

VIÐAR PÁLSSON

## PAGAN MYTHOLOGY IN CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

### I. Mythology and Religion\*

“Soviel auch schon über die Snorra-Edda geschrieben worden ist, besteht doch über den eigentlichen Sinn und Zweck des Buches noch immer wenig Klarheit.” Thus the opening statement of Walter Baetke’s ground-breaking *Die Götterlehre der Snorra-Edda*.<sup>1</sup> Although Snorra-Edda still deludes us on many levels, and still offers very difficult and multifaceted questions and problems, few would dare to open with such a statement today. But when it opened Baetke’s monograph in 1950 it was not at all an overstatement.

Of the seemingly countless sets of problems offered by Snorra-Edda, two in particular figure prominently in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship. Firstly, there is the problem of an alleged inner incoherence. The difficulty, which was to many an evident impossibility, to read Snorra-Edda as a fairly cohesive work with a sound structure and coherent ideology and presentation lead many scholars to the explanatory device of dismissing significant parts of it as interpolations. The Prologue became particularly suspect in this matter: Andreas Heusler famously

\* Thanks are due to many for comments and discussions: my fellow participants in the seminar “Fortíðin á íslenskum miðöldum” at the Third Icelandic Historical Congress at the University of Iceland in May 2006, where a previous version of this article was discussed: Helgi Þorláksson, and Sverrir and Ármann Jakobssynir; to my mentor Carol J. Clover for discussions at earlier stages; and above all to my other mentor at Berkeley, John Lindow, for whom I originally wrote the paper that grew to be this article and who offered extensive comments.

1 Walter Baetke, *Die Götterlehre der Snorra-Edda*. Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse 97:3 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1950). Rpt. in *Kleine Schriften: Geschichte, Recht, und Religion in Germanischem Schrifttum*, eds. Kurt Rudolph and Ernst Walter (Weimar: H. Böehlau, 1973), 206.

argued against Snorri's authorship of it almost a century ago, and both R. C. Boer and Anker Teilgård Laugesen dismissed it, in significant parts or whole, in two different studies, in 1924 and 1942 respectively, to name only three widely read studies in this mould.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, there is the alleged problem of the cultural and religious context of pagan mythology in Christian society in general and that of Snorra-Edda in particular. Early scholarly response to this problem differs, but there seems nevertheless to have been a general consensus that the problem existed and that it was imposing. If the open and considerable interest in mythological and mythologically-related material was not seen by every scholar as fundamentally contradictory to the proclaimed Christianity of eleventh-, twelfth-, thirteenth-, and fourteenth-century Iceland, it was at least seen to be somewhat odd, peculiar, or surprising, and demanding specific explanations. One line of approach, forming the ballast in a tradition led most prominently by Hans Kuhn, was to seek answers through interpretations put thoroughly in religious and religiohistorical context. Kuhn's determination to view Snorra-Edda and other mythological material primarily as pagan religious remnants led him to his thesis of a post-conversion age of religious syncretism, an age somehow primitively Christian but yet lukewarm pagan.<sup>3</sup>

Baetke met both of these problems head-on in *Die Götterlehre*, quite possibly the most important work yet written on Snorra-Edda, and fundamental to modern understanding of it.<sup>4</sup> He argued cogently that Snorra-Edda should be seen squarely within the classical and learned Christian medieval traditions, that it gained inner coherence only when read against the background of sophisticated Christian theological and religiohistorical explanations and concerns, and that the Prologue and Gylfaginning are inseparably intertwined in the larger and fundamental framework of the

2 Andreas Heusler, *Die gelehrte Urgeschichte im altisländischen Schrifttum*. Abhandlungen der königlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philologisch-historische Klasse 1908:3 (Berlin: Verlag der königlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1908); R. C. Boer, "Studier over Snorra Edda," *Årbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* (1924): 145-272; Anker Teilgård Laugesen, "Snorres opfattelse af Aserne," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 56 (1942): 301-315.

3 Of Kuhn's numerous writings on the subject the classic is "Das nordgermanische Heidentum in den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 79 (1942): 132-166.

4 Hans Kuhn is specifically targeted, cf. Baetke, *Die Götterlehre der Snorra-Edda*, 206ff.

work which ultimately renders it meaning. Scholarship on Snorra-Edda in later decades has chiefly run the course marked out by the larger implications of Baetke's thesis: the focus is not on whether Snorra-Edda is a product of classical and medieval European and Christian learning but rather on the question on which learned classical and medieval works exactly Snorri did cut his teeth, and how exactly and to what extent they are put into service within the Edda. Similarly, the focus is not as much on whether Snorra-Edda is a holistic work (although to what extent is certainly still debatable) as it is on the finer points of overall organization, ideology, aim, and purpose, the elements binding the work together as a whole. In any case, the Prologue has been given back to Snorri.<sup>5</sup>

Let us step back to Kuhn's syncretism and the second problem, that of cultural and religious context. A base assumption on which much of his argument rests, and is of particular interest for the present study, is that the presence of mythology is in and of itself an evidence for pagan sentiment. In other words: mythology and religion are assumed to be inextricably intertwined and inseparable. There is another and closely related historiographical tradition which also revolves around the idea of mythology and religion being two sides of the same coin: the ritual-behind-the-myth tradition. Largely an exercise in cyclical argumentation the myth-ritual tradition has declined steadily since around and after the mid-twentieth century, finding few but loyal advocates today.<sup>6</sup> Many and complex fac-

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Walter Baetke, see, e.g., Byrge Breitag, "Snorre Sturluson og æserne," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 79 (1964): 117-153; Anthony Faulkes, "The Genealogies and Regnal Lists in a Manuscript in Resen's Library," *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977* I, eds. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 12 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977): 177-190; Ursula and Peter Dronke, "The Prologue of the Prose Edda: Explorations in the Latin Background," *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977* I, eds. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 12 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977): 153-176; Anthony Faulkes, "Pagan Sympathy: Attitudes to Heathendom in the Prologue to *Snorra-Edda*," *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, eds. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldr Bessason, The University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies 4 (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1983): 283-314.

<sup>6</sup> The focus has for the most part been on eddic poetry. Link between Skírnismál and ritual are argued in Magnus Olsen, "Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus," *Maal og minne* (1909): 17-36; among what might be called the radical or fundamentalist arm of the tradition are, e.g., Bertha S. Phillpotts, *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama* (Cambridge: University Press, 1920); Anne Holtsmark, "Myten om Idun og Tjate i Tjodolvs *Hauströng*," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 64 (1949): 1-73; Einar Haugen, "The Edda



tors have contributed to the decline of these two traditions, but the one to cast our eyes on here is the growing emphasis on distinguishing clearly and properly between mythology and religion.<sup>7</sup> It has become increasingly clear that the aforementioned assumption was born rather of what modern scholars felt must have been than of what the medieval sources suggest actually was. There are no medieval sources that either suggest or support the idea that Christian medieval Icelanders drew any connection whatsoever between their own knowledge, transmission, and use of mythological material, on the one hand, and of pagan sentiment, on the other. There is nothing to suggest that they understood such undertakings to be immanently religious in any real sense. And that statement may stand as the thesis of the present study.

However, it is not so much that there are many Kuhnians around today – few if any still suggest that Snorri was possibly a crypto-pagan who dressed his religious or religiously related undertakings in the Edda in the disguise of the Prologue. Rather, it is the curious, and essentially contradictory, fact that much modern scholarship still seems to accept some of the fundamental implications of the second problem, and bends itself accordingly. More specifically: modern scholarship is still quite unwilling to abandon the idea that the knowledge, transmission, and use of mythology by Christian medieval Icelanders must have rested on some sort of “justification.” It still finds, to various degrees, pagan mythology in Christian society somewhat out of place, and religiously suspect.

If we speak in this context of justification of one sort or another then it must follow that someone was against or had quibbles about the appropriateness of that which was being justified. And the onus probandi must

as Ritual: Odin and his Masks,” *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, eds. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, The University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies 4 (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1983): 3–24; arguing for more indirect relations of rituals and preserved texts is, e.g., John Stanley Martin, *Ragnarök: An Investigation into Old Norse Concepts of the Fate of the Gods*, Melbourne Monographs in Germanic Studies 3 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972); on the use of myths as reflections of ancient Germanic cult and religion, see Otto Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen I* (Frankfurt am Main: M. Diesterweg, 1934), and Otto Höfler, *Verwandlungskulte, Volkssagen und Mythen*, Sitzungsberichte der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philologisch-historische Klasse 279:2 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> cf. John Lindow, “Mythology and Mythography,” *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, eds. John Lindow and Carol J. Clover, *Islandica* 45 (Ithaca, et al.: Cornell University Press, 1985): 48: “myths are not identical with religion and may flourish outside of a religious context.”



surely rest with those claiming that there was an opposition. That duty has not been fulfilled through adequate demonstration in the sources, while the notion of justification has been taken for granted on the basis of an assumption which seems rather derived from modern gut-feeling than medieval sources. To the contrary, the sources do, if anything, demonstrate the normality with which Christian medieval Icelanders used mythological material, with no hints of moral problems or religious guilt.

The following pages are devoted to this normality, and are split into two main sections. The former is a study in *Sturlunga saga*, the contemporary sagas of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland. The latter takes up the case of skaldic poetry in *Sturlunga*, and proceeds to a broader discussion of skaldic poetry in general, genealogies, and *Snorra-Edda* and mythology.

Before moving on to *Sturlunga* a point should be explicitly emphasized, although quite implicitly done above: Christian medieval Icelanders, as we meet them in the sources, did not view paganism impartially, let alone favorably. Heathen religion itself is, quite expectantly, uniformly negatively viewed. We will encounter such instances in our survey, although they are not specifically under review.

## II. The Attitude Towards Mythology – the Testimony of *Sturlunga*

Plowing *Sturlunga* only turns up a handful of instances where mythology is directly touched upon or referred to, and our focus is primarily on those. Also, we may occasionally encounter instances where thoughts of mythology are evoked while no direct reference is made. These instances are, however, rare. One is found in *Íslendinga saga*, where the course of events in the fateful year 1255 is told. Shortly before the killing of Oddur Þórarinnsson in *Geldingaholt*, *Hrafn Oddsson*, one of the two assailants, rides with his men over the *Hjaltadalsheiði* heath:

Ok er þeir kómu upp á heiðina, kenndi, at brá lit. Hrafnar tveir flugu með þeim um alla heiðina. Hrafn Oddsyni kvaðst þat vel líka, er nafnar hans váru þeim í sinni.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, eds. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn (Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946), 512.

Most modern readers probably think of Óðinn when reading this passage. The two ravens remind us of Huginn and Muninn, mythological figures and the two most famous of ravens. It is particularly noteworthy in this context that while Hrafn and his men are preparing the attack, Sturla Þórðarson, our storyteller, shows us the Christian religious side of Oddur: “Oddr svaf lítit um nóttina ok söng lengi ok las saltara sinn.”<sup>9</sup> He is killed this very night after a spectacular defense. The ravens surely serve as an omen to the fight, but are they a reference to Óðinn? Ravens are associated with Óðinn in Norse mythology, and Óðinn is the god of death and battle, among other things. At the very end of *Íslendinga saga* we also find a tale of four dreams of a certain girl, Jóreiður in *Miðjumdalur*, all relating to events of this very year, 1255. The well-known literary character Guðrún Gjúkadóttir visits Jóreiður in her dreams. Jóreiður has not yet learned of the results of the battle on Þveráreyri from later that year, where Eyjólfur ofsi and Hrafn fought against Þorgils skarði and Oddur’s brother, Þorvarður, and she asks Guðrún about the fates of Eyjólfur and Hrafn. Guðrún, not favoring the two, says they will surely go “í helju heim”. The girl inquires why that is so. “Þá ætla þeir með illvilja sínum at koma heiðni á allt landit”, Guðrún replies.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to see the dream women linking Hrafn with heathen ethics so shortly after the raven story, and this even encourages us to take it, the two ravens, as some kind of a reference to Óðinn and paganism. However, the dream scene is the only thing in the saga that encourages such an understanding; there is nothing else in the saga that links Hrafn with paganism. Furthermore, it would be unique to learn of such an association of a thirteenth-century person. The dream scene may even be an interpolation,<sup>11</sup> and that would leave us with nothing to aid our understanding of the ravens as a reference to Óðinn.<sup>12</sup> What we

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 513.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 519–522. There is further mention of *heiðni* in the dream sequence, again void of any mythological relations. Jóreiður asks Guðrún, when she reveals her identity in the third dream: “Hví fara heiðnir menn hér’ kvað mærin [i.e., Jóreiður]. ‘Engu skal þig þat skipta,’ segir hon [i.e., Guðrún], ‘hvárt em ek kristin eða heiðin, en vinr er ek vinar míns.’” Guðrún also comments: “Nú hefir þetta þrisvar borit fyrir þig, enda verðr þrisvar allt forðum. Þat er ok eigi síðr, at góð er guðs þrenning.”

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 577.

<sup>12</sup> However, based on the general negativity of the saga’s references to Óðinn, cf. the examples reviewed below, one is led to assume that an association with Óðinn through the ravens is not intended as a favorable one.

arrive at, and that is our aim to show by dwelling on this example, is that we really do not know how exactly medieval audiences understood this passage and its equivalents.

The literary products of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland bear indisputable witness to a profound and genuine interest in the past, not least the pre-Christian past. Mythology and mythologically related material figures large; one only needs to mention the Eddas. Thus it is noteworthy, if not surprising, to find Sturlunga as good as exempt of direct references to mythological material (barring skaldic diction, of course, in which there is plenty).

The scant references that are found, all but one in *Íslendinga saga*, can be said to be of three types. The first type, a single reference only, is a reference to Norse mythology that cannot, nevertheless, have had any mythological meaning whatsoever for a thirteenth-century Icelander. It is when April 28th 1237 is referred to in *Íslendinga saga* as “Týsdaginn eftir páskavíku”.<sup>13</sup> This is no more than a conventional dating method, and gives us little to chew on. If it shows anything at all in our context, then it is how normal it was for Christian Icelanders to use the old day names without regarding it a heathen practice.<sup>14</sup>

The second type, again a single reference, embraces the practice of giving the *búðir* at alþingi names derived from Norse mythology: Snorri Sturluson’s *búð* Valhöll. During Snorri’s dispute with Magnús allsherjar- goði in the 1210’s he named his *búð* Grýla, doubtlessly to indicate that he was a force to be reckoned with.<sup>15</sup> Later, during the summers of 1228, 1231,

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>14</sup> As we learn from *Jóns saga helga*, Bishop Jón Ögmundarson is said to have fought against the use of pagan day names during his bishopric at Hólar in the first quarter of the twelfth century, but this seemingly took some time to change. “Im Gegensatz zu anderen Bischofssagas ist die J[óns] s[saga] h[elga] in erster Linie kein histor[ischer] Bericht, sondern reine Hagiographie”, in the words of Hermann Pálsson and Rudolf Simek, and Jón’s reported stance on this matter is probably best understood within that context. *Biskupa sögur* I, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1858), 165, 237; Hermann Pálsson and Rudolf Simek, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, Kröners Taschenausgabe 490 (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1987), 201.

<sup>15</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, 269. The ogress Grýla is well-known in later Icelandic folklore as the frightening mother of the *jólasveinar*. That ogress, or its forerunner, is mentioned twice in *Sturlunga*, clearly being referred to as some kind of a monster, “ok hefir á sér/hala fimmtán.” In other places in *Sturlunga*, and in other sagas as well, we find the word *grýla*, sometimes in plural, as meaning threats or intimidation. Grýla is also found as a *heiti* for a



and 1234, his *búð* is called Valhöll.<sup>16</sup> This is probably not a new name for a new *búð*, but a new name for the *búð* that belonged to Snorrunagadoðorð, the family chieftaincy of the Sturlungar. Snorri had strived for quite some time to pull Snorrunagadoðorð out of the hands of Sturla Sighvatsson, his nephew and political opponent, and succeeded in summer of 1227.<sup>17</sup> In the summer of 1228 Þorvaldur Vatnsfirðingur, Snorri's son-in-law, "tjaldaði Valhallardilk", which seems then to be a *búð* attached to Snorri's Valhöll. Sturlunga shows no special attention to the name as such, and it is probably only a coincidence that we learn of it. Therefore we are not in a position to know if this particular *búð* was already called Valhöll before it came into Snorri's hands (if it really was a *búð* adjunct to the Sturlungar chieftaincy), whose idea it was to name it so, and why Valhöll was believed, by someone at least, to be a fitting name for a chieftain's *búð*. However, since this is the only *búð* we know that had a name derived from Norse mythology, and we know that it was the *búð* of Snorri Sturluson, we can reasonably assume that he was the name giver. Otherwise, it would be too bizarre a coincidence. We can also conclude from his other *búð*'s name, Grýla, that it was his practice to give his *búð* a clever and strange name. If Grýla was to refer to fear and force, to terrify Snorri's opponents, Valhöll must also have been a reference to characteristics Snorri thought fitting for a politician and a chieftain. In Snorra-Edda, which Snorri had probably completed at this point, poetic skills, wisdom, and immense cleverness are the main positive characteristics of Óðinn, the ruler of Valhöll.

Is Snorri likening himself to the heathen deity Óðinn or to the euhemerized and deified Óðinn? Inevitably it must have been a little bit of both. That Snorri chose to link himself to Óðinn in this fashion is highly interesting, not to say more, given the fact that all other references to Óðinn recorded in Sturlunga show an extremely negative view of that

giantess in Þulur, preserved in AM 748 Ib 4to; Ibid, 281, 324; *Sturlunga saga* II, 186, 307; *Þórðar saga hreðu*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, Íslenzk fornrit 14 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1959), 188; *Heilagra manna sögur I: Fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinde*, ed. C. R. Unger (Christiania, 1877), 683; *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* IA., ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912–15), 655; Terry Gunnell, "Grýla, Grýlur, 'Grøleks' and skeklers: Medieval Disguise Traditions in the North Atlantic," *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 57 (2001): 33–54.

<sup>16</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, 319, 344, 374.

<sup>17</sup> On Þórsnessþing in spring 1227 "tók Jón [murtur Snorrason] vit tveim hlutum [of Snorrunagadoðorð], en Þórðr [Sturluson] hafði þriðjung." Ibid., 315.

trickster. Snorri made every effort to increase his honor in the struggle for power and influence,<sup>18</sup> and naming his *búð* Valhöll was undoubtedly a part of that. He would hardly have given his *búð* that name had it been a generally negative reference. Moreover, it is likely that Valhöll was intended not only to refer to the positive qualities of Óðinn himself, learning, wisdom, cleverness, and immense political abilities (Ynglinga saga offers a catalogue of these characteristics<sup>19</sup>), but also to serve as a general reference to Snorri's own education, learning, and cultural capital, to use a Bourdieuan term. Valhöll was thus a symbolic capital of Snorri's, symbolizing his cultural capital in the form of education and skills in *fræði*; the name of the *búð* reminded guests at alþingi of Snorri's mastery in *fræði* and *ars poetica*.<sup>20</sup> Snorra-Edda itself identifies Óðinn first and foremost with the skaldic tradition, and Ynglinga saga, most often but not indisputably assigned to Snorri, comments that this ancient chieftain and king “[m]ælti... allt at hendingum,” in his daily chat, “svá sem nú er þat kveðit, er skáldskapr heitir.”<sup>21</sup> Lastly, Valhöll refers not only to Snorri's own cultural capital and the mythological Óðinn but also to the euhemerized Óðinn, a man so rich in cultural capital that it was transformed by his contemporaries and their descendants into religious capital.<sup>22</sup> It is perceivable that the naming was made to evoke thoughts of deadly force as the mythological Valhöll was the house of the dead, and that would be in rhyme with the name Grýla. Snorri may not be known for deeds in the battlefield, but Sturlunga shows clearly that he played the deadly game of medieval Icelandic politics as ruthlessly as anyone, and did not hesitate in having people “removed.”

Two related instances should be mentioned before moving on to the third type, instances where men seem to look back to the pagan past for aid in their present struggle although no direct reference to mythology as such

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Viðar Pálsson, “Var engi höfðingi slíkr sem Snorri.’ Auður og virðing í valdabaráttu Snorra Sturlusonar,” *Saga* 41:1 (2003): 55–96.

<sup>19</sup> On the qualities deluding Óðinn's contemporaries and their descendants into deification, see: *Heimskringla* I, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit 26 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941), 11–22, esp. 17ff.

<sup>20</sup> On Snorri's use of skaldic poetry as cultural capital in the field of power and politics, see: Kevin J. Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*, Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series 4 (Toronto, et al.: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> *Heimskringla* I, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. the above reference to Ynglinga saga as well as the Edda's Prologue.

is made. These instances involve a comeback of the famous spear Grásíða. Well-known to saga audiences from Gísla saga, it suddenly pops up during a fierce dispute between Björn Þorvaldsson and Loftur biskupsson in the winter of 1220–1221, and is recollected in Íslendinga saga. In 1221 their flocks clashed in a mortal combat:

En er hann [i.e., Björn] kom aftr [to the battle], sáu þeir Guðlaugur [one of Loftur's men], at hann var berr um hálsinn. Hljóp Guðlaugur fram ok lagði til Bjarnar með spjóti því, er þeir kölluðu Grásíðu ok sögðu átt hafa Gísla Súrsson.

Björn is wounded, and Guðlaugur brings Loftur the news: “Loptr spyrr, hver því olli. ‘Vit Grásíða,’ svarar hann.” Snorri Sturluson and his men, who held grudges against Björn, celebrated the news, and composed some verses; one of them refers to Grásíða.<sup>23</sup> First of all we note Sturla's phrasing: they “kölluðu” the spear Grásíða, and “sögðu átt hafa Gísla Súrsson.” Sturla does not seem to credit the claim. But we must ask why Guðlaugur and his men made it. Whether they themselves actually believed it is irrelevant, although a worthy question in itself; what matters is that they wanted others to believe that they fought with Grásíða. The real question is thus why they found that desirable. For luck or power of some sort? Believing an old and renowned weapon legitimating their actions in some sense? The story of Grásíða's origins, not on skin yet at the time of the fight but probably circulating, makes the case even more interesting and mystifying. It is somewhat demystified later in Íslendinga saga when Sturla Sighvatsson fights his last fight with a Grásíða at Örlygsstaðir in 1238.<sup>24</sup> Sturla sagnari-tari does not indicate whether this is the same Grásíða as before, or if his namesake claimed it to be *the* Grásíða. The latter seems likely, given the description: “Sturla varðist með spjóti því, er Grásíða hét, fornt ok ekki vel stinnt málaspjót.” During battle, Sturla has to constantly step on it to level out the spearhead. He obviously did not choose it for its quality, and he could easily have, as a powerful chieftain and leader of hundreds, fought with new and excellent weapons. He chose not to. It is also noteworthy that Gissur Þorvaldsson found a reason to pick it up. What we gather from

<sup>23</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, 280–282, 284.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 435–436.



these depictions is that some thirteenth-century Icelanders chose to fight rather with poor and legendary weapons than actually good but historically insignificant ones.<sup>25</sup> It shows an interesting attitude towards the past, but no hints at either religious understanding of the practice or feelings of inappropriateness, religious or other.

The third and last type of mythological references in Sturlunga is when personal characteristics are described through references to the Norse pantheon. Snorri's self-reference is a close kin, but the examples gathered here are both more explicit in the text and used negatively. Only two gods are referred to: Óðinn and Freyr.

One of the two men in Sturlunga to be compared openly to Óðinn is Snorri's father, Hvamm-Sturla, a remarkable fact. He was witty and slick, not uncontrollably greedy yet determined and firm in his quest for power. He could play his role rather relentlessly, to great success, and his opponents frequently tired of what they felt to be excessive stubbornness and unjust demands of the self-seeker. One of those was Þorbjörg, the wife of Páll Sölvason in Reykholt, with whom Sturla so famously disputed in *Deildartungumál*. During talks between the rival parties in 1180, Þorbjörg lost her patience:

Þorbjörg ... var grimmúðig í skapi ok líkaði stórilla þóf þetta. Hon 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?"<sup>26</sup>

Þorbjörg does not explain what characteristics exactly she is referring to, but it is obvious to all: the generally Machiavellian character of the two. Or to use Bishop Brandr's famous description of Sturla given the following year: "Engi maðr frýr þér vits, en meir ertu grunaðr um græzku."<sup>27</sup>

The latter instance of an Óðinn reference is when Sturla sagnaritari compares Gissur Þorvaldsson to Óðinn. In 1261 Hallvarður gullskór, on king's orders, puts Hrafn Oddsson in charge of the Borgarfjörður region, thus replacing Gissur. Gissur himself had consigned the region to Sturla,

<sup>25</sup> Unless, of course, Gísli's Grásíða was so superbly made that after two and a half centuries in use it was still one of the best around, which is doubtful.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 113. On *Deildartungumál*, see: *Ibid.*, 109–114.

his ally at this point, who now felt betrayed. Sturla expressed his disappointment and anger in skaldic verse:

Rauf við randa stýfi,  
 – rétt innik þat, – svinnan  
 allt, þvít oss hefr vélta,  
 Óðinn, þats hét góðu.  
 Skaut, sás skrökmál flýtir,  
 – skilk, hvat gramr mun vilja,  
 Gautr unni sér sleitu – ,  
 slægr jarl við mér bægi.<sup>28</sup>

It must be an understatement when Magnús Finnbogason comments: “auk þess [i.e., that *Gizurr* is an alternative name for Óðinn] kann skáldið að hafa séð ýmislegt svipað í skapgerð þeirra Gizurar Þorvaldssonar og Óðins.”<sup>29</sup> The verse is extremely valuable in that it tells us what characteristics Sturla, a learned man who possibly studied with Snorri as a young man, associated with Óðinn. Firstly, Sturla says that Óðinn/Gissur *rauf við* Sturla *þats hét góðu*; secondly, Óðinn/Gissur has *vélað* Sturla; thirdly, Óðinn/Gissur is *slægr*; fourthly, Óðinn/Gissur *flýtir skrökmál*; fifthly, Óðinn/Gissur *skaut bægi við* Sturla; and sixthly, Gautur, which is Óðinn/Gissur, *unni sér sleitu*. Gissur is thus compared to Óðinn, whose characteristics are, in sum, to betray given promises, to be wily, foxy, and a liar, to turn his back on those he has previously allied with, and to aid trouble. The stanza is not laudatory. Similar use and understanding of Óðinn references are found elsewhere in the literature. In *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, also by Sturla, we are at a feast:

Hertoginn [i.e., Skúli Bárðarson] spurði einn dag Snorra Sturluson í skemtan: „Hvárt er þat satt”, kvað hann, „at þér segit, at Óðinn, sá er atti forn-konungum saman, hétu Gautr öðru nafni?” „Satt er þat, herra”, segir Snorri. „Yrk nú vísu at því”, segir hertogi, “ok seg hversu mjök þessi líkist þeim.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 528. The second *helmingur* of the stanza is also found in Sturlu þáttur, with the first line of the *helmingur* slightly different: “Skýtr, hinns skrökmál flýtir”, *Sturlunga saga* II, 231.

<sup>29</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, 607.

<sup>30</sup> *Hakonar saga*, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Icelandic Sagas And Other Historical Documents*

“Þessi” was Gautur Jónsson, a *lendur* man at the court and a controversial figure, as we may sense from the king’s request and its context in the saga. The verse was picked up by Ólafur hvítaskáld in the Third Grammatical Treatise, with the explanatory comment: “hér er eiginlig líking milli Óðins ok nokkurs illgjarns manns.”<sup>31</sup>

Before leaving Óðinn, let us poke the curious fact mentioned above: father and son being linked to Óðinn in two different ways in two different sagas. Is it a coincidence? Probably not. The incident in Sturlu saga is quite memorable, and forms an important link in the chain of events that led to Sturla’s defeat in the dispute and Snorri’s fostering at Oddi. Deildartungumál were in many ways unusual for their time, and Þorbjörg’s intimate greeting and action were probably infamous. Snorri, in his struggle towards the status of *stórgoði* in Borgarfjörður, must himself have added to the memory of Deildartungumál when he, around 1206, took over the *staður* in Reykholt.<sup>32</sup> As has been argued elsewhere, Snorri’s choice of Reykholt as his primary seat of power in Borgarfjörður was probably no less symbolic than strategic: it symbolized the advancement of the Sturlungar family and increased Snorri’s honor as a political *föðurbetrungur*.<sup>33</sup> It is quite possible in this context that Snorri’s unique self-reference to Óðinn was a calculated move in this very game of honor, and that he was playing with the past in the name Valhöll: Sturla was likened to Óðinn in a degrading sense, but now the wheel of fortune had turned and Snorri made the positive reference himself. He named his *búð* Valhöll with, at least in part, his father’s incident in mind.

We will leave Óðinn with another equally attractive explanation of the same. It is possible that Hvamm-Sturla himself gave the *búð* of Snorrungagoðorð the name Valhöll, and that it survived beyond his days. That would explain why Snorri named his *búð* Grýla at first, but is then found in Valhöll exactly the first summer in which he has power over

*Relating To The Settlements And Descents Of The Northmen On The British Isles II*, *Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores* 88 (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1887), 172–173.

<sup>31</sup> The text is normalized. *Den tredje og fjerde grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda tilligemed de grammatiske afhandlinges prolog og to andre tilleg*, ed. Björn M. Ólsen, Samfundet til udgivelse af gammel nordisk literatur 12 (Copenhagen: S. L. Møller, 1884), 117.

<sup>32</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, 241–242.

<sup>33</sup> Viðar Pálsson, “Var engi höfðingi slíkr sem Snorri?”: 73–74.



Snorrunagoðorð.<sup>34</sup> More importantly it renders Þorbjörg's remarks a new meaning: "Hví skal ek eigi gera þik þeim líkastan, *er þú vill líkastr vera.*" Is Þorbjörg referring to Sturla's Valhöll? Sturla's *búð* is mentioned only twice in Sturlu saga, and in neither case is its name revealed.<sup>35</sup> As we know from Sturlunga *búðir* usually had names. It is also noteworthy in this context what character traits of Sturla the author of his saga underlines, the description belonging to the same scene that called for Bishop Brandur's observation:

þá gekk Sturla fram á virkit fyrir búð sína, því at þat var oft háttir hans at setja á langar tölur um málaferli sín, því at maðrinn var bæði vitr ok tungumjúkr. Vildi hann ok, at þat væri jafnan frá borit, at hans virðing yrði víðfræg.<sup>36</sup>

Sturla's chief concern is honor and reputation, his weapons are cleverness and oratorical skills. It is possible that he named his *búð* Valhöll as a move towards this goal, forging a link between himself and the clever and *tungumjúkur* Óðinn, a move that backfired. In either case, it seems secure to conclude that it was either of the two, Snorri and his father, who named his *búð* Valhöll as a positive reference, undoubtedly first and foremost to secure and increase his honor, as the sources so explicitly reveal was of primary importance to them both.

Freyr is referred to only once, when Þorvaldssynir refer to Sturla Sighvatsson, their mortal enemy, with the phrase Dala-Freyr. Their first use of it comes during their infamous Sauðafellsför in 1229. Having terrorized Sturla's household they thought they had a catch when coming to Sturla's sleeping space:

Peir Þórðr gengu at lokrekkjunni ok hjuggu upp ok báðu Dala-Frey þá eigi liggja á laun.<sup>37</sup>

Further:

<sup>34</sup> His son, Jón, was formally put in charge of two thirds of it and Þórður, Snorri's brother, got a third.

<sup>35</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, 86, 113.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

Peir gengu at hvílu Solveigar [Sturla's wife] með brugðnum ok blóðgum vápnum ok hristu at henni ok sögðu, at þar váru þau vápnin, er þeir höfðu litat lokkinn á honum Dala-Freyr með.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately for Þorvaldssynir Sturla was not home. He was at home, however, three years later, when Þorvaldssynir rode not far from his farm as if to goad him to violate the *grið* granted to them. And that Sturla did: he caught them, had them worked over in an uneven fight, and finally had them axed. During the fight Sturla, standing by, picks up a stone and makes himself ready to throw, then pauses, and lets the stone fall to the ground. Þorvaldssynir goad Sturla, using the former *níð* as the whip: “Hví sækir hann Sturla eigi at? Ok ætla ek, at Dala-Freyr sanni nú nafn sitt ok standi eigi nær.”<sup>39</sup> The exact term Dala-Freyr does not appear elsewhere but straightforwardly translates literally into Freyr of Dalir. Its actual meaning in this context is also quite clear: do not hide yourself, loverboy! One of Sturla's main duties is, of course, to be on guard and protect his household; catching him off guard, and in bed at that, would have been quite dishonorable. The *níð* plays on these opposites: on-guard protection and off-guard *ars amandi*. During their last defense Þorvaldssynir use it again, quite explicitly, to mock Sturla for his inactiveness and passivity, a serious *níð* and *eggjun* at once. In the background is Freyr, associated with love and fertility. Guðrún Nordal attempted to read further into the term in an article in 1992, and touched on it again in her dissertation.<sup>40</sup> She argues that the term originated around Snorri Sturluson, whom rumors held might have been in connivance with Þorvaldssynir, and that it was intended to underscore Sturla's *ofsi* and *ofmetnaður*, in addition to its obvious meaning. Her argument rests on an interpretation of Snorri's Freyr as exemplifying the personal defects of *ofsi* and *ofmetnaður*, and ties in with her thesis, laid out in the dissertation, that Íslendinga saga as a whole revolves around Sturla/Freyr and Gissur/Óðinn.<sup>41</sup> Whether the *níð*'s sub-reference is sufficiently argued for is debatable, but what matters here is

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 348–357.

<sup>40</sup> Guðrún Nordal, “Freyr fifldur,” *Skírnir* 166:2 (1992): 271–294; Guðrún Nordal, *Ethics and action in thirteenth-century Iceland*, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 11 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998), 179.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 166–169, 182 *passim*, for Sturla as a wolf and Sturla's *ofsi*; Ibid., 58, 178–179 *passim*, for Sturla/Freyr-Gissur/Óðinn.

that mythological knowledge is used, as before, to illuminate a reference to personal characteristics, and that such use is neither understood religiously nor found inappropriate.

And that point may serve as a summary for Sturlunga as a whole. The entire corpus contains only a few but valuable references, outside the premises of skaldic poetry, to use of mythology. Two things are striking in particular. First, that the way in which mythology was employed in twelfth- and thirteenth-century political discourse shows unmistakably that mythological knowledge was expected among those participating in it and were thought of as conversant in it. It is reasonable to assume that naming a *búð* Valhöll or mocking a chieftain by calling him Freyr were not intended as “local references” in closed circles of a learned few, but rather as sharp comments to be understood by the many. Second, that knowledge, transmission, and use of mythology come through as a matter of course.

### III. Skaldic Poetry and Christian Culture

Sturlunga is brimful of skaldic poetry, 149/150 stanzas.<sup>42</sup> Régis Boyer counts a total of fifty-three kennings in them “dealing directly with mythology,” thereof thirteen involving Óðinn, five regarding Freyr, three concerned with Baldur, and one linked to Njörður.<sup>43</sup> As with non-poetic mythological references there is no hint of concern about the use of mythologically-based skaldic diction. Quite the other way: Sturlunga testifies to the naturalness, so to speak, of utilizing mythological material. This can be illustrated with an example.

On Easter 1207 Kolbeinn Tumason and his flock rode to the episcopal seat of Hólar, where Guðmundur góði, his archenemy, was waiting for them. Guðmundur stood with his men on the rooftops, the bishop showing no fear of the chieftain. In their famous and harsh dispute Guðmundur was not sparing on excommunications. That was at least Kolbeinn’s view, and at this meeting he publicly threw forth a stanza for all to hear:

<sup>42</sup> Overview is, e.g., Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto, et al.: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 90–96.

<sup>43</sup> Régis Boyer, “Paganism and Literature: The So-called ‘Pagan Survivals’ in the *samtíðarsögur*,” *Gripla* I (1975): 151–152.



Báls kveðr hlynr at Hólum  
 hvern mann vesa í banni  
 Gylfa láðs, þanns greiðir,  
 geðrakkr, fyr mér nakkvat.  
 Trautt kann hóf, sás háttar,  
 hoddlestir, vel flestu,  
 – meðr eru af því aðrir  
 ósælir – , stórmæla.<sup>44</sup>

Note Kolbeinn's kenning for the *geðrakkr* man in the first *helmingur*, for he calls him, Guðmundur that is, *Gylfa láðs báls hlynr*. The kenning is firmly based in pagan mythology and refers to the bishop himself: Gylfi is a name for a sea king, and *Gylfi's láð* is thus his kingdom, the sea; the *bál* of the sea is gold, as mythology reveals to us; and gold's *hlynr* belongs to a common group of kennings for a "human." The triple kenning thus simply means "man." If there ever was a motive and an opportunity to express dissatisfaction, religious or moral, with such a use then this must have been it. The dispute was ruthless, and every conceivable accusation was valuable. Had Guðmundur's men found Kolbeinn's use of this mythologically-based kenning possibly inappropriate, even if only *ad hoc* for political purposes, they surely would have snapped it up on the spot and turned it against him. The fact that they did not is a telling witness. In fact, they showed no attention to the matter.

Much the same is to be said of skaldic poetry in general. It remained central to Old Norse literature continually from the Viking Age into the later Middle Ages. Mass of skaldic poetry is scattered throughout the saga corpus, from the earliest sagas on, and there are no signs of failing interest or dull periods. It was a living practice among Christian Icelanders, not merely antiquarian hobbyhorses. It embraced Christianity at much the same time as the skalds themselves, and their companionship was not charged with tension. The quickest roundtrip is illuminating.

Of the *biskupasögur* only Páls saga byskups and the sagas of Guðmundur góði contain skaldic verses. Páls saga contains four laudatory stanzas by Ámundi smiður Árnason, simple and without mythologically-based

<sup>44</sup> *Sturlunga saga* I, 244–245ff.

kennings,<sup>45</sup> while the skaldic poetry found in the four sagas of Bishop Guðmundur exhibits various *heiti* and kennings derived from Norse mythology.<sup>46</sup> The translated saint's life Jóns saga postula IV is brought to an end with several skaldic stanzas, by Nikulás, “fyrsta ok fremsta Pverar munklifis abota i Eyiafirði,” “Gamla kanunk austr i Þyckabe,” both from the twelfth century, and Kolbeinn Tumason.<sup>47</sup> Dating from the thirteenth century are Heilags anda vísur, a translation of the Latin hymn Veni creator spiritus into *dróttkvætt*, the only surviving medieval translation of a foreign hymn into *dróttkvætt*.<sup>48</sup> Original poetry of religious subject is older still. The oldest preserved Christian *drápa* is Einar Skúlason's Geisli, recited at the consecration of the Cathedral of Niðarós in 1152/1153. Scholars have speculated, mostly on the ground of his extensively preserved output, that he was clerically trained and may even have served as a priest. Be that as it may, Einar's Geisli glorifies Ólafur helgi through the use of traditional skaldic diction, mythologically-based kennings notwithstanding.<sup>49</sup> And Geisli is no *rara avis*: The *drápa* Harmsól by the aforementioned Gamli kanúki and preserved in AM 757a 4to from around 1400 probably dates to the last third of the twelfth century, and of its numerous kennings a good deal is mythologically-based.<sup>50</sup> Not much younger, and possibly older, is Placitus *drápa*, preserved in AM 673b 4to from around 1200 and composed from the pre-mid-twelfth-century Norse translation of the saga. The saint's life is retold in skaldic verse and diction thick with mythologically-based kennings.<sup>51</sup> A further survey of religious poetry in skaldic form would lead

<sup>45</sup> *Biskupa sögur* I, 138, 146-147.

<sup>46</sup> All four versions contain skaldic poetry, and while some stanzas are found in more than one version only a single stanza is found in all four. For A-version, see: *Guðmundar sögur byskups* I, ed. Stefán Karlsson, Editiones Arnarnæðæne B6 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1983), 17-255; for B-version, fragmentary in AM 657 C 4to, see: *Biskupa sögur* I, 559-618; the C-version is unpublished; for D-version, see: *Biskupa sögur* II, eds. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Jón Sigurðsson (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1878), 3-187.

<sup>47</sup> *Postola sögur: Legendariske fortællinger om Apostlernes liv [.] deres kamp for kristendommens udbredelse samt deres martyrdød*, ed. C.R. Unger (Christiania, 1874), 509-512.

<sup>48</sup> *Die Geistlichen Drápur und Dróttkvættfragmente des Cod. Am. 757 4to*, ed. Hugo Rydberg (Copenhagen, 1907), 1-4, 45-47; Martin Chase, S.J., “Christian Poetry,” *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York, et al.: Garland, 1993), 75.

<sup>49</sup> *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* IA, 459-473; Martin Chase, S. J., “Einnarr Skúlason,” *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York, et al.: Garland, 1993), 159.

<sup>50</sup> *Die Geistlichen Drápur*, 20-32; Bjarne Fidjestøl, “Gamli Kanóki,” *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York, et al.: Garland, 1993), 223-224.

<sup>51</sup> The oldest preserved manuscript of the translation, although fragmentary, is the Norwegian

to the anonymous thirteenth-century *Líknarbraut*, its author possibly a cleric,<sup>52</sup> to the fourteenth-century *Maríudrápa*,<sup>53</sup> and to *Leiðarvísan*, preserved in fifteenth-century manuscripts but dated to the twelfth.<sup>54</sup>

The manuscript tradition is also illuminating in this respect. A handy example of peaceful coexistence in manuscripts is found within the group of Snorra-Edda manuscripts: AM 757a 4to contains *Skáldskaparmál*, the so-called *Litla-Skálda*, a section of Fenris úlfr, Pulur, and Ólafur hvítaskáld's skaldic-laden Third Grammatical Treatise along with *Heilags anda vísur*, *Leiðarvísan*, *Harmsól*, *Gyðingavísur*, *Líknarbraut*, and *Maríudrápa*. AM 757a 4to is not the only Snorra-Edda manuscript to contain religious poetry: Just after *Rígsþula* and *Ókennd heiti* in the largest medieval Snorra-Edda manuscript, *Codex Wormianus*, a fifteenth-century hand has added *Maríuvísur*.<sup>55</sup>

But the classic narrative of justification still holds two cards up its sleeve. The first is claimed to show that the conversion to Christianity caused a lull in use of mythologically-based kennings for some one-and-a-half centuries. The second that knowledge, transmission, and use of mythology and mythologically related material, and thus also mythologically-based diction, only returned when learned methods of justification and excuse had been successfully acquired and employed. It is to these two that we now turn, the latter first.

AM 655 IX 4to, dated to the mid-twelfth century. AM 673b 4to is believed to be a copy. The *drápa* itself is fragmentarily preserved, totaling fifty-nine stanzas out of probably seventy-eight in the original. Hermann Pálsson and Rudolf Simek maintain that the *drápa* "könnte schon um 1150, sicherlich aber vor 1180 verfaßt worden sein"; "Placitus drápa," ed. Jonna Louis-Jensen, *Plácidus saga*, ed. John Tucker, *Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ B:31* (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1998), 93–123; John Tucker, "Placitus saga," *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York, et al.: Garland, 1993), 504–505; Chase, S. J., "Christian Poetry", 75; Hermann Pálsson and Simek, *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*, 281.

<sup>52</sup> *Die Geistlichen Drápur*, 11–20, 47–53; Chase, S. J., "Christian Poetry", 75.

<sup>53</sup> *Die Geistlichen Drápur*, 32–43; Martin Chase, S. J., "Christian Poetry", 75.

<sup>54</sup> *Die Geistlichen Drápur*, 4–11; *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning IA*, 618–626; Reidar Astås, "Leiðarvísan," *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York, et al.: Garland, 1993), 390.

<sup>55</sup> An overview of the main Snorra-Edda manuscripts is given in, e.g.: Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, second chapter (41–72).



#### IV. Justification or Understanding? The Conceptualization of Mythology and the Past

The world of Late Antiquity was marked by fusion of the Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, and the conceptualization of the pagan past, not least its intellectual heritage, became a matter of prime concern in patristic writings. Sailing between the two extremes exemplified by Tertullian and Origen in the third century early Christianity developed theological schemes of understanding the pagan past and its relations to the Christian present, three of which are of prime importance and dominated medieval intellectual culture: natural theology/religion, euhemerism, and demonology.

The Pauline theology of natural religion was read most frequently by Late Antique and medieval authors from Rom.1:19–20,<sup>56</sup> arguably the most important scriptural passage in medieval thought, and cited and built heavily upon by Augustine among others. By arguing in a platonic fashion that paganism was at heart a perverted and imperfect understanding of true religion, deduced from the physical and visual world through reason vis-à-vis divine illumination, a conceptual link between past and present, paganism and Christianity, was formed. Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job* is fundamental in this respect, and the *topos* of the "Book of Nature" became standard in early and medieval Christianity.<sup>57</sup>

Euhemerism offered another, albeit closely related and complementary, conceptual tool. Although of pre-Christian origin it was employed early on by many of the most widely read and influential Christian writers to account for the emergence of pagan deities, arguing that pagan gods were deified historical persons of heroic status. Wisdom 14 offered scriptural support (20):

<sup>56</sup> "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made."

<sup>57</sup> "A certain philosopher asked St. Anthony: 'Father, how can you be so happy when you are deprived of the consolation of books?' Anthony replied: 'My book, O philosopher, is the nature of created things, and any time I want to read the words of God, the book is before me.'" *The Wisdom of the Desert*, transl. Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 1960), 29.

multitudo autem hominum, abducta per speciem operis, eum qui ante tempus tanquam homo honoratus fuerat nunc deum aestimaverunt...

Augustine lays it out in several places in *The City of God*, e.g.:

De quibus credibilior redditur ratio, cum perhibentur homines fuisse, et unicuique eorum ab his qui eos adulando deos esse voluerunt, ex ejus ingenio, moribus, actibus, casibus, sacra et solemnia constituta.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, Isidore of Seville takes it up in *Etymologiae* VIII 11:

Quos pagani deos asserunt, homines olim fuisse produntur, et pro uniuscujusque vita vel meritis, coli apud suos post mortem cæperunt.<sup>59</sup>

Euhemerism thus spread as widely as possible in learned medieval circles.<sup>60</sup>

Demonology took the opposite view of euhemerism in grouping pagan deities as devilish deceptions, and was employed mainly in sterner ecclesiastical writings, e.g., in the field of hagiography.<sup>61</sup>

Snorra-Edda, the medieval storehouse of Norse mythology, should be and has been read against this intellectual and theological background. Snorri's conception of the past and its link to the Christian present revolves around the complementarity of natural religion and euhemerism, as is seen most explicitly in the Prologue. It opens with a detailed explanation of natural religion, how true knowledge of God was lost, and how

<sup>58</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina: Patrologiæ cursus completus, Series Latina* 41 (Paris, 1843), 208.

<sup>59</sup> *Etymologiae*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina: Patrologiæ cursus completus, Series Latina* 82 (Paris, 1878), 314.

<sup>60</sup> On euhemerism, natural theology, and demonology in medieval Icelandic sources, see, e.g.: Andreas Heusler, *Die gelehrte Urgeschichte*; Rudolf Schomerus, *Die Religion der Nordgermanen im Spiegel christlicher Darstellung* (Leipzig: Robert Noske, 1936); Lars Lönnroth, "The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas," *Scandinavian Studies* 61 (1969): 1–29; Anthony Faulkes, "Descent from the gods," *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11 (1978–1979 [publ. 1982]): 92–125.

<sup>61</sup> Snorra-Edda makes no use of demonology, although the term *Gylfaginning* has been found to smell of it, if faintly.

the existence and imperfect understanding of the Creator were deduced through examination of his creation:

Af þvílíkum hlutum grunaði þá, at nokkurr mundi vera stjórnari himintunglanna, sá er stilla myndi gang þeira at vilja sínum, ok myndi sá vera ríkr mjök ok máttigr, ok þess væntu þeir, ef hann réði fyrir höfuðskepnunum, at hann myndi ok fyrr verit hafa en himintunglin... 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.<sup>62</sup>

But their knowledge was limited to human reason and unaided by divine illumination:

En alla hluti skildu þeir jarðligri skilningu, þvíat þeim var eigi gefin andlig spekðin; svá skilðu þeir, at allir hlutir væri smíðaðir af nokkuru efni.<sup>63</sup>

He then describes the rise of Norse paganism as the deification of ancient kings, migrating from Asia to the North:

í þeim hluta veraldar [i.e., Asia] er öll fegrð ok prýði ok eignir jarðar-ávaxtar, gull ok gimsteinar; þar er ok mið veröldin; ok svá sem þar er jörðin feagri ok betri öllum kostum en í öðrum stöðum, svá var ok mannfólkit þar mest tignat af öllum giptunum, spekinni ok aflinu, fegrðinni ok allz konar kunnostu.<sup>64</sup>

...

EN hvar sem þeir [i.e., Óðinn and his men] forv ifir lönd, þa var agæti mikit fra þeim sagt, sva at þeir þottv líkari goþvm en monnvm.<sup>65</sup>

...

ok sa timi fylgþi ferþ þeira [i.e., Óðinn and his men], at hvar sem

<sup>62</sup> *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: Udgivet efter håndskrifterne af kommissionen for det arnamagnæanske legat*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel – Nordisk Forlag, 1931), 2–3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



þeir dvalþvz ilandvm, þa var þar ar ok friþr, ok trvþv allir, at þeir væri þes raþande, þviat þat sa rikis-menn, at þeir voro vlikir aþrvvm monnvm, þeim er þeir havfþv set, at fegrþ ok sva at viti.<sup>66</sup>

The framework of Snorra-Edda is thus thoroughly learned and Christian, and firmly in the tradition of classical and Catholic intellectual culture. Snorri's aim as a mythographer was not only to write a handbook in skaldic poetry and background stories to kennings, but also to conceptualize the past from a world-historic and Christian perspective. But in no sense whatsoever is Snorra-Edda a religious work of pagan myths, and no sources point in the direction of such an understanding among medieval men. Only Snorri's classic and well-known statement in *Skáldskaparmál* may appear to hint at such an impression:

en ecki er at gleyrna eþa osana sva þesar frasnir, at taka or skaldskapinvm fornar kenningar, þær er höfvtskald hafa ser lika latit, en eigi skvlo kristnir menn trva aheiþin goð ok eigin asanyndi [þesa sagna anan veg en sva sem her finz ivhafi bokar.<sup>67</sup>

But this is, of course, a mere rhetorical comment, void of religious meaning in itself and quite expected in a medieval treatise incorporating myths. To interpret this passage, put down well over two hundred years after the Conversion, as actual worries of Snorri's that some of his audiences might be or become pagan would be absurd. The core of the passage as a whole is quite clear: The fact that the stories are untrue, and one should know that they are, should not in and of itself lead to their dismissal, and therefore also of the old kennings in skaldic poetry of which they form basis and the skaldic *auctores* accepted.

There is no way of knowing through which works and authors exactly medieval Icelanders were schooled in these learned traditions. Ælfric's homily *De falsis Diis* is preserved in a Norse translation in *Hauksbók* from the early fourteenth century, but the translation itself may be from as early as the twelfth century. Euhemerism is put to the fore:

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 86.

Enda fengu þeir enn meiri villudóm ok blótuðu menn þá er ríkir ok rammir váru í þessum heimi síðan er þeir vóru dauðir, ok hugðu þat at þeir myndu orka jafnmiklu dauðir sem þá er þeir vóru kvikir...<sup>68</sup>

Snorri himself would not have had to search far for euhemeristic learning as it is found in *Skjöldunga saga*, or more accurately in *Upphaf allra frásagna*, a leftover of the now lost original, and has been linked to Oddi around 1200:<sup>69</sup>

Óðinn ok hans synir váru stórum vitrir ok fjölkunnigir, fagrir at álitum ok sterkir at afli. Margir aðrir í þeira ætt váru miklir afburðarmenn með ýmisligum algerleik ok nokkura af þeim tóku menn til at blóta ok kǫlluðu goð sín.<sup>70</sup>

Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* and *Historia Norwegiæ*, both from around 1200, also display euhemeristic ideas. The sources do not allow us to reach much further back, but it should be clear – this point cannot be overemphasized – that dating the arrival in Iceland of these inextricably Christian intellectual concepts is inseparable from dating the arrival of Christianity itself.

Genealogies offer a somewhat special case. Ari fróði, a most Christian author, ends *Íslendingabók* with his own genealogy stretching back to Freyr, Njörður, and Yngvi.<sup>71</sup> Other genealogies, found in various sources, reach even further back, in the extreme back to Óðinn to Troy to Saturn to Adam. The immanent question: Are these euhemerized genealogies of pagan origin, and thus pagan remnants excused through euhemerism, or does their origin lie with the same Christian authors that euhemerized them? Anthony Faulkes has argued the latter, and quite convincingly.<sup>72</sup>

His argument is mainly twofold. First, we simply lack sources to back up a claim of pagan origin. The three oldest *langfeðgatöl* are *Ynglingatal*,

<sup>68</sup> The text is normalized. *Hauksbók efter de Arnamagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4° samt forskellige papirshåndskrifter*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab, 1892–1896), 158.

<sup>69</sup> Bjarni Guðnason, *Um Skjöldunga sögu* (Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður, 1963), 272–283.

<sup>70</sup> *Skjöldunga saga*, ed. Bjarni Guðnason, Íslenzk fornrit 35 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1982), 39.

<sup>71</sup> *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1968), 27–28.

<sup>72</sup> Faulkes, “Descent from the gods.”

Háleygjatal, and Noregskonungatal. Ynglingatal, thirty-eight stanzas by Þjóðólfrur úr Hvini and incorporated by Snorri in Ynglinga saga, traces the kings of Norway back to Fjölfnir. Snorri added Óðinn, Njörður, and Yngvi/Freyr/Yngvi-Freyr before Fjölfnir (Óðinn not being Njörður's son), and is unlikely to have done so on grounds of lost verses of Ynglingatal.<sup>73</sup> Eyvindur skáldaspillir's Háleygjatal, preserved in sixteen stanzas and half-stanzas in Heimskringla, Snorra-Edda, and Fagurskinna, and dated to the late tenth century, traces the earls of Hlaðir back to Óðinn and his son, Sæmingur.<sup>74</sup> The poem is, however, so poorly preserved that its original genealogical line is obscure.<sup>75</sup> The youngest in the group, Noregskonungatal, dates to the last quarter of the twelfth-century, and exhibits no gods or divine progenitors.<sup>76</sup> Taken as a whole, the oldest *langfeðgatöl* do not suffice to uphold a claim of pre-Christian genealogies extending back to then divine figures.

Faulkes's second main argument is particularly persuasive. Through compilation and analysis of the extant genealogies a dominant chronological trend is identified: expansion through time. Ari took his line back to Yngvi Tyrkjakonungur, as noted, but it seems to be only around 1200 that all the three major houses in Scandinavia, Ynglingar, Hlaðjarlar, and Skjöldungar, had put Óðinn as progenitor. This development happened earlier still in England, which leads Faulkes to suspect Anglo-Saxon influence on the genealogical elevation of Óðinn. At much the same time eleven generations were put before Óðinn, while Snorra-Edda extends the line further yet to the Trojans and Thrór/Þór.<sup>77</sup> The two final steps were taken in Codex Wormianus, from Troy to Saturn, and in the Sturlungar genealogies, from Saturn to biblical genealogies and Adam.<sup>78</sup> All these genealogies appear euhemerized, and if we were to argue for pagan genealogies stretching back to divine progenitors then we would be facing a development of extended genealogies that were shortened before being re-extended, a

<sup>73</sup> *Heimskringla* I, 9–25; Faulkes, “Descent from the gods”: 96–97.

<sup>74</sup> *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* IA, 68ff, IB, 60ff.

<sup>75</sup> Faulkes, “Descent from the gods”: 97–98.

<sup>76</sup> *Flateyjarbók* III, ed. Sigurður Nordal ([Reykjavík]: Flateyjarútgáfan, 1945), 131–139.

<sup>77</sup> *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 4–6.

<sup>78</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum I: Íslenskt fornbréfasafn, sem hefir inni að halda bréf og gjörn-ínga, dóma og máldaga, og aðrar skrár er snerta Ísland eða íslenska menn*, 834–1262, ed. Jón Sigurðsson (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafjelag, 1857–1876), 501–506; III. 1269–1415, ed. Jón Þorkelsson (1896), 10–13; Faulkes, “Descent from the gods”: 99–106.



rather unattractive and illogical thesis. Should that nonetheless have been the case then would the latter extensions be new extensions (non-pagan then) or the reattachment of an older set(s)? If the latter, then how were these genealogical bits transmitted over the chronological gap, by whom, and why? The more one pushes the thesis the less attractive it becomes. Besides, the genealogical writings at hand bear close affinity to classical and medieval learned traditions, and are to be seen first and foremost as products of Christian European culture. Euhemeristic genealogies appear in Jordanes, Bede, and other Late Antique and medieval *auctores*.<sup>79</sup>

Euhemerism and natural religion were developed as conceptual tools when Christianity was in its infancy and youth, when the pagan past impinged upon the new intellectual and religious landscape that was gradually forming in the transformative period of later-Roman and post-Roman Europe, and when the issue of proper Christian attitude towards the pagan past – cultural, religious, intellectual – was fresh, open to debate, and without a venerable tradition to consult. Centuries later, when Christianity reached Iceland, a venerable tradition existed. Christian culture had come to terms with the past in the sense that it had incorporated conceptual categories for understanding the pagan past in terms of the Christian present and future. Subjects that might previously have been taboos, and in need of excuse or justification of some sort to become suitable topics of discussion, fell from the list of suspects. When Christianity, in its religious and cultural totality, reached Iceland it enabled medieval Icelanders to apply a learned understanding to their pagan past and some of the most important surviving cultural aspects of it. Depicting Christianity simultaneously taking a stand against the knowledge, transmission, and use of mythological material offers a contradiction ill-supported by the sources.

## V. Mythological Knowledge – the Question of Religious Interpretation of Skaldic Development

The notion of justification or excuse in the context of mythological knowledge and its use in early Christian Iceland inevitably begs the fundamental question: Who exactly was against it? The answer offered never really extends beyond the vague assumption of “the church” and/or

<sup>79</sup> cf. Faulkes, “Descent from the gods”: 93.

“Christianity,” without any specification of what exactly is meant by such terms, void as they are of empirical demonstration through citation to relevant sources. The opposition is assumed, but the sources do not reveal it. A closely related set of questions in this context: What was the state of mythological knowledge in Christian medieval Iceland? Was mythological knowledge general? Was it declining? Who possessed it? Who transmitted it and made use of it?

There are hardly any sources that demonstrate a decline in knowledge of mythology in the age of skaldic poetry. Quite the contrary: solid, even thorough, knowledge in mythology is testified to widely in the sources. Nevertheless, strong notion seems still to be among many that Snorri wrote the Edda as some sort of a rescue project. The work is, among other things, a handbook in skaldic poetry, particularly in the mythological knowledge necessary to understand and acquire fluency in the art of kennings:

En þetta er nú at segja vngvum skaldvum, þeim er girnaz at nema mal skaldskapar ok heyia ser orþfiolþa með fornvm heitvm eþa girnaz þeir at kvna skilia þat, er hvlit er qveþit, þa skili hann þesa bok til fropleiks ok skemtvnar ...<sup>80</sup>

But the assumption that Snorri was documenting knowledge in decline seems to rest on the dubious and unspoken assumption that documentation must in and of itself suggest a declining knowledge in that which is being documented. Cyclical argumentation is not far away: The writing of Snorra-Edda is first used to demonstrate a decline in mythological knowledge, and then a decline in mythological knowledge is used to explain the motivation behind its documentation.

The role played by skaldic poetry in the saga corpus does not attest to decline in knowledge, transmission, and use of mythology and mythological material. Skaldic poetry fills sagas of all periods, and we have to assume that the authors understood what they were writing, and that they did not fill their works with poetry none of the audiences really understood. The fact that even Snorri could occasionally misunderstand some of the oldest poetry, as did some saga authors once in a while, does not hint at decline. The skaldic tradition was already centuries old when Snorri and others

<sup>80</sup> *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 86.

were writing and recollecting some of the oldest verses, and it is only normal that over such a long period of time some kennings and/or dictional tricks and stylistics had become obscure to later observers.

Saints' lives offer a particularly interesting view into the state of mythological knowledge. John Lindow has shown that name replacements in translated saints' lives (Jupiter to Óðinn, etc.) were in fact much more than just that: they were localizations.<sup>81</sup> Demonological as well as euhemeristic explanations are used, the latter emphasizing that the "gods" were only mortal and sinful human beings. What captures our attention when the process of localization is analyzed is that the translators, presumably clerics, not only possessed mythological knowledge but apparently also found nothing wrong with publicizing that fact. Furthermore, the use of mythology in the saints' lives suggests that the audiences were expected to be not too badly versed in it either, for they would have to make use of it to fully capture some of the arguments made. Is this the church and/or the clerics that opposed, on religious grounds, the knowledge, transmission, and use of mythological material? Would they have fed the common people mythological knowledge by incorporating it into saints' lives that were presumably read aloud in churches on the holy days of the saints? That would have been a strange strategy, indeed. To the contrary, it has become increasingly clear in recent years that the literary corpus of medieval Iceland and the world of Norse myth belonged, to an extraordinary degree, to the same intellectual sphere. Mythological knowledge seems to have been expected of the readers and audiences of works of the most varied types. No scholar has demonstrated this better than Margaret Clunies Ross in her two-volume *Prolonged Echoes*, arguing for the presence of "mythic schemas" in the literary culture of medieval Iceland (the title is descriptive).<sup>82</sup>

The circle has now tightened around a classic thesis in the field of skaldic poetry, a thesis that exemplifies the assumption that there was a religious collision between "Christianity" and mythological knowledge in general, skaldic poetry in particular: For a century and a half after the Conversion skalds shun mythologically-based kennings for religious rea-

<sup>81</sup> John Lindow, "Norse Mythology and the Lives of the Saints," *Scandinavian Studies* 73:3 (2001): 437–456.

<sup>82</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse myths in medieval Northern society* I: *The myths*, II: *The reception of Norse myths in medieval Iceland*, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 7, 10 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994, 1998).



sons, until euhemerism and natural theology offered excuse and justification for an old-skaldic renaissance of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Pagan kennings were revived, the dust was blown of mythological knowledge. This thesis is problematic on several levels.

The notion that skaldic poetry became somewhat simpler and its diction less laden with kennings in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries extends back to Finnur Jónsson and earlier.<sup>83</sup> The religious framework of the thesis is associated primarily with Jan de Vries's *De skaldenkenningen met mythologischen inhoud*, published in 1934 and his main contribution to a debate on the issue with Hans Kuhn.<sup>84</sup> Besides de Vries's study, which argues for a lull in use of pagan kennings both numerically and relatively in the given period, there seem to be few if any studies that systematically and empirically demonstrate the thesis through counting; and we should emphasize that it is a *thesis*. But would a systematic count do the job? Is a systematic count possible? Such a count, like de Vries's, relies on absolute accuracy in dating of all skaldic poetry. Without absolute certainty in the dates of the poetry in question a count would quickly incorporate a distortion to the degree of meaninglessness. Since Finnur Jónsson's fundamentalist stand on the issue just around a century ago, arguing generally for the trustworthiness of the dates given by medieval writers themselves, the development has been gradually but decisively towards skepticism. The problems facing us in dating skaldic poetry are not of minor sorts.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie* I, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1920), 389; see also Erik Noreen, *Studier i fornvästnordisk diktning*, Uppsala Universitets årsskrift IV:2, Filosofi, språkvetsenskap och historiska vetenskaper 3 (Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1923), 27–44.

<sup>84</sup> Jan de Vries, *De skaldenkenningen met mythologischen inhoud*, Nederlandsche bijdragen op het gebied van germaansche philologie en linguistiek 4 (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1934); Kuhn, "Das nordgermanische Heidentum"; Jan de Vries, "Kenningen und Christentum," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 87 (1956–1957): 125–131.

<sup>85</sup> Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historia* I, 357–367, 390–398, *passim*. Doubts about accurate dating of skaldic poetry were voiced already in the nineteenth century, e.g., by Guðbrandur Vigfússon in *Corpus poeticum boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue, from the Earliest Times to the Thirteenth Century*, eds. and transl. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and F. York Powell (New York: Russel & Russel, 1965 [orig. 1883]), lxxxiiff. The literature of the past century outlining the problems of dating skaldic poetry is voluminous; for an overview, see Roberta Frank, "Skaldic Poetry," *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, eds. John Lindow and Carol J. Clover, *Islandica* 45 (Ithaca, et al.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 157–196.

But while this fact prevents us from detecting such finer points of development in skaldic diction as the exact ratio between certain types of kennings in narrower periods, it does not prevent us from detecting the bigger strokes. The impression is certainly that skaldic poetry went through at least three major stylistic phases with regard to kennings and diction: in the Viking Age it was rather sturdy, heavy on kennings, and riddle-like in character, around the turn of the millennium its style became generally lighter and more straightforward, with fewer and simpler kennings, and in the later twelfth century the taste swung again towards a more ornamented style of kennings in the spirit of the old days. As all other art forms that are in use over prolonged periods of time skaldic poetry was fluid but not static, and it goes without saying that it was subject to ever-changing taste and fashion. The tendency to view the “middle period” as somehow abnormal, calling for external explanatory factors (such as religion), probably owes much to the Snorristic spell: the often irresistible tendency of modern students to grant the teachings of this supreme and incomparable teacher on skaldic poetry the status of absolute normality. We should remind ourselves regularly that deviation from Snorri’s taste and aesthetics, which were quite definite, is not a sign of abnormality. The insistence on interpreting the development of skaldic diction in religious terms relies on the same presuppositions as before: that composing a skaldic stanza using mythologically-based kennings was perceived of as a religious act. Locating that understanding, as well as the assumed opposition, in the sources is problematic. The only instances found are references to the insistence of the two Ólafar not to listen to or receive poetry incorporating mythologically-based kennings, recounted in *Hallfreðar saga* and *Heimskringla*.<sup>86</sup> *Hallfreður vandræðaskáld*, who served both Hákon Hlaðajarl and Ólafur Tryggvason, is then the classic example of the turning tide.<sup>87</sup> However, these remarks are first and foremost an evidence for the personal piety of the two king-saints (or the personal piety attributed to them), and carries as much historical weight

<sup>86</sup> *Hallfreðar saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1934), 155–156; *Heimskringla* II, 55.

<sup>87</sup> cf. Kare Ellen Gade, “Poetry and its Changing Importance in Medieval Icelandic Culture,” *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42 (Cambridge, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 73–74.

with it in terms of general attitude towards mythology as the hagiographic piety of Jón Ögmundarson.

Excluding religious attitude from the possible causal factors in the stylistic development of skaldic poetry has been our final concern, while detecting the remaining possibilities is beyond it. We might end, though, by noting that judging from *Lilja*, the end of the skaldic tradition had less to do with doctrine and religious opposition than function, less to do with religious acculturation than changing needs. Perhaps Brother Eysteinn was under the Snorristic spell when he cited the riddle-like characteristics of skaldic poetry as the main reason for its unsuitability for illuminating and clarifying Christian doctrine; of different types of kennings he could not have cared less:

Varðar mest að allra orða  
undirstaða sé réttlígg fundin,  
eigi glögg þótt Edduregla  
undan hljóti að víkja stundum.

Sá, er óðinn skal vandan velja,  
velr svo mörg í kvæði að selja,  
hulin fornryðin, að trautt má telja,  
tel eg þenna svo skilning dvelja.  
Vel því – að hér má skýr orð skilja, –  
skili þjóðir minn ljósan vilja, –  
tal óbreytilegt veitt af vilja.  
Vil eg, að kvæðið heiti *Lilja*.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *Lilja*, ed. Pétur Már Ólafsson [after Guðbrandur Jónsson's edition ([Reykjavík]: Helgafell, [1951])] (Reykjavík: Vaka-Helgafell, 1992), 105.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Primary sources*

- Biskupa sögur* I-II, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Jón Sigurðsson. Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1858–1878.
- Corpus poeticum boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue, from the Earliest Times to the Thirteenth Century*, eds. and transl. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and F. York Powell. New York: Russel & Russel, 1965 [orig. 1883].
- De Civitate Dei*, ed. J. P. Migne. Patrologia Latina: Patrologiæ cursus completus. Series Latina 41. Paris, 1843.
- Diplomatarium Islandicum* I, III: *Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn, sem hefir inni að halda bréf og gjörninga, dóma og máldaga, og aðrar skrár er snerta Ísland eða íslenzka menn*, 834–1262, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, 1269–1415, ed. Jón Þorkelsson. Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1857–1876, 1896.
- Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: Uðgivet efter håndskrifterne af kommissionen for det arnamagnæanske legat*, ed. Finnur Jónsson. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel – Nordisk Forlag, 1931.
- Etymologiæ*, ed. J. P. Migne. Patrologia Latina: Patrologiæ cursus completus. Series Latina 82. Paris, 1878.
- Flateyjarbók* III, ed. Sigurður Nordal. [Reykjavík]: Flateyjarútgáfan, 1945.
- Die Geistlichen Drápur und Dróttkvættfragmente des Cod. Am. 757 4to*, ed. Hugo Rydberg. Copenhagen, 1907.
- Guðmundar sögur byskups* I, ed. Stefán Karlsson. Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ B:6. Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1983.
- Hakonar saga*, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon. *Icelandic Sagas And Other Historical Documents Relating To The Settlements And Descents Of The Northmen On The British Isles* II. *Rerum Britannicarum medii ævi scriptores* 88. London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1887.
- Hallfreðar saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit 8. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1934.
- Hauksbók efter de Arnarnagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4° samt forskellige papirshåndskrifter*, ed. Finnur Jónsson. Copenhagen: Kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab, 1892–1896.
- Heilagra manna sögur* I: *Fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinder*, ed. C. R. Unger. Christiania, 1877.
- Heimskringla* I–II, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Íslenzk fornrit 26, 27. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941, 1945.
- Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson. Íslenzk fornrit 1. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1968.
- Lilja*, ed. Pétur Már Ólafsson [after Guðbrandur Jónsson's edition ([Reykjavík]: Helgafell, [1951])]. Reykjavík: Vaka-Helgafell, 1992.

- Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* IA-IB, ed. Finnur Jónsson. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912–15.
- “Placitus drápa,” ed. Jonna Louis-Jensen. *Plácidus saga*, ed. John Tucker. *Editiones Arnamagnæanæ* B:31. Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1998, 93–123.
- Postola sögur: Legendariske fortællinger om Apostlernes liv [,] deres kamp for kristendommens udbredelse samt deres martyrdød*, ed. C.R. Unger. Christiania, 1874.
- Skjöldunga saga*, ed. Bjarni Guðnason. Íslenzk fornrit 35. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1982.
- Sturlunga saga* I–II, eds. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn. Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946.
- Den tredje og fjerde grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda tilligemed de grammatiske afhandlinges prolog og to andre tilleg*, ed. Björn M. Ólsen. Samfundet til udgivelse af gammel nordisk literatur 12. Copenhagen: S. L. Møller, 1884.
- The Wisdom of the Desert*, transl. Thomas Merton. New York: New Directions, 1960.
- Þórðar saga breðu*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson. Íslenzk fornrit 14. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1959.

### Secondary sources

- Astás, Reidar. “Leiðarvísan.” *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano. New York, et al.: Garland, 1993, 390.
- Baetke, Walter. *Die Götterlehre der Snorra-Edda*. Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse 97:3. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1950. Rpt. in *Kleine Schriften: Geschichte, Recht, und Religion in Germanischem Schrifttum*, eds. Kurt Rudolph and Ernst Walter. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1973, 206–246.
- Bjarni Guðnason. *Um Skjöldunga sögu*. Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður, 1963.
- Boer, R. C. “Studier over Snorra edda.” *Årbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* (1924): 145–272.
- Boyer, Régis. “Paganism and Literature: The So-called ‘Pagan Survivals’ in the samtíðarsögur.” *Gripla* I (1975): 151–152.
- Breitag, Byrge. “Snorre Sturluson og æserne.” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 79 (1964): 117–153.
- Chase, S.J., Martin. “Christian Poetry.” *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano. New York, et al.: Garland, 1993, 75.
- Chase, S. J., Martin. “Einarr Skúlason.” *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano. New York, et al.: Garland, 1993, 159.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret. *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse myths in medieval Northern society* I: *The myths*, II: *The reception of Norse myths in medieval Iceland*. The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 7, 10. Odense: Odense University Press, 1994, 1998.

- Dronke, Ursula and Peter. "The Prologue of the Prose Edda: Explorations in the Latin Background." *Sjöttu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977 I*, eds. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 12. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977, 153–176.
- Faulkes, Anthony. "The Genealogies and Regnal Lists in a Manuscript in Resen's Library." *Sjöttu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977 I*, eds. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 12. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977, 177–190
- Faulkes, Anthony. "Descent from the gods." *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11 (1978–1979 [publ. 1982]): 92–125.
- Faulkes, Anthony. "Pagan Sympathy: Attitudes to Heathendom in the Prologue to *Snorra-Edda*." *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, eds. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason. The University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies 4. Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1983, 283–314.
- Fidjestøl, Bjarne. "Gamli Kanóki." *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano. New York, et al.: Garland, 1993, 223–224.
- Finnur Jónsson. *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie* I. 2nd ed. Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1920.
- Frank, Roberta. "Skaldic Poetry." *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, eds. John Lindow and Carol J. Clover. *Islandica* 45 (Ithaca, et al.: Cornell University Press, 1985): 157–196.
- Gade, Kare Ellen. "Poetry and its Changing Importance in Medieval Icelandic Culture." *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross. *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature* 42. Cambridge, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 73–74.
- Guðrún Nordal. "Freyr fifldur." *Skírnir* 166:2 (1992): 271–294.
- Guðrún Nordal. *Ethics and action in thirteenth-century Iceland*. The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization 11. Odense: Odense University Press, 1998.
- Guðrún Nordal. *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Toronto, et al.: University of Toronto Press, 2001.
- Gunnell, Terry. "Grýla, Grýlur, 'Grøleks' and skeklers: Medieval Disguise Traditions in the North Atlantic." *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 57 (2001): 33–54.
- Haugen, Einar. "The Edda as Ritual: Odin and his Masks." *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, eds. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason. The University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies 4. Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 1983, 3–24.
- Hermann Pálsson and Rudolf Simek. *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*. Kröners Taschenausgabe 490. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1987.
- Heusler, Andreas. *Die gelehrte Urgeschichte im altisländischen Schrifttum*. Abhandlungen der königlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philo-



- logisch-historische Klasse 1908:3. Berlin: Verlag der königlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1908.
- Höfler, Otto. *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* I. Frankfurt am Main: M. Diesterweg, 1934.
- Höfler, Otto. *Verwandlungskulte, Volkssagen und Mythen*. Sitzungsberichte der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philologisch-historische Klasse 279:2. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1973.
- Holtmark, Anne. "Myten om Idun og Tjatse i Tjodolvs *Haustlǫng*." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 64 (1949): 1–73.
- Kuhn, Hans. "Das nordgermanische Heidentum in den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten." *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 79 (1942): 132–166.
- Laugesen, Anker Teilgård. "Snorres opfattelse af Aserne." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 56 (1942): 301–315.
- Lindow, John. "Mythology and Mythography." *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, eds. John Lindow and Carol J. Clover. *Islandica* 45. Ithaca, et al.: Cornell University Press, 1985, 21–67.
- Lindow, John. "Norse Mythology and the Lives of the Saints." *Scandinavian Studies* 73:3 (2001): 437–456.
- Martin, John Stanley. *Ragnarǫk: An Investigation into Old Norse Concepts of the Fate of the Gods*. Melbourne Monographs in Germanic Studies 3. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972.
- Noreen, Erik. *Studier i fornvästnordisk diktning*. Upsala Universitets årsskrift IV:2. Filosofi, språkvetenskap och historiska vetenskaper 3. Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1923.
- Olsen, Magnus. "Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus." *Maal og minne* (1909): 17–36.
- Phillipotts, Bertha S. *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*. Cambridge: University Press, 1920.
- Schomerus, Rudolf. *Die Religion der Nordgermanen im Spiegel christlicher Darstellung*. Leipzig: Robert Noske, 1936.
- Tucker, John. "Placitus saga." *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano. New York, et al.: Garland, 1993, 504–505.
- Viðar Pálsson. "'Var engi höfðingi slíkr sem Snorri.' Auður og virðing í valdabaráttu Snorra Sturlusonar." *Saga* 41:1 (2003): 55–96.
- Vries, Jan de. *De skaldenkenningen met mythologischen inhoud*. Nederlandsche bijdragen op het gebied van germaansche philologie en linguïstiek 4. Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1934.
- Vries, Jan de. "Kenningen und Christentum." *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 87 (1956–1957): 125–131.
- Wanner, Kevin J. *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*. Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series 4. Toronto, et al.: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

## EFNISÁGRIP

Greinin fjallar um viðhorf kristinna manna á íslenskum miðöldum til varðveislu, notkunar og miðlunar á goðafræði og goðfræðilegri þekkingu, og fræðileg vandamál þeim viðvíkjandi. Vitnisburður Sturlungu er rannsakaður sérstaklega og ítarlega í þessu samhengi, en sjónum einnig beint að Snorra-Eddu og notkun goðfræðilegra/heidinna kenninga í dróttkvæðum.

*Viðar Pálsson*  
*The University of California, Berkeley*  
*vidarpalsson@berkeley.edu*