* in the same stanza, as well as to the putative *ǫðul Njarðar* in v. 12, if that phrase refers to the Vanir. But *Óðins ætt* is far from straightforward. The mss are not unanimous, but read: *ætt* 61, 53, 62, 557, Bb, 22, 325IX1b, *blót* Fl and *orð* M. Both *ætt* and *orð* make good sense: the poet abandons Óðinn’s kindred, or his words, but both of them produce superfluous (vocalic) alliteration. The Fl reading *blót* ‘sacrifice’ is metrically preferable, semantically straightforward, and is adopted in ÍF 8, 159, but it is exclusive to Fl and may well be influenced by *blót* in l. 2. Even the often conservative Kock felt obliged to emend to *sætt* (*Skald* I, 86).

*Verðum flest at forðask / fornhaldin skǫp norna* ‘we must renounce many an anciently-held decree of norms’ in v. 13 is textually unproblematic, but semantically somewhat enigmatic. The couplet itself, and the previous one about a ban on sacrifices, encourage the idea that the phrase *skǫp norna* refers not merely to fate (as seemingly in *Kml* 24 and *Fáfn* 44), but also to the ancient religion of the Æsir. This would be supported by the fact that the norms seem to represent the old religion in a *helmingr* from an unidentified poem attributed to

Eilífr Goðrúnarson:

Setbergs kveðja sitja  
sunnar at Urðar brunni,  
svá hefr ramr konungr remðan  
Róms banda sik lönðum.

‘They say that he sits in the south by the spring of [the norm] Urð; thus has the strong King of Rome [God] strengthened himself with the lands of the gods’ (*Skj* AI, 152, *Skj* BI, 144).

Whatever its exact import, *skop norna* is clearly something to be left behind by the neophyte, and it probably contributes to the negative picture of things heathen. Elsewhere the norms’ duty of allotting fates shades off into a valkyrie-like role (e.g. *Snorra Edda* p. 40). They are cruel (*norn erum grim*, in the *Kveldúlfr* verse on the death of Þórolfr, *Skj* AI, 29, BI, 26), and ugly (*Sigsk* 7), which perhaps explains why ‘norn’, unlike valkyrie names, rarely functions as the base word to kennings for ‘woman’ (Meissner 1921, 409). Nevertheless, the adjective *fornhaldin* and the note of compulsion in *verðum* suggest that renunciation of *skop norna* is attended by painful nostalgia.

As well as mythological names and phrases, the verses contain somewhat more extended religious ideas. Divine power was a vital issue in the missionary period. Steinunn crows over Þórr’s superiority to Christ when the missionary Þangbrandr’s ship is wrecked (*Skj* AI, 135-36, BI, 127-28), while on the Christian side Skapti Þóroddsson praises the might of Christ (*máttir es munkar dróttins / mestr*) and his role as powerful (*ríkr*) creator of the whole world (*Skj* AI, 314, BI, 291). Eilífr Goðrúnarson, composer of a mighty *Þórsdrápa*, also commemorated the victory of Christianity in the lines cited above, presenting it directly as a territorial takeover, and highlighting strength by means of word-play in *ramr - remðan*. The emphasis on power or rule in the Conversion verses is fully in accord with this. The *vald* attributed to Christ and God in v. 12 is a clear counterpart to the statement in v. 10 that the poet is content with Óðinn’s *vald*. Divine power also inspires fear. As we saw, the skald in v. 12 fearfully anticipates the wrath of the pagan gods while flinching equally from the anger of the ‘son’ (*erum leið sonar reiði*).

Sacrifice is presented as the main ritual manifestation of Ásatrú, as the skald recalls sacrificing to Óðinn (*gat’k ... vel blóta*, v. 9, cf. Óðinn as *hrafnblóts goði* in v. 11).<sup>10</sup> Again, these statements are counterbalanced, or in fact cancelled, by the Christian response. It is the custom of the Sogn-men’s sovereign that sacrifices are banned (*Sá’s með Sygna ræsi / siðr, at blót eru kviðjuð*, v. 13). Poetry is also seen as a form of devotion to the god (*Öll hefr ætt til hylli / Óðins skipat ljóðum ... aldar* ‘the whole race of men has wrought poems to win Óðinn’s grace’, v. 10), and part of the ancient and honourable

<sup>10</sup> Ohlmarks sees *vel blóta* as a reference specifically to poetry, and *hrafnblót* as a kenning for ‘battle’, the offering of corpses to ravens; its ‘priest’ is hence Óðinn, god of battle (1957, 490-91).

roots of the old religion (*algildar man'k ... iðjur várra niðja* 'I recall the exquisite works of my forbears', also v. 10). But Óðinn is said to have repaid men's praise by nourishing fraud in v. 11 (*þess's ól við lof lýða / lóm*); and this is picked up in the reference to *dul Njarðar* 'the deceit of Njarðr' in the AM 61 version of v. 12. If there is a pseudo-Hallfreðr at work, using the famous skald's conversion as a platform for Christian didacticism, we might glimpse him here. Talk of deceit is the nearest these verses ever get to renouncing belief in the old gods, or perhaps, since treachery is an attribute of Satan, we could see it as a touch of demonisation. If so it might be akin to *líknisk gròm við Grímnir* 'let the *gròm* ask mercy from Grímnir [Óðinn]' (v. 12). *Gròm*, or *gramir*, seems elsewhere to refer to unspecified demons, as in the phrases *hafi þik gramir* (*Hárþ* 60) or *gramir hafi Gunnar* (*Brot* 11), so presumably the sense is 'demons may go on serving Óðinn, but I cannot'.

The two religions cannot ultimately be reconciled. The end of v. 10 makes it clear that one cannot serve Christ and Óðinn; and the end of v. 13 shows that worship of Christ entails rejecting Njarðr's / Freyja's kin and the *skop norna*.

The Christian content of these verses, already glimpsed above, is altogether more transparent, and there is no Christian doctrine of the kind that might be implausible in a composition by a recent convert: no sin or redemption, Crucifixion or Judgement.<sup>11</sup> The awesome power of God and Christ are coupled with their love in v. 12. Only two persons of the Trinity are mentioned, not the *eining sön* *í þrennum greinum* of *Lilja* 1, and this accords with the absence of the Holy Spirit from other skaldic poetry from the early Christian period. The seeming reference to the son holding power under the father of Earth (*vald á frægt und foldar feðr*)<sup>12</sup> prompted an anxious exploration of possible Arianism by Hjelmqvist in 1908, from which he was only able to exonerate Hallfreðr by means of deft but rather implausible emendations; but other commentators have been untroubled by this. Hjelmqvist was also among those who noted that the idea of an angry god (*sonar reiði*) is paralleled in Psalm 2:11-12, and Bjarni Einarsson adds that vv. 7-8 of the same Psalm refer to the father-son relationship (1961: 191-92). This, Bjarni believes, is a sophisticated notion more plausible in a learned Christian saga-author than a neophyte. However, I am not convinced that the motifs of an angry God and of Christ holding power under God require a specific source, or are so sophisticated as to be unlikely in a missionary environment.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, then, the old religion of the north receives more, and more

<sup>11</sup> Unless Sigurður Skúlason is correct in interpreting *róða* in the phrase *láta fyr(ir) róða* (v. 13/6) as the first record of the word *róði* 'cross, crucifix', which he argues was grammatically either masculine or feminine, though the feminine *róða* prevailed (1931-32).

<sup>12</sup> There is some doubt as to whether *foldar* is to be construed with *feðr*, hence 'Father of earth' or with *vald*, hence 'power over the earth'.

<sup>13</sup> I would therefore agree with Lange (1958, 36 n.1) that Hjelmqvist's 1908 discussion of v. 9 exaggerates Hallfreðr's Christian learning.

complex, coverage in these verses than Christianity, and it is viewed with a blend of nostalgia with denunciation and renunciation. The stance remains essentially polytheistic, in the sense that there is no outright statement of disbelief in the Æsir and Vanir, though there is a recognition that the perfidy of the old order must give way to the power and love of the new, and there may be hints of demonisation. If the verses are not genuine, they are a skilful and sensitive reconstruction of conversion mentality.

### Style & Metre

Stylistic tests for authenticity are notoriously unreliable. Skaldic style and diction are conservative, and a skilful pastiche could in theory replicate the style of Hallfreðr or any other poet. There are Hallfreðr hallmarks, but none is both consistent enough within Hallfreðr's *œuvre* and rare enough outside it to tip the balance in arguments about authenticity. For example, unity and symmetry between two *helmingar* in a stanza, achieved by harmony of ideas, imagery, diction, or clause arrangement, or by syntactic links between *helmingar*, is distinctive of Hallfreðr, but it is far from unique to him, so this feature in the Conversion verses can only be used as supporting evidence. Further, where there are dissimilarities, they may be determined by difference of genre or topic as much as by difference of author or period. Some devices which appear in Hallfreðr's court poetry, such as the use of verbal extensions to kennings e.g. *hleyptimeiðr hlunnviggja* in *Óláfsdrápa* 5, or of echoic effects e.g. *sverði/sverðleikr* in *Óláfsdrápa* 8 and *norðra/norðr* in *Erfidrápa* 26, cf. also *Lvv.* 1, 11 and 14, are rare or non-occurring in the Conversion verses, but this is unlikely to be significant. One feature which is striking, however, is the similarity of emotional tenor between the Conversion verses and Hallfreðr's *Erfidrápa* (memorial poem) for Óláfr Tryggvason - a poem whose authenticity has never been questioned - where the skald not only laments a loss but portrays himself in an agonising dilemma, torn between belief and disbelief at the rumours that his liege lord escaped the battle of Svǫldr. He even complains about deceit on both occasions.

Metre is much more readily quantifiable than style, but again is difficult to use as a criterion for dating. Kari Gade, in a forthcoming article, adduces metrical evidence which encourages faith in a tenth-century dating for at least some of the verse in *Kormáks saga* and *Hallfreðar saga*. Unfortunately, though, the Conversion verses themselves show scarcely any of the archaic features, such as disyllabic hiatus constructions in words such as *áar* or *fiendr*, archaic name forms, or use of the expletive *of*, which might confirm a late tenth-century date; nor do they show any of the specific metrical types which would betray a later pastiche.

### Cicumstantial & Contextual Evidence

In the attempt to understand these verses and form an opinion about their authenticity, I turn now to wider circumstantial and contextual evidence, especially that relating to the life and *œuvre* of Hallfreðr, and the manuscript preservation of the verses, with which I begin.

It is interesting how often mythological names have been mangled in transmission, for not only the phrases *harra Hliðskjalftar* and *frumver Friggjar*, but also *Njarðar* (twice) and *Grímnir* are affected.<sup>14</sup> I am not certain what this tells us, other than that mythological and skaldic expertise were at low ebb among the mainly fourteenth-century scribes, and possibly that we should think in terms of a longer rather than shorter period of transmission for these verses. This seems reasonable in the light of their overall state of preservation. It is striking that two are isolated *helmingar*, and there are several textual cruces. If the verses were late fabrications one could expect them to be better preserved.

The manuscript transmission is vital in other ways, too. To read these 32 lines in *Skj*, printed in the ‘Hallfreðr’ section alongside his court poetry, encourages faith in their authenticity by implying a belief that the verses originated with the poet and pre-dated *Hallfreðar saga* by two centuries. The saga context, on the other hand, introduces the possibility that they are as much of an imaginative reconstruction as the prose. It is indeed disconcerting, if one is predisposed to accept the authenticity of the Conversion verses, to note that they are only preserved in *Hallfreðar saga*, not, for instance, in the Olaf sagas of Oddr Snorrason or Gunnlaugr Leifsson, or in *Heimskringla*, and not either in *Snorra Edda*. However, it is arguably only the ‘Óðinn’ kennings that could have earned the verses a place in *Snorra Edda*, and as we have seen, the particular kennings deployed are rather eccentric.

Bjarni Einarsson’s view of the skald sagas, as is well known, is that they are mainly fictional, drawing their love triangle plots ultimately from the Tristan story (1961, *passim*). He accordingly sees the occasional verses, *lausavísur*, in them as also likely to be later fabrications. But a number of studies, most recently Finlay 1995 and forthcoming articles from Finlay and Andersson, have undermined the claims of Romance influence and to some degree restored faith in the native origins of *Hallfreðar saga*. This does not necessarily imply historicity in the prose narrative or authenticity in the verses, but it does leave these questions more open. Moreover, the imperfect ‘fit’ between the Conversion verses and the surrounding prose (as when the king claims that v.

<sup>14</sup> In 9/2 (normalised) *harraHliðskjalftar* is the reading only of M and 61, with the variants: *harra] herra* 62, *hēra* Bb, 22; *-skialfar] -skialfan* 53, 557, Bb, 22, 325IX1b, Fl, *-skialfra* 62. In 10/7 *á frumver Friggjar* is the reading of 61 and Fl, with the variants: *frumver] fa born vid* 53, 22, 325IX1b, Bb, *af bæn við* 557, *afvrm er* 62, *a lof* M; *friggjar] friggi* 557. In 12/2, *Njarðar* is the reading of M, 61, 62, and Fl, with the variants: *mærdar* 53, 557, 22, 325IX1b, *mærdar* Bb. In 12/3 *Grímnir* in M, 61, 62 and Fl has the variants: *grimmri* 53, *grimma* 557, *grimann* Bb, *grimman* 22, *grymman* 325IX1b – despite the mention of Freyr, Freyja and Þórr in the same *helmingr*. Finally, in 13/7 the majority reading *Njarðar* has the variants: *hiardar* 53, Bb, *Freyiu* M.

11 is no improvement on v. 10) suggests that the verses were inherited by the prose author and not composed by him, though it does not rule out the possibility of a date in between Hallfreðr's lifetime and the compilation of the saga.<sup>15</sup>

The Conversion verses constitute five out of thirty-three verses in *Hallfreðar saga* ('M' version). If we could be certain that the others either were or were not authentic, this would at least be an indicator. But, as usual, certainty eludes us, and opinions have been divided, although in general scepticism has increased through time. The faith of Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (ÍF 8, 1931, lix-lx) contrasts with the atheism, as it were, of Bjarni Einarsson 1961, and although the metrical evidence adduced by Gade allows for a tenth-century dating, it does not prove it. The other verse in the saga which wrestles with religion, Hallfreðr's 'last verse', in which he speaks of his dread of Hell, is particularly problematic, but there is undoubtedly a possibility that it was composed late for inclusion in the 'O' redaction of the saga. Otherwise its absence from the 'M' redaction would be an inexplicable piece of carelessness. Moreover, we know that false attribution can even afflict formal encomium, since one of the *Óláfs drápur Tryggvasonar* has been recognised as a twelfth century product for a very long time, despite its attribution to Hallfreðr in Bergsbók (*Skj* AI, 573).

The preservation of *Hallfreðar saga* partially within *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, and its general kinship with the *konunga sögur*, in which we would have much higher expectations concerning verse authenticity, might inspire some faith in the verses, especially when, as is the case with the Conversion verses, they occur within the most Olaf-dominated part of the saga. On the other hand, the verses are presented as part of the action (*Þá kvað Hallfreðr vísu...*) rather than in the manner of footnotes to authenticate the narrative (*Þetta sannar Hallfreðr..*). They are 'situational' rather than 'authenticating' (using the terminology of Whaley 1993), and poems cited in this manner are generally regarded as carrying less historical weight.

Overall, then, the context of the Conversion verses' preservation in *Hallfreðar saga* yields mixed messages about the likelihood of authenticity. I would estimate the factors pro and con to be of roughly equal weight.

As to the general likelihood that Hallfreðr would have composed verses about the Conversion, I would see this as strong. No one could deny that Hallfreðr was 'a real historical person, and a great poet' or that Hallfreðr's conversion is a 'historical fact' (Bjarni Einarsson 1981, 217 and 218). His devotion to the missionary king Óláfr Tryggvason is, for instance, attested from the twelfth century, when Hallar-Steinn says that Hallfreðr, *hróðar gjarn* composed a *drápa* for the king (*Rst* 34, *Skj* AI, 552, BI, 534; cf. *Ísldr* 12).

<sup>15</sup> It appears highly likely that the verses were originally a sequence, even a unitary poem. Ohlmarks calls them *Goðavísur* (1957, 490); Sophie Krijn wondered whether they might be fragments of the lost *Uppreistardrápa* (1931, 126).

Óláfr is commemorated not only as Hallfreðr's patron but specifically as his godfather in Hallfreðr's *Erfiðrápa* for Óláfr, v. 26:

Hlautk þanns æztr vas einna  
 – ek sanna þat – manna  
 und niðbyrði Norðra  
 norðr goðföður orðinn.

'I gained a godfather who was the greatest of all men in the north under the burden of Norðri's kin [dwarfs -> sky]. I vouch for that' (cf. v. 28).

The first preserved narratives of Hallfreðr's conversion appear in Oddr Snorrason's saga of Óláfr Tryggvason at the end of the twelfth century, and his biography is developed into a saga, with influences from all kinds of narratives including legends of Sigvatr,<sup>16</sup> while his persona is clearly drawn in conformity with the emergent stereotype of the wilful and lovelorn skald. The theme of reluctant conversion is a *leitmotiv* throughout the saga. An accusation of continued paganism leads to bloodshed for which Hallfreðr has to atone by reluctantly maiming the recalcitrant heathen Þorleifr; he travels the perilous (*óhrein*) route to pagan Gautland, where his religious observance amounts to blowing in the shape of a cross over his drink but not praying much; he marries a pagan woman who is then baptised; he makes further reparation by composing a presumably religious poem, *Uppreistardrápa*; he is twice restrained from taking blood revenge by a posthumous visitation from Óláfr Tryggvason. Finally, on his death at sea, his body is washed up on the Holy Island of Iona, where it is buried and the treasures given him by King Óláfr are made into sacred objects. From the point when he meets Óláfr, then, Hallfreðr's whole turbulent career is punctuated, even dominated, by the influence of his sovereign and the new religion. But again the evidence is ambivalent, for it is not clear whether the verses about Hallfreðr's conversion belong to the historical kernel which inspired this rich development, or whether they are part of the later process of elaboration.

As a functionary skald whose career straddled the turn of the millennium, Hallfreðr composed for both pagan and Christian patrons. Nine *helmingar* ascribed to him in *Snorra Edda* are among the most pagan verses we have, presenting a jarl in a sacred marriage to Jörð – goddess and land. Despite problems with the traditional editorial ascription to a *Hákonardrápa* (e.g. Fidjestøl 1982, 102-3), Hákon – whose paganism was an integral part of his political identity, and whose propaganda machine was fed by sophisticated

<sup>16</sup> Experiences in common between the two poets include these: A Christian king Óláfr (Tryggvason or Haraldsson) initially refuses to hear the skald's poem; at royal command Sigvatr uses material from *Uppreistarsaga*, the story of Creation, in a poem while Hallfreðr composes an *Uppreistardrápa*; both go on missions to Gautland; their royal patrons make posthumous appearances to them at the time of their deaths (see Bjarni Einarsson 1961, 207, 232 and references there).

pagan poems such as *Vellekla* – is the likeliest dedicatee. The remainder of Hallfreðr's court poetry is almost all for Óláfr Tryggvason, belonging either to the *Óláfsdrápa*, a catalogue of campaigns, or to the *Erfidrápa*, which centres on the tragic defeat at Svǫldr. According to *Hallfreðar saga*, the king only gave Hallfreðr's poetry a hearing with reluctance, presumably because he favoured too pagan a brew of Óðinn's mead, while Hallfreðr clearly feels a tension between his poetry and his change of religion (opening of ch. 6).

As it turns out, composing for a Christian ruler does not present a major technical problem to the neophyte skald. Kennings containing pagan allusions are not altogether abandoned. The god-name *Týr*, for instance, forms the base word of warrior-kennings in *Óláfsdrápa* 9 and *Erfidrápa* 17, and wolves appear as the steeds of troll-wives in *Óláfsdrápa* 6. However, there is a slight decrease in such expressions, which forms part of – and helps to initiate – a wider trend which has been noted by several scholars (e.g. de Vries 1934, Fidjestøl 1993). My own view would be that expressions of this sort were already stereotyped and religiously void in much pre-Conversion poetry, and they certainly are here. In *Erfidrápa* 15, for example, *sléttan sylg Surts ættar* 'smooth drink of giants [poetry]' is immediately followed by the name of the missionary king Óláfr himself; and the reference to the sky as the 'burden of Norðri's kin' is juxtaposed with the word *goðfaðir* in v. 26 (above). It is inconceivable that the mythical allusion is a piece of defiance at this point, so it must mean that the idea of dwarfs holding up the sky was a mere poetic whimsy, not an article of faith to Hallfreðr.

Meanwhile, a moderate amount of Christian content is injected into the ancient form of the *drápa*. Hallfreðr does not praise Óláfr for the conversion of the northern lands, or for pagan-crushing crusades, but casts him twice as the bane of heathen sanctuaries, once in the kenning *horgbrjótr* in *Óláfsdrápa* 3, and once in the adjective *végrimmr*, which is juxtaposed with Óláfr's enemies, the notoriously pagan Wends (*Vinðr*), in the alliterative scheme of v. 4a. In the *Erfi-drápa* Óláfr is commemorated as Hallfreðr's godfather (cited above), and there is a prayer for his soul in v. 29, which seems to launch a tradition continued by Sigvatr and others.<sup>17</sup> In the same verse the exciting eschatological references to the sky splitting are a superb example of continuity between pagan Ragnarøk and Christian Doomsday, looking back to Eyvindr Skáldaspillir's *Hák* 20 as well as looking forward to, and influencing, Arnórr jarlaskáld in *Porfinnsdrápa* 24. By dint of skilful compromise, therefore, Hallfreðr produces resounding praise for rulers of both religious persuasions, rather like the craftsmen whose moulds could cast Thor's hammers and Christian crosses with equal ease. Nevertheless, the conversion was clearly an anxiety to a poet steeped in the pagan tradition living precisely at that period – a threat both to his

<sup>17</sup> Fidjestøl prints the seven examples from court poetry in a useful survey of religious content (1993, 117-18).

long-cherished religion and to his livelihood – and it seems more likely than not that he would have composed stanzas about this major personal and public upheaval. In support of this is other poetry reflecting the power struggle between the old gods of the north and the new ones from the south, for instance the quatrain from Eilífr Guðrúnarson cited above.

### Conclusion

The large and important question about the authenticity of the Conversion verses spawns a myriad of other questions about their content and context, and it would be unrealistic to pretend that certain answers can be given. The dating of *dróttkvætt* poetry is formidably difficult, especially given its conservatism, and the interpretation of specific details and of literary links often uncertain. For instance, does the fact that *ór heiðnum dómi* occurs in a verse by Sigvatr as well as in one of the Conversion verses encourage faith in the latter, or indicate one of the sources for pseudo-Hallfreðr's clever pastiche? The debate therefore has to draw evidence both from the verses themselves, and from their context. To me the strongest indicators against authenticity are the possible echoes of Christian law and the preservation of the verses only in *Hallfreðar saga*. It is easy to envisage the fabrication of verses as part of a general development of the Hallfreðr legend, which is so intimately bound up with that of Óláfr Tryggvason that *Hallfreðar saga* as a whole is as much a narrative of conversion and the tension between the two religions as it is a love story (cf. Mundal 1974, 119). In other cultures one could expect such forgeries to be more unequivocally anti-pagan, but this is not necessarily the case here. The saga appears fascinated by Hallfreðr's religious angst and rather indulgent towards it, so a verse forger could arguably have shared the same sensibility and have invented the verses in response to traditions about the poet who proved such a slippery catch to the monarch angling for new Christians.

On the other hand, it is beyond dispute that poetry played a major role in the pagan-Christian debate in the years around the millennium, and that the conversion affected the life and output of Hallfreðr more than any other skald known to us. It seems likely that he would compose about it, and if he did, it would be curious if the verses were lost and then replaced by fakes – excellent fakes, which show some general similarities with Hallfreðr's court poetry, especially the urgently personal tone, the wit, and the integration of *helmingar* within stanzas. The verses' poor state of preservation and the mismatch of prose and verse in *Hallfreðar saga* ch. 6 would argue for composition not later than the twelfth century – certainly not contemporary with the saga at the beginning of the thirteenth.

As to the verses themselves, my provisional view – and I will be grateful to have the opinions of others – is that there is no detail, metrical, stylistic, lexical or conceptual, which obliges us to look for a date outside the conversion period.

I would suggest that some of the more obscure pagan allusions encourage rather than discourage the assumption of authenticity. On the evidence of the trouble that later copyists had with names such as Grímnir and even Njǫrðr, and of the necessity for a *Snorra Edda*, knowledge of the old mythology declined substantially. The Christian doctrine embedded in the verses is elementary, and the emphasis on divine power is entirely in keeping with what we know about the conversion of the Nordic peoples. So too is the view of conversion as a ‘transfer of loyalty’, ‘a matter of shifting allegiance’ (Karras 1997, 101 and 105). The transfer is between gods, but it is also a consequence of a new earthly allegiance. Hallfreðr’s conversion takes place under duress from the *hǫlða reifir* apostrophised in v. 11. One can almost agree with Lange that ‘Hallfreds Christentum heisst Olaf’ (1958, 38). Meanwhile, Hallfreðr’s reluctance and ambivalence is the personal correlative of the conversion process in Scandinavia – ‘gradual, piecemeal, muddled and undisciplined’ (Fletcher 1997, 416), and it is in tune with material evidence of pagan-Christian continuity (e.g. Abrams 1998, 120-1).

If twelfth-century fabrications, then, the Conversion verses represent a remarkably – implausibly? – good attempt to get inside the troubled head of a reluctant convert, and they can take their place alongside *Snorra Edda* as one of the most creative glances back over the great religious divide, though their value is diminished by our total ignorance of the time and milieu to which they belong. If genuine, the verses are a precious rarity, given ‘the unfortunate condition of near-sourcelessness’ (Abrams 1998, 109) which dogs the study of the Christianisation of the North, and they modify, though they do not overturn, the view that that process was ‘top-down’, instigated by rulers, everything to do with politics and with external manifestations of cultural identity and nothing to do with religious belief. They give unparalleled access to the intensity of the personal and professional dilemma which conversion posed to this millennium man.

## References

- Abrams, Lesley. 1998. ‘History and Archaeology: the conversion of Scandinavia.’ In *Conversion and Christianity in the North Sea World*, ed. Barbara Crawford. St Andrews; 109-28.
- Andersson, Theodore M., forthcoming. ‘The Literary Context of the Skald Sagas: the Love Triangle’. In Poole, forthcoming.
- Bjarni Einarsson. 1961. *Skáldasögur : Um uppruna og eðli ástaskáldasagnanna fornu*. Reykjavík.
- Bjarni Einarsson. 1981. ‘The last hour of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld as described in *Hallfreðarsaga*.’ *Proceedings of the Eighth Viking Congress*. Ed. Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. Odense; pp. 217-221.
- Cleasby-Vigfusson: Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, rev. William Craigie, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. Oxford, 1957.
- Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius*. I. Text, ed. Gustav Neckel, 3rd edn, rev. Hans Kuhn. Heidelberg 1962.
- Fidjestøl, Bjarne. 1982. *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*. Øvre Ervik.
- Fidjestøl, Bjarne. 1993. ‘The contribution of skaldic studies’. In *Viking Revaluations*, ed. Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins. London; 100-20.

- Finlay, Alison. 1995. 'Skalds, Troubadours and Sagas', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 24, 105-53.
- Finlay, Alison. Forthcoming. 'The European Context of the Poets' Sagas'. In Poole, forthcoming.
- Fletcher, Richard. 1997. *The Conversion of Europe*. London.
- Fritzner, Johann. 1886-96. *Ordbog over det gamle norske Sprog* I-III, 2nd edn. Oslo. Repr. 1954.
- Gade, Kari Ellen. Forthcoming. 'Age and authenticity of the *lausavísur* in the Skald Sagas'. In Poole, forthcoming.
- Hallfreðar saga*: In *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 8. Reykjavík 1939; pp. 133-200.
- Hallfreðar saga*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 15. Reykjavík 1977.
- Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit 26-28. Reykjavík 1941-51.
- Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit 1. Reykjavík 1968; 1-28.
- Hjelmqvist, Theodor. 1908. 'Var Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld arian?' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 24, 155-79.
- Hofmann, Dietrich. 1955. *Nordisch-Englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*. København.
- Karras, Ruth Mazo. 1997. 'God and Man in Medieval Scandinavia: writing – and gendering – the Conversion' In *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon. Gainesville, Florida; 100-14.
- Krijn, S. A. 1931. 'Halfred vandraedaskald'. *Neophilologus* 16, 46-55 and 121-31.
- Kuhn, Hans. 1942. 'Das nordgermanische Heidentum in den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten.' *Zeitschrift für deutsche Altertumskunde* 79, 133-66.
- LP: Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguae Septentrionalis*, 2nd edn, rev. Finnur Jónsson. København 1931, repr. 1966.
- Lange, Wolfgang. 1958. *Studien zur christlichen Dichtung der Nordgermanen 1000-1200*. Göttingen.
- Meissner, Rudolf. 1921. *Die Kenningar der Skalden*. Bonn & Leipzig.
- Mundal, Else. 1974. *Fylgjemotiva i norrøn litteratur*. Oslo.
- Ohlmarks, Åke. 1957. *Tors skalder och Vite-Krists*. Stockholm.
- Paasche, Fr. 1914. *Kristendom og Kvad*. In his *Hedenskap og Kristendom*, 1948. Oslo.
- Poole, Russell G. (ed). *Text, Vocation and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*. Forthcoming.
- Sigurður Skúlason. 1931-32. 'At láta fyr(ir) róða.' *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 6, 199-202.
- Skald: Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, I, ed. Ernst A. Kock. Lund 1946.
- Skj: Den norsk-isländske skjaldedigtning*, AI, BI, ed. Finnur Jónsson, København 1912-15, repr. 1967-73.
- Snorra Edda: Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson. København 1931.
- Vries, J. de. 1934. *De skaldkenninger met mythologischen inhoud*. Haarlem.
- Whaley, Diana. 1993. 'Skalds and Situational Verses in Heimskringla'. In *Snorri Sturluson*, ed. Alois Wolf. ScriptOralia 51. Tübingen; pp. 245-66.

# The reception of myths concerning literacy and poetry

Tarrin Wills

University of Sydney

This paper will draw together some of my own work and that of others on the history of the study of runes. I will concentrate on scholarly works from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which discuss Old Norse-Icelandic runology and/or myth. I wish to place these works within the context of some broad intellectual movements of the period, particularly those which affected theories of language, writing and literature; as such, I will be restricting this survey largely to published material, but I will make some reference to unpublished works and correspondence.

The main Old Norse (-Icelandic) texts dealing with runology or the uses of runes and known in the seventeenth century were:

1. *The Third Grammatical Treatise* (3GT) by Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld. This work is found in four medieval manuscripts, three of which contain versions of *Snorra Edda*. Two chapters of the first section contain detailed information on runes: their names, phonetic values and so on.

2. The Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian *Rune Poems*. These poems contain a short verse for each of the runes in the *fubark*.
3. The Eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál* (as the Codex Regius version is known) or *Brynhildarljóða* (as the version in *Völsunga saga* is known). This contains a number of verses which refer to magical uses of runes, that is, spells for which runes can be employed.
4. The Eddic poem *Hávamál*. The section which deals with runes was treated as a separate work in the period which I am discussing today; There is a decorated capital in the Codex Regius which separates that section, which was known as *Runa Capitule* or the runic chapter(s). This contains an account of Óðinn's ordeal, in which he hangs on a tree for nine nights in order to gain knowledge of runes. Óðinn then enumerates a number of purposes for which runic spells can be employed.

The information on runes found in these works falls into two main categories. Firstly, material which consists of largely technical discussions of the nature and origin of runes or material which can provide such information — I will be referring to such material as runological. This includes 3GT and the *Rune Poem*. Secondly, material which refers to the magical uses of runes, primarily the Eddic poems. There is another category, the mythology and mythological genesis of runes or runic knowledge, which is seen in the first section of the 'Runic Chapter', that is, *Hávamál*, but as we will see, this last category of information on runes did not generate nearly as much interest as the others.

The early seventeenth century saw a rapid increase in interest in runes and consequently, in almost any texts that could shed some light on their uses.

Arngrímur Jónsson seems to have been the originator of modern runology, if largely indirectly. In his 1609 work *Crymogæa* (ed. Jakob Benediktsson 1951) he included a chapter on the language of the Icelanders. This discussed, along with language, runes. Much of his material is taken from the grammatical treatises in the Codex Wormianus, a manuscript which had been in his family for some time. The material on runes is largely based on the rune chapters of 3GT and the *Rune Poem*.

Arngrímur's chapter seems to have generated Ole Worm's interest in runes, and Worm and Arngrímur eventually entered into a long-lasting and enthusiastic correspondence. The Codex Wormianus was probably in Copenhagen in 1626 (Faulkes, 72), on loan to Þorlákur Skulason. Eventually Arngrímur sent Worm the manuscript. Worm used the runological material in 3GT as the basis for a great many of the chapters in his 1636 work, *Literatura Runica*. There are strong indications that 3GT influenced Worm's theories on runes.

The only other medieval text which Worm quotes at length in the body of

*Literatura Runica* is the Old Norwegian *Rune Poem*. In other words, the medieval sources of Worm's runological material were limited to works dealing specifically with runes themselves — works which were themselves runological. Other material, which dealt with the uses of runes was not used so much by Worm.

The reasons for this were at least in part that Worm's contacts in Iceland do not seem to have sent him material. Nevertheless, they knew of his interests. Such material would not have supported his theory that runes were the original way of recording all early Scandinavian literature. It is possible that the Icelanders thought that the material would not have been of interest to Worm, who had already formed his theories about the uses of runes.

The interest in runes led Ole Worm and many following him to some unusual conclusions. Those of most significance to us centre on two basic theories (which we now know to be more or less false). These theories involved an extreme exaggeration of (a) the age of runes and their origins; and (b) the extent of the use of runes. More specifically, scholars, mostly following Worm, believed runes to be extremely old and many thought that they derived from Hebrew; likewise, it was believed that they were used to record all Old Norse-Icelandic literature, and that it was the primary, indeed the only script used to record Old Norse literature in manuscripts. The latter theory in particular continued to be widely held throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The second half of the seventeenth century saw the discovery and publication of the Old Icelandic mythological poems. For example, Björn Jónsson á Skarðsá in his unpublished work 'Nockut Litit Samtak vm Runer' (1642) cites *Sigrdrífumál* and *Hávamál* (Faulkes 75), largely for their information on runes.

In 1651, Worm published the second edition of *Literatura Runica*, and in it were quotations from *Völuspá* and *Hávamál* (Faulkes 85). The material from *Hávamál* is not from 'Rune Capitule', except for one verse which is quoted twice. This does not contain much in the way of mythological material:

Rúnar munt þú finna  
ok ráðna stafi,  
mjök stóra stafi,  
mjök stinna stafi,  
er fáði fimbulpulr  
ok gørðu ginnregin  
ok reist Hroptr royna,

The runes you must find  
and the meaningful letter,  
a very great letter,  
a very powerful letter,  
which the might sage stained  
and the powerful gods made  
and the Hroptr of the gods [Óðinn] carved out.

(Evans 69, trans. Larrington 34 (modified))

Worm's interest in *Hávamál*, therefore, was not closely tied to the mythological material on runes.

Perhaps the most significant of the seventeenth-century texts to the present

study is Resén's 1665 editions of *Snorra Edda*, *Hávamál* and *Völuspá*. In his introduction to the edition of *Snorra Edda* he cites Arngrímur and Worm, including the latter's quotation of the Valdemar rune-phrase in 3GT (a short sentence containing all the runes, designed to demonstrate their phonetic values). Resén's edition of *Hávamál* includes Guðmundur Andrésón's notes to the runic section. It is quite apparent that this section caused great difficulty in interpretation, in particular, the two lines 'nýsta ek niðr / nam ek upp rúnar' (I looked down / I took up the runes). Nevertheless, Guðmundur makes basic sense of what is going on in the passage (page c 3r), that Óðinn's ordeal results in his acquisition of the knowledge of runes.

The first four stanzas of the 'Runa Capitule' are not quoted in any edition for over a century after Resén's edition (see Clunies Ross 1998, 254–255) — it is only the references to magic which are quoted; the myth of Óðinn's acquisition of runes is thus not dealt with for some time.

Faulkes states that the interest in *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál* was largely because of their material on runes (Faulkes, 76). However, the material on runes, particularly in *Hávamál*, covers both mythology and magic. Most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars were fairly selective when it came to this material.

The interest in *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál* seems to have centred on the examples of runic spells or references to such instances of magic. The use of runes for magic was one of the things that generated a lot of interest in this period and later, despite the anti-Christian resonances of such practices. The actual myth of Óðinn's acquisition of runes is not something that seems to have been of as much interest as the references to the magical uses of runes. There may be some practical reasons for this: the passage of *Hávamál* in which it occurs is obscure and difficult, particularly so for early scholars without much access to material which could aid them in understanding and interpreting the passage.

The reason why the mythological runic section in *Hávamál* was not reproduced and discussed more was not just because it was difficult. After all, when faced with other difficult material, for example, in *Völuspá*, many scholars applied themselves to trying to understand the material. It seems rather that scholars were not particularly interested in Old Icelandic myths about runes, even though they were interested in almost anything to do with their uses. Hence the sections on the magical uses of runes were of interest to them.

I think the reasons for this have to do with the reasons why people were interested in runes in the first place. The study of runes coincided with a much broader cultural movement in which non-Latin scripts became the focus of a great deal of scholarly attention. An enormous number of works were published in the seventeenth century which looked at a range of issues to do with writing and language. These works dealt with writing systems such as Chinese and Hieroglyphics; with magic languages, such as the secret language of the

Rosicrucians; and they presented a range of theories about the concept of a perfect language and the origins of language: usually that they all derived from an original language, that which Adam spoke, which was Hebrew (cf. Eco 1995, chapters 5, 6 and 8).

This tendency can be seen in the seventeenth-century works on runes and other texts which mention them. Worm's *Literatura Runica* is very much part of this scholarly tradition. Worm discusses at length the possible origins of Runes in Hebrew letters; Resén, in his introduction to *Snorra Edda*, discusses the various writing systems of Greek, Hebrew, Latin, hieroglyphics, and so on (pp. d 1v–3v). Runes were seen as an example of another non-Latin script, which scholars were keen to link closely with the original and perfect language, usually thought to be Hebrew.

The uses of runes for magical purposes, as presented in *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*, also had some relevance to these currents in European thought: the material in those works fitted in well with the interest in magic languages that was prevalent in the seventeenth century (cf. Eco, 178–83).

This general scholarly framework goes some way to explaining why the mythological material in *Hávamál* was not particularly interesting for seventeenth-century scholars. The myth of the origin of runes would have seemed a bit strange in the context of these ideas about language. It involves Óðinn going through a ritual of endurance and self-injury to gain knowledge of runes. Not only was this a fairly barbaric account, but it placed the origin of runes in a framework very much alien to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century views of the genesis of writing systems.

The eighteenth century saw a gradual shift in the philosophy of language and writing. This involved moving away from the emphasis on writing systems and more towards literatures. Consequently, runology gradually dwindled (a notable exception being Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík's 'Runologia') and attention to Old Norse-Icelandic literature as a subject of interest increased.

This general movement involved a decreased interest in runes for their own sake. Nevertheless, Worm's theories remained popular, largely because they addressed an ongoing issue. While runes as a writing system were not so interesting, the theory that everything was written in them meant that the Old Icelandic literary material could be separated from the Latin tradition, and thus be seen as more original. As Romanticism emerged, originality became a highly important characteristic for those wanting to promote certain literature or literatures.

The material published in the seventeenth century continued to be of interest to scholars in the eighteenth century, including *Hávamál*. Perhaps the most important of the eighteenth-century publications containing the poem was Paul-Henri Mallet's *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes* (1756; 2nd ed. 1763), and its English translation, Thomas Percy's *Northern*

*Antiquities* (1770). It was also translated into German. Mallet and Percy quote the so-called Runic Chapter, along with selections from *Hávamál*. The Runic Chapter, which is given the alternative title, ‘The Magic of Odin’, in *Northern Antiquities*, starts with the seventh verse in the Codex Regius and then goes through to the end, skipping an occasional verse along the way. The quotations are thus restricted to stanzas referring to magical uses of runes, and the mythological material is left out.

*Northern Antiquities* does not reveal a good impression of the mythological aspect, either:

I have before observed, that the Conqueror, who usurped this name, attributed to himself the invention of Letters; of which, they had not probably any idea in Scandinavia before his time. But although this noble art is sufficiently wonderful in iteself, to attract the veneration of an ignorant people towards the teacher of it: yet Odin caused it to be regarded as the Art of Magic by way of excellence, the art of working all sorts of miracles: whether it was that this new piece of fallacy was subservient to his ambition, or whether he himself was barbarous enough to think there was something supernatural in writing. He speaks, at least in the following Poem, like a man who would make it so believed. (Percy, 216)

The problem seems to be that the ‘Runic Chapter’ of *Hávamál* portrays runes as being principally for performing magic; the myth of Óðinn’s acquisition of runes would have only accentuated this, had it been included. Mallet and Percy, like most scholars in the eighteenth century, wanted to see runes as having a primarily literary function, that is, having the function of recording and preserving the literature of the Scandinavians. Once again, the myth conflicted with the broader intellectual context, and it is probably at least in part for this reason that the mythological material is suppressed.

The reception of the myth of the mead of poetry in many ways is very similar to the reception of the myth of the acquisition of runes. Despite great interest in both the poetry and the mythology of medieval Iceland, there was comparatively little interest in the mythology of poetry, in particular, the account of the mythological genesis of poetry in *Snorra Edda*.

*Northern Antiquities*, again, is a good example of this lack of interest. After including almost all of *Gylfaginning*, it includes selections from *Skáldskaparmál*, and among these is the myth of the mead of poetry. It is introduced as ‘an allegory not altogether void of invention’ (Percy, 185) and is included in an abridged form. Unlike the other selections, there is no commentary on the myth. Few other scholars saw much interest in it, either, in spite of its classical resonances — that is, as a divine drink which inspired poetry.

Once again, I think the lack of interest stems largely from the conflict between the ideas of the genesis of poetry in the myth and those of late eighteenth-century scholars. The mead of poetry as poetic inspiration is the

product of saliva, murder and fermentation, and its acquisition by Óðinn the result of trickery, seduction and cunning. This, in many ways, is not a representation of poetry that pre-Romantic scholars would have wanted to promote.

Thus we can see that although the writing system and poetry of the medieval Icelanders was of great interest to early scholars, and in addition, the mythology and mythological works of medieval Icelanders were also of interest, it did not necessarily follow that the myths concerning runes and poetry were also of interest. These in many ways conflicted with the dominant intellectual movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which, at the same time, also generated much of the interest in other Old Norse-Icelandic material.

### References

- Byock, Jesse L. 1990. *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. Berkeley: Uni. of California Press.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1998. *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750-1820*. Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso.
- Eco, Umberto. 1995. *The Search for the Perfect Language*. London: Blackwell Publishers.
- Evans, David A. H. 1986. *Hávamál*. London: Viking Society.
- Faulkes, Anthony. 1977. *Edda Islandorum: Völuspá. Hávamál. P. H. Resen's editions of 1665*. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.
- Jakob Benediktsson, ed. 1951. *Arngrimi Jonae: Opera Latine Conscripta*. 4 vols. Copenhagen: Munksgaard.
- Larrington, Carolyne. 1996. *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford: Oxford U. P.
- Page, R. I. 1999. *The Icelandic Rune-Poem*. London: The Viking Society.
- Percy, Thomas. 1770. *Northern Antiquities*. Vol. II. London [Reprinted in facsimile 1979, New York: Garland].

## Three Miracles of the Virgin Mary Concerning Childbirth Set in Medieval Iceland

Kellinde Wrightson

University of Sydney

This paper will examine three recordings of miracles performed by the Virgin Mary for women in labour — in Kálfafell, Svinafell, and Kirkjubær — as well as some aspects of the development of the cult of the Virgin Mary in medieval Iceland. These stories form part of a large collection of Marian miracles found in AM 234 4to which was compiled in the southern diocese of Skálholt. The cathedral at Skálholt was founded in the first century after the conversion in c. 1000 and the translation of this particular collection of miracles between 1050 and 1200 from the Latin must have been one of the first Christian literary projects to have been undertaken, and it provides some of the earliest evidence of the Mary cult.

# Ragnarök: Götterdämmerung und Weltende in der nordischen Literatur

Stefanie Würth

University of Tübingen

Über Ragnarök ist uns zwar eine Vielzahl detaillierter Informationen über Ragnarök überliefert, doch diese Informationen sind mit zahlreichen Problemen verknüpft. Das größte Problem der Ragnarökdarstellung besteht wohl darin, dass wir nicht genau entscheiden können, inwieweit wir es mit christlichen oder mit vorchristlichen germanischen Vorstellungen zu tun haben.

Schon Axel Olrik (1922) versuchte, christliche von vorchristlichen Motiven zu trennen und der Herkunft der Ragnarökvorstellungen auf die Spur zu kommen. Doch weder ihm noch späteren Forschern gelang es, eine ursprüngliche, rein vorchristliche Ragnarökvorstellung heraus zu filtern. Als gesichert kann somit lediglich gelten, dass im Mittelalter offensichtlich Interesse an der Ragnarökvorstellung herrschte und die mittelalterlichen Autoren zu selbständiger Weiterbearbeitung anregte.

Sieht man von der Göttlichkeit der Personen des Mythos ab, so lässt er sich sein Kern daraufhin reduzieren, dass er eine Stresssituation behandelt, die durch einen Mord innerhalb einer Familie entsteht – ein Thema also, das uns aus der mittelalterlichen Literatur, z.B. der germanischen Heldendichtung, wohlbekannt

ist (Clunies Ross 1994). Margaret Clunies Ross führt verschiedene Beispiele an, die belegen, dass der Baldr-Mythos und damit auch die gesamte Ragnarökdarstellung nicht nur einen religiösen, sondern auch einen sozialen Diskurs enthält, der mehrere Jahrhunderte hindurch nicht an Aktualität verlor. Im folgenden möchte ich mich auf die *Völuspá* als wichtigstes Zeugnis der Ragnarökdarstellung konzentrieren, deren Besonderheiten näher herausarbeiten und sie anschließend in einen größeren historischen und literarischen Kontext einbinden.

Das eddische Götterlied *Völuspá* leitet als erstes Lied die im 13. Jahrhundert entstandene Sammlung der Eddalieder im Codex Regius ein. Während die meisten anderen eddischen Lieder nur im Codex Regius vollständig überliefert sind und in der Regel nur Einzelstrophen auch in anderen Handschriften erhalten sind, nimmt die *Völuspá* eine Sonderstellung ein, weil noch eine zweite Handschrift, die Anfang des 14. Jahrhunderts entstandene Hauksbók [Edition Finnur Jónsson 1892-96], einen kompletten Text dieses Liedes enthält, wenn auch mit zum Teil recht gewichtigen Unterschieden hinsichtlich Wortlaut, Strophenfolge oder Metrum. Darüber hinaus werden zahlreiche Strophen der *Völuspá* auch in der *Snorra Edda* zitiert. Im Text der Hauksbók fehlen einige Strophen des Codex Regius, dafür enthält die Hauksbók umgekehrt aber auch Strophen, die wiederum im Codex Regius nicht erhalten sind. Es lässt sich bisher nicht eindeutig klären, welcher der beiden Texte dem verlorenen Original des Liedes näher steht.

Abgesehen von der Überlieferungssituation nimmt die *Völuspá* auch im Hinblick auf Erzählhaltung und Inhalt eine Sonderstellung innerhalb der eddischen Dichtung ein. In Form einer Prophezeiung, die von einer Völva, d.h. einer Seherin, geäußert wird, liefert das Gedicht eine Weltgeschichte von der Schöpfung über den Untergang der Welt bis zu einer neu entstehenden zukünftigen Welt, in der christliche und pagane Elemente nicht immer deutlich zu trennen sind. Die ersten 29 Strophen (in Sigurður Nordals Edition, 1980) erzählen von der Entstehung der Welt, die aus einer chaotischen Leere von den Göttern geschaffen wird. Von Anfang an existieren auch bedrohliche Kräfte, die sowohl konkrete Gestalt annehmen können, wie die Riesen, als auch abstrakte Bedrohungen, wie Geldgier, Neid und Eifersucht. Die dadurch ausgelöst Angst veranlasst Odin, Kontakt zu der Völva des narrativen Rahmens aufzunehmen und sie über die weitere Zukunft der Welt auszuforschen. In Odins Dialog mit der Völva wird deutlich, dass die Götter selbst vom moralischen Chaos bedroht sind, dem sie mit strengen Bestrafungen entgegentreten wollen. Doch ihre eigene Verderbtheit wird um so deutlicher, je härter die Strafen sind, wodurch ihre Feinde, die Riesen, ermutigt werden, einen Versuch zur endgültigen Auslöschung der Götter zu unternehmen. Der Untergang der Götter wird schließlich im dritten Teil des Gedichtes beschrieben, der die Strophen 45-65 umfasst und der auch die das Thema Ragnarök bedeutsamen Strophen enthält.

Da bis heute nicht sicher entschieden ist, ob die *Völuspá* vor oder nach der Christianisierung entstand, wurde auch der christliche Gehalt des Gedichtes in der Forschung heiß diskutiert. (z.B. Butt 1969; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 1999) Ist die *Völuspá* ein christliches Gedicht, das vorchristliche Mythen verwendet oder handelt es sich bei der *Völuspá* um ein genuin paganes Werk, in das später christliche Elemente interpoliert wurden? Zur Zeit herrscht bei den meisten Forschern wohl eine Art Kompromissansicht vor: Der anonyme Verfasser der *Völuspá* war selbst wohl nicht Christ, aber er verwendete eine Menge christlichen Materials, das vor allem aus der biblischen Offenbarung stammt, wodurch sich der schwierig zu fassende Synkretismus des Gedichtes erklären lässt. (Dronke 1997; McKinnell 1993)

Bis über das 13. Jahrhundert hinaus bestand in Skandinavien und – wie Bilddarstellungen bezeugen - auch auf den Britischen Inseln großes Interesse an der Ragnarökdarstellung. Es fällt auf, dass die Ragnarökvorstellungen offenbar eine Affinität zu prophetischer Literatur aufweisen. Die *Völuspá* ist ein Visions- oder prophetisches Gedicht, das im Codex Regius an erster Stelle steht und somit den eddischen Zyklus einleitet, diesen aber auch gleichzeitig enthält bzw. vorwegnimmt, da es ja die gesamte Weltgeschichte von der Schöpfung über den Untergang bis in die neue Zeit umfasst. In der Hauksbók ist außer den Prophezeiungen der germanischen Völva unter dem Titel *Merlínuspá* auch die isländische Übersetzung der *Prophetie Merlini* enthalten, und damit steht die Ragnarökdarstellung hier in einen zunächst allgemein weltgeschichtlichen, dann aber auch in einem speziell zeitgeschichtlichen Kontext.

Bei näherem Hinsehen weisen die Ragnarökdarstellung der *Völuspá* im Codex Regius und in der Hauksbók beträchtliche Unterschiede auf. (Dronke 1997, S. 27) Während die Ragnarökdarstellung im Codex Regius 22 Strophen umfasst, begnügt sich die Hauksbók mit nur 14 Strophen. Ein Teil dieser fehlenden Strophen in der Hauksbók erklärt sich damit, dass hier der Tod Baldrs nicht erwähnt wird. Damit fehlt in dieser Version der *Völuspá* einerseits der für den Codex Regius so wichtige Zusammenhang zwischen dem Tod Baldrs und dem Kampf zwischen Asen und Riesen. Andererseits erscheint Baldrs Tod in der Hauksbók nicht als Opfer für die Erneuerung der Welt, sondern hier wird in einer zusätzlichen Halbstrophe die vorher bereits erwähnte, dritte göttliche Macht, eingeführt, die noch deutlicher als die Baldr-Figur im Codex Regius christliche Züge aufweist. Damit ist die christliche Konnotation in der Hauksbók stärker ausgeprägt als im Codex Regius bzw. sie hat einen anderen Schwerpunkt – nicht der eigentlich heidnische Gott Baldr erscheint hier als Christusfigur, sondern es wird eine neue, unbenannte, aber deutlich christliche Erlöserfigur eingeführt.

Gemeinsam ist jedoch beiden *Völuspá*-Versionen, dass die Ragnarökdarstellung in Form einer Vision oder Prophetie vorgebracht wird. In der

Forschung wurde vor allem von Ursula Dronke auf die Parallelen zwischen der *Völuspá* und antiken sibyllinischen Texten aufmerksam gemacht. (1997, S. 27ff) Ursula Dronke weist insbesondere darauf hin, dass die *Völuspá* zwei unterschiedliche Modelle der sibyllinischen Literatur miteinander kombiniert. Dies geschieht, indem das „ek“ [„ich“] der Völva mit einer „hon“ [„sie“] spricht, die einer spirituellen Welt entstammt und die eigentlich nur gewissermaßen die „andere Seite“ dieser Völva repräsentiert. (ähnlich Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1962, S. 324)

Auf den ersten Blick scheint die *Völuspá* im Codex Regius und in der Hauksbók in jeweils ganz unterschiedlichem und kaum vergleichbarem Zusammenhang zu stehen. Im Codex Regius ist die *Völuspá* ausschließlich im Kontext eddischer Dichtung überliefert. Nach Ansicht von Heinz Klingenberg spiegelt sich im Codex Regius deutlich der zeitgeschichtliche Kontext, d.h. die Wirren der Sturlungenzeit mit der am Ende der Freistaatzeit herrschenden Anarchie. Daher setzt Heinz Klingenberg auch die *Völuspá* in einen direkten Bezug zur Zeit der Entstehung der Handschrift: „Die Zeichen der Endzeit, von einem der größten Dichter des europäischen Mittelalters wohl vor dem Epochenjahr 1000 gesetzt, gewinnen nun am Ende der Sturlungenzeit eine beklemmende Aktualität.“ (1974, S. 132)

Tatsächlich lassen sich in den Motiven der Ragnarökdarstellung zahlreiche Parallelen zu den anarchischen Zuständen im Island des 13. Jahrhunderts erkennen: Verwandtenmord, gegenseitige Ausrottung mächtiger Familien, moralischer Verfall und generelle Orientierungslosigkeit. Doch andererseits lassen sich diese Charakteristika in jeder Krisenzeit feststellen. Darüber hinaus lässt sich eine Endzeit ja immer erst aus der Retrospektive erkennen. Die *Völuspá* passt demnach erst aus der Retrospektive auf das Ende der Sturlungenzeit, wobei dieses Ende bei der Entstehung der im Codex Regius enthaltenen Sammlung noch gar nicht abzusehen war. Ähnliches gilt auch für das „Epochenjahr“ 1000, denn in der neueren Forschung ist ja höchst umstritten, welche eschatologische Bedeutung das Jahr 1000 tatsächlich hatte. Zum anderen ist es fraglich, ob den Isländern diese auf uns so schicksalträchtig wirkende Jahreszahl überhaupt bewusst war. In der frühesten isländischen Historiographie, d.h. historischen Werken des 12. Jahrhunderts werden nur sehr selten absolute Jahreszahlen genannt. Vielmehr erfolgt die Datierung von Ereignissen anhand von Regierungsjahren ausländischer Herrscher oder den Amtszeiten der einheimischen Gesetzessprecher. Darüber hinaus ist auch fraglich, inwieweit man die Ragnarökdarstellung in Bezug zu einem doch nur aus christlicher Sicht als „Epochenjahr“ zu bezeichnendem Datum setzen kann: Da Island erst im Jahr 1000 endgültig christianisiert wurde, würde ein christlicher Autor wohl kaum auf Motive der heidnischen Mythologie zurückgreifen, um die bevorstehende Endzeit zu charakterisieren. War der Autor der *Völuspá* dagegen kein Christ, so war das Jahr 1000, das ja auf einer

christlichen Chronologie basiert, für ihn erst recht kein Epochenjahr und schon gar kein Endzeit verheißendes. Die Ragnarökdarstellung, die die Endzeit und ihre Vorzeichen so allgemein formuliert, dass sich jeder Rezipient, der sich in einer Krisensituation befindet, darin wiederfinden kann, ist offenbar in unterschiedlichen zeitlichen Kontexten verwendbar und kann immer wieder von neuem angepasst werden. Auch in der Version der *Völuspá*, die im Codex Regius überliefert ist, bezieht sich die Ragnarökdarstellung offenbar nicht auf eine konkrete Krisensituation, sondern steht hier in einem allgemein weltgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang, wobei die Weltgeschichte hier mit Bildern aus der eigenen Überlieferung illustriert wird.

Aufgrund der unspezifischen Charakterisierung der Endzeit in der Ragnarökdarstellung der *Völuspá* ist es kein Wunder, dass sich das Gedicht auch in den Kontext der ca. 50 Jahre nach dem Codex Regius entstandenen Hauksbók einpassen ließ. Während es jedoch im Codex sich entweder um eine spezifisch germanische oder bestenfalls skandinavische Endzeitdarstellung handelt, wird in der Hauksbók mittels des Kontextes ein deutlicher Bezug zur norwegisch-isländischen Geschichte. Haukur Erlendsson, Auftraggeber der Handschrift und auch selbst Schreiber eines Teils der Texte, war geborener Isländer, verbrachte aber den größten Teils eines Lebens in Norwegen, wo er als Beamter des Königs tätig war und offenbar auch eine Vertrauensstellung einnahm. Alle Texte der enzyklopädisch ausgerichteten Hauksbók bezeugen das historische Interesse ihres Auftraggebers und Hauptredaktors. Neben der *Völuspá* enthält die Hauksbók mit der isländischen Übersetzung der *Prophetie Merlini*, noch ein zweites Gedicht mit im weitesten Sinne apokalyptischem Inhalt.

Auch wenn in der Handschrift *Völuspá* und *Merlínusspá* nicht direkt benachbart überliefert werden und damit auch auf den ersten Blick in keinem direkten Zusammenhang stehen, so lässt sich doch bei näherer Betrachtung durchaus eine Affinität der beiden Texte erkennen. (so auch Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 1999) Zum einen handelt es sich um Gedichte, wodurch die beiden Texte schon rein formal unter den Prosatexten eine Sonderstellung einnehmen. Darüber hinaus handelt es sich in beiden Fällen um Prophetien, die von einem sehr langen Zeitraum berichten. Es fällt auf, dass in der Hauksbók die beiden Teile der *Prophetie Merlini* vertauscht sind. Durch diese Umstellung entsprechen sich nun die Chronologien des Inhalts in *Merlínusspá* und in *Völuspá*. Darüber hinaus fehlt in der isländischen Übersetzung der Prolog der lateinischen Prophetie. Statt dessen beginnt die *Merlínusspá* mit vier Strophen, die über Entstehung und Verfasser der Prophetie Auskunft geben und damit eine für den Inhalt verantwortliche Autorität einführen. Die letzten Strophen der *Merlínusspá* äußern sich zum Akt des Dichtens und geben außerdem eine Anleitung zur christlichen Interpretation des Werkes. An Hand von Beispielen, die dem Traum Davids in der Bibel entnommen sind, wird erläutert, wie die

Umschreibungen der Prophetien aufzulösen sind. Insgesamt folgt die *Merlínusspá* ihrer lateinischen Vorlage sehr genau, verwendet aber Bilder und Metaphern, die aus der einheimischen Poesie stammen und der isländischen Version der Prophetie Merlini den Charakter eines eddischen Liedes verleihen – wodurch die *Merlínusspá* einerseits formal in die Nähe der *Völuspá* rückt, andererseits aber die *Völuspá* inhaltlich mit der *Merlínusspá* assoziiert werden kann. Da sich beide Gedichte mit im weitesten Sinne historischen Fragestellungen befassen, wird es auch verständlich, dass sie in die sonst so nüchtern wirkende Hauksbók aufgenommen wurden.

Dass es sich bei der Hauksbók nicht um ein unreflektiertes Sammelsurium handelt – als das mittelalterliche Enzyklopädien auch heute noch manchmal betrachtet werden – bezeugen die redaktionellen Eingriffe in die Texte, die grundsätzlich gekürzt wurden, um die historiographischen Aussagen stringenter heraus zu arbeiten. (Würth 1998, S. 151ff) Die *Merlínusspá* ist in die *Breta sögur* integriert, die isländische Übersetzung der *Historia regum Britannie* des Geoffrey of Monmouth. Zusammen mit der unmittelbar vorausgehenden *Trójumanna saga*, der isländischen Übersetzung des *Excidium Troiae historie* des Dares Phrygius, bilden die *Breta sögur* eine kontinuierliche Darstellung der Geschichte von den mythischen Anfängen bis hin zum norwegischen König Hákon Haraldsson (reg. ca. 920-960), der beim englischen König Æthelstan aufgezogen wurde, daher auch den Beinamen Aðalsteinsfóstri trug und somit die Verbindung zwischen zunächst Weltgeschichte, dann britischer Geschichte und schließlich norwegischer Geschichte herstellte.

#### 4. Die Funktion der Ragnarökdarstellung

Wie Margaret Clunies Ross deutlich gemacht hat, so drücken Mythen soziale und kulturelle Bedürfnisse aus. (1994, S. 15) Daraus lässt sich jedoch nicht nur der Schluss ziehen, dass die Interpretation der Mythen die geistige und materielle Welt berücksichtigen müsse, in der die Mythen entstanden. Vielmehr lässt sich Margaret Clunies Ross' Feststellung auch auf das Weiterleben der Mythen übertragen: Der soziale und literarische Kontext der erhaltenen Texte gibt uns nicht nur Auskunft über die Rolle, die ein eventuell ursprünglich heidnischer Mythos auch noch in christlicher Zeit gespielt hat. Wir können daraus auch erkennen, wie Mythen adaptiert wurden und neuen Bedürfnissen Ausdruck geben konnten. (ähnlich auch Lindow 1985, S. 53)

Mit Geoffreys of Monmouth *Prophetie Merlini* begann zunächst in England, dann auf den britischen Inseln allgemein und schließlich auch in den übrigen europäischen Ländern eine Tradition politischer Prophezeiungen, die sich einerseits durch ihre schwer verständliche Symbolik, andererseits durch einen eindeutigen Bezug auf historische Ereignisse auszeichnete. (Taylor 1967) Die Entstehung dieser politischen Prophetien steht in einem deutlichen Bezug zu Konflikten und Krisensituationen, denen sich eine Gesellschaft ausgesetzt

sah. So lassen sich z.B. die zahlreichen walisischen Prophetien aus den endlosen Konflikten zwischen Walisern und Engländern bzw. später zwischen Walisern und Normannen erklären. (Wallis Evans 1984, S. 278) Charakteristisch für die walisische Form der Prophetien wurde die Gestalt eines Erlösers, der nach seinem Tod zurückkehren, Wales aus seinen Fesseln befreien und Rache an den Engländern bzw. Normannen üben sollte. Mehr als acht Personen erlangten Berühmtheit als solche „redeemer-heroes“. (Henken 1996, S. 23ff) Nur sehr selten äußern sich die Prophetien, woher der Erlöser zurückkommen wird – wichtig allein ist, dass er kommen wird. Das Kommen des Helden ist stets mit militärischen Aktionen verbunden. Nicht die Ankunft des Helden bringt die Erlösung, sondern seine kriegerischen Fähigkeiten. Der entscheidenden Schlacht geht eine kataklysmische Zeit voraus, in der alle Normen und Regeln außer Kraft gesetzt sind. Erst der Erlöserheld etabliert eine neue Ordnung, die dauerhaften Frieden und Wohlstand verspricht.

Solche Erlöserfiguren lassen sich auch in der mittelalterlichen isländischen und norwegischen Literatur finden: Neben der *Völuspá* ist hier vor allem die *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* [Edition Ólafur Halldórsson 1958-61] zu nennen. Sowohl die walisischen als auch die isländisch-norwegischen Retterfiguren sollen die Hoffnung auf eine bessere Zukunft zum Ausdruck bringen. Diese Erlösung kann aber erst erfolgen, wenn die alte Ordnung vollkommen außer Kraft gesetzt wurde und die menschliche Gesellschaft durch eine „reinigende“ Katastrophe in Form eines vernichtenden Krieges ging. Trotz dieser vordergründig umstürzenden Funktion des Helden handelt es bei diesem Retter dennoch um keine subversive Figur. Eigentlich geht es immer um eine Bestätigung der herrschenden Kraft: des jeweils herrschenden Königsgeschlechts oder bzw. und der Kirche. Denn die Gestalt des Retters ist eine zurückkehrende Figur, die einer bereits tatsächlich herrschenden Familie entstammt. Mit der Figur des Redeemer wird zwar eine Identifikationsfigur angeboten, die die Unzufriedenheit der Leute besänftigen soll, die aber letztlich dennoch einen tatsächliche Revolution verhindert. Denn nur derjenige, der sich anpasst und der bereit ist, dem neuen Herrscher zu folgen, wird das Chaos überstehen und die verheißene Zukunft erleben. In der *Völuspá* wird dieses die herrschende Macht bestätigende Bild sehr geschickt vermittelt: hier wird impliziert, dass die Rettung (=Baldr) aus der eigenen Vergangenheit bzw. der vorchristlichen Religion kommt, aber diese „germanische“, d.h. nicht-römische und damit nicht-fremdkulturelle Figur wird in Übereinstimmung mit der christlichen Lehre dargestellt, so dass letztendlich doch die herrschende katholische Theologie bestätigt wird.

Daher ist es auch kein Wunder, wenn diese Texte in christlicher Zeit so lebhaft rezipiert wurden. Im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert kann es sich dabei nicht mehr um eine geschickte Adaption heidnischer Mythen handeln, um den Menschen den Übertritt zum neuen Glauben zu erleichtern, sondern es muss

sich um ein rein politisches Phänomen, d.h. um einen Machtdiskurs gehandelt haben. Das Unbehagen der Menschen über die zeitgenössischen Zustände wird aufgenommen und als endzeitliches Chaos interpretiert. Auf dieses vernichtende Chaos folgt eine paradiesische Zeit, an der auch die Menschen teilhaben können. Da jedoch die Macht in der neuen Welt von einem Gott bzw. Herrscher übernommen wird, der bereits an der Herrschaft der alten Welt beteiligt war, so empfiehlt es sich, sich bereits jetzt mit diesem Retter gut zu stellen und seinen Forderungen nachzukommen.

Der Übersetzer der *Merlínussþá* war der isländische Mönch Gunnlaugr Leifsson. Er lebte und arbeitete in dem Benediktinerkloster Þingeyrar, in dem eine ganze Reihe bedeutender Werke und Handschriften des isländischen Mittelalters entstanden. (zu Gunnlaugr vgl. Würth 1998, S. 205f) Unter anderem stammen auch zwei Sagas über den norwegischen König Ólaf Tryggvason aus diesem Kloster, die von Gunnlaugr und seinem Zeitgenossen Oddr verfasst wurden und die die Grundlage für spätere Bearbeitungen bildeten. Oddr, dessen Saga über Ólaf Tryggvason [Edition Finnur Jónsson 1932] auch Gunnlaugr benutzte, stilisierte den norwegischen König als Erlöserfigur, die Norweger und vor allem die Isländer vor dem heidnischen Irrglauben rettete. Ólaf Tryggvason wird zwar in der Schlacht bei Svoldr besiegt, aber das Gerücht besagt, dass er auf wunderbare Weise gerettet worden sei und sich als Mönch in Griechenland niedergelassen habe. Implizit enthält auch diese Geschichte das Versprechen auf die Wiederkehr des Königs, der schon zu Lebzeiten eine Erlöserrolle gespielt hat.

Ebenso wie die Figur Ólaf Tryggvasons lässt sich auch die *Völuspá* sowohl aus religiöser wie auch aus politischer Perspektive deuten. Spätestens seit Snorri Sturlusons Königsgenealogien, die eine direkte Abstammung der skandinavischen Herrscherdynastien von Odin postulieren, konnten die germanischen Götter auch als Repräsentanten weltlicher Herrschaft aufgefasst werden. Steht dann noch die *Völuspá* – wie z.B. in der Hauksbók - in einem dezidiert historiographischen Zusammenhang, denn ist es ohne weiteres möglich, das Gedicht nicht religiös-eschatologisch, sondern weltlich-politisch zu deuten. Der religiöse Inhalt der *Völuspá* wird dann metaphorisch aufgefasst: Das Gedicht verspricht nicht eine Erlösung nach dem Untergang der Welt, sondern nach einer großen Katastrophe wird ein „Redeemer“ in Gestalt eines neuen Herrschers erneut Ordnung schaffen. Da der genealogische Zusammenhang zwischen Odin und dem norwegischen Königshaus allgemein bekannt war, dürfte die *Völuspá* dahingehend gedeutet worden sein, dass auch der neue Herrscher, den die *Völuspá* ja ebenfalls als Nachfahr Odins beschreibt, aus dem gleichen Geschlecht stammen wird.

Die *Völuspá* plädiert somit für eine Kontinuität der Herrschaft in Norwegen, und da Island sei 1262 der norwegischen Krone unterworfen war, dürfte auch hier einerseits ein lebhaftes Interesse an einer stabilen Regierung geherrscht haben. Andererseits dürfte aber auch die norwegische Regierung

darán interessiert gewesen zu sein, den neuen Untertanen, Sicherheit zu vermitteln, indem ihnen ein Retter aus möglichen Krisensituationen in Aussicht gestellt wurde. Bei genauerer Betrachtung ist die *Völuspá* im historiographischen Kontext der Hauksbók also als durchaus ambivalenter Text zu betrachten: Denn er prognostiziert eine Katastrophe in Form eines Krieges, droht damit also mit drastischen Sanktionen im Falle des Widerstands gegen die Regierung und prognostiziert, das – auch wenn der Krieg mit einer Niederlage der herrschenden Macht endet, so doch die Erneuerung wieder nur von Seiten genau dieser Macht erfolgen kann. Die *Völuspá* im Kontext der Hauksbók verfolgt damit genau die gleiche Argumentationsstrategie wie die Sagas über die beiden norwegischen Missionskönige Ólaf Tryggvason und Ólaf den Heiligen, die jeweils ihre in christlichem Auftrag grausam zu Werke gehenden Herrscher als zukünftige Erlöser erscheinen ließen.

Prophetische Literatur steht somit immer zunächst einmal im Dienst der Macht, aber sie enthält durchaus auch subversive Elemente, die belegen, wie leicht die herrschende Macht zu erschüttern ist. Durch die Gestalt des Erlösers wird versucht, diese die Ordnung bedrohenden Elemente in Schach zu halten, doch da die Prophetie weder eine Garantie für die Rückkehr des Erlösers geben kann noch den Zeitpunkt der Erlösung vorhersagt, muss sie sich, um eine Wirkung erzielen zu können, stärker auf die in der Schilderung des weltauflösenden Chaos liegende Drohung verlassen als auf die der verheißenen Erlösung.

### Bibliographie:

- [Saxo Grammaticus] *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, hg. v. Jørgen Olrik und H. Raeber. Bd. 1: Text, Kopenhagen 1931; Bd. 2: *Indicem Verborum Contines*, hg. v. Franz Blatt. Kopenhagen 1957
- Butt, Wolfgang: „Zur Herkunft der *Völuspá*“ in: *PBB* (West) 91 (1969), S. 82-103
- Clunies Ross, Margaret: *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse myths in medieval Northern society*. Bd. 1: *The Myths*. Odense 1994
- Dronke, Ursula: *The Poetic Edda*. Bd. 2: *Mythological Poems*. Oxford 1997
- Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, hg. v. Finnur Jónsson. Kopenhagen 1931
- Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, hg. v. Gustav Neckel und Hans Kuhn. Heidelberg <sup>5</sup>1983.
- Hauksbók udgiven efter de Arnarnagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4é samt forskellig papirshåndskrifter*, hg. v. Eiríkur und Finnur Jónsson. Kopenhagen 1892-96
- Hauksbók. The Arna-Magnæan Manuscripts 371, 4<sup>o</sup>, 544, 4<sup>o</sup>, and 675, 4<sup>o</sup>*, hg. v. Jón Helgason. Kopenhagen 1960 [=Faksimileausgabe]
- Henken, Elissa R.: *National Redeemer. Owain Glyndwr in Welsh Tradition*. Cardiff 1996
- Klingenberr, Heinz: *Edda – Sammlung und Dichtung*. Basel & Stuttgart 1974
- Lindow, John: „Mythology and Mythography“ in: *Old Norse – Icelandic Literature. A Critical Guide*, hg. v. Carol J. Clover und John Lindow. Ithaca 1985, S. 21-67
- Martin, John Stanley: *Ragnarok. An Investigation into Old Norse Concepts of the Fate of the Gods*. Assen 1972
- McKinnell, John: „*Völuspá*“ in: *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, hg. v. Phill Pulsiano. New York & London 1993, S. 713-715
- Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, hg. v. Ólafur Halldórsson. 2 Bde, Kopenhagen 1958-61
- Olrik, Axel: *Ragnarök. Die Sagen vom Weltuntergang*. Berlin und Leipzig 1922 (Das dänische Original wurde 1914 fertig gestellt; die deutsche Übersetzung von Wilhelm Ranisch wurde an

etlichen Stellen überarbeitet)

Rafnsson, Sveinbjörn: „Merlínusspá og Völuspá í sögulegu samhengi“ in: *Skírnir* 173 (1999), S. 377-419

*Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk*, hg. v. Finnur Jónsson. Kopenhagen 1932.

Schier, Kurt: „Balder“ in: *Reallexikon der Germanische Altertumskunde*, Berlin 1973-; Bd. 2, S. 2-7

Sveinsson, Einar Ólafur: *Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld*. Reykjavík 1962

Taylor, Rupert: *The Political Prophecy in England*. New York 1967

*Völuspá*, hg. u. kommentiert von Sigurður Nordal. Darmstadt 1980 [isländische Ausgabe erschien erstmals 1923; die deutsche Übersetzung basiert auf der zweiten, überarbeiteten Ausgabe von 1952]

Wallis Evans, R.: „Prophetic Poetry“ in: *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, hg. v. A.O.H. Jarman und Gwilym Rees Hughes, Llandybie 1984, Bd. 2, S. 278-297

Würth, Stefanie: *Der „Antikenroman“ in der isländischen Literatur des Mittelalters. Eine Untersuchung zur Übersetzung und Rezeption lateinischer Literatur im Norden*. Basel & Frankfurt/M. 1998.