

Britt-Mari Näsström

Freyja – the Great Goddess
of the North

LUND STUDIES
IN HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

General editor
Tord Olsson

VOLUME 5

Department of History of Religions. University of Lund
Lund Sweden

PREFACE

Although Freyja appears as a prominent deity beside Óðinn, Þór, Freyr and Loki in the sources of Old Norse mythology, scholars have not as yet paid much attention to her, preferring to concentrate their studies on the male gods and, to a certain extent, on Frigg, Íðunn and Skaði.

The great silence surrounding Freyja must be due to her many different functions as they can be gathered from the various sources, functions whose characters are sometimes contradictory. Scholars have usually chosen to avoid discussing those the qualities that deviate from the aspect of fertility. Freyja has been classified as a Nordic parallel to the Greek and Roman love goddesses in the handbooks of Old Norse mythology. She is indeed, the perfect goddess of love, erotic and amoral by nature, the giver of wealth and riches and the protectress of carnal passion. But unlike many of her counterparts in Classic Antiquity, she plays a major part in the male-governed pantheon, and she always acts with authority and independence.

However, there are other sides to Freyja's character as well, characteristics to which this work intends to pay attention - such as her qualities as goddess of war, a receiver of the dead, her cultic function and her role as the sorceress who has knowledge of *seiðr*, a form of witchcraft much talked of in the Old Norse sources. She is the Great Goddess of the Nordic people, whose pre-Christian beliefs formed a part of the total mass of the Indo-European religion, spread over Europe, Iran and India more than four thousand years ago. From this point of view her qualities could be compared with those of the illustrious goddesses of Celtic, Roman, Iranian and Vedic mythology.

Freyja's relation to Frigg and to other female deities is another field that will be analysed in this book. The same applies to sets of lower deities called Norns, Valkyries and Dísir. Freyja's role in the various myths where she plays some part, will also be interpreted in order to make the picture of the Great Goddess of the North a fuller and a more elaborated one.

In addition, the present work has the ambition to arouse interest not only in the goddesses and their functions but also in Old Norse religion, which is a part of our cultural heritage. Glimpses of more and less faded myths from ancient, sometimes forgotten times open up an absorbing view of man's hopeful belief in the powers of gods and the goddesses.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many friends and colleagues have been involved in my work about the Great Goddess Freyja. I owe a dept of gratitude to the Seminars in Uppsala led by professor Anders Hultgård, professor Jan Bergman and professor Peter Schalk, who have helped me in the progress of my studies. I would also like to thank Einar Hrafnsson, B. A. and Docent Kristinn Jóhannison for help with the Icelandic language; Docent Erik af Edholm, Uppsala, for the Sanskrit terms and Docent Ann-Sofi Gräslund, Uppsala, for advice concidering the archaeological problems. I am also indebted to Marianne Thormählen, who checked my manuscript and made it readable.

Finally I would like to thank my husband, who encouraged me to write this book.

Lerum in December, 1994

Britt-Mari Näsström

Published with Grants of The Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Contents

THE SOURCES OF OLD NORSE RELIGION	11
Runes, Theophoric Place-names and Rock-Carvings	11
The Poetic Edda	12
Scaldic Poetry	12
The Works of Snorri Sturluson	13
Saxo Grammaticus	14
Tacitus' Germania	14
Adam of Bremen	15
Ibn Fadlān	15
THE GODDESS FREYJA IN THE SOURCE MATERIAL	17
In The Poetic Edda	17
In Scaldic Poetry	17
In Gylfaginning	18
In Skáldskaparmál	19
In Heimskringla	19
In Sörla þátttr	19
In the Saga Literature	21
In Later Literature	21
PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE GODDESS FREYJA	23
The "Oriental" Hypothesis	23
Cybele	23
Isis	26
Inanna	26
The Voluptuous Love Goddess	27
A Polytheistic System	28
The New Comparative Mythology	29
The Structuralist Method	31
THE MYSTERIOUS NERTHUS	33
The Prehistoric Problem	33
The Evolutionary Perspective	33
Images of a Goddess?	34
Gods and Goddesses on the Rock-Carvings?	36
Other Possible Depictions of Gods?	38
The Religion of the Bronze Age	39
Burial customs in the Viking Age	40
The Bog-Corpses	42
The Gods in Germania	45
Nerthus and her Worshippers	47
The Name Nerthus	48
Nerthus and Njörðr	50
The Traces of an Earth Goddess	50
Nerthus' Origin	52
The Travelling Deity	54
The Lýtir-Episode	57

Peace and Quiet	58
Human Sacrifices	58
Conclusions	59
THE VOLUPTUOUS VANIR	61
Different Tribes of gods	61
The Origin of the Vanir	61
The Entrance of the Fertility Gods into the Pantheon	63
The Characteristics of the Vanir	65
Njörðr with the Beautiful Feet	68
Freyr	69
Heimdallr	70
THE GREAT GODDESS OF THE NORTH	73
The Concept of the Great Goddess	73
The Love Goddess	77
Freyja as Óðinn's Wife	81
The Sorceress	82
Freyja's many Names	85
The Death Goddess	86
The Complex Nature of Freyja	89
The Great Goddesses in Different Cultures	90
The Indo-European Great Goddesses	90
The Trivalent Goddess	91
Anāhitā, Vāc and Sarasvatī	92
Juno	93
Draupadī	94
Sætanæ	95
The Trivalent Freyja	97
FREYJA, FRIGG AND THE OTHER GODDESSES IN OLD NORSE	
MYTHOLOGY	98
Snorri's Classification of the Gods and the Goddesses	98
A Patriarchal Structure?	98
Goddesses known from other Contexts	100
The Unknown Goddesses	103
Freyja and Frigg	104
Lovemaking for gold	107
Frigg - "the Beloved"	109
Other similarities between Freyja and Frigg	110
The Mourning Mother	112
Frigg in Vafþrúðnismál and in Grímnismál	112
Frea in De origo Langobardum	114
The Guileful Goddess	114
The Conflict between Male and Female Deities	115
Circe	116
Gerðr	118
Rindr	119
The Holy Wedding	122

FERTILITY, FIGHT AND FATE: DÍSIR, VALKYRIES AND NORNS IN OLD NORSE MYTHOLOGY

The Collectives of Female Deities	124
The Origin of the Dísir	124
The Dísir and Þiðrandi	127
The Cult of the Dísir	127
The Vǫlsa þáttr	129
The Cult of the Dísir at Uppsala	131
The Sacrifice at Uppsala	132
The Great Dís	133
The Valkyries and the War-Fetter	135
Óðinn and the Valkyries	136
The Selectors of the Slain	137
The Individual Valkyrie	139
The Number of the Norns	141
Those who create compelling necessity	142
The Individual Norn: Urðr	144
The Well of Urðr	145
The Recipients of the Dead	148
Dísir, Valkyries and Norns related to Freyja	149
The interpretation of Hyndluljóð	151
Óttarr and Angantýr	152
Óttarr's Genealogy	155
Óttarr and Siritha described by Saxo.	157
Helgi in the Helgi Poems and other Sources	158
The Hero and his Protectress in Gesta Danorum	159
Freyja and Óttarr	161
Initiation of a Warrior	163
The Erotic Motif	166
The War Boar	169
Hyndla's Function in the Poem	173
The Secret of the Gods	174
Conclusion	175
FREYJA AND THE GIANTS: THE BACKGROUND OF PRYMSKVIÐA	178
The Content of Prymskviða	178
The Relations between the Gods	179
Loki	180
Þórr and his Hammer	181
The Abduction of the Goddess	182
The Theft of Brísinga Men	184
The Inversion of the Sexes	187
WHO KILLED THE KING?	189
The Divine King and the Sacral Kingship	189
The Sacral King is characterised as Divine and the Issue of the Gods.	191
The Sacral King is chosen for his Royal Power by the High God in order to watch over Right and Righteousness.	192
The Sacral King's Enthronement brings Happiness.	192

The Sacral King is the Supreme Priest and possesses Prophetic Gifts.	194
The Holy Wedding and the Ignoble Death of the King Dómalði	195 196
The Myth of the Never-Ending Battle	200
The Twofold Death: Dómalði, Víkarr	202
Sacrifice by hanging?	203
THE OBSCURED GODDESS: FREYJA AFTER THE CHRISTIANISATION PROCESS	207
The Decline of the Heathen World	207
Hjalti Skeggjason's Blasphemy	209
The Metamorphosis of a Goddess	210
The Obscured Goddess of Vegetation	213
The Traces of a Goddess	214
REFERENCES	217
INDICES	237

The Sources of Old Norse Religion

Runes, Theophoric Place-names and Rock-Carvings

The problems facing us when we enter the realm of Old Norse religion are manifold. Most of them emerge principally from the fact that the primary sources are few and hard to interpret, and we do not possess any organised mythology or description of the cult made by the believers themselves. We do have the knowledge that the letters called runes were regarded as divine and could operate as spells in order to cure illness, calm the sea or seduce women. This was all in accordance with tradition mediated by Óðinn, who had acquired the relevant knowledge by means of a ritual self-hanging, described in a few stanzas in *Hávamál*. However, the runic texts themselves do not convey any information about gods, myths or cultic behaviour. Most of them had come into existence in the time of upheaval when Old Norse religion confronted Christianity and express Christian values. Even apparently pagan inscriptions such as *Þórr vígi þessa rúnor* "Þórr may hallow these runes" probably display an influence of Christian belief mixed with the old cult, as a consecration of this kind was more typical of Christianity.¹

The place-names inform us about the worship of the gods, performed in holy places of different design, called *vé* "sanctuary, *lundr* "grove" or *høgr* "a stone pile", to mention the most common variants. Moreover the frequencies of certain theophoric place-names convey something about the popularity of the gods, which varied geographically. Þórr, Freyja, Freyr, Njörðr and Óðinn were apparently the predominating ones. The place-names where Freyja's name appears display an interesting dispersion in the south of Sweden, where they seem to be spread evenly over the archaeological regions, which had been characterised as chieftaincies. This could mean that the worship of Freyja might have been a part of a religious organisation existing before the Christianisation process. Pending further evidence from the toponymists and archaeologists, it might be advisable not to indulge in too far-reaching speculations about the structure of an organised cult of Freyja.

Depictions such as the rock-carvings of the Bronze Age and the picture-stones of Gotland have been the subjects of many different interpretations. Addressing religion from a historical perspective, all we can suggest is that many of these depictions, in their capacity of certain archaeological finds, probably show a cultic situation. To proceed further in interpreting them without being able to rely on literary sources will always amount to pure guess-work. Besides, the question remains whether the people who once made the rock-carvings belonged to the same religion or culture as the people of later periods.

What has survived and now constitutes our knowledge of Old Norse religion is primarily the mythological system, which was elaborated by the Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson in the thirteenth century, two hundred years after the Christianisation of Iceland. Snorri's ambitions

¹ Discussed in E. Marold, 1975, "Þórr vígi þessa rúnor", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, ed. K. Hauck, Bd. 8, pp.195-222.

were not those of a religious historian; he wished to create a manual for poets-to-be, and it is from that aspect we must regard his work.

Snorri named his work *Edda* for reasons not familiar to us. "Edda" means "great grandmother" in Icelandic, which might be taken to imply that it deals with conceptions of previous generations, but there are other explanations.

The Poetic Edda

The old songs about gods and heroes, previously handed down through oral tradition were written down in Snorri's times. When a manuscript of these was found in 1643, the learned world presumed it to have been written by another Icelandic historian, Sæmundr, which is why it was called *Sæmundar Edda*, nowadays *The Poetic Edda* or simply *The Elder Edda*.² It contains songs about gods and heroes and about the beginning and end of the world, songs in which we may discern motifs belonging to ages long gone and bearing witness to the common cultural inheritance within the Indo-European mythical framework.

Scaldic Poetry

The Eddic songs about gods and heroes are anonymous works. Unlike them, the Scaldic poetry was created by named authors whose fates are more or less well-known to us. Their songs were usually composed with the intention of pleasing a certain king or chieftain, and now and then this would result in skilfully composed poetry, characterised by periphrases, called *kenningar*, a form of poetic riddles. A *kenning* often constitutes a myth in miniature, like the periphrases of "poetry" as "the theft of Óðinn", alluding to his stealing the mead of poetry from the giant Suttung. Other types of *kenningar* only embody feeble allusions to mythological relations, for example Gunnlaugr Ormstunga's description of his beloved Helga as "Eir of the arm's day-light", i.e. "Eir of the golden ring". This is a depiction of Helga's appearance, stating that she wears a ring of gold, whereas the allusion to the goddess Eir serves as to suggest that she is also a noble and fair woman.

Some of the poems refer directly to well-known myths about the gods, for example Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa*, where - among other myths - the story of Gefjun and her creation of Sjælland (Zealand) in Denmark is told in poetical form. Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa* relates the struggle between Loki and Heimdallr about the adornment of Freyja - a myth where only details remain, unknown not only to us but also to Snorri, who mentions the story very briefly. An example like this one may illustrate the problem, which emerge whenever we try to collect and reconstruct the fragments of mythological event, used by Scaldic poetry to create artistic embellishments.³

The Saga literature, involving Family Sagas, Fornaldar sögur or Heroic Sagas, supplies scanty but interesting facts about the cult. These Sagas were composed after the Christianisation process, but they have retained expressions and observations related to the old faith in the text.

2 The quoted passages are from *Eddadigte* I-III, 1971 (3rd ed.), ed. Jón Helgason, Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen.

3 The quoted passages are from *Den Norsk-Islandske Skaldedigtning*, 1967, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen and *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 1946, rev. E. A. Kock, Lund

The Works of Snorri Sturluson

In the thirteenth century the Icelanders began to forget their pagan myths. Consequently the Scaldic poetry would have become incomprehensible to them if Snorri Sturluson and other authors had not preserved it in their books. The careful reader will, however, find that Snorri mixes Christian theology with narratives about the origin of the old gods. This is obvious in the first part of his *Edda*, simply called *Prologus*, where Snorri displays a form of historical writing typical of the erudite men of the Middle Ages, providing the gods with an origin in Troy at the same time as he plays with popular etymologies suggesting that the Æsir derived their name from Asia.⁴ People apprehended them as gods, but in reality they were malevolent demons, assumes Snorri, following the usual Christian conventions regarding the description of the pagan gods.⁵

The Norse scholar Anne Holstmark had suggested that the ensuing section, *Gylfaginning*, should be regarded in a similar manner, i.e. Snorri continues to demonise the pagan gods by showing them as perverting Christian terms in their narratives about themselves.⁶ Still, *Gylfaginning* differs, from the learned aspect presented in *Prologus*, although it reflects Christian motifs, especially from the Old Testament. The demonic aspect of the gods is toned down, though they behave rather vexatiously towards Gylfi when he enters their abode. Faced with the narrative zest of *Gylfaginning*, however, it is hard to subscribe unreservedly to the idea that Snorri intended to moralise or even mock the old myths. Not even the final scene, where the gods decide to keep the names by which they had introduced themselves to Gylfi in order to be remembered and revered for the future, carries the bombastic tone or the bigotry which usually characterised Christian polemics against paganism.

Snorri's method of mixing heathen myths with certain Christian motifs caused some scholars in the beginning of the nineteenth century to question his credibility as a source in the field of the history of religions. They pointed out contradictions and misunderstandings in his mythological accounts and even suggested that most of the stories were his own inventions.

Others judged Snorri's *Edda* as genuine expressions of the Old Norse religion, a learned man's attempt to systematise and reconstruct his material, sometimes after the pattern of Classical mythology, sometimes influenced by Medieval literature but mostly concerned with the original myths, of which he had intimate knowledge. More than anyone else, the famous French scholar Georges Dumézil has re-established Snorri's reputation as an important source of the Old Norse Religion,

4 The quoted passages are from *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 1926, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.

5 About the medieval influence on *Prologus*, see Gerd W. Weber, 1986, s.v. *Edda, jüngere*, in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*; M. Clunies Ross, 1987, *Skaldskaparmál*, Odense, pp. 12-13, 20-21; L. Lönnroth, 1969, "The Noble Heathen", *Scandinavian Studies*, pp. 8 - 11; U. and P. Dronke, 1977, "The Prologue to the Prose Edda: Explorations of a Latin background", in Einar G. Pétursson og Jónas Kristjánsson eds., *Sjöttúu Ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*, Reykjavík, pp.166-167.

6 A. Holstmark, 1964, *Studier i Snorres Mytologi*, Oslo.

demonstrating that many myths have their counterparts in other Indo-European myths.⁷

Saxo Grammaticus

The Heroic Sagas were the principal source material that the Danish historian Saxo, nicknamed Grammaticus, used when he wrote the first eight books of his *Gesta Danorum*. The *Gesta Danorum* neither is history in the modern sense of the word nor Sagas, but narratives about bold kings, fair maidens and ugly trolls in a manner bordering on the folk tale.⁸ Saxo was a monk who worked as a secretary to King Absalon. He assumed a moralistic attitude towards the heathen gods, whom he described as demons filled with evil and licentiousness. They fathered children on mortal women and could be defeated on the battle-field by mortal men. It goes without saying that Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* constitutes a source which has to be handled with circumspection when it comes to extracting mythological material. Still, the first eight books contain many narratives that refer to well-known myths. Others are hidden in narratives about heroes, such the tale about Hadingus, and there is probably more interesting material for the historian of religions to discover in the first part of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*.⁹

Tacitus' *Germania*

Both Snorri and Saxo are examples of history writers and historians who attempted to preserve and systematise - in different ways - the old myths and narratives of an abandoned, if not forgotten, religion. There are, however, other sources which are important for the study of Old Norse religions, namely the descriptions furnished by authors from foreign cultures, many of whom had never visited the different countries in Scandinavia or even Northern Europe. They based their knowledge on informants who belonged to, or were in touch with the people of the North. This is to a great extent true of Tacitus, who wrote the book, commonly referred to as *Germania*, on the basis of information handed to him by soldiers or slaves whose origins lay north of the Roman border.¹⁰ He died in the first years of Emperor Hadrian's reign (117-138) after having fulfilled an official career, and ending his days as proconsul of Asia Minor. *De origine et situ Germanorum* was supposedly the original title of the description of Germania. Published in AD 98, it provided information about the strange people in the North, who had been in intimate contact with the Roman Nation since the invasion of the Cimbri and the Teutons. One immediate reason why Tacitus wrote this book was the negotiations with the Germanic tribes during the reign of Emperor Trajan at Cologne that same year. The description of the Germanic people supplied by Tacitus is not unfavourable, its purpose being to support Trajan's defensive policy towards the tribes. It has been supposed that the

7 G. Dumézil, 1958a, *L'ideologie tripartite des Indo-Européens*, Brussels; 1959a *Les dieux des Germains, essai sur la formation de la religion scandinave*, Paris; 1959b, *Loki*, Darmstadt; 1968 *Mythes et épopée I* (2nd ed); 1971b, *Mythes et épopée II*; 1973, *Mythes et épopée III*.

8 Saxo: *History of the Danes I-II*, 1951, trans. H. R. Ellis Davidson, Cambridge, abbreviated as Saxo. See also *Saxonia Gesta Danorum*, 1931, ed. J. Olrik and H. Raeder, Copenhagen.

9 G. Dumézil, 1973, *From Myth to Fiction*, Chicago, p.19.

10 The edition of Tacitus' *Germania* referred to here was edited and translated by W. Peterson, 1946, London and Cambridge, Loeb Classical Library.

contrast between the physical and moral health of Germanic natives and the depravity of Roman citizens was a tendency, a common feature among national historians, who would use exotic tribes as ideals when they were actually criticising contemporary life in Rome.¹¹ Still, archaeological finds have confirmed that Tacitus' descriptions of the material world of the Germanic tribes are essentially correct.¹²

No special reasons can be adduced for questioning Tacitus' description of the religious beliefs of the Germanic tribes. The Romans generally held a liberal attitude to foreign religions and performed an *Interpretatio Romana*, i.e. they "read them into" their own gods. Tacitus occasionally employs this method, sometimes, but he also tries to supply the original names of the Germanic gods as he apprehends them.

Adam of Bremen

The Christian author Adam of Bremen, is - although geographically closer to the North - much more questionable than Tacitus with regard to his tendencies in religious matters. Adam of Bremen wrote his *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* around 1060 as an apology for his episcopate, arguing in favour of renewed and extended mission work in Scandinavia, since it was obvious that some of the Nordic kings - for instance - Sven Estridsøn had turned their interests in other directions, especially towards England.¹³ The same Sven Estridsøn seems to have become Adam's principal informant during his visit to Denmark. Adam also based a great deal of his account of the Christianisation of Svíþjóð on Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*, written in the latter half of the 9th century as a biography of Ansgar, the first missionary in this area.

Adam's description of the great temple in Uppsala is renowned, although it has to be examined critically, especially as it carries an implicit tendency: if the episcopacy of Bremen managed to destroy "this centre of wild superstition", a mass conversion of the Svear would take place - an idea which reminds us that the Age of the Crusades began a few decades later.¹⁴

Still, there are details in Adam's descriptions of the religious ceremonies which enables us to spot some resemblances to other sources. Besides we must remember that Adam did in fact visit one Nordic country, Denmark, where Christianity was hardly more than a thin veneer barely covering the old faith. There is no reason for disbelieving his account of the sacrifices and the central religious position of Uppsala, as these points are comparable with information provided by other contemporary sources.

Ibn Fadlān

Another contemporary source which gives us an insight into the cult, particularly into funeral rites was created by Ibn Fadlān, one of the Arab

11 J. G. G. Andersson, 1938, *Cornelii Taciti*, Oxford, pp. X-XI.

12 "Introduction to Germania", *Germania*, trans. W. Peterson, London 1946, pp.256 ff; J. Brøndsted, 1963, *Danmarks historie I*, pp. 381-399.

13 The edition referred to is *Adam av Bremen*, 1984, trans. E. Svenberg, Stockholm, abbreviated to Adam; *Adam av Bremen, Beskrivelse af øerna i Norden*, 1978, trans. A. A. Lund, Højberg, Worms, has been a useful complement.

14 K.Johannesson, 1984, "Adam och hednatemplet i Uppsala", Adam, p.382.

merchants, who had contacts with the Vikings in the East.¹⁵ Regarding this Nordic tribe, settled at the estuary of Volga, as utterly barbarian, Ibn Fadlān describes their cult as a worship of demons and themselves as being lost in the darkness of infidelity. However, his description conveys the impression of an eye-witness account, suggesting intimate association with a funeral ritual, to which archaeological finds supply parallels.

¹⁵ S. Wikander, 1978, *Araber, vikingar, vāringar*, Norrtälje, pp.31-72.

The Goddess Freyja in the Source Material

In The Poetic Edda

A characterisation of the Goddess Freyja must be based on the available Old Norse literary source. They convey the image of a multifunctional deity whose cultic realms extend far beyond the fertility aspect.

Grímnismál enumerates the heavenly abodes of the gods. Freyja's home is called Folkvangr, "the field of the warriors", where she receives those who had fallen in battle: but according to Snorri her hall is called Sessrumnir, "holding many seats". *Grímnismál* tells us about Freyja distributing the seats in the hall among the slain warriors she chose on the field of battle.

Freyja plays a dominant part in the search for Þórr's hammer, Mjólnir, in *Brymskviða*. In order to reach the world of the giants Þórr is forced to disguise himself as Freyja and to carry her principal attribute, Brisingamen, when he undertakes his fearful and humiliating journey to the giants (Þrk. 19). Freyja, Njǫrðr's daughter from Noatun, is welcomed among these ogres, who consistently attempt to abduct her by trickery and as well as by force. Her capacity of desire is well emphasised by Loki's words: *svá var hón ódfús í iǫtunheima* (Þrk.26, 28) "she was longing so much (literally 'pining in ecstasy') for the giants' world".

In another poem *Lokasenna*, Loki presents a similar but rather less chivalrous picture of Freyja, declaring that she has slept with all the gods, even her own brother, and that she is a witch filled with all kinds of evil.

Hyndluljóð is framed by a dialogue between Freyja and a giantess called Hyndla, "the little bitch". On a ride to Valhöll, "the Hall of the Slain", Freyja seeks help for young Óttarr, her special devotee, from the giantess. At the end of the poem Hyndla scorns Freyja for her lecherous life calling her *eðlvina*. This term used to be translated as "noble friend", but it rather means "lustful friend"; the goddess answers this insult by threatening Hyndla with fire.

These are the passages where Freyja is directly mentioned in *The Poetic Edda*. In its other poems she appears under other names for instance Menglǫð in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* or in the form of a kenning such as *Óðs mey* "Óð(inn)'s maiden/ or wife"(Vsp.25).

In Scaldic Poetry

In the Scaldic poetry, Freyja's name is used in kennings denoting beautiful women, which do not add to our knowledge about the goddess herself. From our point of view the poetry of Hallfréðr vandræðaskáld, who was more or less forced by Óláfr Tryggvason to be converted to Christianity, is more interesting. He depicts his anguish over abandoning the old gods in the following words:

The wrath of Freyr and Freyja comes upon me, when I am deserting the belief in Njörðr.¹⁶

In *Gylfaginning*

Snorri presents the Vanir, i.e. Njörðr and his children, in chapters 23-24, of the part of his *Edda*, which is called *Gylfaginning*:

Njörðr at Nóatún then had two children. The name of the son was Freyr and that of the daughter Freyja. They were both beautiful to look at and powerful. Freyr was the most excellent of the Æsir; he rules the rain and the sunshine, and the fertility of the earth, and he is the god to invoke for the year's crop and for peace. He rules over the prosperity of men. Freyja is the most excellent of the goddesses, she lives at the place that is called Folkvangr, and everywhere where she rides into battle she owns half of the fallen, the other half (belongs to) Óðinn, as here is told:

...
Her hall is called Sessrúmnir, it is big and fair. When she is travelling about she is drawn in a chariot by two cats. She is the first to be invoked by mankind, and from her name derives the honourable name when noble women are called *fróvor* (*freyjur*). She likes love poetry. It is good to invoke her about love affairs (Glgf.23-24).

Later on in *Gylfaginning*, we are told that:

Freyja is the supreme (goddess) beside Frigg; she married the man who is called Óðr, their daughter's name is Hnoss. She is so fair that from her the word 'hnossir' is derived, which means fair and precious. Óðr went away for a long time and Freyja wept for him, her tears were of red gold. Freyja has many names, due to the fact that she gave herself various names when she went with unknown people to find Óðr. She is called Mardöll, Hørn, Gefn, Sýr. Freyja owned Brisinga men. She is called Vanadis (Glgf.35).

This enumeration of Freyja's different names can be compared with the stanza in *Bulur* (IX) in Snorri's *Edda*:

*heiti eru hennar
Hørn ok Þrungva,
Sýr, Skjölf ok Gefn
ok et sama Mardöll*

Snorri also involves Freyja in a myth about the building of Valhöll, where she is one of the rewards promised to the giant:

As payment he asked for Freyja to be his wife, and besides he wanted to have the sun and the moon..... Then the gods sat in their

¹⁶ Hallfréðr Vandræðaskáld, Lausavísa 9, in *Den Norsk-Islandska Skjaldedigtningen*, 1967, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.

judgement chairs and took council and asked one another who had given the advice to marry Freyja in the giant's home and to defile the air....(Glgf.42)

Towards the end of *Gylfaginning*, at the burial of Baldr, Freyja arrives in a chariot drawn by her tom-cats (Glgf.48).

In *Skáldskaparmál*

The next part of Snorri's *Edda* is called *Skáldskaparmál*, a section which was previously regarded as a manual for poets, teaching them to find the right kenningar and periphrasis. Recent research is more apt to consider Snorri's work as a key to his contemporaries' understanding of Old Norse religion, noting that Snorri combines this tradition with the world-view of Classical Antiquity, especially Plato's.¹⁷ Freyja is mentioned in many kennings as "the daughter of Njörðr", "the sister of Freyr", "the wife of Óðr", "Hnoss' mother", "the owner of the slain, Sessrúmnir, tom-cats and Brisinga men", "the Vanir goddess", "Vanadís", "the goddess beautiful in her weeping", "the love-goddess"(Sksm.20). Gold is referred to as "The shower of Freyja's eyes"(Sksm.30), varied in "Freyja's cheeks" or "eye-lid's hail"(Sksm.35).

We are also told that she is present at the banquet of Ægir (Sksm.1 and 31) and that she is the only one among the Ásynjur, the goddesses, who dares to serve beer to Hrungrnir (Sksm.17).

In *Heimskringla*

Snorri has more to say about Freyja in his *Heimskringla*, where he describes the gods' emigration to Uppsala and their inauguration of the cult:

Freyja was the daughter of Njörðr. She was a sacrificial priestess/goddess (*blótgyðja*). She was the first to teach the Æsir *seiðr*, which was used by the Vanir (Hkr.4).

Later, after the deaths of the three gods, Óðinn, Njörðr and Freyr, Freyja remains in Uppsala, according to Snorri:

Freyja now maintained the sacrifices, since she was the only one of the gods alive and she was the most famous, so that all women were called by her name, who now are called *freyjur*. Thus everyone, who rules over her property is called Freyja and Hufreyja if she owns (a house). Freyja had many (varying) temperaments. Her husband was Óðr, her daughters were Hnoss and Gersimi (Hkr.10).

In *Sörla þáttr*

A passage in the *Flateyjarbók* called *Sörla þáttr* relates a detailed narrative about Freyja. In this tale she appears as Óðinn's mistress, and she lives in a strongly built room which no one can enter without her

¹⁷ Clunies Ross 1981, pp.174-175.

permission. One day she happens to meet four dwarves in the neighbourhood, busy forging a golden adornment. She agrees to sleep with them in turn in order to acquire the adornment. After the four nights are gone she takes the necklace and goes home, pretending that nothing has happened.

But Loki, who is Óðinn's servant, discovers her infidelity. Óðinn lets him undertake the difficult task of stealing the adornment. This mission being accomplished, Óðinn tells Freyja that he has discovered her adultery and dictates the following terms to her: she shall set up a never-ending battle between two mighty kings and not until then will she have her adornment back. Freyja accepts and takes - in spite of Óðinn's terms - the necklace with her. The story continues with the tale about Sǫrli, a warrior, who defeats the Danish king Hálfðan in a battle. Hálfðan's son Hǫgni takes revenge, becoming so successful that he has twenty tributary kings with lands. His name is known from Lapland to Paris and in every place between them. Freyja now has to find his equal:

Hjarrandi a king was named and he ruled Serkland. He was married to a queen and had a son named Héðinn. Héðinn early became excellent in height, strength and all his doings. He went to war in his youth and became a sea-king and fought everywhere in Spain and Greece and other lands near them, so that twenty kings must pay him tribute for land and fief. Héðinn sat in the wintertime at his home in Serkland. It is said that he once went to the wood with his men. Without his men he stayed in a glade. He saw a woman sitting on a throne in the glade, she was tall and fair to look at. She greeted Héðinn courteously. He asked for her name and she answered that her name was Gǫndul. After that they talked to each other. She asked about his great achievements.

Héðinn tells Gǫndul-Freyja about his exploits, asking her if he has any equal. She answers that King Hǫgni in Denmark could compete with him. Héðinn now sails away at the vernal equinox with 300 men. After a journey through summer and the winter, he arrives in Denmark the following vernal equinox. Hǫgni greets him courteously, and they immediately begin to compete with each other. Soon they find out that they are completely equal in every contest and swear brotherhood. Héðinn is unmarried, but Hǫgni is married to a lady of noble birth and has one child, a daughter called Hildir, who is beautiful and wise.

Héðinn again meets with Gǫndul-Freyja who gives him a magic potion which makes him forget his brotherhood with Hǫgni. In Hǫgni's absence, Héðinn brutally murders the queen and abducts Hildir when he flees with his ship. For the third time he meets Gǫndul-Freyja who releases him from the sorcery, but she also consecrates him to Óðinn, i.e. she chooses death for him. When Hǫgni tracks down Héðinn a perpetual battle between them ensues, where their men keep killing one another; but according to some versions Hildir wakes the dead in the night.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid. pp.275-283; the story is also found in *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, Sksm.47 and in Saxo, p.139.

In the Saga Literature

The Saga literature usually mentions Freyja among the other gods and their cult. A passage in *Egils saga Skalla-Grimsonar* emphasises her role as receiver of the dead; this occurs at the point where Egill's daughter declares that she is going to commit suicide together with her father, after the death of Þóðvarr.¹⁹ The Sagas, however, reflect a period after the Christianisation process, a time of ambivalence towards the old religion. The hostile aspect emerges in the scornful couplet which Hjalti Skeggjason recites before the gathered Assembly, calling Freyja a bitch who makes him an exile from Iceland. This episode is retold in different sources and adheres to the usual conventions in a process of conversion described by the winning party. Christianity oscillated between regarding the native gods as lifeless idols and as malevolent demons. Freyja's erotic qualities became an easy target for the new religion, in which an asexual virgin was the ideal woman. In *Heilagra manna sögur* Freyja is called "a harlot" and "a whore"²⁰ by the holy men and missionaries, whereas many of her functions in the everyday lives of men and women, such as protecting the vegetation and supplying assistance in childbirth were transferred to the Virgin Mary.

In Later Literature

Freyja survived in other ways, though. Folklore contains faded traces of her myths and functions in the tradition as does folk medicine and popular belief. She appears in folk songs, where *Þrymskviða* becomes transformed into the Icelandic *Þrymlur*, the Danish *Thor af Havsgaard* and the Swedish *Torsvisan*. In the latter version Freyja is transformed into a noble but rather inactive lady called Frojenborg, whose reactions are far removed from the wrath of the goddess when Þórr orders her to marry the giant:

*Det var den väna Frojenborg
hon tog så illa vid sig
det sprack av vart finger blodet ut
och rann i jorden ner.*

It was the fair Frojenborg
She was so upset [over Þórr's demand]
her blood burst from each of her fingers
and ran down into the ground.

At an early point in modern Swedish literature, Freyja became a counterpart of the Roman Venus, most prominently in the songs by the Swedish poet C. M. Bellman, where the prostitutes of 18th-century Stockholm are called "the children of Fröja" and Ulla Winblad, one of the main characters in the circle of "hedonist" who constituted "the Order of Bacchus", is often identified with the goddess herself.²¹ Occasionally Bellman sang love's praises as "the honour of Fröja"; at other times the

¹⁹ *Egils saga Skalla-Grimsonar*, 1933, ed. Sigurður Nordal, *Íslenzk fornrit* Reykjavík, p.244.

²⁰ *Heilagra manna sögur* I, 1877, ed. C. R. Unger, Christiania, p.569.

²¹ Bellman, C.M., Nos 25 and nr 28 of the Fredman Epistles among other examples. *Carl Mikael Bellman*, 1962, Stockholm.

goddess just merely represented lust and potency: *Fröja mig lockar och Fröja mig nekar*, "Fröja tempts me and Fröja denies me".²²

19-th century Romanticism did not dwell on Freyja's erotic qualities; instead it emphasised the pining goddess, weeping for her husband:

*Falkvingar tog
Freja en gång och kring rymderna drog
sökte i norr och i söder
älskade Öder.*²³

Freyja once assumed the wings of a falcon and roaming in the air she looked for her beloved Öder in the north and in the south.

In Denmark Freyja appears in a national context. Grundtvig, among others represented her as the giver of all good gifts. She has been identified with Gefjun, who stole a piece of land from Sweden and created Sjælland. This notion is reflected in the Danish national anthem, written by A. Oehlenschläger, which alludes to the old fertility goddess in the last line of the first stanza, Denmark being designated as *Fröjas sal* "the Hall of Freyja".

In the twentieth century Freyja suffered the same fate as the other Nordic gods in that her name was given to sweetmeats or to stout cart-horses. In early 1990s Freyja, or Fröja, began to appear as a first name for girls for the first time in history - no mortal could of course bear the name of a god or a goddess during pre-Christian times. Besides these examples, only the Icelandic expression for coquetry, *hafa freyjuketti í augum*, literally "having the cats of Freyja in the eyes", seems to remain as a direct association to the Old Nordic goddess Freyja.

As was mentioned above, Freyja is usually characterised by references to her unlimited eroticism and therefore classified as a fertility goddess. It is quite obvious that scholars have generally paid little attention to her, omitting those sources which deviate from the prevalent pattern, disregarding whatever seemed irrelevant to the mythological picture of a goddess of love. These sources thus constitute a neglected set of materials, which may well modify our idea of the goddess Freyja.

²² Op. cit., Epistle No.35.

²³ E. Tegnér, "The Lament of Ingeborg" in *Fritjofs saga*.

Previous Research on the Goddess Freyja

The "Oriental" Hypothesis

The traditional conception of Freyja not only placed her in a convention; it also led to the emergence of several hypotheses which looked for her origins in the Orient and in the Great Goddesses of the Eastern Mediterranean. It has been suggested that not only Freyja, but other gods from the Nordic pantheon, too, may have originated in Asia Minor. Baldr and Freyr, both synonyms of the appellation "Lord", were connected with the Greek Adonis, whose name has the identical meaning.²⁴ Moreover, all these gods had some characteristic features in common: they were young; they were connected with fertility; and they died in the prime of their manhood. The laments for these dead and dying young gods were typical features in their cult. These expressions of grief have been related to the notion of weeping Nature which appears in legends, including a Christian variant connected with the death of Christ on the Cross. In Old Norse religion the motif appears after the death of Baldr, with a view to returning him from Hel to the living gods.²⁵

The essence of the mythological complex relating the dying young gods in Asia Minor may according to Gustav Neckel, have been anticipated by poets or mythographers connected with the Gothic kingdom before 600 AD and spread in the Nordic area, where the version about Baldr, the beautiful, and Freyr, the god of vegetation, took shape.²⁶ Neckel built his hypothesis on the outlines of Frazer's theory about the young god. There is, however, a conspicuous similarity between the deaths of Baldr and the Mysian prince Atys.²⁷ Atys is the sole heir of the kingdom, as his elder brother is deaf and dumb. When his father, the King, is tormented by bad dreams, all weapons are hidden from him in the palace. A man named Adrastos, literally "the inescapable", appears at the court and becomes Atys' friend. When they are hunting a dangerous boar, Adrastos happens to kill the prince and the tragedy is completed. Behind this history, told by Herodotus, a myth complex appears which is different from the local versions concerning Adonis and Attis; it is probably of Scythian-Thracian origin. It is related to other Indo-European myths about the inevitable death, ostensibly caused by a mistake, sometimes unwittingly perpetrated by the blind brother.²⁸

Cybele

Among the mythical figures surrounding the dying god of vegetation Neckel and his followers perceived a resemblance between Freyja and the Phrygian goddess Cybele, who can also be interpreted as a fertility goddess.²⁹ This is in point of fact the only resemblance between these two

²⁴ G. Neckel, 1920, *Die Überlieferung vom Gotte Balder*, Dortmund 1920, pp.134-135.

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp.146-147.

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp.222-229.

²⁷ *Herodotus* 1, 1960, trans. A. D. Godley, 34-45.

²⁸ The theme has - as Dumézil has shown - nothing to do with vegetation, but forms an essential part of the drama of the world. G. Dumézil, 1959b, *Loki*, Darmstadt, pp.107-131.

²⁹ Neckel, 1920, p.168.

goddesses; but references to an affinity between Freyja and Cybele still reappear in virtually every work about the Old Norse religion. These "parallels" are due to sheer ignorance about the characteristics of Cybele; scholars have not troubled to look into the resemblances and differences between the two goddesses, if any, in support of their arguments for a common origin.

Cybele was an important Great Goddess of the Eastern Mediterranean with a famous temple in Pessinous in Phrygia. In the coastal area of Asia Minor, populated by Greeks, her cult was amalgamated with that of Rhea, the Mother of the Gods at an early date. During the Second Punic War, when Hannibal invaded Southern Italy, she was invoked by the Roman people as their original goddess, the only one who would be able to protect them from their enemy. Her image in form of a black stone was ceremonially transported from Asia Minor to Ostia, where some miracles took place before her installation on the Palatine. After Hannibal's troops were defeated, Cybele or Magna Mater became the Guardian of the City of Rome and later of the Roman Empire.³⁰ Her cult increased in popularity and was disseminated to the provinces, where remains of her sanctuaries have been found both in Gaul and Germany.³¹

In Rome the image of Cybele was wheeled on a wagon through the city in an annual procession. The rites of the vernal equinox concentrated more on Cybele's consort, young Attis, whose image in the effigy of a pin was carried to the sanctuary of Cybele and bewailed. The picture of the goddess was finally bathed in the river Almo, according to notices in the Roman festival calendar.³² Cybele was often depicted as riding in a chariot drawn by two lions. This circumstance became important evidence when Franz Rolf Schröder elaborated Neckel's assumption, claiming that the image of Freyja was influenced by the Oriental goddesses, primarily by Cybele.³³ Jan de Vries later preferred a more cautious attitude on the matter, although he admits a certain resemblance:

Jedenfalls klingt der Zug, dass sie mit einem Katzenspann nach Balders Scheiterhaufen reitet (SnE 66) ganz ungermanisch und erinnert lebhaft an die Löwen der dea Syria und den Pantherwagen der Kybele.³⁴

Gabriel Turville-Petre reasons along the same lines, albeit more deliberate:

The motive has been compared with stories of oriental goddesses, and especially with that of Cybele, whose chariot was drawn by lions and panthers, but it is not necessary to assume foreign origin.³⁵

³⁰ B. M. Näsström, 1990, *O Mother of the Gods and Man*, Lund, pp.19-43.

³¹ H. Graillot, 1913, *Le culte de Cybèle*, Paris; *Corpus Cultus Cybelæ Attidisque* VI, 1989, ed. M. Vermaseren, Leiden, pp.1-21.

³² Näsström, 1990, p.58-59. About the resemblance to the Nerthus cult, see pp.00-00 below.

³³ F. R. Schröder, 1929, "Neuere Forschungen zur germanischen Altertumskunde und Religionsgeschichte", *Germanisches-Romantische Monatschrift* 17, p.414.

³⁴ J. de Vries, 1970, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* II, Berlin, abbreviated as de Vries, II, p.312.

³⁵ G. Turville-Petre, 1964, *Myth and Religion of the North*, Worcester and London, p.176.

Folke Ström regards the theory of Freyja's Oriental origins with unreserved approval:

I Snorres Edda skildras Freyja då hon kommer till Baldersbålet sittande i en vagn förspänd med katter. Även detta är ett drag som tyder på orientaliska influenser. Närmast går väl tanken till den mindreasiatiska modergudinnan Kybele och hennes panterspann.³⁶

These scholars have, for some reason, favoured the assumption that Cybele's carriage was drawn by panthers, albeit the sources from Classical Antiquity plainly speak of lions. The panthers belong to the cult of Dionysos, where they obviously play a symbolic role.³⁷ It is still possible to assume a line of influence from Cybele's lions to Freyja's cats, but the evidence lost its credibility once the scholars had brought panthers into the picture.

Another motif, suggested by Schröder and emphasised by F. Ström and E. A. Philippon³⁸, considers the resemblance between Freyja and Cybele in their respective relation to their partners. According to Snorri, Freyja usually bewails her absent husband Óðr, with tears of pure gold, which has been compared with Cybele's mourning for young Attis. Following R. Much, Philippon even suggests an etymological similarity between Cybele's beloved Attis and Óðr, related to an old Germanic *Atos with the ablaut Oda, Uote, Óthal; this etymology is, however, impossible.³⁹ F. Ström calls Freyja's sorrow a reminiscence from the Great Goddesses of the Oriental high cultures, on the basis of which he propounds his thesis about the ritual sacrifice of the king in the North.⁴⁰

There are, however, no essential myths according to which Cybele would have roamed about the world bewailing her consort, with the exception of Diodor of Sicily's euhemerised version in which Attis was murdered by her father. Cybele is not looking, but mourning, for Attis, and this in its turn causes a famine - a recurrent pattern in Mesopotamian as well as in Anatolian myths.⁴¹ In other myths Attis kills himself in different ways, usually by castrating himself, an action ritually repeated by his priests during the ceremonies of the vernal equinox. It is true that he is bewailed in the temple of Cybele after his death, but this wake ends in exhilaration, and the following day is called Hilaria.

No doubt there are some resemblances between Cybele and Freyja: They are goddesses of fertility, although secondarily connected with agrarian rites; and they are both autonomous in relation to the male gods. These features are, however, normal for a Great Goddess, and cannot therefore be used as an indication that Freyja constitutes a Nordic interpretation of the Great Mother Cybele.

³⁶ F. Ström, 1961, *Nordisk Hedendom*, Göteborg, p.102.

³⁷ M. Detienne, 1977, *Dionysos, mis à mort*, Paris, pp.93-98.

³⁸ E. A. Philippon, 1953, "Die Genealogie der Götter in Germanischer Religion, Mythologie und Theologie", *Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, Vol. 37, Urbana, p.27.

³⁹ R. Much, 1967, *Die Germania des Tacitus*, 3rd edition revised and enlarged by H. Jankuhn, Heidelberg, p.180.

⁴⁰ F. Ström, 1954, *Diser, Nornor och Valkyrior*, Göteborg, pp. 8-9. Concerning the hypotheses about the ritual sacrifice of a king, see the chapter "Who Killed the King?" below.

⁴¹ *Diodor of Sicily III*, 1961, trans. C. H. Oldfather, London, ch. 58-59; Näsström, 1990, p.25.

Isis

It is more natural to trace the motif of the lost husband back to the myth of the Egyptian deities Isis and Osiris, recounted by Plutarch:

Isis and Osiris constitute the ideal couple in the pantheon, whose happiness is disturbed by the jealous and dissatisfied Set, endeavouring to annihilate Osiris in different ways. Osiris was put into a coffin, which was thrown into the sea and finally used as a pillar in the palace of Byblos. The faithful Isis, searching for her husband everywhere, finally found his remains, but Set again intervened and cut Osiris into pieces to effectuate the final elimination. Isis collected the pieces, and succeeded in begetting an heir, Horus, the symbol for the king in this world, whereas Osiris was the king in the Land of the Dead.⁴²

Isis' search and her magical efforts to revive her husband are expressions of the Egyptian hope for an afterlife. The suffering Osiris, destined for life in the realm of death, represents the existential fate of man in the Egyptian perspective, whereas Isis fulfils the intention of the divine trying to overcome death and destruction. She both fails and succeeds: Osiris will never come back, but he is not annihilated by death. In this respect he represents mortals who after death are identified as "Osiris". In the Isis mysteries of late Antiquity, Osiris' fate was illustrated in an annual ritual in the course of which the god's disjointed members were put together, emphasising the crossing of the border between the living and the dead.⁴³

Inanna

Clearly then, there are no proper similarities between the myth and the ritual drama of Isis and Osiris on the one hand and the sparse facts about Freyja's search for Óðr on the other, beyond the phenomenon of a missing husband. The same goes for the many weeping goddesses in Mesopotamia. The best-known myth from this area is concerned with Inanna, who bewailed her dead lover Dumuzi - a story that once belonged to the pattern of the dying gods.⁴⁴ However, new discoveries of cuneiform tablets altered the outcome of the love story between Inanna and Dumuzi. The story comprises Inanna's descent to the kingdom of the Dead, in order to usurp even that world. She was overpowered by her elder sister Ereshkigal, though. Ereshkigal, representing Death, paralysed Inanna, divested her of her garments and finally changed her into a corpse hanging from a stake. Inanna's attendant managed to send her two creatures, who revived her by sprinkling "food of life" and "water of life" on her lifeless body. She could not come back from "the Land of No Return" without providing a substitute to replace her, which is why a number of gruesome demons were pursued her back to earth. When she found her husband, Dumuzi, celebrating her disappearance, she handed

⁴² A summary of Plutarch, *Moralia: De Iside et Oriside*, 1957, trans. F. C. Babbitt, London 1957, ch.356-358.

⁴³ Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionem*, 1957, ed. A. Pastorini, Firenze, 27.

⁴⁴ About this pattern, see also p.33 below.

him over to the demons, who - after a merciless hunt - finally tormented him to death in a sheepfold.⁴⁵

Like the Egyptian myth about Isis and Osiris, the Sumerian myth tells about the condition of man and about inevitable death. The Sumerian afterlife was gloomy and frightening, a circumstance reflected in Dumuzi's fear, whereas the Egyptian religion promised a restoration after death comparable with the world of the living. Although they express different views of the existential conditions of mankind, these two myths display the same structure on the part of the human dilemma - to grasp and overcome the antinomies of life and death.

A third myth complex from the Orient which has sometimes been connected with Freyja's search for Óðr is found in the many variants of the story about Venus and Adonis. Adonis was a beautiful young man, passionately adored by the goddess of love but also by the Queen of Hades, Persephone. He was finally killed by the jealous Zeus. His connection with vegetation was expressed in a certain ritual where spices were planted in small pots, "Gardens of Adonis", and placed on the roofs during the worst summer heat where they flourished quickly and faded. They represented the short and hectic but barren life of the beautiful Adonis and had nothing to do with vegetation or fertility.⁴⁶

These three mythological complexes are, despite their differences fundamentally concerned with the issue of life versus death. The short fragment passed on by Snorri yields no implications with regard to this motif. Hence, the idea of an influence from the East Mediterranean must finally be laid to rest.

The Voluptuous Love Goddess

With a few exceptions, scholarly descriptions of Freyja emphasise her aspect as a voluptuous love goddess, an uninhibited fertility deity, preoccupied with her lewd pursuits. Philippson even makes a judgement of her lack of moral reputation:

"Moral" im christlichen Sinne ist von der germanischen Göttinnen ebensowenig zu erwarten wie etwa von der griechischen, aber die Wanengöttinnen hatten schon in Heidentum einen "schlechteren" Ruf als die Asinnen.⁴⁷

Hilda Davidson supplies one of the above-mentioned exceptions when, in her survey of the Norse gods, she gives prominence to Freyja's function as a sorceress - a function which is quite evident in the sources.⁴⁸ Freyja in her role as the deity who receives the dead is almost by-passed by scholars as an anomaly or a misinterpretation of Óðinn's functions, save for Viktor Rydberg⁴⁹ and Folke Ström.⁵⁰ The latter, moreover, presented her as a Great Goddess, upholding different functions, although he emphasised her

⁴⁵ S. N. Kramer, 1961, *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, Chicago, pp.107-114.

⁴⁶ M. Detienne, 1972, *Le jardins d'Adonis*, Paris, pp.211-215.

⁴⁷ Philippson, 1953, p.26.

⁴⁸ H. R. Ellis Davidson, 1964, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, Harmondsworth, pp.114-124.

⁴⁹ V. Rydberg, 1886, *Undersökningar i Germanisk Mytologi*, Stockholm, pp.335 ff.

⁵⁰ F. Ström, 1954, p.83.

fertility aspect in relation to sacral kingship in his *Diser, Nornor och Valkyrior*.

It is obvious that those "deviating" features of Freyja which do not agree with the image of unbound sexuality were generally neglected or regarded as "anomalies" by scholars. For this reason, one of the purposes of the present work is to analyse these "anomalies" and discuss their functions in conjunction with the usual picture of the love goddess. It is to be hoped that this study will, by means of a close investigation of Freyja's complex nature contribute to the emergence of a more modulated picture of the Great Goddess of the North.

A Polytheistic System

The source material is sometimes regarded as being so fragile that the only way of dealing satisfactorily with this problem is to regard the stories solely as literary phenomena recalling earlier myths and rites.⁵¹ It is true that any attempt to wholly reconstruct the Old Norse religion must fail, but this is not so much due to a lack of sources as to the fact that we are never able to arrive at total insight into, and complete empathy with any religion from ancient times. It is not the task of a historian of religion to effect such a reconstruction; rather his/her job is to pay attention to perceptions and motifs which were important to those who practised particular religions and then to place them in a social context.

It must also be emphasised that the Old Norse religion did not consist of a monolithic or exclusive faith unlike - for example - Christianity and Islam. It was a religion with a polytheistic system where many gods were worshipped, although the individual preferred to venerate one or a couple of them. As time went by different gods and goddesses seem to have been worshipped under different names in different regions. Any attempt to give prominence to an "original" or "correct" version can mislead us in our approach to Old Norse religion, or plunge us into deep difficulties. Any useful method must start out from regarding every myth, or fragment of a myth, as carrying a message of some value for the interpretation of the religions. With such a point of departure an opportunity might emerge to locate myths and rites in their social context, not only in Norse society during the Viking Age but in a widened perspective as far back in time as to their origins in the Indo-European family of language and religions.

The problem of the sources and their variations according to different times and dissimilar literary contexts is that special methods are required for making an investigation of a goddess of Freyja's calibre meaningful as well as plausible. The major problem, considering the material, is primarily to do with the fact that we only possess vague ideas about the social context of our most important source of the Old Norse religion, the poems about the gods in *The Poetic Edda*. Certain motifs can be seen to originate in a common Indo-European tradition, whereas others leave us in the dark. The hypotheses made by scholars in the field oscillate noticeably between a view of these poems as sacred expressions for faith and seeing them as Christian mockery of pagan beliefs. The same applies to the works of Snorri Sturluson and his students. Eugene Mogk suggested that they were products of literary novels by Snorri himself; Hans Kuhn

51 J. Lindow, 1985, "Mythology and Mythography", *Old Norse-Icelandic literature: a critical guide*, ed. C. Clover and J. Lindow, Ithaca and London, pp. 21-23 and 53-54.

saw as a collection of examples of syncretism; Walter Baetke regarded them as a zealous Christian effort to interpret the myths with reference to Paul's Epistle to the Romans, 1:18-23, the passage about God's appearance to mankind from creation and to the decline into paganism.⁵² In many cases, the formidable problem of how to value the sources impelled several scholars to state that nothing can really be said about Old Norse religion.

The New Comparative Mythology

A different attitude toward *The Poetic Edda* and Snorri's work was articulated by the comparative philologist and historian of religions, Georges Dumézil. Dumézil and his followers considered Snorri's *Edda*, as well as other Icelandic sources, as being exponents of the old Indo-European traditions, making them corner-stones in his well-known hypothesis of the tripartite ideology in the early Indo-European societies.

Dumézil's approach is not based on functional or historical methods, nor could it be categorised as a "pattern theory", as his idea of Indo-European ideology relies on the conception of "collective representatives".⁵³ His method is, as one of his followers puts it, unique and based on two postulates: Primarily, the contention that mythology expresses social values which strengthen social coherence and secondly that a linguistic unity - like the ancient Indo-European Language - suggests a considerable measure of ideological unity, understandable in the terms of comparative method.⁵⁴

Dumézil's tripartite ideology rests on the three classes, or, as he prefers to call them, functions that existed in Indo-European society: priest-kings with legal roles, warriors and peasants. Such functions are easily discernible in almost every society; but what makes the Indo-Europeans exceptional is that the three social classes were reflected in the pantheons and the myths of the early religious system. The tripartite ideology is characteristic of the religious view. It is found among most cultures and parallels the linguistic structure of the Indo-European family of languages, displaying a balance among the three social classes.

Dumézil's influence on research of comparative religion is immense. In the last few decades, it has affected such historians of religions as Jan de Vries, Gabriel Turville-Petre, J. Duschesne-Guillemin and Edgar Polomé, among others. Nevertheless, critical attempts to scotch the tripartite system have occasionally been made, for instance by the British Indologist John Brough, who published an attempt to prove that it also could be applied to the image of God in the Bible and to the twelve tribes of Israel.⁵⁵ However, Dumézil's answer makes it clear that Brough had misunderstood his method; besides, Brough's examples from the Bible did not articulate any tripartite characteristic in the text itself.⁵⁶

Other critical voices have been raised against Dumézil and his theory, questioning his comparative method as well as the tripartite

⁵² Lindow, 1985, p.38.

⁵³ C. Scott Littleton, 1982, *The New Comparative Mythology*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, p.132.

⁵⁴ Loc. cit.; Dumézil, 1958a, p.91; Cf. É. Benveniste, 1969, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Paris, pp.8 f.

⁵⁵ Brough, J., "The tripartite ideology of the Indo-Europeans: an experiment in method", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies* 23, pp.68-86.

⁵⁶ Dumézil, 1973, pp.338-361.

ideology. The critics either (often due to misunderstanding) distrust the idea of the three functions as a common, inherited ideology among the Indo-European-speaking peoples, or follow Brough's example, regarding the tripartite system as an all-encompassing idea. An increasing number of scholars, within and outside the community of philologically-trained historians of religions, have accepted Dumézil's concepts in the last couple of decades.

In Old Norse mythology, the first function of priest and judge was occupied by Óðinn and Týr; the second, the warrior, by Þórr; and the third by Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja. Still, we may note that Óðinn is related to the warriors, whereas Þórr appears as the god of peasants according to the central texts in Old Norse religion. This is due to a phenomenon which Dumézil called *glissement* "a sliding" between functions, and which he considered typical of the Germanic society, where the borders between king-warrior and warrior-peasant were not so sharp and easily discernible as in a more developed society, e.g. ancient India, where the positions of the social classes were clearly marked.⁵⁷ A striking example of the way in which the Germanic society had preserved the tripartite ideology while boundaries between them were gliding is found in the Eddic poem *Rígsþula*. Kon-ungur, the magico-religious King is the son of Jarl, representing the warriors, whereas Karl, the free peasant, has strikingly warlike features. Although the Germanic society tended to blend the first and the second functions, the tripartite theological system was preserved as an ideological superstructure.⁵⁸

Dumézil applied his method to Saxo's strongly euhemerized versions of the Nordic myths, demonstrating how varying tales about heroes correspond with the myths told by Snorri. His most elaborated example is that of the hero Hadingus, whose adventures are reflections of myths about the Vanir Njörðr and Freyja.⁵⁹ Likewise, he revealed the underlying tripartite structures that arise in the different Sagas about the hero Starkatherus, who - like his Vedic and Greek counterparts, Shisupala and Heracles - sins on three occasions each time against one of the three functions.⁶⁰

Despite his familiarity with Old Norse mythology, Dumézil paid very little attention to the role of its goddesses. For this reason it could be interesting to apply his theories about the Indo-European goddess in the tripartite system to the complex character of Freyja, thereby casting new light upon her functions. Dumézil's method embodies an acceptance not only of structuralism but also of the functionalistic perspective on the interpretation of myths, simultaneously involving the comparative and linguistic aspect. An application of this method to the Nordic material entails placing that material in a new and different context, calling for new hypotheses. Its flexibility conforms to the statement that there is no single and comprehensive theory of myth "except, perhaps, the theory that all such theories are necessarily wrong."⁶¹

⁵⁷ G. Dumézil, 1958b, "La Rigsthula et la structure sociale indo-européenne", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 154:1-19; J. de Vries, 1960, "Sur certains glissements fonctionnels de divinités dans la religion germanique", *Hommages au Georges Dumézil*, Bruxelles, pp.83-95.

⁵⁸ Dumézil, 1958b, pp.1-19.

⁵⁹ Dumézil, 1973, p.19.

⁶⁰ G. Dumézil, 1983, *The Stakes of the Warrior*, Los Angeles and Berkeley, pp.9ff.

⁶¹ G. S. Kirk, 1984, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, Harmondsworth, p.38.

The Structuralist Method

Although Dumézil claimed that he was not a structuralist, his interpretations of the myth have much in common with the structuralist method. The structuralist approach to myths has an advantage over the others: it is emancipated from the previously prevailing nature-cum-aetiological models, which - in their ambition to explain every element as a just-so story created both obstacles and confusion. In studies of the myth concerning the Great Goddess of Eastern Mediterranean, that kind of interpretation has been predominant in that her relation to the young god was interpreted as the rhythm of the vegetation, reflected in his flourishing and fading away.⁶² Such an interpretation usually becomes meaningless when we consider these myths - which must still have carried a deeper significance as they were told repeatedly.

The structuralist method attempts to reach a non-narrative significance meaning behind the ordinary meaning of myth, just as linguistics seeks the abiding structure of language behind the flow of words. It abandons the pattern of vegetation drama and works with mythic elements, which have nothing to do with each other on the level of narrative but actually reveal a set of relations between society, man, nature and the supernatural. In this respect M. Detienne's *Les jardins d'Adonis* has convincingly shown that the myths about Adonis do not in fact depict the dying god of vegetation, but hold him up as an example of what neither man nor nature should be. The myth about Adonis tells the story of a man who flourish too early, before marriage and procreation, or - in a transferred sense - that of an ear of corn which never ripens and fulfils its purpose.⁶³

Even so, structuralism in its most extreme form - which abjures references to comparative material, as well as the social context of myths - will be avoided in the present work. The meaning of the myths that reflect an existential view of man relies on the religious and social environment which bred them. Any investigation of a goddess such as Freyja is bound to place her in a religious context in the society which made her an object of worship. Moreover we must analyse her relation to the other gods before trying to uncover the structures that will help us interpret the myths which deal with her.

Likewise, the comparative method - whose value in linguistic connections is unchallenged - has to be handled with care when we compare gods and heroes in ancient myth. We must always bear in mind that a perfect coincidence can never be found between cultures separated both by time and distance. It is, on the other hand, evident that a religious ideology reflected in myths, and even in religious terms could be subjected to illuminating comparisons, as has been demonstrated by the application of comparative linguistics to studies of Indo-European religion, see for example Émile Benveniste's *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, 1-2. A combination of a structuralist method encompassing both the comparative and the linguistic aspect provides an opportunity to overcome the difficulties encountered by the students of Old Norse mythology, especially the problems with the sources. As we search for

⁶² J. Frazer, 1936, *The Golden Bough*, London, especially the volumes *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris* and *Balder*, the beautiful.

⁶³ Detienne, 1972, pp.188-226.

supporting structures in the myths and the mythical fragments, we do not need a hypercritical approach, discussing influences from sources coming from Medieval Europe as those sources are fruits of the same cultural heritage. Christianity did change this cultural heritage in Europe but Europe also changed Christianity, which turned from a local sect with strong demands for equality into an effective instrument of political power. Further on in the history of Europe, the tripartite structure found its new form in the three estates of nobility, priests and peasants; it appears in Martin Luther's concept of the ideal society, divided into "der ehrende Stand, der wehrende Stand und der nährrende Stand".

In spite of all criticism against Dumézil's comparative method, as well as against his theory of the three functions of the Indo-European societies with its theological superstructure, he has recently become accepted in practically all quarters. The growing respect for structuralist studies has also favoured Dumézil's theories, and his critics are now in a minority.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Lindow, 1985, p.47.

The Mysterious Nerthus

The Prehistoric Problem

The history of religions, must for obvious reasons, embody a search for possible connections with the past. Once we pass beyond the boundary between history and the present, however, the attainment of certain knowledge becomes an possible aim. True, archaeological research furnishes us with many tangible objects, and we may speculate as to whether or not they are of a religious character. Attempts at building theories without any support from historical texts not infrequently come to the conclusion that the proposal can neither be proved nor disproved, ending up as a mere conjecture. Faced with this dilemma many historians of religions hesitate to meddle with matters other than the written sources, omitting the archaeological find, which could have been useful complements to the texts.

Some archaeologists, feeling rather unfamiliar with or uninterested in the history of religions, neglect the subject or prefer to use the word "ideology" when confronted with obviously religious objects. This distance between archaeology and the history of religions has entailed demands for new and better models of a co-operation between the disciplines, especially in the field of Old Norse history and culture. An attempt at collaboration has recently been made, resulting in two volumes, *Words and Objects*, 1986, and *Nordisk Hedendom - et symposium*, 1991.¹

The Evolutionary Perspective

This gap between the disciplines was not always there. Earlier archaeologists and historians of religions supported one another and it was not unusual for these branches of scholarship to be united in the same person. These people structured the material according to a scholarly model which was based on Darwin's theory of the origin of species and which presupposed an evolution in the human mind throughout the millennia. The idea presumed a correlation between the material standard in a culture and the mental condition of the people who lived in it. In the fields of anthropology and history of religions, scholars such as Frazer, Tylor and Marrett built their theories on a mental process of evolution in the realm of religion, all had proceeding from different starting-points. Frazer saw the origin of religion in magic, Tylor in animism and Marrett in pre-animism. The idea of mental evolution made it possible to compare finds from prehistorical cultures with similar objects in modern cultures which had remained on the same material level and which were called primitive, in the literal sense of the word - that is to say they were survivals of the first evolutionary level of mankind.²

This procedure of building structures with different levels considering the cultural expressions of mankind has long been abandoned by scholars.

¹ *Words and Objects*, 1986, ed. G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford, and *Nordisk hedendom. Et symposium*, 1991, ed. G. Steinsland, U. Drobín, J. Pentikäinen, P. Meulengracht Sørensen, Odense.
² J. P. Schjødt, 1986, "The 'Meaning' of the Rock Carvings and the Scope for Religio-Historical: Some Thoughts on the Limits of the Phenomenology of Religion", pp.180-196 in *Words and Objects*, ed. G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford.

When a contemporary historian of religions discovers a resemblance concerning rituals and religious objects between different cultures and times, he/she regards the places of those cultures in a wider context as being more relevant than determining or comparing the mental respective levels of different peoples. The old paradigm does still exist, though, and is reflected in the fact that unidentified objects from prehistoric times are too are defined as "religious" or "magic", without any kind of analysis.

Images of a Goddess?

To illustrate this problem we may for a moment turn to the small figurines of female bodies, often called prototypes of the Great Goddess. Many scholars have suggested that a female deity appeared very early in the history of mankind, basing their assumptions on the existence of these figurines. The most comprehensive presentation on this subject was made by Marija Gimbutas in her *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe 6500-3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images*.³ She bases her survey on the different types of Mother Goddesses represented in the archaeological finds mostly made on the Balkan during this period, where she distinguishes between different shapes and decorations of the figurines and classifies them as Mother Earth, the Death Goddess, the Bird Goddess, the Fertility Goddess, etc.

Critical voices against Gimbutas' survey of prehistoric religion have been surprisingly unobtrusive, notwithstanding that many of her arguments are based on weak assumptions, probably depending on the fact that the concept of "Mother Goddess" had been coined in the history of religions without a closer definition. In an essay published before Gimbutas' work A. Fleming makes an attempt to oppose, claiming that much of the evidence of so-called "Mother Goddesses" is too weak and that some of the figures do not even have human traits. In other cases scholars have found one eye here and a breast there and still called it a cult of a "Mother Goddess". The finds of outspoken feminine forms could, according to his opinion, be interpreted as "cheerful local pornography".⁴ That many of them were found in graves could suppose a connection with a belief in after-life. The figurines formed with a big bosom and emphasised genitalia can be associated with fertility and serve as evidence of a belief of a new existence beyond death. Still, nothing in these figurines gives us the right to call them "Mother Goddesses" or even "the prototype for the Great Goddess", since we have no information about their purpose and their social context.

It might, however, be fruitful to study details of these female portraits, whether they are supposed to portray goddesses or not, since their gestures and attributes could convey a symbolic meaning for the life-giving fertility-goddess. Such a typical gesture appears in different cultures from different times: the female image grasping her breast as she is preparing for the baby to suckle. This nourishing function, invaluable for the survival of mankind, is a detail, recognised in the images of the Great Goddesses of historical times. The motif was developed into an expression for royal power of the sacral king, where he was depicted as suckling the breast of the Great Goddess. In Christianity the topic of the mother

3 M. Gimbutas, 1982, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe 6500-3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images*, London.

4 A. Fleming, 1969, "The Myth of the Mother Goddess", *World Archaeology*, London, pp.247-261.

preparing her breast for nourishing a baby reappears in pictures of the Virgin Mary.

An image of that type was discovered in Fårdal on Jutland, which in popular literature is sometimes called an image of Freyja. The figure is kneeling, her left hand grasping around her right breast. She is naked, except a short skirt made by threads, of the same fashion as the Egtved-girl, as she is called, was wearing (1300 BC). This figurine could be an image of a goddess or a priestess. Still, there is nothing that excludes other interpretations. The same statement has to be made concerning the so-called "Fröja from Rebild", a rough-cut wooden figure with female forms.⁵

We could regard "Fröja from Rebild" and other finds of human shape as presumable objects for worship and at the same time be aware of the possibilities of other interpretations. The next question to be asked of these objects is if we can associate them with the gods and the goddesses, related in the literature of the Viking Age. The problem is that few archaeological finds of the idols remain, since they were usually made of wood and were burned or destroyed in other way during the christianization process. The cult-places called *hof*, *hørg* and *vé* seem to have met the same fate as the idols and even the existence of the sanctuaries and temples of the Nordic Religion is debated. Especially the excavations made by Olaf Olsen seem to contradict a cult-continuity like the one in the Mediterranean, where churches were built on the remains of the pagan sanctuaries.⁶ This had called in question the existence of temple or any kind of religious building besides the house cult, yet new discoveries in the last two decades have changed the picture. The remains of a sacrifice involving bears were found when the altar of the Middle Age church in Frösön was excavated.⁷ The notices about the great temples of Uppsala and Thronheim are repeatedly scrutinised by critical scholars, albeit a complete answer could never be attained until the remains of these buildings are found and recognised.⁸

The numerous finds of gold-sheet plaques, called "guldgubbar", have probably been used in the cult as a form of sacrifice or as votive gifts. They could depict mythical figures and it seems reasonable that a well-dressed lady carrying a drinking-horn could depict some of the Valkyries

5 P. Riismøller, 1952, "Fröja from Rebild", *KULM*, pp.119-132.

6 O. Olsen, 1965, *Hørg, hof og kirke, Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, ed. Det Nordiska Konglige Oldskriftsselskab, Copenhagen, pp.236-275. However, two recent essays point out that Olsen's definition is too limited and that "cult-site continuity" would be a more useful approach. J. Sandnes, 1987, "Hedensk kultus og kristen kirke. Noen refleksjoner om kultkontinuitet ut fra plasseringen av enkelte kirker i Nord-Trøndelag", *Festskrift til Alfred Jakobsen*, ed. J.R. Hagland et alia, Trondheim, pp.144-152 and S. Brink, 1992, "Kultkontinuitet från bosättningshistorisk utgångspunkt", *Kontinuitet i kult och tro från vikingatid till medeltid*, ed. B. Nilsson, Uppsala pp.105-128.

7 A. S. Gräslund, 1992, "Kultkontinuitet - myt eller verklighet. Om arkeologiens möjlighet att bevisa problem", *Kontinuitet i kult och tro från vikingatid till medeltid*, ed. B. Nilsson, Uppsala, pp.129-150.

8 About sanctuaries in Germanic and Old Norse religions, see Å. V. Ström and Biezais, H., 1975, *Germanische und Baltische Religion*, Stuttgart, pp.214-217 and Turville-Petre, 1964, pp.236-250. Tacitus describes a goddess in his *Annals* I, 51 whose festival occupied a Germanic tribe while Germanicus and his troops attacked, after which her temple was rased to the ground. This contradicts his account in *Germania*, 9 about the lack of temples among the Germanic tribes. Temples are mentioned by the Christian writers like Bede and Adam of Bremen as well as in the Icelandic Sagas.

or, even Freyja herself, greeting the deceased on his arrival to the Other World. Another recurrent motif depicting an amorous embrace between a man and a woman, could represent the goddess' meeting with her male partner in a *hieros gamos*. Still, a certain restraint is necessary when interpreting these objects and it is not possible to identify any mythical events before a clarification about the cultic context of these "guldgubbar" is made.⁹

The question about migrations and different strata of population in the Scandinavian area during pre-historic times has been an obstacle when co-ordinating archaeological finds with history of religions. Some scholars maintain that the population of the North emanated from different tribes that immigrated in repeated waves, among these the Indo-Europeans. It was supposed that the boat-axe people constituted an earlier stratum of the population than the war-axe people, which consisted of the earliest waves of the Indo-Europeans. These travelled by horse, which explains their rapid invasion of the area.¹⁰ These theories are now abandoned and a certain carefulness is observed when defining the different types of migration.

The changing of the burial customs into cremating the corpses was associated with the Indo-European thought of a deliverance of the soul, well-known from the hymns of Veda. A total break with the earth burial in the Nordic area did, however, not occur, besides the Indo-European customs exhibit both types of funerals.¹¹

Gods and Goddesses on the Rock-Carvings?

The question about the rock-carvings, which have been the object of various interpretations and theories of profane as well as of religious nature. Many of them are rather precarious assumptions, seeking their origins in rather distant cultures without regarding the fact that rock-carvings for technical reasons must display similar forms.

The thought that the rock-carvings were anthropomorphic gods, among whom the male deities were dominating, arose early. A phallic figure depicted Freyr, a figure wearing a sword, Þórr and another with a spear Óðinn. Another interpretation, based on the theory of evolution, supposed that the rock-carvings described an early stratum of people's belief dominated by an indifferent view of the deities, apprehended merely as powers. This perception developed during time into an individualisation of the principal male gods of the Nordic pantheon.¹²

Following this hypothesis the absence of the female goddess became conspicuous and the suggestion was raised that the cup-marks were a symbol connected with an earth-goddess. The cup-marks were apprehended as bowls containing sacrifices to the earth goddess or that the thrilling of them was a symbolic representation of the intercourse between the sky-god

9 A comprehensive survey of the research on "guldgubbar" and of the recent finds is presented in G. Steinsland, "De nordiske gullblekk med parmotiv og norrøn fyrsteideologi", *Collegium Medievale*, 1990:3, pp.73-94. Steinsland introduces her own hypothesis of "guldgubbar" as a motif of the holy wedding connected with the Norse ideology of kingship.

10 F. Ström, 1962, p.18.

11 *Ibid.* p.20.

12 O. Almgren, 1926, *Hällristningar och kultbruk*, Stockholm, p.281; B. Salin, 1903, "Heimskringlas tradition om asarnes invandring", *Studier ägnade O. Montelius*, Stockholm, p.134.

and the earth-goddess.¹³ Some cup-marks depicted between the legs of a female figure indicates a correspondence to the male phallus, others still pose a problem for their interpreters.¹⁴

The Danish archaeologist Johannes Brøndstedt has outlined a complete pantheon of the Bronze Age from the material of the South Scandinavian rock-carvings. He has located a sun god, a god with big hands also called the god of lightning, the twin gods, two goddesses of fertility, divided into the diving goddess and the goddess with the neck-rings.¹⁵ Brøndstedt's hypothesis, built on earlier speculation, suffers from the same problem as was mentioned earlier concerning the female figurines. Donald Ward has criticised this kind of argumentation in his *The divine twins*, where he claims that a human shaped rock-carving must not necessarily have to be a religious icon depicting or honouring a god "... and should not be so interpreted unless there is sufficient additional evidence supporting the assumption. Such iconic evidence must therefore be treated with caution and the investigator should refrain from drawing far-reaching conclusions from the icons alone."¹⁶

Human like figures without phallus and with long hair and sometimes with a cup-mark between their legs are usually interpreted as women. They appear in coitus scenes and sometimes in a position of adoration. Some scholars claim that the minority of the women related to the phallic men are due to the circumstances that they are depicted as symbols instead of being portrayed anthropomorphously.¹⁷ There is a suggestion that the ships symbolise the fertility goddess, which had been related to the notice of Tacitus about the Svebes' sacrifice to Isis.¹⁸

Pars Sueborum et Isis de sacrificat: unde causa et origo peregrino sacro, parum comperi, nisi quod signum ipsum in modum liburnae figuratum docet advectam religionem (Germ.9).

A section of the Suebi sacrifices also to Isis: the cause and this origin of the foreign worship I have not succeeded in discovering, except that the emblem itself, which takes the shape of a Liburnian galley, shows that the ritual is imported.¹⁹

This goddess can, however, also be identified as Nehalennia, one of the matronae, as these goddesses are called, who appeared in Middle Europe, especially in the Rhine Valley.²⁰ Three decorated altars in this area present her in a human shape, erected with her left foot resting on the stem of a ship, leaning her hand on a rudder. Her other attributes are

¹³ de Vries I, pp.125-126; A review of the various interpretations of rock-carving is presented in two essays, "Rock Drawings as Evidence of Religion: Some Principal Points of View" by Å. Hultkrantz, pp.43-45 and "Interpretation of South-Scandinavian Petroglyphs in the History of Religion, Done by Archaeologist: Analysis and Attempt at Auto-Critique" by J. Nordblad pp.142-144 in *Words and Objects*, 1986 ed. G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford.

¹⁴ J. Brøndstedt, 1963, *Danmarks historie* I, Copenhagen, p.220.

¹⁵ J. Brøndstedt, 1977, *De ældste tider. Særudgave af Danmarks historie* I, Copenhagen, p.322.

¹⁶ D. Ward, 1968, *The Divine Twins*, Berkeley, p.47.

¹⁷ G. Mandt, 1986, "Female deities in the religious manifestations", p.114, *Words and objects*, ed G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford.

¹⁸ B. Almgren, 1962, "Den osynliga gudomen", *Proxima Thule* Stockholm, p.60.

¹⁹ The translation of *Germania* into English is made by M. Hutton.

²⁰ de Vries, II, pp.314-316.

baskets with fruits and she is followed by a dog. These attributes are similar to Isis (or Fortuna's) and gives an explanation of Tacitus' reference to Isis as an imported deity, when he describes her as the great goddess of the Svebes, although she was probably of autochthonous origin.

The ship is symbolically connected with fertility, like the ship Skjöblaðnir, which was the attribute of the god Freyr. The custom to carry ships in procession to benefit the fields survived for a long time in certain parts of Denmark.²¹ The ship could, on the other hand, represent the death ship, when it appears in the rock-carvings and we can not neglect the possibility that a depiction of a ship is nothing else but a ship. Other suggested female symbols besides the cup-marks and the ships are the foot-print, the snake, the spiral motif and the ring with a cross. All these suggestions, however, naturally give rise to the question: Why should the fertility goddess be depicted in symbols, while the male gods were represented in a human shape? The suggestion that the deity is depicted with a symbol, since no mortal should behold its holiness, does not answer the question of the difference between male and female representations, whether the figures represent gods or mortals.²²

In her thesis *Nordiskt och keltiskt. Sydsandinavisk religion under yngre bronsålder och keltisk järnålder* Marianne Görman puts forward the idea that the rock-carvings depict Celtic gods and myths. She bases her assumption on comparisons made between the Urnenfelder- and La Tène-culture and what is known about the attributes of the Celtic gods.²³ Compared with the blurred explanations of the religion of the Bronze Age as nothing more than a worship of the sun, Görman's effort to interpret the rock-carving in a new light is a good try. Still, her presentation lacks convincing arguments, mostly due to the difficulties we have already mentioned. Although the Scandinavian rock-carvings provide a very rich material, the interpretation of them as religious pictures is hazardous, whether we suggest a Celtic or Germanic origin of their motif. These pictures with their phallic men, ships and animals do not seem to reflect any known myths in the Indo-European mythologies.²⁴

Other Possible Depictions of Gods?

The same goes for the figures on the Golden Horns of Gallehus, although B. Lincoln in his *Priests, Warriors and Cattle* has suggested that the recurrent motif like the serpent-dragon and the three-headed man, against whom the hero has to fight belongs to the old Indo-European myth about the cattle-raid, is depicted on them.²⁵ The famous Gundestrup-Cauldron with its fascinating scenes belongs without doubt to the Celtic mythology, although it was found in northern Jutland.²⁶

²¹ H. Henningsen, 1950, *Kirkeskibe og Kirkeskibsfesten*, (Søhistoriske Skrifter 3.), Copenhagen, pp.93-101; H. R. Ellis Davidson, 1964, *Gods and myths of Northern Europe*, Harmondsworth, p.100.

²² Mandt, 1986, p.125.

²³ M. Görman, 1987, *Nordiskt och keltiskt. Sydsandinavisk religion under yngre bronsålder och keltisk järnålder*, Lund.

²⁴ Schjødt, 1986, pp.180-182.

²⁵ B. Lincoln, 1981, *Priests, Warriors and Cattle*, Berkeley, pp.114ff.

²⁶ The motifs are discussed in G. Olmsted, 1979, *The Gundestrup Cauldron: its archeological context, the style and iconography of its portrayed motifs, and their narration of a Gaulish version of Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Bruxelles and in F. Kaul, 1991, *Gundestrupskedlen*, Copenhagen.

There are few representations of Old Norse mythology in the visual arts even in the Viking Age. The most popular motifs were in fact drawn from the epic cycle about the *Völsungar*, especially *Sigurðr Fáfnisbani*. Still, depictions from the 6th century as the decorations of the helmets from Vendel and the stanzas of *Torslunda* are possible to identify as the gods *Óðinn* and *Týr*. To distinguish any god or goddess from anthropomorphic logs or stones are, as we already, mentioned, pure guess-work.

It is possible that the rock carvings of the Bronze Age as well as the pictures of the Golden Horns of Gallehus and the Gundestrup-Cauldron, can be regarded as reflections of older, bygone religions.²⁷ Still, until new finds will throw a new light on the interpretation of these objects, the question must remain open.

The Religion of the Bronze Age

The religion of the Bronze Age is customarily described as the worship of the sun. This assumption is based on different finds, like a disk with stylised rays on a rock-carving at Tanum, surrounded by kneeling females and the Sun Chariot, as the wagon discovered in Trundholm on Sjælland is called, with a disk placed on a wagon and driven by a horse.²⁸ It has also been suggested that the twelve bronze shields discovered in Kållandsö, 1987, belong to the worship of the sun, since they are too fragile to have been used in combat.²⁹

The grave-gifts indicate a belief in after-life, although they vary in the different burial customs, i.e. the gifts from the earth burials are of a material nature, whereas the cremation burials changed the objects into other materials, for example the neck-rings, which seem to have been important grave gifts during the early Bronze Age, many of them too big and too heavy to serve as human adornments.

In the late Bronze Age some bronze figurines of human shape appear occasionally in the deposition-finds, among them women with a double neck-ring. The female figurines with their neck-rings have been regarded as objects of religious worship and furnished with the name "the Goddess with the Neck-Ring" by some archaeologists, as a term for a special goddess during the Bronze Age, who also appeared on the rock-carvings. Scholars have moreover associated this goddess with Freyja who carries the famous adornment, the *Brísinga men*, which either is to be apprehended as a necklace or a girdle.³⁰ In the late tale *Sörla þáttr*, Freyja owns a necklace, which is stolen from her by Loki and she appears as *Menglǫð* "the one who is gladdened by adornments".³¹ It feels tempting to make a connection between the female figurines with their neck-rings from the Bronze Age and Freyja with her *Brísinga men* from the Viking Age, but we must consider other explanations of their appearance in the late Bronze Age than being objects of cult.

²⁷ A. Bækstedt, 1988 *udar och hjältar i Norden*, Oslo, p.22.

²⁸ P. V. Glob, 1970, *Højfolket*, Copenhagen, p.80.

²⁹ U. E. Hagberg and L. Jacobszon, 1988, "Fröslundasköldarna - en arkeologisk sensation", *Fynd*.

Tidskrift för Göteborgs Arkeologiska Museum och Fornminnesföreningen i Göteborg 1, Göteborg, pp.1-29.

³⁰ B. Arrhenius, 1962, "Det flammande smycket", *Fornvännen*, pp.79-101.

³¹ *Fildteyjarbók* I, 1860, Kristiania, pp.275-283.

Burial customs in the Viking Age

Man's perception of afterlife forms a variable and complicated picture, which varies not only between different religions and cultures, but also displays the existence of miscellaneous concepts inside the same theology, without experiencing those as contradictory or heterodox. The perception of after-life in modern Christianity may illustrate this case, where man is believed to rest in the grave abiding the final judgement, but at the same time to go directly to God or to prepare his ascension in another place like the purgatory. A study of modern obituary notices might offer other variants.

The Old Norse religion was no exception but displays different thoughts of after-life like Valhöll and Folkvangr, the paradises of the fallen warriors, Hel for those who were not slain and for the criminals, according to Snorri, and finally Rán for those who drowned at sea. The archaeological finds from the graves give us some information, which we can compare with the written sources. The wealthy man was surrounded by riches in his grave, but was also equipped with weapons and a horse for the life in Valhöll, and sometimes buried in a ship. The woman of a corresponding rank had no less gold in her grave, furthermore she brought tools for embroidery and other female occupations, befitting her social position. She was not seldom buried in a wagon furnished with ornamentation. Although we have no information about the women's life after death, the equipment in the grave as well as the attending servants bears witness of a more pleasant existence than the gloomy Hel.³²

High-ranked people were sometimes accompanied into death by a girl-servant, who more or less voluntarily agreed to follow her master or mistress to the other side. Such a ritual is described by Ibn Fadlān, who witnessed the burial of a chieftain belonging to rūs, i.e. Northmen, at the estuary of Volga.

When one of their chieftains dies, they ask their slaves and slave-girls: "Who is going to die with him? - "I will", one of them answers and when she has said so it is her duty and there is no return from this, even if she regretted it is not allowed. It is usually slave-girls, who undertake this.

As soon as the man I have spoken of had died, they (the Rūs), asked the slave-girls: "Who is going to die with him? - "I will", one of them answered. Then she is handed over to two slave-girls, who watch her and follow her wherever she goes, yes, they wash her feet with their own hands. During the time they take care of the dead and cut his clothes and prepare everything that he needs. The slave-girl drinks and sings every day, glad and exhilarated.³³

The slave-girl was finally stabbed by an old woman, called "the death angel" at the same time as two men choked her with a rope. The moments before this event she has a vision of the after-life, when she beholds her father, mother and relatives together with her master in a green and lovely place.

³² E. Roesdahl, 1980, *Danmarks vikingetid*, Copenhagen, pp.191-193.

³³ Wikander, 1978, pp.67-68.

This ritual could be compared with archaeological finds from the ship of Oseberg, where two female bodies were found, which are hypothetically identified as a queen - sometimes called Åse - and her slave-girl. Similar finds have been discovered in other excavations of tombs, where supposed servants were killed and buried together with their mistress or master.³⁴ One passage in *Landnámabók* relates about the chieftain Ásmundr, who was buried together with his slave, but was unable to cope with him in the grave. Ásmundr began to haunt the surroundings until the slave was removed from his grave-mound.³⁵

The burial customs of different cultures often contain offerings to the dead in the form of things that he or she is going to need in the Other World. Grave gifts as cereals, cattle and servants became, for economical reasons, habitually replaced by substitutes like figurines, miniatures or paintings. With reference to the previously discussed figurines with their neck-rings, it could have been possible to regard them not as deities but as grave-gifts, meant as substitutes for servants, if they had been found in the graves. Since they are located in other places, we could only regard their functions as uncertain.

Still, the neck-ring seems to have carry a cachet. The dying Brynhildr promises those who are willing to follow her in death:

May now the women come to me, all those who wishes gold from me. I give each of them a golden neck-ring...(Sg.48).

The gold and the neck-ring are not apprehended as a generous enough legacy the servants, yet they hesitate and reject her gifts:

...they all were silent and they all answered together: There is enough corpses, you may allow us to live...(Sg.49).

When the servants are unwilling Brynhildr calls their attention to the fact that they will arrive miserably poor to the Other World:

I will not for our sake take the life of anyone who is numb and unwilling. But on your legs may once burn lesser jewellery when you arrive.....and would not have the meal of Menja (Sg.50, 51).³⁶

Other servants receive the neck-ring and follow voluntarily their masters, Guthormr's and Sigurdr's fire:

On the fire next to the hun my bond servants shall be burnt embellished with neck-rings (Sg.66).

The neck-rings, like other wealth, obviously served as an assurance for the existence of the dead in the Other World. The necklace was at the same

³⁴ E. Roesdahl, 1989, *Vikingernes verden. Vikingerna hjemme og ude*, Copenhagen, pp.66-67. About the graves in Birka, see A.S. Gräslund, 1980, *Birka VI, The burial customs - a study of the graves of Birka*, Uppsala, p.36.

³⁵ *Landnámabók*, 1968, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík, pp.102-104.

³⁶ Menja, one of the giantess of *Grottasöngur*, who ground gold for king Grotte. "The Meal of Menja" is a kenning for "gold".

time a gratuity to faithful servants, who were thought to accompany their masters in the grave, which implied a guarantee of a more respectable position in the Other World than Hel.

The Bog-Corpses

Human sacrifice took place under other circumstances, which are testified by the bog-corpses. The first discovery of a bog-corpse was noted in 1640, but the real research about the people buried two thousand years ago in the peat began in the late 19th century. A general inventory of European bog-corpses was published in 1965 by Alfred Dieck, which included all existing corpses from the Mesolithic time to the Second World War. The finds are concentrated to Denmark and North Germany, especially to Schleswig-Holstein.³⁷

The bodies are in some cases well preserved. Still, the experts admit they are complicated to date with the C 14-method for different reasons. Nevertheless a majority of them are dated to a narrow time interval, viz. the late Bronze Age and the Pre-Roman Iron Age, which means the centuries before our era.³⁸ It has been observed that a great number of these people had suffered a violent death, for example as the man from Tollund, who was hanged by a noose, still preserved, and the man from Grauballe, whose throat was cut from ear to ear. Other corpses, as the so-called "Queen Gunhildr" and the man from Borremosse, had their right thigh-bone broken and actions had obviously been performed to hinder them from haunting the place.³⁹ The girl from Windeby was only fourteen, when a bandage was put over her eyes and she was drowned in the mud.⁴⁰ The Elling woman was around thirty years old, and wore a complicated coiffure, which required help from two other people. She was hanged by a leather noose, found in her proximity. In most of these cases the persons were killed before they were placed in the shallow lakes more than two thousand years ago. Sometimes they might have lost their consciousness before death, but their bodies carry no sign of torture. Some of them received a burial, as for example the man from Tollund, whose mouth and eyes were closed and whose body was placed in his wet grave in a sleeping position.⁴¹

For what reason were these people killed so brutally and placed in a well or lake, which by the course of time changed into a bog? The common burial custom of this time was cremation, where the carbonised bones were laid in sepulchral urns with symbolic votive-gifts. The people buried in the bogs differ from the one previous mentioned and therefore some scholars consider them as criminals, who were punished by a violent death and therefore buried outside the village. A remark in Tacitus' *Germania* has been apprehended as evidence for this hypothesis:

³⁷ F. Ström, 1976, "Tacitus and Germania", *Words and Objects* ed. G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford, p.223f.

³⁸ H. Tauber, 1979, "Kulstof-14 dateringen af moselig", pp.74-75, *KUML*.

³⁹ P. V. Glob, 1965, *Mosefolket: Jernalderens Mennesker bevaeret i 2000 år*, Copenhagen, p.60ff.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp.92ff.

⁴¹ C. Fischer, 1979, "Moseligene fra Bjældskovdal", *KUML*, pp.18ff.

distinctio poenarum ex delicto. proditores et transfugas arboribus suspendunt, ignavos et imbelles et corpore infames caeno ac palude, iniecta insuper crate mergunt (Germ.12).

The nature of death penalty differs according to the offense: traitors and deserters are hung from trees; cowards and poor fighters and notorious evil-livers are plunged in the mud of marshes with a hurdle on their heads.⁴²

Cowardice was equal to homosexuality, and both these traits of character were coinciding in their turn with the conception of *ergi*, that often meets us in the Old Norse Literature. *Ergi* means, using a plain translation, "unmanliness", in which just characteristics like "cowardice" and "effeminacy" are involved as well as playing the passive part in a homosexual relationship.⁴³ The bog-corpses from the Bronze Age seldom show signs of being punished in this manner. Only a few of them met their deaths by drowning, the wickerwork or branches rarely appear over the bodies and nearly 50 per cent of the bodies are women.⁴⁴ The careful funeral of some of the corpses moreover opposes the speculation that the dead were criminals, whom society was eager to get rid of.⁴⁵ The fact that many of them were found together with animals and artefacts in what was a lake rather leads towards the suggestion that they were sacrificed to a divinity, who was supposed to live in connection with water.⁴⁶

The human sacrifice among the Germanic tribes is testified by Tacitus, in his description about the Semnones, a tribe among the Svebes, living between Elbe and Oder:

stato tempore in silvam "auguriis patrum et prisca formidine sacram" omnes eiusdem sanguinis populi legationibus coeunt caesoque publice homine celebrant barbari ritus horrenda primordia (Germ.39).

At fixed seasons all the tribes of the same blood gather through their delegations at a certain forest, "haunted by visions beheld by their sires and the awe of the ages"⁴⁷ and after publicly offering up a human life they celebrate the grim "initiation" of their barbarous worship.

It is true that Tacitus does not mention in which way and where these people were sacrificed, nevertheless we can notice that the human sacrifice was performed regularly. Procopios, living in the 6th century,

⁴² ...*corpore infames*... , "homosexuality", although the translator tries to gloss over the meaning of the word. Tacitus uses this expression about male actors in *Annales*.

⁴³ F. Ström, 1986, p.227; P. Meulengracht-Sørensen, 1983, *The unmanly man. Concepts of sexual defamation in early Northern society*, Odense, pp.14-24.

⁴⁴ F. Ström, 1986, pp.230-231.

⁴⁵ Fischer, 1979, p.39.

⁴⁶ F. Ström, 1986, p.225. Although Fischer has observed that these depositions are made after the people were killed, it is in fact no argument against a sacrificial situation. Fischer, 1979, p.33.

⁴⁷ The translator makes a hexameter strophe. The quotation says only "sign of their fathers of holy and old visions."

relates about the religion of the inhabitants of Thule, which was an old term for northern Europe:

But the other inhabitants of Thule, practically speaking, do not differ very much from the rest of men, but they reverence in great numbers of gods and demons (*theos kai daimonas*), both in the heavens and of the air, of the earth and of the sea and sundry other demons, which are said to be in water, of springs and rivers. And they incessantly offer up all kinds of sacrifices and make oblations to the dead, but the noblest of sacrifices in their eyes, is the first human being whom they had taken captive in a war; for they sacrifice him to Ares,⁴⁸ whom they regard as the greatest god. And the manner in which they offer up the captive is not by sacrificing him on an altar only, but also hanging him from a tree or throwing him among thorns or killing him by some of the most other cruel forms of death.⁴⁹

There is some evidence that supports the suggestion that the bog-corpses were sacrificed ritually. Almost all of them were young people - the oldest about 30 years and they were all healthy. The Danish scholar P.C. Glob, who devoted many years of study to the people of the bogs, claims that their hands are not marked by work, which could imply that they had been selected from the others and spared from hard work to be in a perfect state when sacrificed.⁵⁰

His colleague C. Fischer objects to this argument in an article "Moseligene fra Bjældskovdal", where he asserts that the epidermis of their skin has not been preserved, why it is difficult to determine whether the hands had been spared from hard work.⁵¹ It is, however, not the main point to determine whether these victims had been hard workers or not, but rather to observe their age and their physical state. The sacrifice, being a gift to the gods, had to be perfect in all senses, since the gods are requested to give good and perfect things back. For this reason neither cripples nor sick nor old people can serve as objects of human sacrifice, but those have to be chosen among the young and healthy. The complicated coiffure of the Elling woman, mentioned in Fischer's article, is rather a strong argument for the hypothesis that she was devoted to the god as a sacrifice, and had been specially embellished before the ritual.

It is true that all bog-corpses were not ritually sacrificed, but some of them were just such criminals as mentioned by Tacitus, others had been killed for other reasons, others again had merely drowned by accident. Still, many of the corpses buried in the peat testify to the fact that they had once represented the greatest gift their tribe was able to give to the deity, who they supposed could determine their fate and whom they considered as living in water, not in heaven.

⁴⁸ Probably Óðinn, the god of war and frenzy, although he is generally interpreted as Mercurius.

⁴⁹ Procopios, *History of the Wars* VI, 1954, trans H. B. Dewing, London, XV, 23-26.

⁵⁰ Glob, 1965, pp.139-140.

⁵¹ Fischer, 1979, p.33.

The Gods in Germania

The written source that best describes the centuries during which these human sacrifices take place is the *Germania* by Tacitus. Tacitus' description is partly based on an earlier original, written by the historian Poseidonius, born 135 BC, who wrote several works on history, philosophy and science. His works of history, especially *Peri okeanou* and *Peri theon*, seem to have provided Tacitus with his material, but are lost for posterity. Other sources for Tacitus' description were Cæsar's *De Bello Gallico*, Livy's *History*, book CIV and Pliny's *Naturalis historia* and *Bellorum Germani libri* xx. The author had, as we earlier mentioned, access to oral sources like Roman soldiers and merchants, Germanic delegates, prisoners and slaves, who contributed to the information about the Nordic tribes: The Germanic gods catch Tacitus' interest already in the second chapter:

Celebrant carminibus antiquis, quod unum apud illos memoriae et annalium genus est, Tuistonem deum terra editum et filium Mannum originem gentis conditoresque (Germ.2).

Their ancient hymns - the only style of record or history which they possess - celebrate a god Tuisto, a scion of the soil, and his son Mannus as the beginning and the founders of their race.

Both Tuisto, whose name means "double-shaped, twin" and his son, Mannus, "the (primeval) man" have their roots in a creation-myth, which is found in other Indo-European religions.⁵² These primeval gods generated the three tribes Ingaevones, Herminones and Istaevones, who got their names from Mannus' three sons, a notice also given by Pliny the Elder.⁵³ The Ingaevones, who consequently descended from Ing, were, according to Tacitus and Pliny, situated along the North-Sea and the Baltic. In *Beowulf*, written more than 600 years later, the name Ingwine "friends of Ing", (1044, 1319) represents the people from East Denmark (=Skåne). Moreover, Ing is mentioned in old English rune-tale:

*Ing wæs ærest mid East-Denum
gesewen secgum oþ he siððan est
ofer wæg gewat; wæn æfter ran
ðus Heardingas ðone hæle nemdun*

Ing was first among the East-Danes seen by men, until afterwards eastward over the waves he departed. His chariot ran after him. So did the men name-their hero.⁵⁴

The names Ingui, Inguinus and Inguet are mentioned in an Old-English genealogy as origins of the kings⁵⁵ like Yngvi, who was said to have been the ancestor of the Ynglingar. There is little doubt that Ing is identical

⁵² B. Lincoln, 1975, "The Indo-European Creation Myth", *History of Religions*, 15, p.121-145.

⁵³ Pliny, *Natural History*, 1912, trans. H. Rackham, London, IV, 99. Pliny mentions five tribes, but nothing about Tuisto and Mannus.

⁵⁴ Translated by Turville-Petre.

⁵⁵ de Vries II, p.167.

with Yngvi⁵⁶, also called Freyr "the Lord", and perhaps the proper name of the fertility god. The combination appeared as Yngvi-Freyr and Ingunar Freyr (Ls.43)⁵⁷, which was probably derived from <* Ingviafraujaz "The Lord of the Ingviones". The etymology of "Ing" is interpreted as *membrum virile* by most scholars, which agrees with the phallic idol of Freyr described by Adam of Bremen.

Tacitus continues his description of the Germanic religion, with an account of their preparations before a battle (Germ.3). They sing towards their shields, he reports, a war-hymn to Hercules. The warlike Hercules with his club ought to be an interpretation of Þórr, but Tacitus' description also reminds us about Óðinn, who has the power to excite the warrior by *æði*, a reckless rage. Hercules behaves quite regardless of the consequences just like a berserk at several times, for example when he slays his own family or kills the centaurs. A notice of Diodor of Sicily moreover shows the ancient historians' predilection of placing Hercules in the North:

Now in the course of his campaign against Geryones, Heracles visited Celtica and founded there the city of Alesia and the maiden, on seeing Heracles, wondered at his prowess and bodily superiority and accepted his embraces with all eagerness, her parents having given their consent. From this union she bore a son named Galates.⁵⁸

When Tacitus later relates about the god Mercury, to whom the Germanic tribes sacrifice human beings, it is probably Óðinn/Wotan, whose attributes, the wide-brimmed hat and spear, associate to the Roman god. This furthermore coincides with the fact that Dies Mercurii, "the day of Mercury", was translated as "the day of Óðinn".⁵⁹ Like Mercury Óðinn possesses an obscure and ambivalent nature and both are obviously divinities with a function to take care of the dead.

The Germanic women seem to have a certain function in the society: *Inesse quin etiam sanctum aliquid et providum putant, nec aut consilia earum aspernantur aut responsa neglegunt* (Germ.8).

Further, they (the Germanic males) conceive that in woman is a certain uncanny and prophetic sense: they neither scorn to consult them nor slight their answers.

One remarkable prophetess was Valeda, whose name means "the seer". She lived in a tower by the river Lippe and was separated from the world around her. Another was called Aurunia by Tacitus, but her real name was maybe Albruna.⁶⁰ The sooth-saying women appear in the later literature,

⁵⁶ AnEWb s.v. Yngvi p. 678. In Snorri's *Heimskringla*, Freyr is called Yngvi-Freyr and counted as forefather of the house of Ynglingar. Against this connection with the sacral kingship, see W. Baetke, 1964, *Yngvi und die Ynglingar. Eine Quellenkritische Untersuchung über das nordische "Sakralkönigtum"*, Berlin, pp.125ff.

⁵⁷ AnEWb s.v. Ingunarfreyr, p.286.

⁵⁸ *Diodor of Sicily*, 1960, trans. C. H. Oldfather, V, 24, 3.

⁵⁹ S. O. Jansson, s.v. vecka, KLMN.

⁶⁰ R. Much, 1967 (3rd ed.), *Die Germania des Tacitus*, rev. and enlarged by H. Jankuhn, ed. W. Lange, Heidelberg, pp.169-170.

especially in the Old Norse realm as *vplva*, and to divine was a female concern, in which no man could take part with his reputation intact.

Nerthus and her Worshippers

About the goddesses mentioned by Tacitus, we have already discussed Isis. He also reports about another anonymous goddess, who is worshipped by the Æstii tribes:

matrem deum venerantur. insigne superstitionis formas aprorum gestant: id pro armis omnique tutela securum deae cultorem etiam inter hostis praestat (Germ.45).

They worship the mother of the gods: as an emblem of that superstition they wear the figures of wild boars: this boar takes the place of arms or of any other protection, and guarantees to the votary of the goddess a mind at rest⁶¹ even in the midst of foes.

This description of a goddess, associated with the wild boar and guarding the warriors, undoubtedly points forward to Freyja in her role of protectress of the warriors in *Hyndluljóð*, where also the helmet Hildisvíni is mentioned.

The best known of the deities in Tacitus' descriptions of goddesses is, however, his account on Nerthus and her seven tribes in chapter 40 of *Germania*:

Reudigni deinde et Aviones et Anglii et Varini et Eudoses et Suardones et Nuitones fluminibus aut silvis muniuntur... (Germ.40).

Then come the Reudigni and the Aviones and the Anglii and the Varini and the Eudoses and Suardones and Nuitones. These tribes are protected by forests and rivers....

Many attempts have been made to locate the Nerthus-people as this *anfiktyni* is called, but one of the most appealing effort was made by E. Wessén, who connected the names of the tribes with place-names in Schleswig-Holstein and in the south of Jutland.⁶² Reudigni, OG Reudingoz is derived from *rydja* "a glade, a cleared land". This people is later known as *holtsetar*, "living in the forest" by Adam of Bremen.⁶³ Aviones lived on the islands of the North Sea⁶⁴ and the Anglii on the Angle, a still existing place-name in Schleswig. Varini⁶⁵ were their neighbours in the north, probably combined with the place-name Varnæs at the bay of Åberrå. Eudoses, Suardones and Nuitones were all tribes in Jutland.⁶⁶

⁶¹ The Latin *securus* means "safe, secure."

⁶² E. Wessén, 1924, *Studier till Sveriges Hedna Mytologi och Fornhistoria*, Uppsala, pp.49-51.

Baetke claims that it is almost impossible to identify these place-names. Baetke, 1964, p.145.

⁶³ *Holcetae, dicti a silvis, quas accolunt*, Adam II, 17.

⁶⁴ Cf. Pliny, *Natural History*, 1912, trans. H. Rackham, London, IV, 97.

⁶⁵ Mentioned by Procopios, *History of the Wars*, VI, XV, 15 as Ouarnoi, could also allude to a tribe near the Rhine. Much, 1967, p.446.

⁶⁶ Wessén 1924, pp.50-51. Jankuhn concludes the discussion and agrees with Wessén that these so called Nerthus-people lived in the south of Jutland and the present Schlesvig-Holstein in his commentary to Much, 1967, pp.445-449.

Other places connected with the worship of Nerthus have to be mentioned. In the South of Norway there is an island called Njardar-log. M. Olsen interpreted the name as "Njorðr's bath", alluding to the ritual of Nerthus.⁶⁷ He combined the worship of Nerthus with the god Týr, who was represented in the place-name Tysnesøen, putting up another hypothesis of the holy wedding between these deities, where the image of Týr was brought in procession to the goddess.⁶⁸ Olsen's hypothesis was rejected by toponymists as too speculative. The proximity of two theophoric place-names representing a god and a goddess, was not good enough an argument to presume that a ritual *hieros gamos* had once taken place.⁶⁹

Another attempt to locate the amphiktyoni of Nerthus geographically, was made by H. Armini, who in the seven places named Åsaka in Västergötland saw the names of the stations, where the wagon with the goddess had once passed.⁷⁰ According to Armini the name Åsaka derives from *ås-ak* "the ride of the god", cf. OSw. *þorak, áska* (<*ás-ækia*). Toponymists prefer, however, to explain the name as *ås-haka*, claiming that a *haka*, i.e. a hanging peak, a shoulder, dominates the *ås*, "the ridge", although many of the seven Åsaka-names do not have such a topography.⁷¹ A recent explanation of the many Åsaka-names of Västergötland proposes a compound of *áss* "god" and *eik* "oak", which reflects on holy groves of oaks, situated in these places cf. the place-names Fröseke, Torseke, Alsike.⁷²

The Name Nerthus

nec quicquam notabile in singulis, nisi quod in commune Nerthum, id est Terram matrem, colunt eamque intervenire rebus hominum, invehì populis abritrantur...(Germ.40).

..nor is there anything noteworthy about them individually, except that they worship in common Nerthus, or Mother Earth, and conceive her as intervening in human affairs and riding in procession through the cities of men.⁷³

The name Nerthus offers a lot of difficulties. The name is mentioned only in this text. As we have noticed, Tacitus usually identifies the Germanic gods in an *Interpretatio Romana*, but in this passage he presents the goddess' name, as he apprehended it directly from his informants. The different manuscripts coincide with the variant Neithum, except one faulty variant which provides the reading Hertha.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ M. Olsen, 1905, *Det gamle norske ø-navn Njardarlog. Skrifter utgitt av Videnskapsselskabet i Kristiania*, Kristiania.

⁶⁸ M. Olsen, 1914, *Hedenske Kultminder i norske Stedsnavne*, Kristiania, pp.195-197.

⁶⁹ J. Sahlgren, 1950, "Hednisk gudalära och nordiska ortnamn", *Namn och Bygd* 38, pp.16-20.

⁷⁰ H. Armini, 1948, "Ett par svenska ortnamn belysta av Tacitus och Jordanes", *ANF*, pp.73-88.

⁷¹ Orttnamnen i Skaraborgs län, 13, 1955, ed I. Lundahl, Lund, pp.230-231.

⁷² L. Elmevik, 1985, "Åsaka", *Namn och Bygd*, pp.156-167.

⁷³ The Latin text says nothing about "cities". This might be a quotation from Vergilius *The Æneid* 6. 785.

⁷⁴ The name of the goddess is only mentioned here. By some coincidence "Herta" name got some attention and an existence as a female surname. When F. Bremer wrote her novel with the purpose of emancipation for women, she named it "Hertha".

The most prevalent interpretations of the name are the following, according to de Vries' conclusions: ⁷⁵

- 1 The name has a Celtic origin from *nerthos* "force".
- 2 The first syllable *ner-* belongs to an Indo-European stem, found in Skr. *nar-* "male power, generating power", cf. Albanian *n'ër* "man", Osset. *narten*, Greek *aner* "man", etc.
- 3 Nerthus is derived from the Greek *nerteroi* "from the Underworld", referring to a chthonic goddess related to the fertility.
- 4 Nerthus derives from the same stem as Skr. *nart* "dancer", suggesting on a dancing ritual.
- 5 Two attempts have been made to derive Nerthus from the Lithuanian language: *neriti* "to dive", hinting at the ritual to drown the servants of the Goddess and from *nerseti* "to play".

All these theories are built on the fragile material, which Tacitus presents in chapter 40 of *Germania*. We may add that the Celtic word *ner-* meaning "force" corresponds to the expressions *njarð-gjörð* "girdle of strength" and *njarð-láss* "strong lock".⁷⁶ These expressions belong to the mentioned Indo-European stem **ner-*, reflected in many expressions for "man, virile power"⁷⁷, for example appearing in the Old Norse expression *narungar* "men".⁷⁸

The etymology behind the name Nerthus thus expresses something like "virile force", which seems to contradict the identification of Tacitus as *Terra Mater*, "mother Earth". Indeed, many of the Great Goddesses carry epithets like "the strong, the forceful" even "the aggressive"⁷⁹, but there are better models for explaining the name Nerthus in relation to "Mother Earth". Much evidence shows that a god's appellation could take a feminine form, which is apprehended as his wife for example Zeus-Dione. The reverse condition also occurs as e.g.. Hera-Heracles.⁸⁰ The name Nerthus for a goddess should therefore imply the existence of a male deity, who might respond to the name "virile force". We find him in *Njörðr*, the Old Norse variant of the name.

⁷⁵ Cf. de Vries II, pp.163-164.

⁷⁶ Turville-Petre, 1964, pp.109-113; AnEWb s.v. *njarð*, p. 410.

⁷⁷ Cf. Benveniste I, 1969, p.292.

⁷⁸ AnEWb s.v. *narungar*, p.405; G. Dumézil, 1953, "Rejoinder to Carl Koch, Bemerkungen zum römischen Quirinskult", *Revue des études latines*, 31, pp. 189-190 provides other examples. See also Benveniste I, 1969, p.292.

⁷⁹ For example the Indian goddess Durgā, carrying a lot of warlike epithets, still is the great maternal principle. *A Dictionary of Hinduism*, 1977, London s.v. Durgā, p.81. Another example is Artemis, see W. Burkert, 1985, *Greek Religion*, Cambridge Mass., pp.149-152, as a third Demeter, Näsström 1990, pp.89-90.

⁸⁰ Benveniste I, 1969, pp.219-220.

Nerthus and Njörðr

The similarities between the name Nerthus and Njörðr were observed at an early stage by the linguists, who had pondered a lot about the question why the goddess changed her sex over the centuries. A. Kock suggested, that the original feminine name Nerthus became transformed, when, according to a sound-change, the vowel *-e-* changed into *-io-* because the word belonged to a *u*-stem. Analogously the OG **ertho* was transformed in OS to *iorþ* and in ON to *jorð* and Nerthus became OS Njord, ON Njörðr. Since Njörðr is a masculine noun, the goddess became split into a male and a female deity, called Njörðr *freyr* "the Lord Njörðr" and Njörðr *freyja* "the Lady Njörðr". In the course of time the feminine form lost her proper name and kept her title, whereas the male god Njörðr still existed and the title Freyr became his son, Kock suggested.⁸¹ Although Kock's hypothesis is attractive, it goes without saying that a religious cult and the concept of its gods do not always follow the phonetic laws. There existed furthermore a feminine form of the name, although faded, in **Njäre* found in Nordic place-names⁸² and in Njörun⁸³, who appeared as a goddess in poetry and Njörn, a poetical expression for a woman.

In his criticism of Kock, J. Sahlgren proposed an evolution from an "onomastic taboo", like the evolution that the Hebraic name of the God, Jahve, passed when it became too holy to be pronounced and circumscribed to Adonai, "The Lord".⁸⁴ This could be a plausible reason for the close interrelation between Njörðr and Freyr, but is in reality no explanation for the fact that the goddess not only changes her name but also her sex.

The Traces of an Earth Goddess

Other scholars put forth the hypothesis that Tacitus had misinterpreted his informants and that Nerthus in reality was an earth goddess called **Ertho* (cf. earth, Erde), coinciding with the characterisation of her as Terra Mater. The Earth-Goddesses in Old Norse Mythology appear only as faded deities, sparsely mentioned in the sources. The goddess Jörð is found in two kennings for Þórr, *Jarðar burr* "the son of Earth" (Þrk.1; Ls.58) and *Jarðar sunn* (Haustl.14) meaning the same, where she appears as his mother. Fjörgyn is synonymous to Jörð, also appearing in a kenning for Þórr, *Fjörgynjar burr*, "the son of Fjörgyn" (Vsp. 56) and *þar mun Fjörgyn hitta Þórr, son sinn* "there Fjörgyn may find Þórr, her son" (Hrbl.56). Hlōðyn is also mentioned as the mother of Þórr, *þá kemr inn mæri mögr Hlōðynjar* "the famous son of Hlōðyn arrives" (Vsp. 56) and is probably related to the North-Germanic goddess Hludana, etymologically from the same stem as *hlōd* "pile of earth".⁸⁵ Jörð, Fjörgyn and Hlōðyn are all examples of earth goddesses about whom the sources leave very little information.

⁸¹ A. Kock, 1896, Die Göttin Nerthus und der Gott Njörðr, *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 28, pp.289ff.

⁸² Exemplified in many place-names as for example Närlunda. The female variant is only found the East Nordic area. G. Turville-Petre, 1969, "Fertility of Beast and Soil", *Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. E. Polomé, Austin, p.255; L. Hellberg, 1986, "Hedendomens spår i Uppländska ortnamn", *Ortnamnssällskapets i Uppsala årsskrift*, 1986, pp.67-70; Brink, S., 1990, *Sockenbildning och sockennamn*, Uppsala, p.50.

⁸³ She is one of the goddesses according to *Pulur* IV and used in some kennings, see J. de Vries, 1931, "Contribution to the study of Othin especially to his relation to agricultural practice in modern popular lore", *Folklore Fellows communications*, 94, Helsingfors, p.37.

⁸⁴ J. Sahlgren, 1918, "Förbudna Namn", *Namn och Bygd* 6, pp. 22-27.

⁸⁵ de Vries II, pp.321-322.

An old Anglo-Saxon charm, which is explicitly Christian in its character, but in some parts reflect an older level of religion, contains a strophe, which is read: *Erce, eorþan modor* "Erce, mother of the earth." This strophe was recited when the first furrow was cut⁸⁶ and a following *hal wes þu, folde, fira modor*, "Hail you, Earth, the men's mother", alludes to the passage about Nerthus characterised as *terra mater* "Mother Earth". Several attempts to combine Erce with *Ertho have been made, none of them with satisfying results. The resemblance with another formula *acræ, acræ, arnem*, used merely as an abracadabra, has moreover to be taken into consideration, before claiming the existence of a possible goddess Erce.⁸⁷

One goddess in the Nordic mythology, directly combined with earth and agriculture is Gefjun, who created the Danish island Sjælland by plowing away a great part of Svíþjóð. Her name means that she bestows happiness and welfare, as Nerthus' arrival did in the villages.⁸⁸ Gefjun is, however, nothing else but a byname of Freyja, and thus related to the sphere of Vanir gods, who watched over prosperity and fertility.

Some scholars apprehend Skaði as an earth goddess or intimately connected with the soil.⁸⁹ She appears in the myth as the daughter of the giant Þjazi and marries Njörðr under peculiar circumstances. In this connection it seems like more than a coincidence that Skaði is a masculine form, but the attempts to suggest a change of sexes between Skaði and Nerthus-Njörðr has been without success.⁹⁰ Skaði is represented in several place-names in Sweden and Norway like Skadevi, Skadalunda, Skee, Skea, Skadalund, etc.⁹¹, of which many imply a cult of Skaði, which is also reflected in her own words:

frá mínom véom ok vǫngom skolo þér æ kǫld ráð koma (Ls.51).

from my shrines and fields will cold counsel ever come to you.

The idea of Skaði's connection with the earth belongs to the observation that Pliny the Elder describes the land in the North as Scadinavia in his *Naturalia Historia*.⁹² This Scadinavia described by Pliny and his contemporaries seems to be identical with Skåne and has been interpreted as deriving from an original *Skadin-awjo meaning "Skaði's island" or "the island in the shadow". These etymologies are, however, strongly criticised and the suggestion of "the dangerous island", hinting at the dangerous reefs along the coast of Skanör has been prevailing among the toponymists.⁹³

The version of "Skaði's island" has been defended among other by F. R. Schröder. According to him *Skadin-awjo is a reminiscence of the influence of the great Goddess Skaði, who once ruled this land and whose

⁸⁶ Turville-Petre, 1969, combines this charm with the plow-myth of Gefjun, p.188.

⁸⁷ de Vries II, p.326.

⁸⁸ de Vries II, p.293.

⁸⁹ F. R. Schröder, 1941, *Skadi und die Götter Skandinaviens*, Tübingen, p.166; G. Steinsland, 1989, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi*, Oslo, pp.61ff, 607.

⁹⁰ For discussion, see de Vries II, p.337.

⁹¹ de Vries II, p.337.

⁹² Pliny, Op.cit. IV, 96.

⁹³ AnEWb s.v. Skaney, pp.482-483.

cult was superseded in favour of the male gods.⁹⁴ Without claiming Skaði's supremacy in a prehistoric pantheon Gro Steinsland characterises her as a giantess who, representing the earth in a cosmological perspective, marries the god, representing the king and from the union of this ill-matched couple some of the dynasties of the Nordic kings emerged.⁹⁵

Whether a giantess or goddess, it is obvious from the material that Skaði hardly carries the evident characteristics of fertility that characterises Nerthus. She is - according to Snorri and *Ragnarsdrápa* - connected with the wild nature and icy mountain, evoked as the *ǫndurdís* "the skiing woman". Skaði rather conveys characteristics that are opposite to those of the Vanir, destroying aspects like cold, frost and darkness, which is implied in a possible interpretation of her name, "damage". This opposition is exhibited in the alternating song between her and Njörðr, which not only reflects the contrast between the inland and the coast, but even between wild nature and human culture (Glgf.22).

Nerthus' Origin

There remain other variants of the cult of Nerthus to be mentioned. Marianne Görman claims that behind the concept of Nerthus, described by Tacitus, the Celtic god Cernunnos hides together with his wife and that their cult as well as the ritual was imported from the Celtic Hallstatt-culture.⁹⁶ Görman suggests that other characteristics in Nerthus' travelling, like the priest's handling of the idol, is an *Interpretatio Romana* of Nerthus in the picture of Cybele's procession in Rome during the vernal equinox, just as many other scholars before her have done.⁹⁷ Cybele had, however, two great processions in Rome, one connected with the rites of the vernal equinox and the second in remembrance of her arrival in Rome 204 BC, which was supposed to have saved the city from Hannibal's attack. None of these processions bears any resemblance to the travelling of Nerthus, except for the Lavatio, the washing of the idol at the end of the ceremony at the vernal equinox. This washing was, however, a common ritual observed in certain agrarian rituals of Athena and Hera.⁹⁸ The washing of the image still is a striking correspondence, but we ought to observe the apposition *si credere velis* "if you would believe it", which could insinuate that Tacitus is not quite sure about the circumstances, but approximately deliberately makes an *Interpretatio Romana* of the final of Nerthus' perambulation. There are no examples of any washing of the gods in the Germanic area; the images were warmed, smeared and dried before the *blót*.⁹⁹

Moreover, Cybele is never mentioned as *terra mater* and there are no notices about sacrificed slaves, when her idol was returned to her temple on the Palatine.¹⁰⁰ We ought to notice that her procession in a wagon was probably an innovation of her cult after it spread to Rome and the provinces, whereas it had the character of a funeral procession in Greece

⁹⁴ Schröder, 1941, p.166.

⁹⁵ Steinsland, 1989, pp.61ff, 607.

⁹⁶ Görman, 1987, p.149.

⁹⁷ Ibid. pp.142-143.

⁹⁸ Graillet, 1912, p.137; Näsström, 1990, p.59.

⁹⁹ Cf. p.168 below.

¹⁰⁰ Näsström, 1990, pp.58-59, 81ff.

and her Phrygian homeland. It is also possible that the cult in the provinces is more connected with the vegetation and less with the lamentation rites around young Attis. In the surroundings of Cologne her cult almost amalgamated with the indigenous worship of the three or nine Matronae and her idol was carried around on the fields to promote the crop long after the Christianization had taken place.

The idea that the cult of Nerthus involves both a female and a male god, is propounded by several scholars. J. de Vries and G. Dumézil mean that she is a fertility goddess who conveys an androgynous, but not hermaphrodite character, i.e. she can take shape either as a man or as a woman.¹⁰¹ Such a figure was supposed to live in the sea or in the lakes, according to Dumézil:

This situation may suggest a way of resolving the Nerthus-Njörðr problem rather more simply, suggesting as it does that an evolutionary explanation of it is unnecessary, since the unimportance of the sex, or rather the possibility they have of embodying themselves in either male or female form, seems to be a constituent characteristic of these beings. Which would quite simply mean that whereas Tacitus' informants happened to tell him about a female form of *Nerthus inhabitant an island of the mainland, the Eddic mythology spread the knowledge of a male form beside which, in folk tradition, there also subsisted a female form that has continued to flourish until our days.¹⁰²

Dumézil suggests that Nerthus-Njörðr belongs to the maritime element and the Scandinavian folk-tales which tell about a *havsman* and a *havsfru* are late reflections of both these deities.¹⁰³ Still, it is hard to omit Tacitus' definition of *terra mater*, her cult place in a lake - not sea - and her travelling among many tribes.

Among other speculations the changing of sex was also apprehended as if the deity was a hermaphrodite. Edvard Lehmann interpreted a rock-carving from Bohuslän as a fertility-deity furnished with breasts and penis, in which he saw the double deity Nerthus-Njörðr, an assumption not based on any scientific fact.¹⁰⁴

The two Norse scholars, Anne Holtmark and Niels Lid tried to solve the problem about the sex of Nerthus in the following way: the earth goddess was served by a priest called Nerthus, a relation which Tacitus misunderstood, and gave the priest's name to the deity.¹⁰⁵ This guess is senseless, since it does not explain anything about the male Njörðr and furthermore omits the place-names of the female *Njörð.

Although Tacitus does not mention a male partner, it is quite probable that he existed in the Germanic cult like Njörun and the female *Njörð did in Old Norse Religion. Moreover, the existence of such a couple corresponds with other fertility gods in the North, known from later

¹⁰¹ de Vries II, p.165; Dumézil, 1973a, pp.221-229.

¹⁰² Dumézil, 1973a, pp.223-224.

¹⁰³ Ibid. pp.228-229.

¹⁰⁴ E. Lehman, 1919, "Tvekønnede fruktbarhetsguder i Norden", *Maal ok Minne*, pp.1-14.

¹⁰⁵ A. Holtmark, 1970, *Norrøn Mytologi*, Oslo, p.17.

sources, like Freyr-Freyja and Fjörgynn¹⁰⁶-Fjörgyn (and perhaps Frigg-Fricco).¹⁰⁷ The close relation between them was expressed in their relation as brother and sister, although at the same time married to each other. Snorri relates that Njörðr was married to his sister before he was exchanged as a hostage to the Æsir. We are also told about an erotic relation between Freyr and Freyja (Ls. 32).

The development was probably the following: in the Viking Age the couple Njörðr and *Njārð were replaced by "younger" deities called Freyr and Freyja, "the Lord" and "the Lady". The changing of names for the divine couple, could have depended on such "onomastic taboo", which we discussed earlier, still no evidence supports this theory. It is true that *Njārð disappeared, leaving only some place-names as a reminiscence of her existence as deriving from the Great Goddess Nerthus, whereas the male Njörðr was taken for an "older" god and the father of the divine brother and sister. This duplication is a well-known phenomenon in the world of myths, and is used by the mythographers, in their attempt to systematise a pantheon and preserve the old names of the gods. The identity between Njörðr and Freyr are obvious in many connections: they are evoked in the same toast in *Hákonar saga goða*¹⁰⁸ and in the same curse: "may Freyr and Njörðr hate the oppressor of his people, he who has violated the sanctuary" in *Egils saga Skalla-Grimsonar*.¹⁰⁹ and furthermore in the oath "So help me Freyr and Njörðr and (the) omnipotent god",¹¹⁰ which could imply that they have developed from the same origin.¹¹¹

The Travelling Deity

est in insula Oceani castum nemus, dicatumque in eo vehiculum, veste contactum; attingere uni sacerdoti concessum. Is adesse penetrali deam intellegit vectamque bubus feminis multa cum veneratione prosequitur (Germ.40).

In an island of the Ocean is a holy grove and in it a consecrated chariot, covered with robes: a single priest is permitted to touch it: he interprets the presence of the goddess in her shrine and follows with deep reverence as she rides away drawn by cows.

Tacitus refers to a *castum nemus* "a holy grove" consecrated to Nerthus. The Germanic tribes seem to have worshipped their gods in groves and forests and the notices about shrines and temples are of a later date. These holy groves are now place-names ending on *-loh, loo* in the Netherlands, *-leah* in England, and *-lund* in Scandinavia.

106 The masculine Fjörgynn appears in a kenning for Frigg, *Fjörgyns mæ*r (Ls.26).

107 H. Jungner, 1922, *Gudinnan Frigg och Als härad*, Uppsala, pp.223ff.

108 *Hákonar saga goða* in *Heimsringla* I, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Islenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík, p.168.

109 *Egils saga Skalla-Grimsonar*, 1933, ed. Sigurður Nordal, *Islenzk fornrit* 2, Reykjavík 1933, p.163.

110 Ólafur Lárússon, s.v. *edsformulär*, p.517, KLN.M.

111 The closeness between Njörðr and Freyr is observed by many scholars. Wessén, 1923, p.126 provides much evidence. Ward, 1968, p. 36 ff and Dumézil, 1973a, p. 116 interpret the couple Njörðr-Freyr as the perception of divine twins.

Such a deity, travelling in a wagon around the villages has several parallels in the Celtic religion¹¹², but is also known among the Germanic tribes. The historian Sozomenos relates about the Goths' cultic procession, that *xoanon ef' harmamaxas estos* "an idol was in the wagon".¹¹³ The Sun Chariot from Trundsholm seems to be a model in the same tradition. The wagon found in Dejberg, although of Celtic origin, bears witness to processions and carrying of idols, probably at different times of the year.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the mentioned runic verse about Ing followed by a wagon belongs to the custom about fertility gods carried in a ritual procession.

The perambulating wagon bringing fertility to the crops and peace to the people is related in a late narrative about Gunnarr Helmingr, found in the *Flateyjarbók*. Gunnarr was accused of having killed a man and had therefore fled from Thronðheim to Svíþjóð:

At that time they (the Svear) celebrated great sacrifices (*blót*) and Freyr was the one they always (worshipped) most. His idol was filled with so much sorcery that the devil talked to men from the idol. Freyr had a beautiful young woman as his wife. The country people thought that Freyr was alive and so it seemed in some cases and they thought that he needed to sleep with his wife. This woman was beautiful and governed the sanctuary and the place and every thing that concerned the house of the god.

Gunnarr Helmingr came at last to the place and asked the wife of Freyr to help him and let him stay there. She looked at him and asked who he was. He said that he was a poor travelling foreigner. She answered: "You are not a man with luck in all circumstances, since Freyr does not look at you with friendly eyes. Rest here for three nights and then we will know what Freyr think about you." Gunnarr said: "It is much better for me to get your help and kindness than Freyr's."

Gunnarr was a merry and very joyful man. When three nights had passed, he asked the wife of Freyr what she thought about his staying at the place. "I don't really know," she says, "you are a poor man, but you may be born of good people and I would rather like to help you. But Freyr does not like you and I am afraid that he is going to be angry. You may stay here half-a-month and then I will see what happens." Gunnarr answered: "Things go the way I want them. Freyr hates me but you help me and therefore I will not be with Freyr."

As the time went by the people liked Gunnarr better for his merriness and bravery. He went again to the wife of Freyr and asked about his future. She answered: "The people like you and I think you had better stay here this winter and take part in the festivals together with Freyr and me, when he gives fertility to the people. But he does not like you." Gunnarr thanked her very much. The time arrived when they prepared to leave the house and

¹¹² There are some finds of Celtic wagons like the example from Strettweg and the drawings on an grave-urn at Ödenburg. de Vries I, p.469.

¹¹³ Sozomenos, *Kirkengeschichte*, 1960, ed. J. Bidez, Berlin, 6.37.

¹¹⁴ de Vries I, p.145.

Freyr and his wife were to sit in the wagon and their servants were to walk before them. They had to travel on a road over a high mountain. A blizzard occurred and Gunnarr was ordered to lead the wagon. At last all the other people had left and Gunnarr was alone with Freyr and his wife in the wagon. Gunnarr became very tired of walking and lead the draught animal and after a while he climbed into the wagon, letting the beast of draught find its own way. After a while she said to Gunnarr: "You must go out otherwise Freyr will rise (and fight) with you." He went out for a while but became tired again and said: "Now I will risk meeting Freyr even if he will attack me." Freyr then rose from the wagon and they wrestled and Gunnarr became very weak. He understood that this would not end well for him. He decided that if he could defeat this devil and return to Norway he would return to the right belief and reconcile with Ólaf again, if he was willing to welcome him. And after this decision Freyr began to totter before him and fell after that. Then the devil, who had lived in the idol ran away, leaving the empty log of wood. After that Gunnarr broke it asunder and went to the wagon and presented two ultimata to the woman: either he would run away from her and try to survive or she should say that he was Freyr when they arrived at the village. She answered that she would like to say this. Gunnarr dressed in the idol's accoutrement, and the weather cleared up so they managed to arrive at last to the festival prepared for them. The men who should have followed them were already there. The people thought it was great that Freyr showed his power arriving with his wife to the village in such weather, when all the others had run away from them. Besides he was now able to walk among other men and eat and drink like everyone else.

The festival lasted the whole winter and Freyr was of few words to any other people than to his wife. Neither would he have living creatures sacrificed nor any *blót* nor any offerings but gold, silver, precious cloth and other jewels.

As the time went by the people noticed that Freyr's wife was pregnant and there was much talk about that and everyone liked this god Freyr especially. The weather was good and everything went so well that no one could remember such a time. The news were spread about the powerful *blótgoð* of the Svear.¹¹⁵

The story ends when king Óláfr Tryggvason realises which person was hiding behind the mighty god of the Svear and arranges a rescue expedition. Gunnarr escapes together with his wife and all the riches he could carry.

The purpose of this story is evident: to glorify the Christian king Óláfr and to expose the compact stupidity of the pagans. It echoes similar narratives from the continental tradition about the devil hiding in pagan idols, who are defeated when the hero takes a holy vow to support the Christian faith. Still, this passage furnishes us with some elements quite comparable with the passage about Nerthus: a deity travelling on a

115 *Flateyjarbók* I, pp.338-339.

wagon bringing prosperity to the peasants. Like Nerthus, who had an attending priest, the idol of Freyr was followed by a priestess. The fact that she becomes pregnant by the god could be interpreted as a *hieros gamos*, but it rather belongs to the comical effect of the whole narrative.

The suggestion that this episode was influenced by the Nectanebos story in *Alexander saga*, has been rejected by Turville-Petre convincingly, since the discrepancies between the two narratives are too many to believe a direct interpretation.¹¹⁶

The Lýtir-Episode

Another passage in the *Flateyjarbók* relates about the god Lýtir and his certain ceremonies in Uppsala.¹¹⁷ The ruling king Eiríkr urges Lýtir to enter a wagon, but the god does not obey but prefers to show that he will come only of his own will. The purpose of the story is equal to the passage of Gunnarr Helmingr - to show the stupidity of the pagan Svear. Dag Strömbäck has shown that this corrupted story echoes a ritual belonging to Freyr.¹¹⁸ The name Lýtir, deriving from *lýta* "dishonour, defile", is given to Freyr as the representative for the demonic pagan gods, cf. *fjandinn* "the devil".¹¹⁹ The idea that the god should enter the wagon at a certain moment ...*verða þeir varir við at Lýtir er kominn*, reminds about Tacitus ...*id adessa penetrati deam intelligit* (Germ. 40).

Strömbäck has furthermore observed an enigmatic sentence in the beginning of the passage: *henni (Ingigerð) blótuðu svíar, ok fluttu hana í ey nokkura* "the Svear sacrificed to her and moved her to an island". He interprets this passage to mean that she is sacrificed to become the wife of the god¹²⁰, but in my opinion another explanation is more plausible. Ingigerð (note the beginning on Ing) is the female part of the divine couple, who like Nerthus receives a sacrifice before she returns to her island.

Some scholars suggest that the travelling of the deity around certain places survived in the Eriksgata in Sweden, a custom where the king after his accession to the throne tours around to important places in his kingdom.¹²¹

It is obvious that the custom of carrying the image of the fertility god or goddess on a wagon or on a bier over the fields to benefit the harvest in springtime survived the beginning of Christianity in that way that the saints replaced the heathen deities. The fertility-god Freyr was thus succeeded by the obscure Saint Erik, whose day was celebrated in May, when the corn ripened. On this day a procession was held around the fields of Uppsala to "hallow the fruit of the Earth".¹²²

¹¹⁶ Turville-Petre, 1969, pp.251-252.

¹¹⁷ *Flateyjarbók* I, pp.579-581.

¹¹⁸ D. Strömbäck, 1928, *Lýtir - En fornsvensk gud. Festschrift til Finnur Jónsson*, Copenhagen, p.288f.

¹¹⁹ L. Elmevik, 1990, "Aschw. *Lytis* - in Ortsnamen. Ein kultisches element oder ein profanes?" in *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names*, ed. T. Ahlbäck, Åbo, pp.493-494

¹²⁰ *Flateyjarbók*, p.577; Strömbäck, 1928, p.290.

¹²¹ de Vries II, pp.446 and 448.

¹²² *Ibid.* p.483. About the parallels on the continent see p.211 below.

Peace and Quiet

laeti tunc dies, festa loca, quaecumque adventu hospitioque dignatur. non bella ineunt, non arma sumunt; clausum omne ferrum; pax et quies tunc tantum nota, tunc tantum amata, donec idem sacerdos satiatam conversatione mortalium deam templo reddat (Germ.40).

Then come days of rejoicing, and all places keep holiday, as many as she thinks worthy to receive and entertain her. They make no war, take no arms: every weapon is put away; peace and quiet are then, and then alone, known and loved until the same priest returns the goddess to her temple, when she has had her fill of the society of mortals

Nerthus is described by Tacitus in a way that identifies her with the Vanir. Like Freyr Nerthus is carried on a wagon to promote fertility. Moreover, *pax et quies* "peace and quiet" is observed during her tour among the tribes, comparable to the notice that Freyr's as well as Fróði's time was filled by *ár ok friðr* "good year's crop and peace", exemplified with Njorðr and his rule in Uppsala, according to Snorri:

In his days it was god peace and all kinds of god crops, so much that the Svear believed that Njorðr ruled the crop and man's riches"(Hkr.9).

The same goes with Freyr: *hann var vinsæll ok ársæll sem faðir hans* "he was popular and gave crops like his father"(Hkr.10).

The story about Frið-Fróði, told by Saxo, relates about a dead king whose remnants were carried on a wagon all over the country, reminds us about this ritual journey by the vegetation god.¹²³ Moreover, the two names Friðr and Fróði allude directly to fertility and procreation. *Friðr* is usually translated as "peace", comparable with *pax et quies* in Tacitus' account, but is derived from *frjá* "to love", and probably connoting a sexual aspect in the formula *til árs ok friðar*.¹²⁴ *Friðr* means "growing, swelling (of fertility)" and conveys a direct connection with sexuality.¹²⁵

Human Sacrifices

mox vehiculum et vestes et, si credere velis, numen ipsum secreto lacu abluitur. servi ministrant, quos statim idem lacus haurit. arcanus hinc terror sanctaque ignorantia quid sit illud, quod tantum perituri vident (Germ.40).

After this the chariot and the robes, and, if you are willing to credit it, the deity in person, are washed in a sequestered lake: slaves are the ministrants and are straightway swallowed by the same lake: hence a mysterious terror and an ignorance full of piety as to what that may be which men only behold to die.

123 Saxo I, p.172.

124 H. Celander, 1955, *Förkristen jul*, Stockholm, pp.45ff. See p.81 and 163, below.

125 AnEWb s.v. *fróði*, p.143.

It is obvious that the goddess is represented by an image during her tour around the seven tribes, yet Tacitus had mentioned earlier that the Germanic tribes did not portray their gods as human beings, ...*neque in ullam humani oris speciem assimilare* (Germ.9). It could indicate that the deities were not depicted anthropomorphously, but represented by some of their attributes, as for example, Freyr by a phallus-shaped stone or were not depicted at all. On the other hand the sources usually relate about anthropomorphously depicted gods as the idol of Freyr in the Gunnarr Helmingr-episode and the same goes for the triad of gods in the temple of Uppsala¹²⁶. When Tacitus mentions that *numen ipsum*, "the goddess herself", was bathed in the secret lake, it must presume a statue or a representation of Nerthus.

Finds in the Danish bogs, which could be images of the gods as the oak-branch wearing some male or female traits were discovered among pieces of ceramics, human bones and flax.¹²⁷ We have mentioned the so-called "Fröja from Rebild" wrapped in a woollen cloth from 400 AD.¹²⁸ They are, however, uncertain factors and we are not able to draw any conclusions from this material.

P. C. Glob, among others, considers that the worship of Nerthus and the human sacrifices in the lake, described by Tacitus, resulted in many of the bog corpses in Denmark and north Germany. According to him it was a sacrifice to Mother Earth to maintain fertility.¹²⁹ In Rappendam and in Rislev wagons, animals and humans, mostly women and children were found, who probably were sacrificed and thrown into the lake.¹³⁰ A place, where similar finds have been made, is Jörlunda, a place-name, which could refer to Njörðr < Nerthus, according to Glob.¹³¹

Human sacrifices are represented among the Germanic tribes according to Tacitus. Conferring to *Gutasagan* sons or daughters could be sacrificed.¹³² *Kristni saga* relates: *Enir heiðnu menn hófðu þá stefnu fiðlmenna ok toku þat rad at blota ij. monnum ur hverjum fiordungi ok hetu at heiðin guð til þers at þau leti eigi kristni ganga yfir landit.*" They (the pagans) had decided to sacrifice two human beings each province, invoking the heathen god, in order to prevent Christianity from pervading the country".¹³³ The famous examples of sacrifices from Uppsala reported by Adam¹³⁴ and Lejre by Thietmar¹³⁵ are debated, but there is nothing that contradicts that great sacrifices were performed at these places.

Conclusions

The presented material exhibits the fragility of the hypotheses around Nerthus. The possibility to reconstruct the character and the cult of Nerthus can be compared to the chances of finishing a jigsaw-puzzle where

¹²⁶ Adam, p.224.

¹²⁷ Glob, 1964, pp.153-158.

¹²⁸ Riismöller, 1952, pp.119-132.

¹²⁹ Glob, 1965, pp.135ff.

¹³⁰ G. Kuhnwald, 1970, "Der Moorfund im Rappendam, Seeland, Dänemark", *Vorgeschichtliche Heiligtümer und Opferplätze in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*, ed. H. Jankuhn, Göttingen, pp.100-118.

¹³¹ Glob, 1965, p.142.

¹³² de Vries I, p.409.

¹³³ *Hauksbók*, 1892-96, ed. Det Konglige nordiske Oldskrifts-selskap, Copenhagen, p.142. This is a puzzling notice as the Christians then decided to sacrifice "their best men".

¹³⁴ Adam, p.225.

¹³⁵ See Wessén, 1924, p.192.

some of the most important pieces are lost and where some bits seem to fit in everywhere, others nowhere. For example, there is a remarkable absence of place-name reminding of Njörðr or *Njārð in Denmark, except the mentioned and discussed Jörlunda. Neither do names reminding of Freyr or Freyja appear in these areas. Such names appear most frequently in Mälardalen, the surroundings of Oslo, along the Gulf of Bothnia and in western Norway.¹³⁶ This does not mean that the cult of the fertility-deities was concentrated to certain places in the North and excluded from others. The place-names bear witness to the presence of a cult, but could not be used in the opposite way. Furthermore, gods and goddesses like Freyr and Freyja bore a lot of different names, why a close invention of the theophoric place-names in Scandinavia would contribute to enrich the picture, not only of Nerthus but also for the Vanir.

We are conclusively able to provide the reliable facts on which we can imagine the contours of the prehistorical Great Goddess of the North:

- There existed a deity called Nerthus in the north of what the Romans called Germania or South Scandinavia, which in Old Norse mythology has survived as the male Njörðr and the female *Njārð.
- Nerthus was a fertility deity, probably of the same character as the Vanir.
- The festival was a procession round a certain area during a certain period of the year, probably springtime or autumn.
- The festival was concluded by human sacrifices.
- The festival was an original rite and not inspired by the cult of Magna Mater. The carrying of Cybele's picture was rather an amalgamation of the original fertility-cults in Western Europe.
- A male and a female deity was involved in the procession, one part was, however, represented by a priest or priestess in the ritual.
- The couple Njörðr-Nerthus hid behind the vague appellations of Freyr and Freyja.
- Nerthus became in Scandinavia the female *Njārð, represented in the place-name or Njörun, appearing in kennings. The name was forgotten in favour of Freyja.

136 de Vries II, p.201.

The Voluptuous Vanir

Different Tribes of gods

Old Norse mythology was populated by many groups of divinities and supernatural beings, among them the Elves (*álfar*), the Dwarves and the collective groups of goddesses named Valkyries, Disir and Norns. The powers of chaos who tried to destroy the creation, were represented by the giants and the horrible monsters, begotten by Loki: The Miðgarðsormr, Fenrir the wolf and the pallid Hel, who ruled the region of Death of the same name. The main deities were the two groups of Æsir and Vanir.

Snorri Sturluson, who attempted to classify the beliefs of his ancestors, wrote that the Vanir originated from a place called Vanaland or Vanaheim, situated on the river Tanais, the classical name of the Don. East of Vanaheim was the land of the Æsir, Ásaland or Ásaheim, which according to Snorri's own etymology, had given the continent its name, i.e. Asiá (Hkr.1-2). This is a typical example of the kind of medieval historical writing, especially prevalent among Irish monks, which involved the euhemerizing of the old myths and the concomitant construction of erroneous etymologies, which were in fact mere puns.

The Æsir and the Vanir constitute two groups of gods with different qualities, but they were equal in rank and status in the Nordic pantheon. A special connection appears as *ása ok álfa* in many Eddic poems (Háv.159, 160; Skm.7, 17, 18; Ls.2, 13, 30; Vsp.48, Þrk.7; Grm.4, Sd.18), which hints at the possibility that the Vanir are identical with the Elves (*álfar*). Snorri mentions two kinds of Elves in *Gylfaginning*, *liósálfar* "bright Elves" and *dökkálfar* "dark Elves" (Glgf.17). The *liósálfar* lived in Álfheimr, the abode which *Grímnismál* ascribes to one of the Vanir, Freyr (Grm.5), who is also called *skírr* "sheer, fair" (Grm.43).

On the other hand, the Vanir and their characteristics diverge from the Elves in the poem *Alvismál*. Furthermore, the Elves are closely associated with the dead, whereas the Vanir are usually connected with life and procreation.¹ Still, they do feature some chthonic aspects among which Freyja as recipient of the dead is the most conspicuous.

It is not possible to offer any decisive elucidation of relation between the Vanir and the Elves; but there are indications pointing to a great deal of similarity. Whether they were of the same origin or not, the Vanir and the Elves constituted two groups in Old Norse mythology which were very close to each other.

The Origin of the Vanir

Earlier research assumed that the Vanir constituted an older, even autochthonous, representation of the Norse pantheon, a primitive peasant religion based on fertility rites. This older population was defeated by invaders who brought their gods, the Æsir, representing an aristocratic and patriarchal ideal. When the Old Norse mythology depicted a battle between the two groups, called "the first war in the world", it was

1 Å. V. Ström, 1975, pp.163-164.

interpreted as a political or religious war taking place in the prehistoric period.²

Other scholars, represented by J. de Vries, G. Dumézil and G. Turville-Petre, opposed such a historical interpretation of this mythical material. Without rejecting the notions of waves of immigration, material changes and transformation of religious beliefs, these scholars argued that the motifs of duality, as well as the co-existence of Æsir and Vanir, belonged to the mythical realm. The myth symbolised the opposition between the two different groups which was expressed in war as well as and their complimentary qualities, manifested in the conclusion of peace.³

The facts given by Snorri in *Heimskringla* could not be used as evidence of an immigration followed by a war, as the war had already taken place at "Tankvisl" before the gods moved to Uppsala. He tells us that Óðinn attacked the Vanir, but that they resisted him and the other Æsir. After a while the gods became tired of the war and began to negotiate (Hkr.4). Snorri's narrative coincides in part with the stanzas in *Völuspá*:

She remembers the war
first in the world
when they riddled
Gullveig with spears
and burned her
in the hall of Hár
thrice they burned her
the thrice born
often, time again
but yet she lives

They called her Heiðr
in every house where she came
sibyl skilled in prophecy
she enchanted magic wands
she cast spells wherever she could
she cast spells in trance
she was ever the joy of evil women.

Then all the gods went
to their chairs of fate,
the all-holy gods and deliberated this,
whether the Æsir should pay the tribute
or all the gods should receive the tribute.

Óðinn cast his spear
hurled it into the host
this was still the war
first in the world
shattered was the plank-wall
of the castle of Æsir
the Vanir with battle-magic held the field.

2 Salin, 1903; Philippon, 1953, p.19.

3 Dumézil, 1959a; de Vries II, pp.350-351; Turville-Petre, 1964, pp.156-161.

Völuspá provides closer details of the battle, "the first war in the world", is fought between the two groups of deities. A female called Gullveig, "thirsty for Gold, drunk of Gold", appears in the hall of Hár (Óðinn), i.e. Valhöll. The Æsir try to kill her and she is burned three times. Still, she survives. They call her *Heiðr* a typical name for a witch, who would use *seiðr* and all kinds of evil; and somehow she seems to demoralise them. At the same time, the Vanir use their battle-magic, which finally breaks down the plank-wall of Ásgarðr. We can only guess that the woman arriving from the Vanir is Freyja herself, who symbolises gold and riches and who is skilled in sorcery.⁴

The Entrance of the Fertility Gods into the Pantheon

We know of these martial episodes and how they ended in negotiation, but what was the reason for the fight between the Æsir and the Vanir? The Nordic sources do not supply an answer, but a comparative perspective makes it possible to reconstruct the events that led to the battle of the gods. Georges Dumézil's analysis of the early Indo-European society has unveiled distinct structures which were reflected in the world of the gods.⁵ According to Dumézil, these structures composed, a tripartite system of classes or ranks, each of them representing social functions. The first social function consisted of priest-kings, the second of warriors and the third of producers, i. e. peasants and cattle-breeders. These classes and their functions were reflected in ancient Indo-European myths, epics and folklore. A particular feature in the myths of the Indo-European pantheons was the story of a conflict between the first and the second classes on the one hand and the third on the other. This conflict developed into a war between the gods, for example the war between the Romans and the Sabines where King Romulus, the divine leader, represented the first and his warriors the second function. When they lacked women, they abducted them from the Sabines who owned great wealth in the form of cattle, gold and were typical of the third function. During the attack of the Sabines, a girl named Tarpeia appeared and showed them a secret passage up to the Capitol. A remarkable detail specifies her greediness for gold, a characteristic which recalls Gullveig; she wanted what the Sabines carried on their left arm, meaning their broad arm rings. Roman history makes a morality of the episode in that it informs us that the girl did receive what the Sabines carried on their left arm, namely their shields, which killed her. The war ended with the inclusion of the Sabines in the Roman empire.⁶

A similar development is depicted in a Vedic myth, where the ruling gods especially the warrior god Indra - fight against the two Ashvins or *Nāsatyas*, the twin gods who protect cattle-breeders. The battle ends with the assumption of these two Ashvins into the pantheon.⁷ In the realm of Celtic myth the fight takes place between Tuatha De Danann, gods of life, light and day, and the Fomorians, gods of darkness and death. At

⁴ Turville-Petre, 1964, p.159; about the parallel with Mithothyn's golden statue, see p.132 below.

⁵ G. Dumézil, 1939, *Mythes et dieux des Germains*, Paris; 1958a; 1959a; 1968; 1971a; 1973.

⁶ Dumézil, 1959, pp.36-37.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.30.

the same time, though, the conflict is connected with the breeding of cows and with the harvest.⁸

The war between the Æsir and the Vanir in Old Norse mythology, mentioned by Snorri and expressed in the stanzas 21-24 of *Völuspá*, is a reflection of the same theme: the Æsir, representing the first and second functions, fight against the Vanir who represented the third - a connection expressed in their very name, which derives from the same stem as Skr. *vanas* "desire" and Latin Venus, meaning "the voluptuous".⁹ Accordingly, they possessed riches, provided fertility and gave worldly goods to mankind.

All these conflicts in the different Indo-European myths hence terminate in a reconciliation, the gods of production being accepted as equals of the first and second function. It is a settlement which takes place on the level of ideas and has no historical background. The material proves that the typical incidents are reflected in widespread Indo-European myths. Furthermore, in myths as well as in epic poetry this tripartite structure is repeated in a conspicuous way geared to enforcing the equality of the three functions.¹⁰ The point of these stories is evident: an explanation of the way in which social functions represented by different categories, farmers, warriors and kings, manage to exist together in harmony.

Nevertheless, there is no reason to take these myths as a form of social contract where the conflicts were conclusively eliminated. They are merely visionary attempts to overcome the gulf between the aristocracy and the peasantry.

Snorri gives us two versions of the negotiations between the Æsir and the Vanir. In his *Skáldskaparmál* (1), each party concluded the peace by spitting into a communal cauldron. From the saliva a man was created, called Kvasir, who became the wisest of all men. Two dwarves, Fjalar and Galar, killed him and made a mead of his blood, which became the source of poetry and wisdom. The story is reflected in the kenning *Kvasis dreyri* "Kvasir's blood", i. e. poetry, and the mead of poetry was a divine skill which both gods and men desired.

The second version tells the story of an exchange of hostages between Æsir and Vanir. Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja were thus sent to the Æsir, who gave back Hœnir, a very beautiful man, and Mímir, who was extremely wise. Then the Vanir again gave a man, Kvasir, who had the same qualities as Mímir. Mímir and Hœnir co-operated in such a way that the first gave wise counsel, which the latter presented to the pleased Vanir. Unfortunately, Mímir could not be present every time, and when the Vanir discovered that Hœnir could not cope without his companion, they felt cheated. They killed Mímir and sent his head back to Óðinn, retaining the beautiful Hœnir.

The meaning of this second version seems unintelligible if we fail to understand the complementary roles of Hœnir and Mímir. Mímir represents the spiritual word, whereas Hœnir is the (silent) reflection, prized in *Hávamál* (15, 27). Both were honest gifts from Óðinn, and we ought to remember that Hœnir was involved in the anthropogony as the one who

8 Turville-Petre, 1964, pp.160-161.

9 AnEWb s.v. *vanir*, p.644.

10 Dumézil, 1958a, p.25.

gave man his *óðr* "intelligence", according to *Völuspá* (18).¹¹ The Vanir, gods of voluptuousness and wealth, did not understand the subtlety of the gift: they kept the beautiful but silent personage and destroyed the wise words, which Óðinn, the magico-religious god, was then able to turn into an instrument to increase his own knowledge.

These elements of the negotiations, peculiar in character and hard to interpret, underscore the mythical values of the story. It is obvious that Snorri in his two versions struggles to present and maintain the strange ritual and behaviour as part of the story, while they must have seemed unfamiliar, sometimes unintelligible, to him.¹²

Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja were integrated with the Æsir according to the Old Norse myths, although the two groups existed side by side from the beginning. The Æsir Óðinn, Þórr and Loki dominate the Old Norse myth together with the Vanir Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja. One of the sources, Adam of Bremen's, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesie Pontificum*, tells us that three gods were represented at the sanctuary in Uppsala, Wotan, and Frizzo i. e. Freyr.¹³ When Egill Skalla-Grímson curses his enemy, he involves Óðinn, Þórr, Freyr and Njörðr.¹⁴ Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, who intends to convert to Christianity, suffers agony when leaving the old gods:

The wrath of Freyr and Freyja comes upon me when I am deserting
the belief of Njörðr - may Grímnir (Óðinn) abide with the trolls -
the strong Þórr is also angry.¹⁵

Similar oaths are preserved in folklore, such as " In the name of Óðinn, Þórr and Freyja"; they are also reflected in the Christian *Heilagra manna sögur*, where a saint characterises the prominent pagan deities in the following manner: *Thor callathi han heimskan, en Odin deigan, en Freyjo portkono*, "He called Þórr a dunce, Óðinn a coward and Freyja a harlot"¹⁶. The late *Bretasögur* speaks of a sanctuary containing the three gods Saturn, Jove and Gefjun (Freyja), also mentioned as Óðinn, Þórr and Gefjun.¹⁷

The Characteristics of the Vanir

Although the Vanir appear as equals to the Æsir, they never lose their integrity which is peculiar to a certain category of the Old Norse pantheon. They were the special gods of fertility and riches, and they watched over the crops, cattle-breeding and fishing, i. e. the factors of production in the society of the Viking Age. Consequently, they were supposed to rule over gold and wealth.

In the war with the Æsir the Vanir used a certain charm, *vígspá*, probably equivalent to the word *galdr*. *Galdr* is related to *gala* "to crow", from which we may conclude that the charm was presented in a shrill

¹¹ de Vries II, p.270.

¹² Dumézil, 1959a, pp.31-37.

¹³ Adam, p.224.

¹⁴ *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ch.56.

¹⁵ Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, Lausavisa 9, in *Den Norsk-Islandske skjaldedigtningen*, 1967, ed.

Finur Jónsson, Copenhagen.

¹⁶ *Heilagra manna sögur*, I, p.569.

¹⁷ *Breta-sögur* in *Hauksbók*, Útg. av Det Konglige Nordiske Oldskrifts-selskab, 1892-96, Copenhagen, pp.240-241.

voice, even in falsetto. The purpose of the *galdr* was to bring evil and make the enemy *galen* , "mad, obsessed". The *galdr* had a special metre, *galdralag*, which is exemplified in *Skírnismál*, when Skírnir forces Gerðr to accept Freyr. The Vanir's skill in sorcery is exemplified by Snorri:

Freyja was the daughter of Njörðr. She was a sacrifice priestess/goddess. She was the one that taught the Æsir *seiðr*, which was used by the Vanir (Hkr.4).

Loki calls her a witch, filled with all kinds of evil. In the guise of Gefjun she uses trickery against Gylfi and steals his land. In her appearance as Gøndul, she employs sorcery and corrupts the mind of Héðinn. Finally, she is probably the deity who operates among the Æsir with *seiðr* during the first war in the world.

Another, more puzzling quality of the Vanir is their incestuous relationship. Snorri writes in *Heimskringla*:

When Njörðr was among the Vanir he was married to his sister, which was accepted among them, their children were Freyr and Freyja. But among the Æsir it was forbidden to marry so close relatives (Hkr.4).

This makes Loki look on Njörðr with scorn:

Enough now, Njörðr, and keep within your bounds, I should not be silent anymore, together with your sister, you got such a son and he is no worse than we expected (Ls.36).

Loki also despises Freyja for having intercourse with her own brother, witnessed in *flagrante delicto* by all the gods.

The Vanir's nature is erotic and they are representatives of voluptuousness and sensual pleasure. Sexual lust should not, however, be regarded as an aspect of the incestuous relationship, which in fact amounts to a violation of the fundament of society.¹⁸ Incestuous relationships are never accepted in any culture, with the exception of some special cases belonging to an extreme social class or group which deliberately placed itself outside the bounds of society, for example the *xvētōdah* marriage in Old Iran.¹⁹

It is true that many myths and epics contain an incest theme, but the pertinent occurrences amount to fortuitous incidents where the partners are un aware of their close relationship. These myths often expose the miraculous birth of a great hero or an ancestor of a famous clan.²⁰ Even so, the relevant incidents are always characterised as a corruption of the prevailing social rules.

The famous hero Hrólfr kraki was the result of a union between a father, Helgi, and his daughter Yrsa. The union was, however, instigated by Yrsa's mother, who plotted the punishment of Helgi for deceiving her.

¹⁸ Dumézil, 1973a, p.52.

¹⁹ See p.116-117 below. A broad survey of this topic is done by N. Sidler, 1971, *Zur Universalität des Inzesttabus*, Stuttgart.

²⁰ Cf. Dumézil, 1973a, p.53 n.5.

When Helgi became aware that he had slept with his own daughter, he set out on a suicidal expedition.

The relationship between the twins Signý and Sigmundr had the purpose of producing an appropriate heir and avenger of the Völsungar. Signý disguised herself as a *seiðkona* and seduced her brother and after that she bears Sinfjötli, who, together with her father, took revenge for the slaughter of King Völsi.²¹

The motif of begetting strong and mighty offspring is dimly reflected in the observation that Þórr was the result of Óðinn's union with his own daughter, Jörð (Glgf.9). The incest motif is, however, common in various religions and not distinctly Indo-European, although many examples can be found in the myths, including sisters tempting brothers as was the case with Signý and Sigmundr,²² Sætanæ and Uruzmaæg²³ and Yami and Yama²⁴

The myths concerning incest have been differently explained. One explanation suggests a survival from a primeval level in the history of mankind, practised in certain groups, as in the cases referred to above from Old Iran.²⁵ Another accounts for the incest motif by suggesting that it reflects one quality of the androgynous high god, created from his own body and apprehended as a sister or as daughter, who becomes the sexual partner in the ongoing creation.²⁶ The latter explanation seems plausible in view of the observations pertaining to the Vanir, especially when we assume that the divine couple was apprehended both as male and female, as Nerthus probably was. The Vanir's connection with procreation emphasises the feature of the close relation between god and goddess, representatives of the third function.

According to Dumézil, Freyja's incest with her brother - for which her father does not blame her - constitutes a parallel to an episode in the narrative about the hero Hadingus, told by Saxo.²⁷ Hadingus is a paraphrase of the god Njörðr, a hero growing up in the home of a giant. The giantess Harþgrepa, who had suckled him, proposes a union with him, which could be apprehended as incestuous behaviour.²⁸ Harþgrepa appears as licentious and wilful as Freyja usually does, and the relation between her and Hadingus seems to belong to the tradition of incestuous behaviour which characterised the Vanir before their arrival as hostages of the Æsir. In this world, Njörðr had to modify his matrimonial habits and acquire a new wife, so did Hadingus, who experienced a new life after Harþgrepa's death; he married a princess, who chose him for her husband in a very special way.

Njörðr with the Beautiful Feet

The Vanir mentioned in the sources are Njörðr, Freyr, Freyja and Heimdallr. There were other Vanir too although we never hear about

²¹ *The saga of the Volsungs. The Norse epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*, 1990, trans. J. Byock, Berkeley, p.43.

²² *Ibid.* 7.

²³ G. Dumézil, 1930, *Légendes sur les Nartes*, Paris, pp.25-28.

²⁴ *Der Rig-Veda*, 1951, trans. K. F. Geldner, Wiesbaden, X, 10 cf. the Iranian Yimак and her brother Yim.

²⁵ S. Wikander, 1941, *Vayu I*, Lund, pp.173, 177, 194.

²⁶ G. Widengren, 1969, *Religionsphänomenologie*, Berlin, pp.118-119.

²⁷ Saxo I, pp.22-24.

²⁸ Dumézil, 1973a, p.58.

them except in the obscure stanza about Gná, seen riding through the air by some of the Vanir (Glgf.36). The Vanir seem to have their home on earth in a place called Vanaheim, where Njörðr is said to return when the final battle, Ragnarök, is going to take place.

In Vanaheimr Vanir begat him
and gave him as hostage to gods
at the end of time he will return
to the home of the wise Vanir (Vm.39).

In the world of the Æsir, Njörðr's abode is called Nóatún, literally "the place of ships, the harbour", alluding to his strong connection with the maritime world. According to Snorri, he rules the winds and calms the sea and is consequently the god to be invoked for navigation and fishing (Glgf. 22,23). His function of granting success in fishing survived until the 18th century in Scandinavian folklore. It was reported that an old woman uttered, when she obtained a week's supply of fish from the lake, : "Thanks be to him, Njor, for this time".²⁹

Like the other Vanir, Njörðr is involved in erotic pursuits. Besides his incestuous marriage to his sister, he obtained a new wife in the world of the Æsir in the most peculiar manner. Having saved Iðunn from Þjazi, the gods killed the giant. His daughter Skaði arrived weeping in Ásgarðr, claiming compensation. She was permitted to choose one of the gods as her husband, but they were hidden behind a curtain, so she could only see their feet. When she discovered a pair of feet of exceptional beauty she thought that they must be Baldr's, whereupon she declared that their owners was her choice. Unfortunately for her, though, they belonged to Njörðr, whose feet were very beautiful.

In the above-mentioned *Saga of Hadingus*, the princess, who is the hero's bride-to-be recognises him by a ring that she had previously hidden inside his leg. This episode also reflects an old marriage ritual from the Indo-Europeans. An episode in *Mahābhārata* tells the story of the beautiful Sukanyā, who has to choose between her husband and the two Nasātyas by looking at their feet only.³⁰ This element is perhaps connected with an Indian wedding ritual among the twice-born, where the bride is only allowed to see the big toe of her husband-to-be and sign it with a red mark.³¹ A custom practised in the former French province of Berry in the old times stated that the bridegroom must choose among the feet of all the girls present at the wedding to find the ones of his bride. The girls lay down on the floor, their shoes and stockings were taken off and they themselves were covered by a sheet. If the bridegroom did not succeed in recognising his bride's feet, his wedding-night was postponed until the following day. ³² In addition, the motif appears in the Cinderella story, where the prettiest foot was originally the object of the King's decision.³³

²⁹ Ibid. p.220.

³⁰ *The Mahābhārata* III, 1973, trans. ed. van Buitenen, J. A., Chicago, p.123-125; G. Dumézil, 1945, "Naissance d'archanges: essai sur la formation de la théologie zoroastrienne." *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus*, Paris, pp.177-180.

³¹ de Vries II, p.176.

³² F. van der Leyen, 1909, *Götter und Göttersagen der Germanen*, München, p.210.

³³ Dumézil, 1973a, p.30.

No wonder the marriage of Skaði and Njörðr turned out to be a very unhappy union. In two stanzas they express their lack of interest in, and alienation towards, their partner's surroundings. Njörðr laments:

Harm the mountains do me
I have not been long there
Nine nights only
The howling of the wolves
Filled me with horror
compared with the song of the swans (Glgf.23).

Skaði replies:

I could not sleep
by the edge of the sea
because of the sound of the birds
It wakens me
coming from the wood as I do
every morning, the sea-mew (Glgf.23).³⁴

The resentful relationship between Njörðr and Skaði is referred to in other contexts, too, for instance in Scaldic poetry, where Þórðr Særekson writes *nama snotr una goðbrúðr Vaní*, "the bride of the gods did not love the offspring of the Vanir".³⁵ In other genealogical sources, Skaði appears as wife to Óðinn and ancestral mother to a certain dynasty.³⁶

Freyr

Freyr, literally "the Lord", appears as a bright chivalrous character. Later on, in Christian times, he continues as St. Erik, the patron saint of Stockholm. On the day of St. Erik, the 18th of May, the banner of the saint and his relics were carried in procession around the newly sown fields. When king Gustav Vasa annulled the Catholic ceremonies, the priests of Uppsala pleaded that the ritual be allowed to continue. There are also records stating that the peasants made their own banners for the procession, in order to promote fertility. In the parish of Vånga in Västergötland, the peasants secretly carried an idol of wood called *kornguden*, "the barley god", round the fields before sunrise.³⁷

Freyr makes love rather than war, as is obvious in *Skírnismál* where he has no qualms about surrendering his sword to secure the woman he loves. In this poem he appears as a true representative of the Vanir, the fertility god overwhelmed by desire, when he utters:

One night is long, two are longer, how shall I endure three. I thought that a month was shorter than half-a- night of desire (Skm.42).

³⁴ Translation given in Dumézil, 1973, p.22.

³⁵ Þórðr Særeksson, *Lausavísur* 2,3, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigkningen*, 1967 B 1, ed. Finnur Jonsson, Copenhagen, s. 303-304.

³⁶ Steinsland, 1989, pp.61-75.

³⁷ E. Brate, 1914, "Vanerna", *Svenska Humanistiska Förbundets Skrifter* XXI, Stockholm, p.21.

Accordingly, he becomes an object of Loki's scorn at the banquet of the Ægir:

You bought Gyml's daughter with gold and gave your sword away,
when Muspell's sons will ride through the Dark Forest, do you then
know, unhappy one, what weapon you will use? (Ls.41).

Freyr succumbs in the final battle with Surtr, the fire demon, which may be regarded as the significant death of a fertilitygod.

When Adam of Bremen mentions the gods of Uppsala and their characteristics he mentions Fricco as the third. Fricco is identical with Freyr; he brings peace and sensual pleasures to mankind and his image is furnished with a huge phallus. According to Adam, offerings were given to this image before a wedding. Later sources describe the image of Freyr in a similar way, claiming that it is he who gives peace, carnal lust and many children.³⁸ The fact that both Njörðr and Freyr are connected with weddings and wedding rites emphasises the originally shared identity of these two gods, although they are subsequently described as father and son.

Freyr rules rain and sunshine, and together with his father Njörðr he brings what the Old Norsemen called *fésæll*, which can be translated as "prosperity" (Glgf.24). His function as a fertilitygod is connected with the prosperity of the crops, *ár*, and the peace, *friðr*. These words, *til árs ok til friðar*, were actually a formula for the first toast at an autumnal festival and originally addressed to Freyr and Freyja, later to Christ and the Virgin Mary. In the North, this fertility god widened his functions and became a chivalrous ideal. As such he arises as the origin of the royal dynasty in Uppsala, sometimes called Yngvi Freyr. During his reign the year's crop was excellent, and his human descendants also possessed this quality of bestowing prosperity, according to Snorri - except the unhappy Dómaldi, who after three years of crop failure was slaughtered by his subjects, probably due to their disbelief in his divine potency. It has to be remarked that these first "Kings" of the Ynglinga dynasty undoubtedly belonged more to the realm of myth than to that of history.

Heimdallr

Heimdallr is the most enigmatic of the gods in old Norse mythology. According to *Brymskviða*, Heimdallr is said to foresee the future "like the other Vanir". This could be interpreted as an indication that his wisdom was comparable with that of the Vanir, although he himself belonged to the Æsir. Nothing is said about Heimdallr in connection with the exchange of hostages, and he is not directly a giver of gold and riches. On the other hand, there is nothing to contradict the idea that Heimdallr resided among the Vanir; in the *Rígspula* he appears as the Father of Men, when he creates the social classes, a function which gives him a place among the productive Vanir. Under the name of Rígr, he walks among primeval mankind, visiting them in the most peculiar manner. His first visit is paid to a couple called Ái and Edda, "great-grandfather" and "great-grandmother", and is welcomed into the bed between them. This

³⁸ Johanneson, 1984, Adam, p.385.

sexual hospitality results in a son with dark skin and an ugly face called Þræl, from whom the thralls descend. Rígr repeats the procedure when he comes to the next couple Afi, "grandfather", and Amma, "grandmother". The latter then bears a son, Karl, from whom the freemen descend. Finally he visits Faðir and Móðir, and this meeting results in a son Jarl, "earl", whose eyes glitter like those of a serpent, an ideal look for the noble warrior. Jarl himself fathers twelve noble sons, among them Kon-ungr, young Kon, who is educated by Rígr himself and who becomes the first *konungr*, the name for the king. Employing puns, the poem reflects a social evolution beginning at a time when there were no differentiated social classes, up to the class society and the institution of the kingdom, which was created by Rígr.

The poem, probably written in the 14th century, echoes older myths about the creation of the social classes, and parallels are easily found in other cultures. It reflects a system deviating from the strict distinctions between the three functions, if we compare it to, for example, the social structure of the Vedic society. In *Rígsþula* the functions represented by priest-kings, warriors and peasants in the Indo-European society are dominated by Jarl, who is more of a warrior than a peasant and Karl, who is more of a peasant than a warrior, before the magico-religious Kon makes his entry. This is due to the fact that the tripartite ideology was not entirely developed in the primitive, sparsely populated societies of the Germanic tribes. Although the tripartite ideology existed on the level of ideas, the material circumstances effected a *glissement*, a "sliding", among the classes, an example of the phenomenon discussed in Chapter 1.³⁹ The theological system, inherited from the Proto-Indo-European faith, did not change so easily, though, and it was thus represented in Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr.⁴⁰ In the early Nordic societies the first, magico-religious, function appeared in combination with the warrior coinciding with the institution of *goði*, whereas *bondi*, *þegn* and *drengr* denoted freeborn people, from the great landowners to those who rented a small piece of land for their living.⁴¹ These represented both the warrior function and the peasantry including those groups which are represented by Jarl and Karl in *Rígsþula*. Like the Indian cast, *Sūdra*, the slaves were outside the tripartite system; although they were not outside society, however, and they formed part of the social system as a whole.

In *Völuspá*, men are invoked by the *völva* as *mögu Heimdalar, meiri ok minni*, "sons of Heimdallr, of higher and lower rank"(1), which correlates with the events in *Rígsþula*, where Heimdallr begets mankind through his wanderings. He is therefore called *sif sifiaðan siptom giðrvöllum* "a relative related to all kin"(Hdl.43), a phrase denoting his position as the father of the social classes.

Heimdallr is not one of the hostages exchanged in the war between the *Æsir* and the *Vanir*, as he belongs to primeval time, according to *Völuspá in skamma: Varð einn borinn í árdaga*, "One was born in the days of yore". He hence represents the god of beginnings, another recurrent motif

³⁹ Dumézil, 1958b, pp.1-19; de Vries, J., 1960, p. 83-95.

⁴⁰ Scott Littleton, 1982, p.133.

⁴¹ About the words *bondi*, *tegn*, *drengr*, see Sawyer, P., 1988, *Da Danmark blev Danmark fra ca år 1000 til ca 1000*. *Gyldendals og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, ed. O. Olsen, bd.1, Copenhagen, pp.171-173.

besides the tripartite functions in Indo-European mythology.⁴² This also implies that he is the god of the end, - a function evident in his death as the last survivor of the struggle between the gods and the giants before the old world collapses.

As was mentioned above, Heimdallr is an enigmatic god, born from the waves, nourished by the earth (Hdl.38, 43) and living in the air as the guard at the end of the rainbow.⁴³ His home is Himinbjörg, "the rocks of heaven", which is probably the same as Himinfjöll (HHI.4, Yt.26), an expression referring to the clouds.⁴⁴ According to Snorri Heimdallr is the son of Óðinn (Sksm.8), whereas his origin seems older in *Hyndluljóð* (42,43). The complicated features of Heimdallr seem to derive from his old and important position in the pantheon, but important myths are lost to us and only some scattered fragments remain.

⁴² Dumézil, 1968, p.184.

⁴³ Dumézil, 1968, pp.183-184.

⁴⁴ B. Pering, 1941, *Heimdall*, Lund, pp.228-232.

The Great Goddess of the North

The Concept of the Great Goddess

The expression "Great Goddess" is often used synonymously with "Earth Goddess", "Mother Goddess", or even "Mother Earth" in various connections and without any further distinction. The scholarly meaning of the term covers a wider sphere of activities than just merely the maternal and agrarian aspects. It is true that this type of goddess carries a life-giving function, protecting the fertility of beasts and soil; nevertheless she often has the function of a death goddess or a war goddess, too. The Great Goddess is hence attended by a large variety of qualities appears as a counterpart to that phenomenon which the history of religions refers to as a High God. A typology of her most prevalent characteristics can be read in the following way:

She is autonomous

She decides fate

She is associated with earth, but can appear as a sky-goddess

She is connected with the moon, only rarely with the sun

Her ambiguous character comprises both good and evil, sometimes divided into two goddesses who are apprehended as mother-daughter or as two sisters.

A great goddess is thus distinguished from other female deities by her complex of characteristics and by holding a dominating position in the pantheon. Her cult is widespread; she is worshipped by both men and women and she usually bears many bynames.

From a historical perspective, it was J. J. Bachofen's work *Das Mutterrecht* from 1860 which inaugurated the concept of the Great Goddess, focusing the history of religions on the female perspective for the first time. His contemporaries in the field of Classical Antiquity, who upheld more traditional points of view, ridiculed the work of Bachofen or were indulgent towards his theories. Later, the historians of religion admitted that he was a pioneer in giving prominence to the phenomenon of the Great Goddess and to the importance of the mystery religions as well.

Bachofen tried to reconstruct an evolution of society. He saw it as consisting of three phases, each of them dominated by a certain type of marriage-laws. Bachofen based his thesis on the Greek myths, in which he saw traces of older social systems. The first phase, which he called the principle of *hetaira* and which was dominated by Aphrodite, was characterised by promiscuity in the relations between man and woman and by ignorance of lineage and blood ties. The next step, the principle of marriage dominated by Demeter, developed a system of lineage between mother and child, connected through blood ties, it was a maternal law expressed through heritage and through other legal factors, called "Das

Mutterrecht"(Mother right). Totally ignorant of his role as father, the male was left outside this initial form of human kinship. This system was, according to Bachofen's own terms, a *gynaikokrati*, i. e. a matriarchy, which was characterised by passivity and stagnation and was reflected in the cosmological myths. Earth, not heaven, was the abode of the supreme divinities, and it was itself sacred and inviolable. Likewise, the body had a supremacy over the spirit. Human mothers were connected with Earth as her representatives, and they were symbolic bearers of the same qualities. Bachofen suggested that it was during this era that the great goddesses made their entrance into the history of religions.¹

Bachofen put forward the idea that many of the Greek myths are reflections of the time when the matriarchy declined in favour of patriarchy, adducing the evidence of its struggle and agony. He bases his thesis on the myth of Orestes, recounted in Aeschylus' trilogy *Orestes* as a testimony to the conflicts between the maternal and paternal law.

When Agamemnon returns from Troy he is killed by his wife Klytaimnestra. This is her just revenge, according to her right as mother because her husband sacrificed their daughter Iphigeneia at the beginning of the war. She feels no guilt for her deed, since she is not related by blood to her husband and the Erinyes, protectors of the maternal law do not haunt her; they rather protect her. But when the tragedy of Thyestes' dynasty rolls on and Klytaimnestra's and Agamemnon's son Orestes kills his own mother in revenge for the slaughter of his father, they intervene forcefully. Orestes was tormented psychically by the goddesses, who appeared as dreadful spirits, accusing him of the worst crime on Earth, that of killing his own mother. In despair, he summons the aid of Apollo, the god invoked by those who had committed homicide. A unique trial takes place, where the precedence of paternal law before maternal law was claimed. Apollo argues: *Pater men an genoit aneu metros* , "the father bears, not the mother"², which means that the semen is the origin of offspring, whereas the woman merely functions as a receptacle for the growing foetus. As his principal witness, Apollo uses the goddess Athena, who was born from her father's head and represents a new kind of goddess.³

Apollo's speech illustrates, according to Bachofen, the literary expression of the change from the Age of Demeter to the Age of Apollo and from the hegemony of earth to that of heaven. It represents the third step in the evolution of mankind, when paternal law replaces maternal law and the laws of succession pass on the inheritance from father to eldest son, excluding daughters from all kinds of birthright. In Aeschylus' drama, this heritage change is expressed by the recitatives of *theoi neotheroi*, "the younger gods", embodying paternal law, who had overthrown *palaios nomos*, "the old law", and *palaiofrona*, "the old wisdom".⁴

1 J. J. Bachofen, 1948, *Das Mutterrecht*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3-4, Basle.

2 Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 1957, trans. H. W. Smyth, London, 660.

3 Bachofen, 1948, pp.35-52.

4 Ibid. 177-183.

Bachofen's thesis was based on his assumption that the myths were symbolic expressions of different conflicts between social categories, a notion which anticipated the modern approaches to theories of myths. But like his contemporaries, Bachofen was mistaken in assuming a unilateral and evolutionary process in the history of mankind. Moreover, he misinterpreted the traces of uxorial and maternal rights as the remains of a prehistoric matriarchate. Nevertheless, *Das Mutterrecht* presented the religious phenomenon of the Great Goddess, and Bachofen has had such successors as E. Neumann, who wrote *Die Grosse Mutter*, a survey of the concept of the Mother, influenced by psychoanalysis and fertility goddesses.⁵ Another monumental work was Briffault's work *The Mothers*, which was more outspoken in claiming the prehistoric matriarchate as the original social system.⁶

When the history of religions moved away from an androcentric perspective during the last few decades of the 20th century, Bachofen's theories came in for a new and sometimes uncritical interest, which also worked in favour of the study of the Great Goddess. Before that time, archaeological finds had inspired scholars to discuss the function and origin of these goddesses. E. James suggested that this cult might have been an early expression of human belief, based on ignorance of the connection between sexual intercourse and conception.⁷ His hypothesis, based on an evolutionary perspective in history of religions, gave rise to many objections. A number of them were recapitulated in the preceding chapter; but his main tenet is worth taking into consideration, as ignorance of conception is not stated in any culture known the anthropologists. It has, on the other hand been observed that most people use various explanations for different reasons, as in the case of the European "Tale of the Stork", referred to despite most adults' being quite aware of the facts of life, whether they are on a so-called primitive level or not.⁸

Some scholars prefer associate the rise of the Great Goddess with the agricultural revolution, in which she became a symbol of the fertility mankind was depending on.⁹ She appears, however, in more connections than merely the agricultural one; we meet her, for instance, as the *pothnia theron*, "the lady of the beasts", who brought quarry to the hunter and who protected wild nature. A well-known example from a high culture is the Greek goddess Artemis, who appears in the myths as a chaste goddess. She was never involved in love affairs, and it was dangerous for men even to take a rapid glance of her. Nevertheless, under the name of Eileithyia¹⁰, she helped women in childbirth. In local variants, she is invoked by epithets like "the Pure One" or "the Strong One", and she played a major part in the initiation of young girls and in the rites of the

5 E. Neumann, 1974, (new ed.), *Die Grosse Mutter: eine Phänomenologie der weiblicher Gestaltungen des Unbewussten*, Olten.

6 R. Briffault, 1927, *The Mothers. A study of the origin of sentiments and institutions*, London.

7 E. James, 1960, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*, London, pp.228-229.

8 For a discussion on this topic, see B. M. Näsström, 1989, *The Abhorrence of Love*, Uppsala, p.63.

9 J. Przysluski, 1960, *La grande déesse*, Paris, pp.19, 23-24.

10 Probably a corruption of the verbal form Eleuthyia, "the Coming". W. Burkert, 1985, *Greek Religion*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp.170-171.

Braunoria in Sparta, where her female neophytes appeared dressed as she-bears, their garb alluding to her connection with wild nature.¹¹

Artemis is one example of a great goddess who is not directly invoked as the Great Mother, although she was closely connected with childbirth and motherhood. On the other hand she was invoked as the death goddess of women, who would have their pains curtailed by a shot from her bow when their pregnancies and deliveries took a change for the worse.¹²

Regarding these examples of the great goddesses from different times and places, we will find that with the exception of the traits presented in our typology, they are quite different. They could, for example, be directly combined with creation and birth, like the Greek Gaia and Rhea, the Phrygian Cybele, the Sumerian Ninhurzag, the Egyptian Nut and the Celtic Modron or Mabon. They could sometimes represent the universal mother caring for a certain child, like the Egyptian Isis, the Hindu Privithi, the Nordic Frigg, and in a transferred sense, the Virgin Mary. The Greek Athena, the Babylonian Ishtar, the Celtic Morrigan and the Nordic Freyja are all examples of war goddesses who appear on battlefields. Finally, the Nigerian Ala, the Egyptian Nut, the Greek Persephone and the Nordic Freyja possess a definite death-goddess character, whereas others such as Isis take the character of a *psykopompos* "a leader of the soul". Most of the goddesses named above can, however, be seen to fit into two or more categories. A modern example of one and the same deity appearing in different aspects is the Hindu shaiva-triad Parvati-Durgā-Kali.

The paradox of being both the goddess of Life and of Death is recurrently reflected in the myths. The Sumerian sisters Inanna and Ereshkigal became involved in a conflict which caused famine and disorder on Earth, until the balance between them was restored. A similar calamity befalls the world when the Greek Demeter seeks her daughter, whom Hades abducted. The girl's sojourn in the world of the living and in the world of the dead had to be regulated by the gods and became manifest in the natural order of the changing seasons. In these myths, the binary opposition of life and death that has to be brought into a state of balance is expressed as a close relationship between two goddesses, who may at the same time be apprehended as one and the same, the Great Goddess. Embodying this paradox, she is often identified with Earth, which gives life and to which the dead return. This ambivalence is, moreover, expressed in the moon and its phases, connected with menstruation, furthermore underscoring the returning antitheses of life and death.

The great goddesses in the North are, as far as we know from the available sources, Freyja and Frigg.¹³ Besides Freyja and Frigg we might suggest that Jorð, Bil, Skaði and Gerðr belonged to a similar framework, although we have little knowledge as to whether these goddesses were

11 K. Dowden, 1989, *The Death and the Maiden*, London, pp. 25-32. As a matter of fact, the bears symbolism belonging to Artemis survived the impact of Christianity in the Virgin Mary of the Bear, and celebrated as Panagia Arkoudiotissa "the Most Holy One of the Bear", in a cave at Acrotiri. Thompson, H. A., Activities in the Athenian Agora 1959, *Hesperia*, XXIX, p.367.

12 Burkert, 1985, p.151.

13 About the relation between Freyja and Frigg, see pp.135ff below.

objects of any form of cult. The other goddesses enumerated in the 36th chapter of Snorri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning* are, as we shall see, merely other names for Freyja and Frigg.

The Love Goddess

Her pertinent sources described Freyja as the particular goddess of love and passion. Like her relatives among the Vanir, Njörðr and Freyr she supports fertility for beast and soil; but her special sphere was human love, and the myths as well as the Scaldic poetry alludes to her own love affairs. Her cult, probably connected with the *dísa*- and the *álfablót*, had features which clearly recall fertility rites.

In the previous research, the worship of the fertility gods was sometimes regarded as a sign of a less developed cultural stage. It represented a primitive phase in the human conception of life, when procreation was the ultimate concern of humans who were - because of the mere struggle for life, or a lack of reasoning power - incapable of further theological speculation. Scholars have described the cultic behaviour of past or exotic cultures as orgies of sexual outrage which expressed a primitive belief in fertility. Fertility rites existed and, indeed, still exist; but many descriptions of them are merely fantasies on the part of the authors, who had no experience of field research.

Behind the Western bias according to which fertility-cult is regarded as a primitive form of religion stood a theological tradition belonging to the salvation history of the Old Testament, a tradition which depicted an intense struggle was intense between the Israelites and the Canaanites. The prophets of Jahve described it as the struggle between one unique, sky-god of Israel and male and female fertility deities, presented as abominable idols. This perspective of the old prophets favours the view that monotheism represents a more civilised form of religious consciousness, a development from a lower stage to a higher one. Such categorisation influenced the view of the fertility cult and of the gods related to it as a primitive form.

With regard to the goddess Freyja, this viewpoint is a conspicuous one, as she is characteristically described as a typical fertility-goddess, sensual and adulterous by nature. de Vries finds it quite natural that she should be called *Sýr*, "the Sow", as a symbol of unlimited fertility.¹⁴ Freyja was naturally associated with her cats, according to Turville-Petre, in view of the lascivious behaviour of these animals.¹⁵ The scandalous affairs of Freyja, emphasised in *Lokasenna* and in *Hyndluljóð* are commented on by F. Ström as being in accordance with "the general pattern of female fertility deities".¹⁶

These general statements concerning Freyja's character recall the Greek Aphrodite Pandemos, the prototype of the sensual goddess of love, who lends who lends herself to all kinds of erotic desire. It is true that the unstrained erotic adventures that characterise Aphrodite are paralleled in Freyja's debauchery among the gods. Besides, Aphrodite's Roman counterpart Venus carries in her name the same stem as Vanir, meaning

¹⁴ de Vries II, p. 313. About the name *Sýr*, see p.000 below.

¹⁵ Turville-Petre, 1964, p.176.

¹⁶ F. Ström, 1961, p.101.

"voluptuousness". No wonder the Nordic poets began to use Freyja's person as an expression of eroticism at an early stage.

Freyja is the female counterpart of her relatives Njörðr and Freyr, who favoured the procreation of mankind, animals and vegetation. We may suggest that Freyja and Freyr were invoked at the *jólablot* to promote *ár ok friðr*, the year's crop and the peace, before Christ and the Virgin Mary were invoked with the same formula. Freyr (Fricco) was, according to Adam of Bremen, furnished with a huge phallus, and the figurine from Rällinge features such an attribute. We may also imagine that a picture of Freyja could carry the corresponding characteristics of distinct genitalia denoting her role as a goddess of procreation, though other ways of portraying her are quite possible, too. Freyja's sphere of activity is sexuality, especially the love between man and woman:

She is the one who is the nearest for mankind to invoke ...

She likes love poetry, she is good to invoke about love (Glǫf.24).

Her own erotic adventures are described as lecherous, even obscene, by the giantess Hyndla:

*Snúðu burt heðan/sofa lystir mik/fær þú fátt af mér/
friðra kosta/hleypr þú, eðlvina/úti á náttum/sem með höfrum/Heiðrún
fari (Hdl.47).*

Turn away from here! I wish to sleep, from me you will not get any friendship! You run in heat, my lustful friend, as Heiðrún with the he-goats in the nights.

Rant at æði/ey þreyiandi/skutuz þér fleiri/und fyrirskyrtu/..(Hdl.48).

You ran ever yearning in lechery, under your shirt still others have crept...

In *Lokasenna* Freyja stands accused because of her licentiousness:

ása ok álfa/er hér inni ero/hverr hefir þinn hór verit (Ls.30)

the Æsir and the Elves, who are here, have been your lechers, everyone.

...

*síztu at bræðr þínom/siðo blíð regin/ok myndir þú þá. Freyja, frata
(Ls.32).*

the mild gods caught you in bed with your brother; then you might fart, Freyja!

Loki vividly depicts her passion and desire in *Brymskviða*:

Át vætr Freyja/dátta nǫttom/svá var hón óðfús/i iǫtunheima (Þrk.26).

Freyja did not eat for eight nights, she yearned so (much) for the giants' world.

Svaf vætr Freyja/átta nóttom/svá var hön öðfús/í iotunheima (Prk.28).

Freyja did not sleep for eight nights, she yearned so (much) for the giants' world.

He is mendaciously trying to convince the giant that Freyja could neither eat nor sleep for eight nights in her yearning for a husband.

Moreover, Freyja uses her sexuality to procure golden adornments. Her desire for gold coincides with the fact that her person is surrounded by golden things, such as the famous Brisinga men, and her daughters are called Hnoss, "Jewel", and Gersimi, "gem".

Concealed behind the name Menglǫð, "the One, who is gladdened by adornment", Freyja once again appears as the loving and yearning woman. This Eddic poem, close to folksongs from a literary point of view, relates the meeting between Menglǫð-Freyja and her beloved.¹⁷

My wish have I won: welcome be thou
with a kiss I clasp thee now
the loved one's sight is sweet to her
who has lived in longing for him

Full long sat I on Lyfiaberg
bided thee day after day
now has happened what I hoped for long
that, hero, thou art come in my hall.

Heart-sick was I, to have thee I yearned
whilst thou didst long for my love
Of a truth I know: we two shall live
our life together (Fjolsv.48-53).

This is an invitation from the Goddess to her partner to unite himself to with her in a holy wedding, which is in its deepest sense a manifestation of the creation and the cosmic order - a perception expressed in myths and performed in a ritual where the union between them is expressed in symbolic forms.

Cultic weddings have attracted great interest among toponymic scholars, who have seen connections between male and female place-names close to each other. Their joint existence could mean that gods like Ullr and Þórr were united in a cultic wedding with the fertility goddess under the names *Njárð, Hǫrn and Freyja, unions reflected in a couple of place-names such as Ullvi-Härnvi in Bro, Uppland, and Torstuna-Härnvi in Västmanland.¹⁸ Although this theory is sometimes considered highly speculative, there is nothing to disprove it from a comparative perspective. In most religions outside the monotheistic and unisexual

¹⁷ *The Poetic Edda*, 1928, trans. L. Hollander, Austin, p.178.

¹⁸ Hellberg, 1986, p.49 and 53; Brink, 1990, p.50.

perspective, holy weddings in the form of processions, where a god is led to his divine bride or vice versa, constitute a regular element in the festival calendar. In many cases, the implicit meaning of this ceremony is not merely a direct symbolic coitus geared to strengthening fertility among people, beasts and soil; it is also a token of agreement, economical exchange, or the like which united one village to another. It is true that a holy wedding could take place between a king and a goddess, or between a king and a queen representing god and goddess. Moreover, a discrepancy between myth and ritual is rather common in these cases. A well-known example is the *hieros gamos* on Samos between Zeus and Hera which was expressed in myth and ritual, but which only existed as a ritual in Athens, whereas the myth is explicitly told in *The Iliad* 14, 295.¹⁹

The literary sources, such as Menglōð's greeting and the story about Freyr and Gerðr in *Skírnismál*, constitute more expressive illustrations of the phenomenon. A cultic wedding between a male and a female deity from different villages is, however, not attested in the literary sources. The short passage about Freyr, his priestess and the cunning Gunnarr Helmingr in *Flateyjarbók* (p.55-56 above) tells the story of a woman playing the role of Freyr's wife during his travels in the kingdom of Svear, whereas the place-name theory presupposes a wedding between two gods. Nevertheless, the episode of Freyr and his priestess reflects the existence of a holy wedding in the Old Norse religion, although it is presented from a Christian point of view.

The small golden plates called "guldgubbar, little men of gold", depicting the courteous embrace of a man and a woman, seem to belong to this sphere, although we are still unsure of their function. It is easy to imagine that these objects were used as votive sacrifices for different rites benefiting the harvest, fertility or merely matrimonial felicity.

On particular aspect of Freyja as the great fertility goddess is her auxiliary function in childbirth, illustrated by the words of the exhausted mother in the Eddic poem *Óðrúnargrátr*. Having been delivered of twins, she blesses her helper with the words:

May the kind powers Frigg and Freyja and other gods help you as you have saved me from dangerous distress (Od.9).

Apparently both Freyja and Frigg protected women in childbirth and were invoked in that connection. Freyja's activity in childbirth is furthermore documented by the Norse saying: *Freyja hjelper kona dysse og nynne bane*.²⁰ The elder-tree, dedicated to Freyja, was considered to lessen the pains of childbirth.²¹ After the Christianisation, Freyja's role as a helper in childbirth was taken over by the Virgin Mary, as were many other functions connected with fertility and procreation.²²

Freyja has, however, other qualities besides being a generous love goddess in the Old Norse Pantheon. She is a goddess of high rank, according to Snorri "the most honourable besides Frigg" (Glgf.34). Her

¹⁹ Widengren, 1969, pp.117f, 155f, 253f, 390.

²⁰ de Vries II, p.311, n.1.

²¹ I. Reichborn-Kjennerud, 1923, "Lægerådene i den eldre Edda", *Maal og minne*, Oslo, pp.22-23.

²² H. Johansson, s.v. Maria, KLN.M.

name was the origin of the complimentary title given to the wives of the nobility, who were called *frúar*, "ladies". In *Heimskringla*, Snorri also tells us that every woman who rules over her own property is called *freyja* and, if she owns a house, *húsfreyja* (Hkr.4). This usage could also be connected with the above-mentioned fact that the appellations Freyr and Freyja mean "the Lord" and "the Lady" respectively, appellations behind which names such as Njörðr and *Njārð were probably concealed (pp.00-00 above). Since this title places Freyja among the highest ranking deities, it is little wonder that she is often related to the supreme god, Óðinn.

Freyja as Óðinn's Wife

Freyja is, in fact, often mentioned as Óðinn's wife, although Snorri reserves that place for Frigg, while calling Freyja's husband Óðr. Looking at the etymologies of the name, there is, however, little doubt that Óðinn and Óðr are the same person. The most common etymologies derive the name of this god from *óðr*, a noun with many shades of meaning, such as "agitation", "skill in poetry", "poetry", "intellect". The word's connection with the art of poetry is implicit in the magic mead *Óðrœrir*, literally "the one stirring the intellect, the poetic skill", in a transferred sense "giving inspiration" or "bringing ecstasy".

The latter connotation is more emphasised in the adjective *óðr*, meaning "furious", "mad", "terrible" and even "mentally disordered", which is reflected in nisl. *óður* "fit of rage". The word refers to an extraordinary mental condition, whether in a favourable or a pejorative sense. The many meanings of the word are exemplified by OE *woðbora*, literally "the one who carries the rage" but in a transferred sense "poet, speaker, prophet". The OE words *woðcraeft*, "art of poetry", *woðgifu*, "skill in singing" and *woðsang*, "song", were similarly constructed.

The adjective *óðr*, which in the Gothic language corresponds to *wops*, was used for the expressions *daimonisteis* and *daimonixomenos* (Mk. 5, 18, 15) in Wulfila's translation of the Bible, just as the OHG *wuoten*, "furious", was used for Lat. *freneticus*, *furiosus*. The Gallic *faith*, "prophet, poet", and Lat. *vates*, "prophet", belong to the same stem.

Óðinn < OG *Woþanaz also appears in OS as Oþin, Oþan, Oþun. Adam of Bremen makes the first known interpretation of the word: *Wodan id est furor*, "Óðinn means rage"; and many scholars have interpreted Óðinn as "the Raging One", the leader of the crowd of the dead, riding through night and storm and feared by country people until the 19th century. But Óðinn is a more complex deity than that and the meaning of his name ranges from "raging", "ecstatic", to "inspired" and "intelligent".

The name has been considered as tabooed; but it does form the first element in the name Odinkar, borne by two Danish bishops.²³

Little is known about Óðr besides the details of Snorri's Edda. In the Scaldic poetry he is mentioned in one kenning, *augna regn Óðs beðvinu*, "the eye's rain of Óðr's wife", i. e. tears²⁴, which alludes to Freyja's tears of pure gold. They were shed when Óðr was travelling far away.

²³ J. Kousgaard Sørensen has pointed out that these names do not derive from Óðinn, but the adjective *óðr* and mean "inclined to rage or madness". J. Kousgaard Sørensen, 1974, "Odinkar og andre navne på -kar", *Nordiska namn. Festskrift till Lennart Moberg 13 dec. 1974*, ed. H. Ståhl and T. Andersson, Uppsala, pp.108-116.

²⁴ LP s.v. Óðr.

Etymologically Óðr is held to be derived from OG *wopu-, which belongs to an older u-stem.²⁵ This results in the dative æði (æði in the manuscript) and was emendated by Bugge to Óði (Hdl. 47). Bugge made a conjecture in the same strophe, from *edlvina* to *Óðs vina*. These emendations thus duplicated the myths about Óðr as the husband of Freyja. Still, what Bugge read as a *lectio difficilior* should, in my opinion, be interpreted in the original form æði, æði meaning "raging", but in the special sense of oestrous, which coincides with the following line about the goat Heiðrún running in heat. Perhaps the philologists of the 19th century were misled by their romantic intentions when they establishing the existence of Óðr in the poem. This means that Óð only appears on one occasion in *The Poetic Edda*, in *Óðs mey* (Vsp. 25). At the same time plenty of evidence assures us that Óðr and Óðinn are in fact the same person:

1. Both Óðinn's and Óðr's names are connected with the adjective *óðr* "furious, ecstatic", alluding to the functions of magic, poetry and sooth-saying.
2. Both are related to Freyja.
3. According to Snorri Óðr was out on journeys far away, something that he describes as typical of Óðinn (Hkr. 3).

The next question must be Snorri's reason for more or less inventing the god Óðr. Hollander draws a parallel with the story about Amor and Psyche, suggesting that their roles had become inverted in the Nordic interpretation. That is to say, *óðr*, "soul", represented the male, whereas Freyja / Frija "love" stood for the female.²⁶ Such a structural inversion is possible; but I am less inclined to go along with his argument that Freyja's longing and tears were too sentimental motifs for the Nordic temperament, and that they must therefore be a loan from Classical mythology.

The attempts to separate Óðinn and Óðr are based on vague circumstances and most scholars are inclined to regard them as identical.²⁷ One possibility is that Snorri did not know the double forms Óðr-Óðinn and apprehended them as two different gods, which fitted his mythological system better (pp.110-111 below).

The Sorceress

Like Óðinn, Freyja commands the skill of sorcery. "She was the one that taught the *Æsir seiðr* which was used by the Vanir" (Hkr. 4). Dag Strömbäck, who wrote a comprehensive thesis about the *seiðr* phenomenon, observes that Freyja is not associated with sorcery in any other connection.²⁸ If we analyse the concept of *seiðr* according to Strömbäck's own definition, it seems to have functioned as divination, the subject of the famous part about Lítill-völva in *Eiríks saga rauða*.²⁹ There was,

²⁵ Denoted by I. Lindquist as a sacral u-stem. de Vries II, p.97 n.2.

²⁶ L. M. Hollander, 1950, The Old Norse God Odr, *Journal of English and German Philology*, pp.304-308.

²⁷ de Vries II, p.87-89; Turville-Petre, 1964, p.176; Å. V. Ström, 1975, p.151.

²⁸ D. Strömbäck, 1935, *Sejd*, Uppsala, p.33 n.1.

²⁹ *Hauksbók*, pp.429-431.

however, a darker and malevolent side to *seiðr*, which operated as a kind of obsession in a physical and psychical way. It was said that Egill Skalla-Grímsson would never sit peacefully in his home on Iceland since Queen Gunhildr had used *seiðr* upon him.³⁰ A ghostly passage in *Laxdæla saga* relates how a 12-year-old boy, Kári, is killed by *seiðr*.³¹

By using the latter and less favourable aspect of *seiðr*, Freyja presumably acts through the sorceresses Gullveig³² and Heiðr, who attack the Æsir with witchcraft and distortion in their war against the Vanir (Vsp.21-22). The name Gullveig "Drunkness of/ power of gold" carries associations to Freyja, the owner of the precious Brísinga men, who weeps tears of red gold while longing for her husband (Glgf.36). In the poetry "Freyja's eyes' rain" is a kenning for gold (Sksm.35).

Freyja's knowledge of witchcraft is attested by Loki:

Begi þú Freyja þú ert fordæða/ ok meini blandin miðk (Ls.32).

Be silent Freyja, you are a sorceress, full of evil.

Fordæða is a strong expression for "witch" and we know from another example how Freyja acts as a sorceress. In the *Sörla þáttr*, where Freyja had promised Óðinn to kindle a never-ending war between two kings, she demonstrates her talents in sorcery. Under the name of Gøndul, she meets one of these kings, Héðinn:

That was said that once Héðinn went to the wood with his men. He stayed in a glade without his men. He saw a woman sitting on a seat in the glade, she was tall and fair to look at. She greeted Héðinn courteously. He asked for her name and she answered that her name was Gøndul. After that they talked to each other. She asked about his noble achievements.

He told her that and asked her if she knew any king equal to him in toughness and bravery and renown. She said that she knew a man no less of value than he with twenty kings subservient to him. His name was Høgni and he ruled in the north, in Denmark. "(Now) I know that," Héðinn said, "that we should measure which is the better of us." "You may now hurry to your men", Gøndul said, "they are looking for you". Then they left each other.³³

The kings met and after their competition, when they found that neither was better than the other, they swore brotherhood and lived in peace together. But Gøndul-Freyja appears again on the stage:

One day Héðinn went into the forest to enjoy himself since the weather was good. He had gone away from his men into a glade.

³⁰ *Egils saga*, ch.59.

³¹ *Laxdæla saga*, 1934, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík, ch.35.

³² Turville-Petre, 1964, p.159.

³³ *Flateyjarbók* I, p.378ff.

There he saw a woman sitting on a seat - the same one as he saw before in Serkland, and she seemed to him fairer than before. She spoke to him, making her voice bland, and held a horn with a lid on it. The king was attracted by her. She asked him to drink and the king was thirsty, since the weather was hot, and he took it and drank. When he had drunk, he felt strange and could not remember what had happened earlier. He sat down and talked to her. She asked if he had experienced something of what she had (earlier) said about his deeds and courage compared with those of Hogni.

Héðinn said that he did not lack competition (in that case), but that they were equal in everything. "You are not that equal," she said. "What do you mean by that?" he said. "I mean," she said, "that Hogni has a queen of noble heritage, but you have no wife." He answered: "Hogni will give me his daughter, and then I have made no worse marriage than he has." "That will diminish you", she said, "if you ask Hogni to become his son-in-law. It would be better if you not are lacking the courage and bravery to abduct Hildir and kill the queen by taking her and laying her outside the board of the dragon-ship and let it cut her asunder, when it sets afloat."³⁴

The ale made Héðinn so bewildered that he did not remember that he had sworn brotherhood with Hogni. He went back and did exactly what Gøndul-Freyja had told him. After his deed they met a third time in the glade:

...when he arrived at the glade he saw Gøndul sitting on the seat. They talked as if they had known each other for a long time. Héðinn told her about his deed and she appreciated that. She had the horn with her, as she had had like the last time before and she asked him to drink from it. He took it and drank until he had drunk (so much) that he became sleepy and slumbered in her lap. But when he was asleep she pulled away from his head and said: "Now I hallow both you and Hogni and all your men with these words on the condition that Óðinn determined." Héðinn woke up and caught a glimpse of Gøndul's face. She seemed to him black and big.³⁵

Here Gøndul-Freyja assumes the role of a seductive witch who changes the mind of Héðinn and makes him break the law of friendship and the code of honour, committing the most gruesome deeds against Hogni's family. She appears three times, in order to fulfil her promise to Óðinn, and to him she finally hallows both Héðinn and his men.³⁶

Though it reflects an obscure activity, Freyja's magical function belongs to the same realm as her sacral one. According to Snorri's strongly euhemerized account of the gods Óðinn, Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja and their arrival in the north, they were the ones who inaugurated the cult at

³⁴ Ibid. p.279.

³⁵ Loc. cit.

³⁶ About the reasons for her promise to Óðinn, see p.133 below.

Uppsala and performed the sacrifices. It is explicitly said that Freyja appears as *blótgýðja* (Hkr.4), a word that offers a special problem, since it could mean both "sacrificial goddess" and "sacrificial priestess". We know from *Völuspá* that the gods built both *hørg* and *hof* for themselves (Vsp.7), an observation that must be explained as expressing the efficacy of the sacrifice which had to be performed, even by the divine powers themselves. We may therefore assume that *blótgýðja* in this case means that the goddess herself performed the *blót*, acting as a priestess. This agrees with Snorri's further narrative according to which Freyja, as the only living representative of the gods, maintained the sacrifices at Uppsala (Hkr.10). It is, as some scholars (among them F. Ström) have argued, quite probable that not only the male gods dominated the cult at Uppsala, but that Freyja had an important role, too.³⁷

Freyja's many Names

We have observed that Freyja is the female counterpart to Óðinn in his magico-religious function as well as in his role as the sovereign; but there are other resemblances, too. Like him she bears many different names and travels far, according to Snorri, who connects this itineration with her search for Óðr. She is called *Mardöll*, *Hørn*, *Gefn*, *Sýr*, *Vanadís* (Glgf.34), *Þrungva* and *Skjálf* [Skjól] according to Snorri's *Þulur*.

The name *Mardöll*/*Marðöll* appears in kennings for gold, for example *Mardallar tár*, "Mardöll's tears" (Bjarkamál 5); *Mardallar grátr*, "Mardöll's weeping" (Einar Skulason 11); *Mardallar hvarma fagrregn*, "the fair rain of Mardöll's eyelids", (Háttatal).³⁸ The name has been interpreted as a compound of *marr*- "sea" and *-döll* or *-öll*. *-döll* is probably a fem. form of *-dallr* (cf. *Heimdallr*), meaning "the shining", whereas *-þöll* means "fir", making no sense.³⁹ "The one shining over the Sea" could imply a connection with a certain star; cf. *Stella Maris*, a byname for *Isis*⁴⁰ and later for the Virgin Mary. Another possible interpretation, according to Snorri, is supplied by a connection with the *Brisinga* men, over which *Heimdallr* and *Loki* fought in the guise of seals in the sea (Sksm.8). *Brisinga* men, the principal attribute of Freyja, have been thought to symbolise the sun.⁴¹ Still, these attempts to explain obscure myths or mythical elements as meteorological or cosmological phenomena have their obvious weaknesses and the question of the origin of the name *Mardöll* must therefore remain open.

Hørn/**Härn* is probably derived from *hørr*, "flax", and it is represented in a number of place-names, *Härnevi*, *Järnevi*, *Järneberga*.⁴² The cultivation of flax arrived early in the North. The first ordinary tax which the Norse peasants were obliged to pay was a duty on linen. Flax was surrounded by many magical perceptions: it protected against evil and

³⁷ F. Ström, 1954, pp.55-56.

³⁸ LP s.v. *Mardöll*.

³⁹ Lorenz, p.440.

⁴⁰ M. Giebel, 1990, *Das Geheimnis der Mysterien*, Zürich, p.167.

⁴¹ K. Müllendorf, 1886, "Fria und der Halsbandsmythos", *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, 30, pp.217-260.

⁴² M. Olsen, 1914, *Hedenske Kultminde i Norske Stedsnavne*, Oslo, p.195; O. Lundberg och H.

Sperber, 1911, *Härnevi och därmed sammanhängande ortnamn. Om nordisk fruktbarhetskult.*

Uppsala Universitets årsskrift, Uppsala.

gave fertility to mankind.⁴³ Flax was connected with women; it was even called the "seed of the woman". Some notices state that it had to be sown on a Friday and that women dressed in their best clothes took part in the sowing on the day consecrated to the Great Goddess of the North.⁴⁴ The spinning of flax was also connected with her; and the product, linen, appearing in the dress of the bride, *gekk hón und líni* (Rgp.40), is another connection with the love goddess Freyja.

Gefn means "the giving", alluding to the fertility aspect of the goddess. It could be compared with Gabiæ and Aligabiæ, names of the Matres or Matronæ.⁴⁵ The name is probably another form of Gefjon (see p.123, below).

Sýr is usually interpreted as "the sow", alluding to a coarse symbol of the fertility goddess, or, in obsolete explanations, as a form of totemism, the goddess appearing in the shape of an animal.⁴⁶ The most appealing etymology derives, however, from the leur. stem *s(w)er-, meaning "to protect, to shield". The original sense of the word had, in the course of time, been lost, and it came to be interpreted as "sow" or "boar", which were used as symbols for Freyja and Freyr respectively.⁴⁷ These two definitions are perhaps used in *Hreiðars þáttur*, in an allusion to Ólaf's foster father, Sigurðr Sýr.⁴⁸ The name is also used in *kenningar* such *sárlaxa Sýr* and *Folk Sýr*.⁴⁹

Þrungva appears in this enumeration only and is probably derived from *þrá* "pining", alluding to the love goddess longing for her partner.⁵⁰

Skjálfr appears in the strophe as the one who hanged king Agni (Yt.10). According to Snorri, she is a Finnish/Lappish princess (Hkr.19). It seems that Skjálfr is the mother of the dynasty of Skilfingar, the name of the Ynglinga dynasty after Agni, which is mentioned in *Beowulf* (Beo.63); she thus forms a parallel to Freyr as an eponymous heroine. This interpretation of her name has been the object of intense discussion.⁵¹ However, Freyja's prominent role in the sacrificial cult of Uppsala could connect her with these obscure tales.

Finally, she is called Vanadís (Sksm.20), a kenning composed of Vanir and Dís, "the woman of the Vanir" (Glgf.35), equivalent with *Vana goð/gyðja* in the same passage.

The Death Goddess

Freyja and Óðinn share the fallen warriors after a battle according to *Grímnismál*, where "she owns the half part of the fallen" (Grm.14). Óðinn receives his part at Valhöll, "the Halls of the Slain", where the afterlife of the fallen warrior is described thus by Snorri:

⁴³ Examples of these perceptions are given in C. H. Tillhagen, 1986, *Vävsrock*, Borås, pp.16-19.

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp.24-28.

⁴⁵ de Vries II, p.293.

⁴⁶ B. Phillpotts, 1920, *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*, Cambridge, p.169.

⁴⁷ R. Schrodtr, 1979, "Der altnordische Beinamen 'Sýr'", ANF, pp.114-119.

⁴⁸ This is probably a pun on the double sense of Sýr. *Hreiðars þáttur*, in *Ljósvetninga saga*, 1940, ed. Björn Sigfússon, *Íslensk fornrit*, Reykjavík, p.259.

⁴⁹ LP s.v. sýr.

⁵⁰ AnEWb s.v. þrá, p.618.

⁵¹ About the interpretations and etymologies of Skjálfr, cf. K.E. Gade, 1985, "Skjálfr", ANF, pp.59-71.

Every day, when they have dressed, they put their armour on and go out in the yard and fight and fell each other; that is their play. But when breakfast is drawing near, they ride home to Valhøll and sit down and drink together (Glgf.40).

A similar perception of the afterlife is related in a passage in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* about Hadingus:

As he was dining, a woman behind a brazier, bearing stalks of hemlock, was seen to raise her head from the ground and, extending the lap of her garment, seemed to be asking in what part of the world such fresh plants might have sprung up during the winter season. The king was eager to find out the answer and after she had muffled him in her cloak she vanished away with him beneath the earth. It was, I believe, by design of the underworld gods that she took a living man to those parts which he must visit when he died. First they penetrated a smoky veil of darkness, then walked along a path worn away by long ages of travellers, and glimpsed persons in rich robes and nobles dressed in purple, passing these by, they eventually came upon a sunny region, which produced the vegetation the woman had brought away. Having advanced further, they stumbled on a river of blue-black water, swirling in head-long descent and spinning in its swift eddies weapons of various kinds. They crossed it by a bridge and saw two strongly-matched armies encountering one another. Hadingus asked the woman their identity.

"They are men who met their death by the sword," she said, "and present an everlasting display of their destruction; in the exhibition before you they are trying to equal the activity of their past lives." Moving on, they found barring their way a wall, difficult to approach and surmount. The woman tried to leap over it, but to no avail, for even her slender, wrinkled body was no advantage. She thereupon wrung off the head of a cock which she happened to be carrying and threw it over the enclosing barrier; immediately the bird, resurrected, gave proof by a loud crow that it had truly recovered its breathing.⁵²

This account of pre-Christian afterlife gives us details recognisable from other sources for instance the fighting men and the river filled with weapons (Vsp.36). In Ibn Fadlān's description of a chieftain's funeral, a cock is beheaded by the slave-girl, who follows her master in death. She is also raised on the arms of the men, where she beholds her husband and her dead relatives as looking over something resembling a door, which could be equivalent with the insurmountable wall between this world and the other.⁵³ The woman in Saxo's account, familiar with the underworld, who takes the hero on this journey is acting like a *psykopompos*, "a leader of the soul". She could be Freyja, emerging from earth and living in the field of the warrior (Folkvangr). It is, however, astonishing that she is

⁵² Saxo I, p.30-31.

⁵³ Saxo II, notes on pp.31-67.

unable to pass over the walls to the land of immortality.⁵⁴ Since the story about Hadingus is composed of several elements from the myth, among others Freyja and Njörðr,⁵⁵ it seems reasonable to believe that even the persons in this episode belong to the realm of the Vanir.

There is one observation, which suggests that Freyja receives dead women. When Egill Skalla-Grimsson has lost his son Þoðvarr, he decides to starve to death. His daughter Þorgerðr visits him at his home:

Ásgerðr greeted her (Þorgerðr) and asked if they had had their supper; Þorgerðr says this: I have had no supper, and I will not have any before I am at Freyja's.⁵⁶

As was mentioned in the survey of the Great Goddess, this type of goddess is usually connected with life and death, which is why it is by no means paradoxical for Freyja to appear as a death goddess. There have been attempts made to connect Freyja with Hel, but such attempts are beset with difficulties. Hel is, in our sources, a monstrous creature, and an offspring of Loki's, and contrasted with Freyja, whose abode is filled with those who suffered a heroic death; Hel, conversely always appears unfavourable as the one who receives the dead. Nevertheless, when Hel sometimes appears described in erotic terms in the contrived Scaldic poetry, receiving as the receiver of the deceased kin, we must suspect that such references really allude to Freyja in her double role as goddess of death and love rather than to the gruesome daughter of Loki.⁵⁷

There existed at least five parallel concepts in the Old Norse religion as to where the dead dwelt: Valhöll, Fólkvangr, Hel, Rán and the grave-mounds. There are even references to people who were reborn.⁵⁸ Considering the available sources, we might be able to make fairly vague distinctions between the noble dead placed at Valhöll and Fólkvangr, the drowned who lodged with Rán, and the passionate who are reborn, and the criminals who reside with Hel; but we must repeat that the relevant perceptions often cross one another, and it hence seems impossible to draw up any some clear-cut categorisation.

Freyja receives those who suffered an honourable death - women, who committed suicide in order to protect their honour and men fallen on the battle-field. In the latter case she acts directly as a Valkyrie, literally "the selector of the slain", since she selects those who are going to die in battle. She may therefore appear as the leader of the group of the Valkyries (see p.135 below). She has a conspicuously belligerent character; we can observe it in *Hyndluljóð*, where she utters:

54 The perception that there is a trace of an essential difference between the Æsir and the Vanir from the "afterlife-perspective" has been put forward by J. P. Schjødt. J. P. Schjødt, 1991, "Relationen mellem aser og vaner og dess ideologiska implikationer." *Nordisk hedendom. Et symposium*, 1991, pp. 303-318. Ed. G. Steinsland, U. Drobin, J. Pentikäinen, P. Meulengracht Sørensen, Odense. Also cf. p.77 above.

55 Dumézil, 1973a, pp.50-76.

56 *Egils saga*, ch.76.

57 Cf. *ok allvald yngva þjópar/Loka mæz at leikom hefr* (VII) and *ok til þings þrþia iofre hueþrongs mæz ór heime bauþ* (XXIV), Þjóðólfr of Hvin, *Ynglingatal*, 1925, ed. A.Noreen, Stockholm; Ström, F., 1954, p.83. These two aspects of Freyja's character are more elaborately discussed in the chapter "Who killed the king".

58 HHu.II, prose in the beginning, after st.4 and after 51. HHv, prose after 43; about Brynhildr in Sg.45; *Flateyjarbók* II, p.135 o 163.

*Dulin ertu Hyndla/draums ætlig þér/er þú kveðr ver minn/ í
valsinni/þar er góltr glóar/gullinbursti/Hildisvíni/er mér hagir
gørðu/dvergar tveir/Dáinn ok Nabbi (Hdl.7).*

You are dull, Hyndla, and dreaming, I believe, since you say that my man is among the dead warriors. It is the boar with the golden bristle, Hildisvíni (War Boar), which the skilful dwarves, Dáinn and Nabbi, made for me.

If we interpret the text literally, Freyja seems to ride on a pig on her journey to Valhöll, which has been explained as an appropriate mount for a fertility goddess.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, as Hilda Davidson remarked, this beast is a boar, called Hildisvíni "war-swine",⁶⁰ and not a plump mother sow. Hildisvíni is thus connected with war and not with fertility, representing the ferocious wild boar used in heraldic contexts (see pp.000ff below).

Freyja is not only a passive receiver of the slain; she actually rides into the battle herself. Her warlike aspect is evident in *Sörla þáttr*, passages referred to above, where she - in the guise of Gøndul - incites two kings to fight each other. In *Hyndluljóð*, she supports the young Óttarr in his fight against Angantýr and on his journey into the realm of the dead.

The Complex Nature of Freyja

This investigation of Freyja's qualities makes it clear that she is more complex than the conventional idea of a fertility goddess would seem to suggest. It is obvious that she possesses the qualities of a Great Goddess, in that she gives life and receives the dead.

Freyja constitutes a reflection of the ideal noble women, the wives of the aristocracy, whose important duty it was to incite their husbands, brothers and sons to fight to protect their honour, which was also theirs. In a wider context, this held the family and the clan together; and as far as we know from the sources, the women were the ones who perpetually upheld the feud.⁶¹

Other evidence confirms the notion that Freyja displays the characteristics of the ideal woman. Her name was identical with the title given to the wives of the aristocracy. This title of honour was, after the Christianisation, transferred to the ideal woman of the new religion - the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary was called *Vår Fru*, which is a translation of *Nostra Domina* (cf. *Notre Dame* and *Our Lady*); even so it does agree with the high value given to the word in Nordic society - a word still represented in the titles *fru* and *hustru* (<hus-fru).

Freyja's magical qualities seem more incompatible with the image of the ideal woman. However, the early Greek and Roman sources emphasise the positive role of the sorceress in Germanic society.⁶² *Seiðr* is not

⁵⁹ Phillpotts, 1920, pp.169ff.

⁶⁰ Davidson, 1964, pp.98-99.

⁶¹ R. Bruder, 1974, *Die Germanische Frau in Lichte der Runeninschriften und antiken Historiographie*, Berlin pp.113 ff. R. Heller, 1958, *Die literarische Darstellung der Frau in der Isländersaga*, Halle, suggests that this is only a literary motif with no realistic background, pp.98-123.

⁶² Bruder 1974, pp.151ff.

apprehended as an undivided negative potency in the Nordic sources. Some episodes actually dwell on its positive effects, for example when the *volva* appears as in *Eiríks saga rauða*.⁶³ Christianity, on the other hand, rebuked all forms of witchcraft.

Freyja is a Great Goddess, composed of many varying qualities. She fuses the opposition of life and death in her person and embodies many other functions as well. Freyja represented the ideal woman, but she was not a special goddess "women's goddess". She protected fertility, but was worshipped by other classes besides the peasants. She was invoked under many names. Her characteristics are many and diverging; but they do compose a special pattern which we recognise as characteristic of the Great Goddess of the Indo-European myth.

The Great Goddesses in Different Cultures

The Great Goddesses have, as was mentioned above, some general characteristics in common, although their appearances in the history of religions display highly dissimilar quite disparate qualities, usually depending on the respective environment from which they emerge. The Greek pantheon constitutes a case in point, where Artemis belongs to wild nature and is a goddess of hunting, whereas Athena, was connected with the urban culture at an early stage and both appear as autonomous and dominating Great Goddesses. They are, however, not Great Mothers, being chaste and childless unlike Rhea, the Mother of the Gods, or Demeter, with her origin in the agricultural world. This means that we have to observe a difference between certain cultures in respect of the characteristics of the individual Great Goddesses. The Babylonian Ishtar, belligerent and concupiscent, is representative of the Babylonian pantheon; the maternal and protecting Isis stands for Egypt and Kali for Modern Hinduism, who, behind her gruesome looks, is worshipped as the soul of motherliness.

The cultural differences appear in the myths, as well. The Mesopotamian Goddesses, like Inanna-Ishtar, are surrounded by a mythical complex in which they yearn and mourn for their dead paramours. Another typical and relevant mythical motif is related to a goddess who was able to engender life by herself; we need only think of the Sumerian Mother Goddess Ninmah in her competition with Enki, or Cybele, who was the mother of herself.⁶⁴

This theme is varied in the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, where Isis plays the active part to breed an offspring and uses magic to attain her purpose. The goddess Neight or Net has the capacity to generate life on her own, according to the sources.

The Indo-European Great Goddesses

The motif of the self-engendering goddess is sometimes stated as a typical characteristic of a Great Goddess. This suggestion does not agree with the pattern according to which the union between a male and a female deity produces mankind, gods or sometimes the entire creation. The Great

⁶³ See Strömbäck, 1935, pp.49-54.

⁶⁴ Albeit of Phrygian provenance, Cybele's local origin is Upper Mesopotamia. E. Laroche, 1960, "Koubaba, déesse anatolienne, et le problème des origines de Cybèle", *Éléments orientaux dans la religions grecque ancienne*, Paris, pp.113-128.

Goddesses of the Indo-European myths belong to the latter sphere: their procreation of divine or mortal offspring involves a male, whether he be a god or a mortal. Nevertheless, they maintain an autonomous position in the pantheon and are often connected with more than one of the gods.⁶⁵

Sometimes the Great Goddesses of the Indo-European myths appear like the Indian Sarasvatī or the Iranian Anāhitā, originally the same deity closely related to water. Sometimes, too, they manifest themselves as earth goddesses, like the misty Dhīsanās in the Vedic hymns, the Greek Gaia or the goddess Jorð in Old Norse mythology.⁶⁶ Some of these goddesses are more or less firmly connected with a male God in a union that creates new generations of gods, for example Gaia's with Ouranos, which yielded the Greek Pantheon or Jorð's with Óðinn, resulting in the thunder god, Þórr.

The relationship between the Goddess and her partner is sometimes strained, even inimical, in the myths. This has been interpreted as a conflict between the pantheon of the immigrant Indo-Europeans and the autonomous and autochthonous Great Goddesses. Such a period is conspicuous in the Greek pantheon where, for example, Artemis was loosely combined with Apollo and Zeus and Hera were joined in an embittered marriage. Other cases are more debatable, and the hypothesis that the peaceful autochthonous gods and goddesses were suppressed by the aggressive sky-gods of Indo-European culture cannot be accepted as a common pattern when we describe the religious consequences of the Indo-European immigrations in different areas. The element of tension in the relationship is based on a structural opposition between the Great Goddesses and the male gods rather than on historical events, the goddess usually representing the third function, struggling for equality against the first and the second.⁶⁷

The Trivalent Goddess

The Great Goddesses in Indo-European myths were usually, due to their productive capacity, relegated to the third function, as a reflection of the war of the gods. This, however, does not amount to saying that all Indo-European goddesses are typical fertility goddesses. Many of them display varying characteristics; sometimes they would assume the stature of minor goddesses, still quite close to their origin, whereas others developed into goddesses of a complex nature, like Freyja. Still, if we analyse the relevant characteristics, we find that they are representative of each of the tripartite functions, i. e. the priest-kings, the warriors and the producers. This mixture is not, as is sometimes suggested, a result of syncretism from many different religious systems; rather, it appears to be an original expression of essentially the trivalent Indo-European goddess.

In this respect she constitutes a complement to the male triad representing the priests, the warriors and the peasants, for example the Nordic Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr or the Roman Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus. When she unites all three functions in her person, she serves as a female counterpart to the male gods, each of whom only embodies one function.

⁶⁵ G. Dumézil, 1970, *Roman Archaic religion*, 1970, Chicago pp.299-303.

⁶⁶ R. B. Lommel, 1954, *Anāhitā-Sarasvatī, Asiatica. Festschrift Friedrich Weller*, Leipzig, pp.404-413.

⁶⁷ About the tripartite system see p.29-30

Although she tends to occupy one function - generally the third - more than the others, she is competent to assume them as well.⁶⁸

Anāhitā, Vāc and Sarasvatī

Thus conceived, the Great Goddess embodies the ideal woman of the relevant society according to the myths and the epics. The trivalent function is conspicuous in the case of the Iranian goddess Anāhitā. She is generally regarded as an amalgamation between Inanna and the Indo-Iranian deity, *Haravati, identical with the Indian Sarasvatī. Irrespective of her contact with the Mesopotamian goddess during the dynasty of the Achaemenians, her origin is traced back to the early Zoroastrism of Eastern Iran.⁶⁹ In her own Yast, the fifth, she is invoked by the warriors, by her own priests and by women, representatives of each of the three functions. She is called Aredvi, "the moist", by the women; Sura "the Strong", by the warriors; and Anāhitā, "the immaculate", by the priests.⁷⁰

A similar trivalent structure is found in the Vedic hymn to Vāc, deified Speech, who presents herself as carrying Mitra-Varuna, Indra-Agni⁷¹, and the two Ashvins:

4. Through me you eat food; the one who sees, who breathes, who hears speech (does it through me). Without thinking about it they depend on me. Listen, o famous One, I tell you the truth.
5. I myself announce this, what is received by gods and men. The one whom I love, only him do I make into a mighty man, a high priest, a .. rsi, a wise man.
6. I draw the bow for Rudra, so that he might kill the enemy of the holy word. I raise war among the people, I impregnate the heaven and earth.⁷²

Mitra and Varuna represent the first function, Indra the second and the Ashvins the third. The three functions are repeated in stanzas 4, 5 and 6 in a different order, the third(=food), the first(=the holy speech) and the second(=the warlike).

Vāc is identical with the goddess Sarasvatī.⁷³ The cult of Sarasvatī was imported by the Aryans, who gave her name to a river in the North West of India, where they abandoned their nomadic existence. Sarasvatī became the prototype for the worship of the life-giving powers, represented by the rivers Gangā and Yamunā.⁷⁴ In certain hymns of the Rigveda, she appears in the third function, maintaining life and vitality. Accompanied by the two Ashvins, she protects procreation; she is the one

⁶⁸ Dumézil, 1970, p.298f.

⁶⁹ M. Boyce, 1961, *The Zoroastrians*, London, p.61.

⁷⁰ For a discussion, see Scott Littleton, 1982, pp.177-178.

⁷¹ Agni, the deified fire of the sacrifice, appears as the only trivalent deity among the male gods. Cf. Dumézil, 1971a, p.119.

⁷² *Der Rig-Veda* 10.125, 1951, trans. K.F. Geldner, 1951. From the German translation.

⁷³ *The Shatapatha Brāhmana* III, 1966, trans. J. Eggeling, Dehli, 12, 9, 14 .. "Sarasvatī the tongue"; II, III, 2, 4, 9, "Now Sarasvatī is the Speech."

⁷⁴ D. Kingsley, 1986, *Hindu Goddesses*, Los Angeles, p.55.

who plants the embryo into the mother's womb (RV.10.184.2.), and her enormous bosom produces all kinds of nourishment (RV.1.164.49). According to *The Shatapatha Brāhmana*, she possesses a healing function in conjunction with the two Ashvins.⁷⁵

In the first function she appears as the aim of purification, and together with the goddesses Idā (Ilā) and Bhārati, she accepts the sacrifice.⁷⁶ In addition she is invoked as *sārasvatī sādḥāyantī dhāyam. na....* "Sarasvatī, who fulfils our (pious) thoughts..." (RV. 2.3.8) and *dhānām avitry*, "the goddesses of prayer." (RV.6.61.4).

Although described as maternal and pious in the hymns, Sarasvatī often appears as a warrior who defeats the enemies of the gods and shares the epithet *Vritraghnī*, "the destroyer of the enemies" (RV.6.61.7), with the dragon-killer Indra.⁷⁷ Together with the warlike Maruts she destroys her foes (RV.2.30. 8), and she is invoked as "the Helping One" in the battle against evil (RV.7.96.2).

According to these hymns, Sarasvatī carries the tripartite functions in her person at the same time as she constitutes the ideal woman, comprising the three functions of Vedic society.⁷⁸

Juno

Anāhitā and Sarasvatī have their counterpart in the Roman Juno, who has characteristics quite different from Hera in Greek mythology. The name Juno has an intricate etymology. It is a derivation from the stem *-iun* and of Indo-European origin, which is recovered in *iunix* "heifer" and in the comparative form *iunior* "very young", connoting "vital force". This is exemplified in the Roman age-class *iuvenis*, which characterised a man at his most vigorous age. The personified youth was represented by a certain goddess, *Juventas*.⁷⁹

Consequently, Juno's very name identifies her as the producing vitality of the third function. Further, she is invoked as *Lucina*, the goddess of childbirth, and in this aspect she receives sacrifices. Furthermore, Juno - with the by-name *Caprotina* - was celebrated by free women and servant girls under a fig tree.⁸⁰ This rite obviously expressed a coarse and strongly sexual symbolism, and it was accordingly considered to promote fertility⁸¹.

However, Juno possessed functions apart from sexuality and childbirth. In Lanuvium she was evoked as *JVNO S.M.R.*, short for *Juno Seipitei Matri Reginae*. Each of the three epithets represents one of the three functions: *Seipes* (or *Sospes* or *Sospita*) is the warlike personage, *Mater*

⁷⁵ *The Shatapatha Brāhmana*, III, 12, 7, 12-14.

⁷⁶ RV. 1.13.9 Idā, Sarasvatī, Matrī; 1.142.9 Bhārati, Idā Sarasvatī; 1.188.8 Bhārati, Idā, Sarasvatī; 2.3.8 Sarasvatī, Idā, Bhārati; 3.4.8. Bhārati, Idā, (Agni), Sarasvatī; 5.5.8. Idā, Sarasvatī, Matrī, 7.2.8. Bhārati, Idā, (Agni), Sarasvatī; 9.5.8. Bhārati, Sarasvatī, Idā; 10.70.8 Idā, 10.110.8 Bhārati, Idā, Sarasvatī.

⁷⁷ She is referred to as *vritrahī* "the killer of the enemy" in RV.2.1.11 cf. Dumézil, 1968, p.106 n.4.

⁷⁸ Dumézil, 1970, p.298f.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.291.

⁸⁰ *Nonae Caprotinae, quod eo die in Latio Iunone Caprotinae mulieris sacrificantur et caprifico faciunt; e caprifico adhibent virgam*, M. Terentius Varro, *De lingua latina*, 1910 ed. G. Goetz and F. Schoell, Leipzig, VI, 18.

⁸¹ H. Erkell, 1981, "Varroniana: Topographisches und Religionsgeschichtliches zu Varro, *De Lingua Latina*", *Opuscula Romana* XIII:2, pp.38-39.

the producer and Regina the priest-king. On coins, she bears the names of Juno Regina, Juno Martialis and Juno Lucina.⁸²

This mixture of characteristics evinced by Juno in the Roman sources has been regarded as a result of syncretism, i. e. the characteristics of minor deities have amalgamated in the shape of the Great Goddess. The pattern of the three functions is evident, though, and it represents an original expression the trivalent Indo-European Goddess, counterbalancing the triad of Jupiter-Mars-Quirinus in Rome.⁸³

Draupadī

The trivalent goddess illustrates the ideal woman in the same way as, for example, the warrior god represents the ideal warrior. This pattern is repeated in myths and it acquires special emphasis in the great Indian epic *Mahābhārata*. The five princes, the Pāndavas, the loss of their inheritance, their exile and the final struggle to regain power compose the plot. Still the stories about the Pāndavas are, as Stig Wikander pointed out and Dumézil went on to elaborate, based on old Indo-European myths. The princes have different fathers, five gods of the Vedic pantheon. Yudhisthira's father is Dharma, Right personified. Bhīma and Arjuna are brothers begotten by war gods of different character. Bhīma's father is the terrifying Vāyu, whereas the chivalrous Indra is Arjuna's. The twin brothers Sahadeva and Nakuntala were fathered by the twin Ashvins, gods of cattle-breeding and fertility. Thus each of the five Pāndavas, like their fathers, corresponds to one of the three functions: Yudhisthira to the first, Bhīma and Arjuna to the second and Sahadeva and Nakuntala to the third.⁸⁴

On one occasion, Arjuna competes in archery with other princes for the beautiful princess Draupadī. With an excellent shot he wins the hand of the princess, and their marriage is prepared. So far a traditional fairy-tale - now the puzzling elements make their entrance. Instead of a traditional wedding, another arrangement takes place: Draupadī should not belong to Arjuna alone but also to his brothers. Her father protests against this decision, finding that it amounts to promiscuity; but he accepts Arjuna's decision when he becomes aware of his daughter's identity and realises that the arrangement is an expression of the will of the gods.⁸⁵

Like the Pāndavas, Draupadī is of divine origin, born from the holy fire of sacrifice and thereby an incarnation of Srī, the goddess of riches and fertility. According to the myth, Srī came into being as a result of Prajāpati's austerity; but the gods plunder her attributes. They were restored to her when Prajāpati revealed that the gods would always receive them through sacrifices.⁸⁶

⁸² W. H. Roeder, 1894, *Griechische und Römische Mythologie*, s. v. Juno.

⁸³ Dumézil, 1970, p.298f.

⁸⁴ S. Wikander, 1944, "Mahābhāratas mytiska förutsättningar", *Religion och Bibel*, pp.27-39.

⁸⁵ *The Mahābhārata*, 1973, trans. ed. J. A. van Buitenen, Chicago, I, 187, 189.

⁸⁶ *The Shatapatha Brāhmana*, IX.4.3, 1-5. The goddess Srī in modern Hinduism and her connection with Lakshmi are a development of the goddess Srī in the Vedic literature; still, her origins are probably found in the pre-Vedic Indo-European tradition, in which goddesses with royal powers are common. The Irish goddess Flaith or Flaith Errenn is a good example, see A. Hildebeitel, 1986, *The ritual of battle* Ithaca NY; Kingsley, pp.19-21.

Besides representing the summit of the royal power, Śrī possesses special activities such as *tejas*, "spiritual and magical power", *indriya*, "physical power" and *pashu*, "cattle", each representing one of the tripartite functions.⁸⁷ When Draupadī's origin is revealed⁸⁸, her father legitimates the polyandric wedding and she marries the five brothers in turn.⁸⁹ In the epic Draupadī is a model of the ideal woman, thanks to her mild and devoted character, and her divine origin is accentuated in her marriage to the Pāndavas, who represent the three functions. Nevertheless, the goddess Śrī-Draupadī also conveys the three functions in her person and she counterbalances them against the male party through her marriage. The peculiar marriage of the Pāndavas is therefore not to be interpreted as a testimony to polyandry, but as a reflection of the old Indo-European myths about the trivalent goddess and her relation to the male gods.

Sætanaë

The Caucasian Ossets, people living in the present republic of Azerbaïdžhan in the former USSR, their language belonging to the Iranian branch of Indo-European languages, possess a rich literary tradition of tales and narratives about different clans and their relations, published by Dumézil under the title *Légendes sur les Nartes*.⁹⁰ These narratives are concerned with the Nartes, a band of heroes divided into three clans. In the clan of Æxargæghtæ, a girl is born in a supernatural way from her mother's grave, and the baby is discovered by the evil and wily Syrdon, the Ossetian counterpart of the Nordic Loki.⁹¹ She is called Sætanaë or merely "the Princess" and "she became so beautiful and so intelligent that her very appearance changed the darkness into broad daylight and her words were sharper than a sword and more penetrating than an arrow".⁹² In her person, she comprises the spirit of her family; she is beautiful, intelligent and industrious, a model of the ideal woman in Caucasian society. This is exemplified in one of her myths, where a famine threatening the people is avoided owing to her prudence.⁹³

In the legendary context of the Nartes, this girl is called a princess. Still, she possesses some features typical of the Great Goddess, acting autonomously and authoritatively. Sætanaë's brilliant characteristics have given rise to the idea, represented by some Russian scholars, that she is a survival from an earlier matriarchate. She lacks real political power in her society, however, although she rules indirectly with great potency.⁹⁴

The dark aspect in Sætanaë's character is her passionate love for her brother Uryzmæg. When he plans to marry a girl called Elda, Sætanaë, still a child, starts to grow very fast. In a short time she becomes a beautiful woman, with hair like gold, eyes glowing like coals and an excellent figure. She frankly asks her brother to marry her, since she

⁸⁷ From *The Shatapatha Brāhmana* 13.2.6.3 and 7; cf. Dumézil, 1968, p.118.

⁸⁸ *The Mahābhārata* I, 13, 189.

⁸⁹ *The Mahābhārata*, I, 13, 190.

⁹⁰ G. Dumézil, 1930, *Légendes sur les Nartes*, Paris.

⁹¹ Dumézil, 1959, pp.125ff.

⁹² Dumézil, 1971a, p.551.

⁹³ Loc. cit.

⁹⁴ Dumézil, 1971a, p.552.

wants no other husband. Uryzmæg blushes violently, his hair stands on end with the shock and he objects against the suggestion. He marries Elda, but after the wedding he departs on a long journey. After one year, he sends a message that he is returning. With great anxiety, Elda prepares the drink with which he is going to be welcomed, a fermented beverage called *rong*. The *rong* does not ferment, owing to Sætanae, "the guile of heaven, the witch of earth".⁹⁵ In her desperation Elda appeals to Sætanae, who at first acts very unfeelingly, but then promises help on condition that Elda change clothes with her. Dressed as Elda, Sætanae has no difficulty in getting into bed with the returning Uryzmæg; moreover, she extends the night with the aid of her magic skills. Meanwhile, Elda realises the perfidy in Sætanae's actions, and in vain she tries to enter the bed-chamber. The lewd deception and Uryzmæg's infidelity kill her, an incident which Sætanae has foreseen. After this night, Sætanae claims her right to become Uryzmæg's official wife.

Like the Pāndavas in the *Mahābharāta*, Sætanae infringes common law when she marries, albeit her crime is incest instead of promiscuity. The incestuous relationship between Sætanae and her brother could also be compared to Freyja's relation with Freyr and to practices among the Vanir. Neither the incestuous relationship nor the polyandric marriage serves as a testimony concerning current matrimonial laws; they reflect mythical relations, which have to be interpreted in a symbolic way.⁹⁶

Later Sætanae's beauty excited a shepherd to masturbation, and his semen fell on a stone which subsequently bore the most glorious hero of the Nartes, Soslan-Sosryko. Sætanae accepted him as her son with the words "my son, whom I did not bear". Sosryko became the most famous of the Nartes, and his fate is quite comparable with that of Baldr in Old Norse mythology.⁹⁷

Sætanae obviously possesses the trivalent functions in her person. She is a princess and a magician; she is aggressive and warlike; and she possesses beauty, gold and riches, as well as the ability to avert famine. Her marriage to Uryzmæg might be considered immoral; still, it gives her the highest rank the society, which along with her other qualities makes her the perfect wife of a hero and the complete heroine.⁹⁸

The episode of the fermenting of the drink in the legends of the Nartes could be compared with a similar episode in *Hálfs Saga and Hálfsrekka*, in the first chapter, where the two wives of king Alrekr compete with each other. Alrekr decided that he would favour the one who brewed the best beer. One of his wives invoked Freyja for help, the other Óðinn. Óðinn spat in the cauldron, and this beer duly became the best; but he wanted to have "what was between the cauldron and her", i. e. her expected child.⁹⁹ This child was to become king Víkarr, who was -

⁹⁵ Ibid. p.556.

⁹⁶ See the preceding chapter about the Vanir. The incest motif could be an influence from the Zoroastrian *xvētōdah* -marriage, "next-to-kin" marriage. This is described in, for example, the myth where the goddess Yimək seduces her brother Yim. The practice of incest flourished during the Sassanids and had its roots among the Magis, who originated from Media. Opinions about their religion differs. See N. Sidler, 1971, *Zur Universalität des Inzesttabus*, Stuttgart, pp.119-125.

⁹⁷ Dumézil, 1959, p.129.

⁹⁸ Loc. cit.

⁹⁹ *Hálfs Saga ok Hálfsrekka*, 1981, ed. H. Seelow, Reykjavík, pp.169-170.

according to several sagas - sacrificed to Óðinn. The main structures are almost identical: two women competing for a man, and the woman who received assistance in her brewing efforts was actually compelled to pay a high price for it.

The Trivalent Freyja

It is not possible to conclude whether these similarities between Freyja and Sætanae are coincidental or not, since the incest motif appears in myths all over the world. More conspicuous is Freyja's resemblance to the Indo-European goddesses in their connections with the three functions, reflected in Loki's other accusation according to which that every one of the gods had been Freyja's lover (Ls 30). This poem, although composed late, carries a lot of myths that are changed by Loki's evil tongue into scorn of the assembled gods and goddesses. Her incestuous relationship with Freyr coincides with the behaviour of the Vanir. We never hear anything about her love-affairs with the other gods, though; yet they must have existed.

In addition, it is quite clear, that Freyja, like the other Indo-European Great Goddesses, embodies the trivalent functions. When she appears as the great sorceress and the sacrificial priestess, she acts in the first, magico-religious, function. As the great valkyrie she is combined with the second, and as love goddess and the owner of gold and riches she represents the third. Remarkably enough, Dumézil omits these facts and declares that the warrior function is missing among the Nordic goddesses, since this function was connected with the first function among the Germans. For this reason the positions of the goddess were divided into two categories: Frigg, represented the priest-king as the magical Óðinn's wife, whereas the god in the third function, Freyr lent his name to a female counterpart, Freyja, rich and pleasure-loving.¹⁰⁰

There are two principal objections to Dumézil's line of argument: First, according to the available sources, Freyja displays other qualities than the third function. Second, the hypothesis that Freyja is derived from Freyr is unsupported by philological evidence. These names are, as we mentioned earlier, appellations, meaning "the Lord" and "the Lady" respectively, which probably conceal the real names of the deities.¹⁰¹

Freyja's belongingness to the traditional Indo-European pattern of the trivalent goddess explains those various qualities of hers which prevented us from identifying her merely as a fertility goddess. Besides, the application of this perspective throws light on some other questions about the relation between Freyja and the other goddesses in the Old Norse pantheon. Since the Indo-European Great Goddess usually appeared on her own in her connections with the male representatives of the three functions, it is possible to assume that many of the obscure deities enumerated by Snorri are actually aspects of Freyja, worshipped under another name, or merely hypostases of her different qualities.

100 Dumézil, 1970, p.300.

101 AnEWb, s.v. Freyr, p. 142. About the connections between Fría, Frija, Frigg and Freyja, see p.104 below.

Freyja, Frigg and the other Goddesses in Old Norse Mythology

Snorri's Classification of the Gods and the Goddesses

It is obvious that Snorri Sturluson obviously attempts to create a classification of Old Norse religion in his *Gylfaginning* when he begins to describe the creation of the universe and its gods, goddesses, giants and spirits. He starts his description with the male gods: *Tólf eru Æsir goðkunnigir* (Glgf.19), "there are twelve Æsir from the family of gods ", and a characterisation of each of them follows, Óðinn being the first (19). Then fourteen gods are enumerated: Þórr (20), Baldr (21), Njörðr (22), Freyr (and Freyja, 23), Týr (24), Bragi (25), Heimdallr (26), Høðr (27), Víðarr (28) Áli or Váli (29), Ullr (30), Forseti (31) and Loki (32). We may observe that many gods are not mentioned, for instance the brothers of Óðinn, Vili and Vé and the sons of Þórr, Magni and Móði. Borr, Búri, Dagr, Dellingr, Hœnir, Ægir, Hermóðr, Byggvi, Lóðurr are also missing. The number twelve is special, however, and could be due to an influence from Mediterranean culture with the twelve tribes of Israel, twelve Olympic gods, etc. Still, we should remember that the number twelve recurs in Old Norse mythology in the twelve names of Óðinn (Glgf.3), the twelve chairs of honour (Glgf.14), the twelve abodes of the gods in *Grímnismál* (Grm.4-17) and the opening of *Völuspá inn skamma*, only eleven gods being present after the death of Baldr (Hdl.30).

The number twelve does not appear in Jafnhár's reply: *Eigi eru ásynjurnar óhelgari ok eigi megu þær minna*, "The goddesses are not less holy and have no less power" (Glgf.19). When we investigate the goddesses in chapter 34, we find 16 names: Frigg, Sága, Eir, Gefjun, Fulla, Freyja, Sjöfn, Lofn, Vár, Vör, Syn, Hlín, Snotra, Gná, Sól and Bil. The next chapter, 35, names 16 Valkyries: Hrist, Mist, Skeggiöld, Skogul, Hildir, Prúðr, Hlökk, Herfjotur, Gøll, Geirahöð, Randgríðr, Ráðgríðr, Reginleif, Gunnr and Róta (and the youngest norn Skuld), finally introducing the two wives of Óðinn, Jörð and Rindr, too. The enumeration omits Sif, Sigyn, Iðunn, Nanna, Skaði and Gerðr. The goddesses Sjöfn, Lofn, Vör, Syn, Snotra and Gná are fairly unknown, except in poetry where they are represented as kennings.

A Patriarchal Structure?

Clearly Snorri arranges the goddesses in a different way from the gods. Although he omits a number of deities in both cases, he puts several unfamiliar goddesses together with those of higher rank. For what reason does Snorri arrange the goddesses in this way? Did he possess some information about them that has disappeared in the course of time? Does this organisation of the goddesses in *Gylfaginning* have any additional implications?

These questions, and quite a few others, were raised in the essay "The Position of the Individual Gods and Goddesses in Various Types of Sources

- with Special Reference to the Female Divinities" by Else Mundal.¹ She observes that Snorri's family structure concerning the goddesses differs from that of Tacitus, who tells of the worship of one single goddess, Nerthus. Snorri arranges the gods and the goddesses into a patriarchal family with Óðinn as its head, whereas other sources - especially the toponymic material - suggest quite different orders of precedence among the gods and goddesses, including Freyr, Freyja and Þórr.²

These observations, along with Snorri's method of arranging the goddesses, imply a deliberate classification where a female deity or mortal is defined by reference to her husband's position in the patriarchal system. The married goddesses Sif, Iðunn, Nanna, Skaði and Gerðr, all belonging to the group of Ásynjur (Sksm.1), are only mentioned in connection with their husbands as one attribute among the others, a common custom which does not only prevail in the Old Norse family structure.

Freyja and Frigg both diverge from this pattern. It is true that they are presented in connection with husband (Glgf.19) and brother (Glgf.23) respectively, like the other goddesses we have mentioned above. Still, they appear in the enumeration of the Ásynjur in chapter 34, reserved for the unmarried goddesses. This means that Freyja and Frigg assume a special position in the system, partly being connected with a male god and partly quite independent. We may ask if this double position is the work of Snorri, acting as an organising mythographer, who is on the one hand obliged to admit the independence of the two great Ásynjur, but does on the other arrange them in a patriarchal structure. Such examples are discernible in the Greek pantheon, where the great goddesses Hera, Athena and Artemis were attached to Zeus as wife and daughters in the mythology, although their cult and ancient rituals rather demonstrate their autonomous power. If we assume that the Great Goddess of the North underwent the same process, we find that Frigg's marriage to Óðinn and her role as mother to Baldr is proven in earlier sources than Snorri's, like *The Poetic Edda* and *The History of the Langobards*. It is more doubtful whether Freyja's husband, the absent Óðr existed before Snorri's Edda (p.87 above) or whether the same applies to her daughter Hnoss, who must be a construction of one mythographer, the goddess' qualities having been assigned to a minor deity.

Investigations of the myths of different times show that neither Freyja nor Frigg matches the qualities of the ideal wife in a true patriarchy. They both act too independently and behave too licentiously. Freyja's amorous exploits are notorious, but she, and no one else, determines her choice of sexual partner, as *Brymskviða* informs us. Frigg committed adultery with Óðinn's two brothers, among others, and behaved downright disloyally to her husband in *Grímnismál*. These and other more concrete similarities have revealed to us that the two goddesses have the same origin, comprising two aspects of the Great Goddess, which eventually became various myths about the mourning mother, Frigg, and the voluptuous love goddess Freyja.

1 E. Mundal, 1990, "The Position of the Individual Gods and Goddesses in Various Types of Sources - with Special Reference to the Female Divinities", *Old Nordic and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place Names*, ed. T. Ahlbäck, Åbo, pp.294-315.

2 Ibid. p.296.

Goddesses known from other Contexts

Hlín is a byname of Frigg's, as we read in *Völuspá* (53), and the same concerns Sága, who resides in Sökkvabekkr, "the sunken rill", corresponding to Fensalir, "the Houses in the Fens" according to *Grímnismál*. Sága's name means "the Seeress", and it should be noted that in the Indo-European languages the verb "see" is, in many cases, equal to "know", hinting at supernatural knowledge. The gift of knowledge of the future belongs to Frigg (Ls.29). Óðinn refers to it in the opening of *Vafþrúðnismál*, and it is reflected in the prose prefacing *Grímnismál*, where the divine couple were seated in Hliðskjalf and looked out over all the worlds.³ We may therefore conclude that Hlín and Sága are merely bynames of Frigg's.

Knowledge of the future is another of Gefjun's qualities, according to *Lokasenna* 21, a strophe whose content is similar to that of the text about Frigg. However, Gefjun offers a special problem when we gather the available information about her from the sources. Unlike the other goddesses, she is not married to a god; and Snorri calls her *mær* "maiden", adding *hennu þjóna þær er meyjar andaz* "those who die as maidens serve her" (Glgf.34).⁴ The young maiden's word in the *Völsa þátr*⁵ could be explained as a rejection of the fertility rite and its consequences⁶:

*Þess sver ek við Gefjun/ok við gudin önnur/ at ek nauðig tek vit nosa
raudum.*

I swear by Gefjun and the other gods that I take the red phallus
being forced to do so.

Gefjun has been regarded as a chaste goddess by the Christian translators, who sometimes interpret her name as Athena,⁷ sometimes as Vesta.⁸ This notion is, however, contradicted by other records concerning Gefjun. She is a key character in the beginning of *Gylfaginning*, appearing as a *farandi kona*, "a tramp", to whom king Gylfi gives plough-land as a token of his gratitude for her *skemtan*, "amusement", which undoubtedly involves a sexual service.⁹ Once she has secured this promise, she bears four sons to a giant - really unusual behaviour for a goddess - and transforms them into oxen to carry away the land, which becomes Sjælland (Glgf.1). In *Heimskringla*, the story has another framework: Óðinn sends Gefjun to obtain more land, and after that she marries his son Skjöldr (Hkr.5).

The accusation made by Loki in *Lokasenna* constitute yet another rebuttal of Gefjun's supposed chastity:

3 A complete survey of the problem is given by Steinsland, 1989, p.93. ff.

4 Holtsmark suggests that this phrase displays an example of Snorri's tendency to highlight the perversion of the pagan gods. The word *þjóna* actually belongs to the sermon of the Virgin Mary, but Snorri uses the word in relation to the Holy Virgin's opposite. Holtsmark, 1964, p.71.

5 *Flateyjarbók* II, p. 334.

6 Cf. G. Steinsland ok K. Vogt, 1981, "Aukin ertu Uolse ok vpp vm tekinn": En religionshistorisk analyse av *Völsa þátr* i *Flateyjarbók*", ANF, pp.87-106.

7 *Trójumanna saga*, in *Hauksbók*, 1892-96, ed. Det Konglige Nordiske Oldskrifts-selskab, Copenhagen, p.199.

8 *Agnesar saga meyjar in Heilagra manna sögur* I, 1877, Christiania, p. 16,34 ; B. Carlé, 1985, *Jomfru-fortellingen*, Odense, p. 73.

9 M. Clunies Ross, 1978, "The myth of Gefjun and Gylfi and its function in Snorra Edda and Heimskringla", ANF 93, pp.44-66.

sveinn inn hvíti/ er þér sigli gaf /ok þú lagðir lær yfir (Ls.20).

The white young man who gave you the adornment and you threw your thighs about (him).

These notes regarding Gefjun's sexual activities place her more in the sphere of the fertility deities than in that of the virgin goddesses. There is, however, a possibility of connecting these two extremes, if we compare her with those goddesses in Classical Antiquity whose byname *parthenos* did not refer to the goddess' status with regard to sexual experience, but to her being independent, i. e. without a husband. Many goddesses were evoked as *parthenoi*, in spite of their love affairs and their children.¹⁰ Later, Christianity added another aspect to the words *parthenos* and *parthenogenesis*, emphasising the virginity as one of the highest virtues. If we interpret Gefjun's position along these lines it becomes comprehensible that Snorri calls her "a maiden" concerning her position outside the patriarchal system. It is, moreover, quite plausible that Gefjun, as an aspect of the Great Goddess, was specially worshipped by unmarried girls, just as Artemis was in Ancient Greece.

Appearing as an autonomous fertility goddess, Gefjun possesses qualities which are identical to Freyja's in many ways: she receives the dead; there is the story of the adornment and an ability to perform magic actions is suggested in the Gylfi-episode; and in her name which is similar to the byname of Freyja, Gefn (Glgf.34). Finally, the late *Breta-sögur* reflects some elements from Gefjun, telling the story of how the Roman Brutus, a great-grandchild of Aeneas, who finds a sanctuary on a certain island, Liogocia, along with the three gods Saturn, Jove and Gefjun, also mentioned as Óðinn, Þórr and Gefjun. Brutus sacrifices a cow to Gefjun in a traditional manner, walks around the image and asks her about the future. He sleeps in the temple and the goddess appears before him and promises him a kingdom, mightier than other countries.¹¹

The episode echoes the ancient custom of incubation, i.e. sleeping in the temple in order to reveal the will of the gods.¹² On the other hand, the sacrifice seems to follow the Old Norse ritual of *blót*.¹³ The sacrifice of a cow can be compared with *Hyndluljóð*(10), where *Óttar rauð i nýju nauta blóði* " Óttar reddens it (the altar) with blood of cattle". The receiver of the sacrifice is Freyja. The triad of gods in *Breta-sögur*, involving Óðinn, Þórr and Gefjun, can be compared with the triad of the temple of Uppsala according to Adam of Bremen, with Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr. It is obvious that Gefjun in this connection stands for Freyja, who represents the third function here .

Eir and Fulla seem to hold inferior positions. Eir appears in *Fjolsvinsmál* as one of Menglǫð's maidens on Lyfjaberg, the healing mountain. Snorri calls her "the best of doctors", which harmonises with her name, meaning "grace, help". Thus she definitely conforms to the qualities of the Great Goddess as helper against illness and misery. It is

¹⁰ See G. Dellling, s.v. *parthenos*, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Stuttgart.

¹¹ *Hauksbók* p.241.

¹² M. Nilsson, 1955, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion* I, München, p.169.

¹³ de Vries I, p.414.

therefore reasonable to believe that Eir is simply such a quality, which, detached from the goddess herself, developed into a minor goddess.

Fulla is more active in the few myths where she appears. She is Frigg's servant, who carries her shrine, takes care of her shoes and is cogisant of her secret plots. Behind this attendant figure, we discern a more independent character. In the *Second Galder of Merseburg*, Fulla/Volla is mentioned as a sister of Frigg:... *þu beguolen Frija, Volla era suister* "then Frija the sister of Volla charmed it".

Volla seems to have a Roman counterpart in Abundantia, "the impersonated abundance". This figure survived in folklore as a giver of food and wine under the name of Abundia, described by the bishop Guilielmus d'Auvergne in 1248, or as dame Abonde in the *Roman de la Rose*. Abundia was especially worshipped by women, who believed that she visited their larders at nights. They would leave the lids off receptables there so that this goddess would be able to eat and drink from the food and wine a form of hospitality which would ensure that prosperity and good fortune remained in the house.¹⁴ Fulla-Abundantia maintains the functions of production that belonged to the Vanir, and she is probably another aspect of Freyja.

Gná, whose name derives from **ga-naha* "abundance",¹⁵ seems to be identical with Fulla. Her role as Frigg's messenger could be an invention of Snorri's, corresponding to that of Iris, the messenger of Hera. The interchange of strophes between her and the anonymous Vanir has nothing to do with the present context and we are not told of any other messenger of Frigg's, besides Fulla in *Grímnismál*. Gná is better placed among the Valkyries in the next chapter.

The appellation Freyja, "the Lady" should hence constitute a covert reference to both Frigg and Gefjun and to the two more shadowy deities Eir and Fulla. Frigg and Freyja were worshipped as separate goddesses in the last days of the Old Norse religion, described by Snorri, whereas the independence of Gefjun, Fulla and Eir is more dubious; they seem to belong to the variety names connected with Freyja.

Vár is mentioned in *Þrymskviða* 32, when the wedding between Þrym and Þórr, disguised as Freyja, is going to take place: *Vígið ok saman Várar hendi!* "Consecrate us together with the hand of Vár (Prk.30).

The phrase echoes a matrimonial formula, and as Snorri tells us:

She hears the oaths of mankind and personal vows (*einkamál*) which women and men give each other. For this reason things of these kinds are called *várar*. She takes revenge on those who break them (Gljf.35).

Vár is the guardian of the matrimonial oath, and her name probably still appears in the marriage service in the lutheran Swedish Church: *Som ett vårdtecken giver jag dig denna ring* "as a token I give thee this ring", where *vårdtecken* used to be spelt *vahrtekn*, meaning "a token of Vár".¹⁶

¹⁴ J. Grimm, 1954, *Deutsche Mythologien*, Tübingen, pp. 237 ff., 256, 778; *Histoire de la France religieuse* 1, 1988, ed. J. Le Goff et R. Rémond, Seuil, pp.530-532.

¹⁵ AnEWb s.v. *gná*, p.177.

¹⁶ *ok til itt warteekn giffuer iach tich thenna ring*, Olaus Petri, *Een handbook på Swensko*, see H. Ljungberg, 1936, "Vårdtecken, en liturgisk-etymologisk undersökning", *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift*,

Jörð and Rindr are wives of Óðinn and mothers of Þórr and Váli, respectively. These goddesses have their own myths and are neither hypostases nor abstractions of the Great Goddess, unlike most of the enumerated goddesses in ch.34.

The two goddesses Sól and Bil are added to such Ásynjur Jörð and Rindr after the enumeration of the Valkyries in chapter 35. They do not seem to belong to the same range as the others: Sól and Bil represent the sun and the moon. Bil is connected with Hjúki (Glgf.10), meaning "increasing" and should thus represent the waning moon. She carries obviously unfavourable aspects, among others the meaning "injury". My own suggestion is that Bil represents menstruation and that she is therefore mentioned in this connection together with the Ásynjur, whereas Hjúki is for some unknown reasons excluded from the enumerated male gods.⁷

The Unknown Goddesses

As guardian of the matrimonial oath, Vár is thus connected with the unknown goddess Sjöfn, "the betrothed".¹⁸ Sjöfn turns men's and women's thoughts towards love, which alludes to Freyja's functions, one of which is that of Lofn, a name derived from *lof* "promise, permission",¹⁹ who - according to Snorri - the deity to invoke when a man and a woman are not permitted to marry. The phrase *Hon er svá mild ok góð til áheita...til manna samgangs* "She is so mild and good to invoke.... for the marriage of mankind" echoes what is said about Freyja, *Á hana er gott at heita til ásta*, "It is good to evoke her in love affairs".

The two deities Vör and Syn, meaning "Carefulness" and "Denial", contain another kind of abstraction which should be viewed in conjunction with Snotra, "Wisdom", corresponding to the cautious ideal of the wise man in *Hávamál*. Frigg and Freyja have this quality of wisdom - they act carefully with shrewdness and guile, outwitting kings and gods, even Óðinn himself.

Freyja, "the Lady", behind whom another name is concealed, was probably invoked in several forms, analogously to many other Great Goddesses. These names were later apprehended as independent goddesses, an evolution analogous to that of Athena's byname Hygieia, who became the special goddess of health, and Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth, originally one aspect of Artemis. An indication which supports our thesis that one and only one goddess is concealed behind the manifold rather vaguely outlined deities is found in the *Gylfaginning* observation according to which Freyja used to appear under different names (Glgf 34).

Other evidence which tends to confirm this thesis about one Great Goddess is provided by the fact that if we exclude Freyja and Frigg from the enumeration in chapter 34, twelve names remain, comparable to the twelve names of Óðinn in chapter 3 and related to the number twelve as connected with the world of the gods. What was originally a correspondence between the Great God and the Great Goddess and their

Stockholm, pp.281-298. Other scholars interpret "vårdtecken" as originating from German *Wahrzeichen* "a token of truth". The etymology is, however, uncertain.

⁷ About Bil and Hjúki, see A. Holtsmark, 1945, "Bil og Hjúke", *Maal og Minne*, pp.139-154.

¹⁸ AnEWb s.v.Sjöfn, p.479 and *sjafni*, p.428. The etymology is uncertain.

¹⁹ AnEWb s.v. *lof*, Lofn, p.363.

respectively hypostases, was altered by Snorri, the mythographer, who preferred to present the epithets of the goddess as independent deities. This explanation answers our question as to why such important goddesses as Skaði, Gerðr, Nanna and Sif are omitted from Snorri's enumeration, other, unknown deities featuring in their places, together with the dominant Freyja-Frigg.

Still, the dual nature of the Great Goddess of the North is remarkable, since she appears partly as the wife belonging to a patriarchal structure, partly as the independent goddess of several love stories, a division that might have been emphasised by Snorri. On the other hand, we have mentioned that Frigg's-Freyja's relation to Óðinn-Óðr is not a work by Snorri or by any of his contemporaries. Neither is it a result of an evolution from a matriarchal society into a patriarchal one, nor evidence of an addition of two religious systems, since there is nothing in our sources to support such developments. The comparative material supplies us with parallels. They follow the typical pattern of the Indo-European Great Goddesses when connected to different male gods, simultaneously being apprehended as loving wives of Óðinn-Óðr. In time, the nature of the independent goddess, compounded of many qualities, became incomprehensible. It is, however, obvious that Snorri, arranging the gods and the goddesses of the pre-Christian beliefs into a mythology, still makes an effort to preserve the special qualities of the Great Goddess, although they emerge as contradictory and puzzling figures. The reconstruction, based on our knowledge of the Indo-European myths and their structures, affords us an opportunity to interpret paradoxical elements and the complex nature of the Great Goddesses.

Freyja and Frigg

It has to be pointed out that the name Freyja derives from the same stem as Freyr < *Fraujaz, meaning "the Lord". Still, these appellations - although phonetically close to Frīg, Frīa or Frīja, which are older variants of Frigg - do not originate from the same stem. Frīja is derived from the same stem as the verb *frjá* meaning "to love", related to Skr. *priya* "the beloved". It is, however, possible to bridge the gap between Frigg and Freyja using the phonetic laws of the Old Norse language, where *-ggj* is replaced by *-yyj*.²⁰ The form used by Adam of Bremen, Fricco, instead of Freyr, furthermore indicates the affinity between the two names. Despite the different etymologies, there must have existed a likeness between Frigg and Freyja, parallel to that of Fricco and Freyr, which goes back to a common origin in the Great Goddess, whose appellations were both "beloved" and "the Lady".

There are close points of similarity between Freyja and the other Great Goddess in the Nordic Pantheon, Frigg - so close, in fact, that we have to face the question whether they are separate goddesses or two aspects of the same goddess. The problem seems already to have existed during the decline of the Old Norse religion, and when, in the thirteenth century, Snorri Sturluson classifies the gods and the goddesses in his *Gylfaginning*, he is apparently in trouble when discussing relations between Frigg and Freyja.

²⁰ R. Iverssen, 1961, *Norrøn Gramatikk*, Oslo, p.54.

Snorri states that Frigg, related to the other Ásynjur, æzt, "ranked as the first" among the goddesses. Freyja is mentioned as the sixth and *tígnuz með Frigg*, "the most prominent together with Frigg"(Glgf.34). However, in an earlier passage he characterises Freyja as *ágætust af ásynjum*, "the most excellent of the goddesses", a parallel to Freyr as *enn ágætasti af ásum* (Glgf.24).

There are other obscurities in Snorri's *Edda* concerning the characters of Freyja and Frigg, for example when he writes about Óðinn:

Frigg is his wife, and she knows the fate of everyone, although she does not foretell, as it is here said that Óðinn himself spoke to the áss named Loki:

...I think that Frigg knows all the fates,
although she says nothing (Glgf.19).

This strophe concerning Frigg is identical with the one in *Lokasenna*, when Freyja recites:

You are furious, Loki, when you now tell us
terrible, evil things. I think that Frigg knows
all the fates, although she says nothing (Ls.29).

Earlier in the poem, Óðinn utters a similar characteristic about Gefjun:

You are furious, Loki, and out of your senses ...
when you make Gefjun angry because she knows
as well as I do all the fates of men (Ls.21).

Lokasenna belongs to the poems of *The Poetic Edda*, although its age and content have been much debated. The circumstances under which Snorri quoted the stanza in his *Edda* show that this poem, or the original version of it had been composed earlier. Obviously, these similarities had confused Snorri to that extent that he overlooked the fact that Óðinn's words concerned Gefjun and that it was Freyja who made the characterisation about Frigg.

Snorri's problem concerning the different goddesses is not unique, but it explicitly hints at the proximity of the two goddesses, which he must have observed when he systematised his own sources. But in his role of mythographer, Snorri makes a difference between them, when describing Freyja as the voluptuous Vanadís quite distinct from Frigg, the queen of the gods and the mourning mother of Baldr. Standing on a basis of Medieval erudition, and relying on a model of the Classical Roman mythology, he made Frigg a counterpart of Juno and Freyja of Venus. This method is obvious already in *Prologus* of the *Edda*, where Snorri gives the Nordic gods a starting-point at Troy, a device paralleled in the Roman national tradition, manifest in Virgil's *Aeneid*, with its focus on the semi-divine Aeneas' emigration to Italy and the coming of the Magna Mater.²¹

²¹ Näsström, 1990, pp.37ff.

Thus far Snorri. In other sources, we are able to detect more similarities between Freyja and Frigg than direct differences. Freyja promotes love and procreation among mankind, as we have already seen from a multitude of examples. Frigg fulfils the same office, when she helps the childless king and queen in the *Völsunga saga* by sending them an apple that resulted in (male) off-spring.²² We have mentioned the exhausted mother who blesses her helper, Oddrún, with the wish that Frigg and Freyja may assist her in her own childbirth, "Like you have saved me from dangerous distress"(Od.9) - which shows that both Freyja and Frigg were invoked as helpers in childbirth.²³

Fertility goddesses usually possess an active potency in their own sexual life. This is reflected in *Lokasenna*, where Loki insults the gods and goddesses at the banquet of Ægir and attacks Freyja: she is the object of every kind of shame, as all the present Æsir and Elves have been her lechers (Ls.30).

What Loki insinuates seems to be a contribution to the scandalous chronicles about Freyja's numerous lovers, but at the same time it hints at the mythological aspect of the trivalent goddess in her relation to the three functions. Like Frigg Freyja appears as Óðinn's wife or beloved (see p.105), and Loki accuses her of intercourse with her own brother Freyr. The relation between Freyja/Frigg and Þórr seems harder to prove, although Þórr's wife Sif, who appears as rather an insignificant personage, bears some resemblance to Freyja: she is the object of the giant Hrúgnir's desire, and her hair is of pure gold - a parallel to Freyja's tears. In his records of folklore in Wärend in Sweden, Hyltén-Cavallius has noted that as late as the mid-19th century, people would celebrate the Thursday, called *signa Thore-Gud ok Frigge*, "Hallow the god Þórr and Frigge". Frigg was, according to popular belief, the wife of Þórr and accompanied him on his travels - a conception also found in other parts of Sweden and Denmark.²⁴

Like Freyja, Frigg is accused by Loki of being promiscuous and furthermore unfaithful towards her husband:

Be silent Frigg! You are the maiden (*mær*) of Fjörgyn and you have always lusted for men, as at the moment when you, the wife of Viðrir, permitted Vé and Vili to rest at your bosom (Ls. 26).

In the quoted passage Loki calls Frigg "Fjörgyn's maiden", i.e. Fjörgyn's daughter, and Snorri refers to Frigg as *dóttur Fjörgyns* "Fjörgyn's daughter"(Glgf.8). The male Fjörgynn is probably connected to a female Fjörgyn, another name for Jörð; and the two names simply mean "earth".²⁵ This pair, Fjörgynn-Fjörgyn, parallel to Njörðr-*Njörð and Freyr-Freyja, intimates an affiliation on Frigg's part to the Vanir, if not an identification with them.²⁶

²² *The Saga of the Volsungs*, 1990, p.36.

²³ About Freyja's activity in childbirth see p.00

²⁴ G. Hyltén-Cavallius, 1972, *Wärend och Wirdarna*, Copenhagen, pp.232-233. Ohrt, 1927, p.290.

²⁵ Þórr is called *Fjörgynar burr* (Vsp.56, Hrbl.56) and *Jarðar burr* (Prk.1). *Iorðin var dóttir hans ok kona hans, af henne gerði hann hinn fyrsta soninn, en þat er Ásaþórr* (Glgf. 9) which makes Óðinn the father and husband of Jörð.

²⁶ For discussion: de Vries, 1970 II, pp.334-335; Lorenz, 1984, p.178; Sahlgren, 1918, pp.28-40 suggests a couple Loðurr-Loðkona, based on certain place-names. Loðurr was the god who gave Ask and Embla *lit* "colour" and *læ*, a hapax l., interpreted as "vital warmth", sometimes as

Neither are Loki's insinuations about Frigg's adultery incorrect. Vili and Vé were, according to tradition, the brothers of Óðinn. They cooperated in the cosmogony and perhaps also in the creation of man, using the names of Lóðurr and Hœnir, a triad repeated in Hár, Jafnhár and Þriðji (Glgf.2, Glgf.5., Vsp.4, 18).²⁷ Once Óðinn had disappeared for a long time, Snorri narrates, and his brothers shared his power and his wife too (Hkr.3). Hallfreðr Vandræðaskáld alludes to this in the kenning *frumverr Friggjar* "Frigg's original, or first husband" (Lausavísa 7).²⁸

Lovemaking for gold

In Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, a similar scandal is reported. When king Othinus (Óðinn) receives a golden image on which a lot of adornments are suspended, his wife becomes possessed by desire:

His wife Frigg, desiring to walk abroad more bedizened, brought in smiths to strip the statue of its gold. Odin had them hanged, and then, setting the image on a plinth, by a marvellous feat of workmanship made it respond with a voice to human touch. Subordinating her husband's divine honours to the splendour of her own apparel, Frigg submitted herself to the lust of one of her servants; by his cunning the effigy was demolished and the gold which had been devoted to public idolatry went to serve her personal pleasure. This woman, unworthy of a deified consort, felt no scruples about pursuing unchastity, provided she could more speedily enjoy what she coveted. Need I add anything but to say that such a god deserved such a wife?²⁹

When Othinus discovers the adultery, he takes himself off in dishonour and humiliation and another king, Mithothyn, takes his place. As several scholars have noticed, the Saxo-episode contains many well-known episodes from Old Norse mythology. The golden statue has its counterpart in the golden adornment of Brísinga men, as well as in Mimir's head, which talked to Óðinn. Mimir's head was returned from the Vanir precisely in the same way as the statue was sent to the Nordic King. The statue - belonging to the wizard Mithothyn - corrupts Othinus' wife in the same way as the Vanir did when they sent Gullveig "Drunkenness of Gold" to the Æsir, according to *Völuspá* (23). The reign of Mithothyn reflects another myth: the obscure episode when Vili and Vé reigned and took Frigg as their wife.³⁰

This appetite for gold, for which the goddess lends herself to adultery with men of lower social rank, is repeated in an episode about Freyja in *Flateyjarbók*.

"seminal fluid". See also G. Steinsland, 1983, "Antropogonimytten i Völuspá. En tekst- og traditjonskritiskt analyse", *ANF*, pp.80-107.

²⁷ For other interpretations, see Lorenz, 1984, p.146. The three brothers' names (V)óðan, Vili and Vé, alliterate, and they obviously belong to the same sacred sphere, the magico-religious one. Vili probably derives from the same stem as *vígja* "to consecrate", whereas Vé means "sanctuary"; cf. the place-names ending on *-vi*. See de Vries II, p.281 about the problem of Vili and pp.86-87 about the comparison between Óðinn and Zeus Triton.

²⁸ See D. Strömbäck, 1975, *The Conversion of Iceland*, London, p.82.

²⁹ Saxo I, p.25-26.

³⁰ Dumézil, 1973a, pp.94-95.

East of Vanakvisl in Ásia was called Ásialand or Ásiahome. The people was called Æsir and the main stronghold Ásgarðr. Óðinn was the king of it. There was a great place of sacrifice. Óðinn installed Njörðr and Freyr as sacrificing priests.

The daughter of Njörðr was called Freyja. She followed Óðinn and was his beloved. There were men in Ásia, one who was called Álfrigg³¹, the second Dvalinn,³² the third Berlingr, the fourth Grer.³³ They had their home near the hall of the king. They were men of such a calibre that their skills in everything they did made sure that they succeeded at it. Such men as those were called dwarves. They lived in a stone. They mingled more with mankind than nowadays. Óðinn loved Freyja very much, because she was the most beautiful woman of that time.

She owned her own house, which was both comfortable and strongly built, so men said that if the door was closed and locked, no man could enter the room without Freyja's permission.

One day when Freyja had gone to the stone, it was open. The dwarves were forging a golden adornment. It was then almost finished. Freyja liked the adornment very much. The dwarves liked Freyja very much, too. She bargained over the adornment and offered gold, silver and other things of value. They did not ask for money, (but) each said that he would sell his part of the adornment for nothing less than that her sleeping with them, one night in turn. Whether she considered this better or worse they agreed about this.

After four nights and after the agreement had been kept they gave the adornment to Freyja and she went home to her house and pretended that nothing had happened.³⁴

The ensuing episode describes how the suspicious Óðinn sends Loki to fetch the adornment from Freyja and how he demands that she set up a never-ending battle between two kings if she wants it back.³⁵ The root of the conflict is Freyja's desire for gold, which is similar to Frigg's actions in the Mithothyn episode. The licentious behaviour to which they resort in

31 Álfrigg, may be composed of *al-* "whole" or *ala* "to beget" and Frigg "the beloved", unknown as a name among the dwarves.

32 Dvalinn is probably related to *dul*, "to hide", AnEWb, p.87. The name is mentioned in several poems, such as Vsp. 11, together with other dwarves, and in 13, where the dwarves of Dvalinn, originating from Lofar, went to Joruvalla and Aurvanga from their home in the stone: see S. Gutenbrunner, 1973, "Eddastudien I: über die Zwerge in Völuspá 9-13," ANF. Dvalinn is mentioned in Hvm.144 - the passage about the hanging god - as the one among the dwarves who knows the runes and is thus a counterpart of Óðinn. In Alv.16 the sun is called "the toy of Dvalinn". One group of the norms are the daughters of Dvalinn, according to Fm.13.

Dvalinn is also the name of a deer in Grm. 33, which (together with, among others Dáinn, "the dead", - a recurrent name, sometimes belonging to the Elves) graze on the buds of Yggdrasil.

33 Grerr, "the screaming" or "the short"; the interpretations are shaky. AnEWb, p.187.

34 *Flateyjarbók* I, p.275.

35 The rest of *Sprla þáttr* is presented on pp.20, 83-84 and 185.

order to secure golden adornments is thus conspicuous evidence to the effect that these two goddesses are the same origin. The betrayed husband is in both cases the same, Óðinn.

Frigg - "the Beloved"

Frigg competes with Freyja as the love goddess in other respects. When, around 1000AD the Anglo-Saxon abbot Ælfric describes the heathen gods, he identifies the Roman goddess Venus with Frigg, *þære sceamleasan gydenan, Uen(us) gehaten and Fric(g) on Denisc*, "the shameless goddess, called Venus and Frigg in Danish"³⁶, analogous to the translation of Dies Veneris in OE *frigedæg*, OHG *frīatac*, OF *frigendei*, i.e. "the day of Frigg", which corresponds with the connection *frjá*, "to love". In a Swedish work from the Middle Ages the translation of Frigg to Venus is confirmed:

*Siwnda dag kalladho hedhne romarar deim veneris oc ware forfædder fredagh aff frig drötning odhins kono.*³⁷

The seventh day the pagan Romans called Venus' day and our ancestors fredag (due to) queen Frigg, the wife of Óðinn.

Frigg is identified as Minerva in *Trójumanna saga*, but here she is obviously misinterpreted as Gefjun. The context is the judgement of Paris in *Trójumanna saga*, where the three rivalling goddesses are described as *konur .iij. Sif (ok) Freiv (ok) FriG*, "...three women, Sif, Freyja, Frigg", although some lines earlier they are mentioned as *Freyiv (ok) Sif (ok) Gefion*.³⁸

As mentioned earlier, Freyja's sexuality involves an incestuous relationship with her brother, according to Loki's accusations in *Lokasenna*. This could be compared with Ælfric's characterisation of Frigg. He describes her as a goddess whose impudent salacity was exemplified by her many lovers, even her father and brother:

Sum wif hatte Uen(us), seo wæs Ioues dohtor, swa fracod and galnysse, þæt hire fæder hi hæfde, and eac hire broðor.

One woman was Venus, she was Jove's daughter, so vile in her wantonness, that she had her father and her brother too.³⁹

In this connection, the incestuous behaviour is ascribed to Frigg, not to Freyja, and as we have seen the two are involved in similar love affairs and erotic activities, always thirsty for gold ornaments. This circumstance supports the theory that they share the same origin, although they were eventually divided into two different goddesses.

The history of Johannes Magnus, written in the 16th century, speaks of a female deity in the temple of Uppsala, Frigga. Her functions were those of "love, beauty, pleasure, marriage and voluptuousness"; she carried a bow

³⁶ "De falsiis Diis", *Homilies of Ælfric II*, 1968, ed. J. Pope, Oxford.

³⁷ Jungner, 1922, p.109.

³⁸ *Trójumanna saga* in *Hauksbók*, p. 199. Frigg described as Minerva carries the warlike aspect which is usually ascribed to Freyja. *FriG... hon var orrostu guð*, p.200.

³⁹ "De Falsiis Diis", *Homilies of Ælfric II*, v.150.

and a sword like the Amazons, and a constellation of stars was named after her, "Friggerocken". This "historical" account has little value as a source in this connection, since Frigga was probably put into the story to replace Fricco, regarded as too indecent a personage to be allowed to represent the ancient deities of Sweden.⁴⁰

The name Fricco is used twice by Adam of Bremen in his description of Svíþjóð, as one of the gods of the triad at Uppsala⁴¹ and in an earlier passage where the bishop Eginus cut the famous idol of Fricco in Götaland into pieces.⁴² One hypothesis suggests that this god Fricco in fact is the female deity Frigg, whose cult in Västergötland is reflected in the place-name Friggésåker. It has also been proposed that Adam, having little knowledge about Old Norse mythology, actually speaks of a goddess in both cases⁴³. However, the description of Fricco in Uppsala *cum ingenti priapos* leaves no room for doubt on this matter, albeit we could not eliminate the possibility that the divine pair of the Vanir, which we encountered under the names of Njörðr-*Njörð and Freyr-Freyja perhaps were represented under the names Frigg-Fricco.⁴⁴

Other similarities between Freyja and Frigg

There are other examples which suggest that Frigg was the Great Goddess of the North. The name of her abode, Fensalir, "the Houses in the Fens", probably a parallel to Sökkvabekkr, "the sunken rill" - implies a goddess living in water; this reminds us of the fertility goddess Nerthus, who was bathed in a secret lake and to whom slaves were sacrificed by drowning. Besides Sökkvabekkr, the subterranean water, alludes to the well of Urðr, hidden under the roots of Yggdrasil; that implies a chthonic function, obvious in Freyja's character as the deity who receives the dead.⁴⁵

Some minor details emphasise the similarities between Freyja and Frigg. They both own a falcon- or feather-guise (Prk. 4, Sksm.19).⁴⁶ Special flowers are named after them, such as Swe. Freyjagräs, "Freyja's weed", or Nisl. Friggjargras, "Frigg's weed"; it is also called *elskugsgras* "love weed", and an aphrodisiac capacity is ascribed to it in folklore.⁴⁷ In Sweden, the constellation "The Girdle of Orion" was called Friggerocken, "the spinning wheel of Frigg", or Friggetenen, and - at least in one case - Frejjarocken.⁴⁸

Specific spells curing illness in horses are directed to Frigg and Freyja respectively⁴⁹:

⁴⁰ The late tradition from Johannes Magnus and Johannes Messenius about Frigga could be an embellishment of the phallic god. K. Johanneson, 1984, p.388, Adam.

⁴¹ Adam, p.224.

⁴² Adam, p. 211; Jungner, 1922, p.225.

⁴³ Wessén, 1924, pp.184ff.

⁴⁴ Jungner, 1922, pp.133, 203.

⁴⁵ Cf. Grm.14, Clgf.24, *Egils saga*, ch.76.

⁴⁶ H. Celander, 1906-09, "Freyjas eller Friggs falkhamn", *Språkvetenskapliga Sällskapet Uppsalas förhandlingar*, Uppsala.

⁴⁷ A. Lyttkens, 1904-1906, *Svenska växtnamn*, Stockholm, p.888.

⁴⁸ H. Celander, 1945, "Fröja och fruktträden", ANF 59, pp.97-110; C. W. von Sydow, 1921, "Gudinnan Fröja i folktraditionen", *Etnologiska studier tillägnande N. E. Hammarstedt*, pp.168-170; Hyltén-Cavallius, 1972, pp.234-237.

⁴⁹ F. Genzmer, 1949, "Da signed Krist - på biguolen Wuodan", *Arv*, pp.37-68; F. Ohrt, 1927, *Da signed Krist - tolkning av det religiöse inhold i Danmarks signaler og besværgelser*, Copenhagen; 1922, *De danske besværgelser mod vrid og blod*, Copenhagen.

Frygge frågade Frå: " huru skall man bota den som floget får?"

Frygge(= Frigg) asked Frå: "How should you cure the one who gets floget (a stomach disease)?"

This question could be compared with the following formula:

*Fylla red utför berget/ hästen vred sin vänstra fot/ då mötte hon Freyja:
"jag skall bota din häst..."*

Fylla rode down the hill, the horse twisted his left leg, then she met Freyja: 'I will cure your horse...'

This spell is compared with the *Second Galder of Merseburg* where Friia, i.e. Frigg and Fulla, are invoked to cure a horse⁵⁰:

*Phol ende Wuodan wuorun zi holza
du uart demo balderes volon sin wuoz birenkiet
thu biguolen Sinhtgunt Sunna era suister
thu biguolen Frija Volla era suister
thu biguolen Wuodan so he wuola conda
sose benrenki sose bluotrenki
sose lididrenki
ben zi bena bluot zi bluoda
lid zi geliden sose gelimida sin.*

Phol and Wodan went to the forest
Then Baldr's horse sprained its foot,
then Sinhtgunt, the sister of Sunna charmed it,
then Frija, the sister of Volla charmed it.
then Wodan charmed it, as he was well able to do.
Be it sprain of the bone, be it sprain of blood,
be it sprain of the limb:
bone to bone, blood to blood
limb to limb, thus be they fitted together.

In this spell, Friia appears as a sister to Volla, i.e. Fulla, Frigg's servant from Snorri's account of the goddesses, see above p.101. Sunna is identical with Sól, whereas Sinhtgunt, whose name only appears in this context, is unknown. Friia-Frigg appears in this *galdr* as a personage familiar with magic, just as Freyja does in Old Norse mythology.

In view of these similarities, we may assume that both Frigg and Freyja must have the same origin. They both represent the Great Goddess of the North, and their characters coincide in many myths.

⁵⁰ About the charm and its interpretation, see Brate, E., 1919, pp.287-296. This spell, from a manuscript written about 900 AD in Merseburg, probably has an older origin, as a similar spell is found in *Atarvaveda*, IV, 12. For discussion see Orth, 1922 and 1927; Genzmer, 1949; Ström, Å., 1975, p.89 n.106. The translation is from Turville-Petre, 1964, pp.122-123.

The Mourning Mother

In other source materials, however, Frigg appears accompanied by a special characteristic which we cannot ascribe to Freyja, namely in her role as the mother of Baldr. Baldr, personifying the bright god whose death opened the gates of Hel and inaugurated the fall of the deities, has been the object of many interpretations. The possibility that the tragedy of Baldr might have been inspired by the Christian passion drama has been discussed; there are plenty of indications to support such an influence, for instance nature's mourning and the promise made by every thing not to hurt the god. Another similarity is found in promise in *Völuspá* of his return at the beginning of the new time.⁵¹ This might explain the nature of Frigg as a *mater dolorosa* in the late sources, where the lascivious features of the fertility goddess have declined in favour of the exalted majesty of the heavenly queen.

Baldr's resemblance to Jesus Christ may, however, be a random case. Other evidence points to Baldr, "the Lord", as an original Nordic god, with a pedigree in the Indo-European world where the hero's death, caused by somebody blind or by ignorance, is a recurrent motif.⁵²

Besides, it hardly seems possible to view the relation between Frigg and Baldr in the light of an *Interpretatio Christiania* when we take her role in *Völuspá* into consideration. In this poem, Frigg is the mourning goddess in two aspects:

...but Frigg cried in Fensalir over the disaster of Valhöll (Vsp.33).

...

Then the second disaster came upon Hlín, when Óðinn goes to fight the wolf...then will Frigg's delight fall (Vsp.53).

Frigg's destiny is thus determined by the deaths of her son and her husband. The mythical time between these events forebodes the time of the cataclysm, ending with the fall of the old gods in Ragnarök. This aspect of the Drama of the World belongs to the heathen world and its thoughts rather than to the realm of Christianity.

Frigg in *Vafþrúðnismál* and in *Grímnismál*

Two other poems in *The Poetic Edda* concern Frigg, namely *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*. Both contain a battle of knowledge between Óðinn and another personage, although the narratives have different courses. In *Vafþrúðnismál*, Óðinn courteously asks Frigg for advice, as he is going to visit the all-knowing giant. Frigg's answer is reluctant "... I would like to hinder you, Herjafaðir, because I know that no giant is equal to Vafþrúðnir"(Vm.2). Óðinn does not heed this warning, still insisting on seeing the hall of Vafþrúðnir. Frigg answers with a benediction and an

⁵¹ Turville-Petre, 1964, pp.119-120.

⁵² Ström, 1975, pp.157-158; Dumézil, 1959, pp.94-112, 196-200. Older theories suggest an influence from the Ancient Near East and the so-called dying gods, cf. J. Frazer, 1936, *The Golden Bough*, London. Herodotus' narrative about the vulnerable prince Atys of Tracian origin is the story that is closest to the Old Nordic myth, and thus the latter's closest relative in the Indo-European family of languages, see p.23.

assurance that Óðinn's knowledge is sufficient to engage in a battle of words with the giant.

This opening seems rather illogical to the modern reader, who notices that Óðinn asks for advice which he does not care about, and that Frigg recommends her husband not to go but then admits in her next strophe that he has knowledge enough to encounter the giant. Maybe Óðinn's first question is of a polite character - he does what he wants to do, whatever Frigg's answer may be. This has been suggested by some scholars,⁵³ whereas others have emphasised the impotence of the goddess in the Nordic pantheon.⁵⁴ There is, however, a third possibility: the gift of soothsaying which belongs to Frigg (Ls.29). Her recitation, the word "hail" being iterated three times, is a parallel to the first word of *Sigrdrífa*, spoken when she is awakened from bewitched sleep.⁵⁵ Frigg uses *sejðr*, which means that she is able to foresee the future and at the same time protect her husband by reciting beneficent spells.

These qualities of Frigg's are more strongly emphasised in the dialogue with Óðinn in the opening of *Grímnismál*. The narrative tells us that the divine couple were seated in *Hliðskjálf* and looked out over all the worlds. This was a place where some of the gods, especially Frigg and Óðinn, were able to procure information about secret places beyond *Valhöll* and *Miðgarðr* and acquire spiritual knowledge. The relation between Óðinn and Frigg has a different character here from that portrayed in *Vafþrúðnismál*: they quarrel about their foster sons, *Agnarr* and *Geirröðr*. Through guile, Óðinn had succeeded in outwitting Frigg's ward *Agnarr*, putting his own protégé on the throne in spite of the principle of primogeniture. Óðinn says triumphantly that *Geirröðr* rules as king in his country, whereas *Agnarr* is exiled to a cave where he fathers children on a giantess. Frigg answers that *Geirröðr* is a bad king, so greedy for food that he harasses his guests if they are too many. Consequently, Frigg assumes that Óðinn has failed in his upbringing. The couple make a wager on this issue, Óðinn undertaking to obtain knowledge from *Geirröðr* himself.

It is questionable whether Frigg really has any knowledge about the character of *Geirröðr*. The prose narrative gives the impression that she rather makes sure that Óðinn leaves for his usual travels, as she sends her servant *Fulla* with a message to *Geirröðr* to the effect that he should be on his guard against a sorcerer who might visit him. This is Frigg's revenge for Óðinn's having cheated her ward, thereby robbing him of his throne.

Geirröðr receives his guest in the most inhospitable manner, torments him and denies him food. Finally his son, *Agnarr* (of the same age as his uncle and namesake was when he disappeared), gives the guest a horn filled with refreshment. Óðinn curses *Geirröðr*, who immediately stumbles on his sword and dies, and *Agnarr* is enthroned as the rightful king. The plot of *Grímnismál*, besides the didactic stanzas, thus raises the problem of the righteous king, Óðinn had failed to enthrone him; it is Frigg herself who, when the first *Agnarr* is lost in chaos among the giants, through her cunning forces Óðinn to introduce the other *Agnarr*. This boy, a

⁵³ *De gamle Eddadikte*, 1932, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen, p.53.

⁵⁴ L. Motz, 1980, "Sister in the Cave", *ANF* 95, pp.168-182.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Sigrdrífumál*, 1-2.

substitute for the lost namesake, demonstrates his hospitality and thus represents the opposite of his father.

Freia in De origo Langobardum

The purpose of *Grimnismál* has been debated⁵⁶, but the connection with sacral kingship is apparent in my view. The rivalry between the wards of Óðinn and Frigg could reflect the change between two religious systems, where the ancient custom of an enthronement was led by a goddess. In due course this rite was taken over by the male god. This hypothesis is too simple, though, and besides the goddess overcomes the god in the end, whereas myths about matriarchates end with the fall of woman's power. We may more appropriately compare the cunning of Frigg in *Grimnismál's* prose with an episode in Paulus Diaconus' history of the Langobards, where a battle between two tribes, Vandals and Winnils, is going to take place the following morning. The Vandals seek help from the god Godan (Óðinn), who promises that those who receive the first glance from his eye when the sun rises will be victorious. The Winnils are led by two brothers, Agio and Ibor, and their mother Gambara⁵⁷ appeals to Freia (Frigg), the wife of Godan, imploring her to grant the victory. Freia instructs her to tell the women to undo their hair and let it fall down in front of their faces, so that it might look like great beards. They should join the army early in the morning, forming up in such a way that they caught Godan's first glance in the morning. When Godan looks out through his window the following morning, he notices the army and asks Freia: "Who are these long-bearded people?" Freia answers that he should give these people victory, having given them a name. The Winnils win the battle and are henceforth named the Langobards, "the long beards".⁵⁸

These two episodes, depicting the ways in which Frigg overcomes her husband by means of wiles and sorcery, again underline her resemblance to Freyja, who is characterised as false (Hdl.6) and as a sorceress by Loki (Ls.32) and who is skilled in *sejðr*. The tricks of illusion help these goddesses to cheat anyone who stands in their way, a modes of behaviour which can be compared with that of the Ossetian princess Sætanae, who tramples customs and rivals underfoot to gain what she desires.⁵⁹

The Guileful Goddess

The guileful goddess has her counterpart in later tales and romances in German literature, where a wife's disloyalty to her husband is the result of her feelings towards her own kin and clients, whom she regard as her true framework. The ladies of the Epics and the Sagas, who care more about their own families than about the welfare of their husbands, are numerous like Hallgerðr, Hervor and Guðrún for example. The conflicts that are reflected in these old myths of the wily goddesses and heroines are matrimonial ones, featuring a woman's double loyalties to her husband and to her family. Since she cannot defend her kin with weapons, she uses

⁵⁶ See J.P. Schjødt, 1988, "The 'fire ordeal' in the *Grimnismál*, initiation or annihilation", *Medieval Scandinavia* 12, pp.29-43.

⁵⁷ Could be <Gand-bera, "bearer of the wand", which hints that she is a *vplva*.

⁵⁸ *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, 1, 1878, ed. G. Waitz, Hannover, in *Monumenta Historiae Germanicae: Scriptorum rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum*.

⁵⁹ Dumézil, 1971, pp.551ff.

cunning and deceit against her husband and even against her children. We may observe that Germanic literature does not comment on this as an immoral conduct, merely as expected behaviour.⁶⁰ Those episodes in the relevant literature where Frigg has an active part rather express approval of her identity with Freyja, the independent and cunning love goddess. They have the same origin but eventually become divided, a phenomenon which tends to reflect the distinction between religion and mythology. As we mentioned earlier, Frigg "the beloved" and Freyja "the Lady" are appellations behind which we may discern the Great Goddess of the North.

The Conflict between Male and Female Deities

Under the influence of patriarchal domination the Indo-European marriage was expressed in such terms that a man wedded a woman and a woman became wedded. The Indo-European languages have no expression for the opposite direction of activity. Hence, a marriage was a social change of status for a woman, not an action spurred by of her own intention.⁶¹ The tension between the Great Indo-European Goddess and her partner can be observed in many myths. One example is provided above - the mentioned pattern of the guileful goddess, like Frigg in *Grímnismál*, who subjects her husband to torture or deceives him for the sake of golden ornaments could be regarded as an act of a revenge on the part of the subdued women, channelled into myths and perhaps into rituals. Since we possess no instance of downright female rebellion in the known sources, we must consider other possibilities of interpretation, too.

The tension rather depended, as was mentioned earlier, on conflicts and difficulties in co-operation not only between the sexes but between social groups and extended families in the Old Norse society.⁶² When the relevant conflicts appear in the myths, they have been modified into a model that tries to overcome them by repeating the motif; we find examples in expressing the third function's struggle to become accepted by the first and the second. Actually, the contradiction embedded in this struggle was impossible to surmount; it thus had to be repeated over and over again for its message to come across.⁶³ For this reason, we may assume that the conflicts between male and female deities in the Indo-European myths symbolise the conflict between the first two functions and the third, the goddesses in this case representing the third function.

We have exemplified the goddesses' deceitful behaviour and their ways of outwitting their male partners. The opposite relation, where the trivalent goddess became subdued, is a motif which seems to reflect old Indo-European myths. G. Dumézil has briefly drawn attention to a comparison between the Circe episode of Homer's *Odyssey* and *Skírnismál* in *The Poetic Edda*, where the three functions appear conspicuously.⁶⁴ By the way of validating his hypothesis we will contrast the Circe episode with a close parallel from another language family, *Arabians Nights*.

⁶⁰ E. Vestergaard, 1984, "Gudrun/Kriemhild - søster eller hustru", ANF 99, pp.63-78.

⁶¹ Benveniste I, 1969, pp.217 ff.

⁶² B. Lincoln, 1981, *Priests, Warriors and Cattle*, passim, Berkeley.

⁶³ C. Lévi-Strauss, 1967, *Structural Anthropology*, New York, p.226.

⁶⁴ G. Dumézil, 1982, *Apollon sonore et autres essais*, Paris, pp.126-131.

Circe

The Circe episode is one of the best-known of Odysseus' adventures. Weather-driven Odysseus and his shipmates reach an unknown island and go ashore to reconnoitre and to seek provisions. One half of his men happen to come across the abode of the sorceress Circe. She appears as a friendly and beautiful woman, who gives them a beverage of cheese, flour, honey and wine to drink, but her intentions are far from hospitable. The drink contains a poison, which primarily makes the men forget their home and their origin. This is, however, not the worst of things, as Circe proceeds to transform them into pigs with her magic wand. Crying, because they still possess the clear minds of human beings, they are locked up in the pigpen, where they must wait for death to release them.

One of the men, Eulylochos, never drank from the poisoned beverage and manages to escape before his shipmates are transformed into pigs. He tells Odysseus that his companions suddenly disappeared without trace. Odysseus decides to investigate the mysterious things that are taking place on the island and find out how his men have been trapped. Fortunately, the god Hermes appears and tells him about the harrowing fate of his crew. The god brings him an antidote and advises him on how to handle Circe's sorcery. Odysseus meets with Circe, who amiably welcomes the new candidate for her pigpen and offers him a drink. Hermes' antidote eliminates the effects of magic potion, and when she swings her wand Odysseus draws his sword and threatens her. As Hermes has foreseen, the sorceress now makes an erotic invitation to him. Mindful of his comrades, Odysseus does not refuse her offer, but asks her to swear a confirming oath that she will not hurt him during love making.

This passage in Canto X of *The Odyssey* has been compared with the story about Bedr Basin and Queen Lab in *Arabian Nights*. Shipwrecked King Bedr Basin lands on a foreign island where it is impossible to go ashore, as a number of mules, donkeys and horses stand in his way. They kick him and try to prevent him from coming ashore in various ways. He actually manages to land at another place, a city on the island, still wondering at the peculiar behaviour of the animals. An old merchant takes pity on him and tells him that the queen who rules over the island usually invites handsome young men at her pleasure. After 40 days the thankless woman turns her lovers into horses, mules and donkeys. Those were the animals which attempted to prevent Bedr Basin's landing in order to spare him their own wretched destiny. Bedr Basin hides from the queen, whose name is Lab, but she discovers him after a while and invites him to her palace, after she has promised not to hurt him. They spend a pleasant time together, but after 40 days of passionate lovemaking Bedr Basin discovers that the queen transfigures herself into a bird. In this guise she meets an old lover, whom she had turned into a black-bird in a fit of anger. Bedr Basin seeks advice from an old merchant who is a true Muslim, unlike Lab and her subjects who worship the fire, i.e. are Zoroastrians. The merchant recommends him to serve the queen poisoned flour - she has the same toxin prepared for Bedr Basin - and to sprinkle water in her face. He follows the advice and Queen Lab changes into a grey mule. She manages to outwit him, though; turning him into a bird, and after that one entanglement follows upon another in the story.

The similarities between these passages from the great epics are evident, and we may assume that some narrative elements from *The Odyssey* might appear in *Arabian Nights*, influenced by the Hellenistic novels. Such a narrative element is found in the passages about men who are transmuted into animals by a sorceress. The motif is common in fairy tales and could signify a process of humiliation, a man losing his identity and individual significance and changing into an object subordinate to the sorcerer/sorceress, suffering insult as well as injury in being changed into a less-than-noble animal, a pig or mule, depending on his master's choice. This humiliation motif differs from another kind of transformation, in which men are turned into wild animals. The latter entails an exile from society, the banished having to dwell in the wilderness far away from human beings. The happy ending is the result of a re-establishment of the "own" identity and of essential humanity. Even so, many folk-tales tell us about men condemned forever to live the life of a wild animal, e.g. the werewolf-stories.

The man transformed into a domestic animal is humiliated, but his situation is not wholly hopeless. A god, an angel or a hero usually intervenes and he is restored as a human being.⁶⁵ This denouement is the same in the two stories recapitulated above. A love story between the hero and the sorceress is a third motif, but here the stories diverge. Odysseus was never changed into an animal like Bedr Basin - his men were, it is true, but without any hint of romance.

Furthermore Bedr Basin and his queen exchange poisons and antidotes, and each of them is transformed into a different animal. Odysseus manages to subdue Circe, and he does so in three different ways: by eating a herb as an antidote; by avoiding the effect of the magic wand via his sword; and finally by extracting an obliging promise from the sorceress not to hurt him. These three methods correspond - as G. Dumézil has suggested - to the tripartite functions of Indo-European society⁶⁶.

The herb belongs to the third function, the sword to the second and the promise to the first.⁶⁷ These three ways of averting the machinations of Circe have no counterparts in the story of *Arabian Nights*. Therefore we may assume that "the tripartite way to vanquish a woman" was not a common element in the treasure of myths and tales of the eastern Mediterranean, but related to Indo-European myths, in which we find similar structures. The general triads of remedies, gifts, poisons and curses have sometimes, in criticism, been held to be merely coincidental, or to constitute allusions to the recurrent triad in folk-tales. As É. Benveniste and G. Dumézil have shown, these examples contain elements of close correspondence with the tripartite functions in the society and the cosmic order of the Indo-Europeans. The fact that they usually appear in a fixed order (as in our example above) confirms that these myths must reveal much more than the mere contention that "all good things are three".

⁶⁵ A story, typical of this sort of situation, which probably could have influenced the narrative about Bedr Basin is, *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius. The motif is also well-known from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. About the influences of the Hellenistic novels on *Arabian Nights*, see G. E. Grünebaum, 1963, *Der Islam im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart.

⁶⁶ Dumézil, 1982, p.131.

⁶⁷ Dumézil, 1958a, pp.21-22.

Gerðr

These three elements appear again in the Edda poem *Skírnismál*. The fertility god Freyr has fallen in love, at first sight, with Gerðr, daughter to the giant Gymir. He sends his servant Skírnir ("the shining one"), who is none less than a hypostasis of the god himself, to propose to the girl. Skírnir passes flames and exchanges words with a shepherd, a recurrent motif in the Old Norse myths, denoting a passage into another world.⁶⁸ He finds Gerðr exceedingly hostile to his errand and begins by offering her golden apples and the ring Draupnir, which produces eight golden rings every ninth night. Gerðr refuses icily. He threatens her with his sword, but she takes no notice. Skírnir now utters a curse, charged with maledictions, intensified when the poem changes its metre from *ljóðaháttir* into *galdralag*, the metre of spells:

Listen giants, listen frost-giants, sons of Suttungr, all kin of Æsir
how I deny, how I forbid the girl from man's joy, the girl from
man's use!

Hrímgrímnir is the giant, who shall have you down at the gates of
Hel; where 'Vilmegir' will serve you goats' piss live on the wooden
roots. You will never get a nobler drink, of my will, of your will.

I carve a þurs-rune for you and three staves: defilement, lechery and
concupiscence! I will carve them off like I (once) carved them, if
that is needded (Skm.34-36).

This curse breaks Gerðr's resistance and she makes Skírnir a promise:
Barri is the name of a grove called where we both may meet in peace; in
nine nights Gerðr will joyfully love Njörðr's son (Skm.41).

According to a common interpretation of this myth, Skírnir represents
the ray of the sun, warming the earth and preparing for the sowing,
symbolised by Freyr's and Gerðr's tryst in the grove of Barri. Barri is, this
interpretation explains, derived from *barr* "corn", and the poem thus
describes a *hieros gamos* between the fertility god and his female partner,
representing the earth. Another interpretation of Barri suggests a grove of
yews, which could be taken to recall the trees near the temple of
Uppsala. The most recent interpretation sees the union between Freyr and
the giantess as a model for royal marriage in the North.⁶⁹

Whichever interpretation of *Skírnismál* we prefer, the three different
methods that Skírnir uses to subdue Gerðr are evident parallels to those
which Odysseus used against Circe: first gold and riches, which - like
herbs - represent the third function; then the sword representing the
second; and finally the force of words, expressing a spell or an oath, as
typical of the first function.

⁶⁸ Cf. for example the incident where Hervor enters Samsey in order to retrieve the sword
Tyrfingr, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*, 1960, ed. Ch. Tolkien, London, pp.12-19.

⁶⁹ Steinsland, G., 1989, pp.145-209. This thesis gives a broad account of the interpretations of
Skírnismál.

Rindr

A third example supports our hypothesis that this pattern is inherent in the Indo-European myths. Saxo Grammaticus' chronicle *Gesta Danorum* tells us how Óðinn (Othinus), seeking revenge for the killing of his son Baldr (Balderus), turns to a soothsayer.

Rosti of the Finn foretold that Rinda, daughter of the Rutenian king, must bear him another son, who would take reprisal for his brother's killing; the gods had destined that their colleague should be avenged by his future brother's hand.⁷⁰

Rosti of as well as the Rutenian king seems to be a mere constructions of Saxo's in his attempts to make history of the myth. There is, however, a slight possibility that Rosti of, Latin Rostiophus < Hrossþjófr "horse-thief" may be identical with Loki, who usually acts as an adviser of the Æsir; there might be an allusion here to Loki's luring away the giant's horse during the building of Ásgarðr.⁷¹

Acting on this intelligence Odin muffled his face beneath a hat so that his features would not be recognised and went to the king to offer his services as a soldier. By him Odin was made general, took over his master's army and achieved a glorious victory over his enemies. On account of his adroit conduct of the battle the monarch admitted him to the highest rank in his friendship, honouring him not less generously with gifts than decorations. After a brief lapse of time Odin beat the enemy's line into flight single-handed and, after contriving this amazing defeat, returned to announce it. Everybody was astounded that one man's strength could have heaped massacre on such countless numbers. Relying on these achievements Odin whispered to the king the secret of his love. Uplifted by the other's friendly encouragement, he tried to kiss the girl and was rewarded with a slap across the face.⁷²

This passage about Óðinn's first appearance as a successful general echoes the episode when he attained the mead of poets from the giants. Using trickery, he killed nine slaves; after that he was taken into the giants' service, in which he had the opportunity to seduce Gunnlōð, who watched the mead (Sksm 1). It is obvious that Saxo uses this story to depict Óðinn's entrance to the court, once more drawing on his martial appearance.

Neither the indignity nor distress at the affront deflected him from his purpose. The following year, to avoid feebly dropping the quest which he had begun so enthusiastically, he put on foreigner's clothing and once more sought his patron. It was difficult for anyone meeting him to discern his true countenance because he had disguised his wonted appearance under deceptive splashes of fresh

⁷⁰ Saxo, p.76.

⁷¹ Loc. cit., n.37. Hrossþjófr is furthermore mentioned as one of the giants enumerated in *Völuspá inn skamma*, Hd1.24.

⁷² Saxo I, p.76.

mud. He made out that his name was Roftrar⁷³ and that he was a practised metal worker. By undertaking the construction of a diversity of bronze shapes with the most beautiful outlines he so recommended his skill in workmanship that the king awarded him a large lump of gold and commissioned him to fashion personal adornments for his womenfolk. So he hammered out many trinkets for feminine embellishments, and at length presented the girl with a bracelet more painstakingly finished than the rest and several rings executed with equal care.

But none of his services could bend her disdain. Whenever he wished to offer her a kiss she boxed his ears.⁷⁴

Óðinn's tactics now follow the pattern we have already mentioned in the examples of Odysseus and Skirnir - he tries to overcome her resistance by gold and riches, but the girl refuses. He has to change into another role, becoming a fighter again.

Odin, however, had found by experience that nothing served eager lovers more than a tough persistence, and although he had been humiliated by two rebuffs he altered his looks a third time and approached the king, claiming unparalleled competence in military arts. It was not merely desire which led him to take such trouble, but a wish to eliminate his discredit. At one time gifted sorcerers had the ability to change their aspect instantaneously and present different images of themselves; they were expert at reproducing the qualities as well as the normal appearance of any age group. Consequently the old veteran would give an admirable display of his professional skills by riding proudly to combat along with the most courageous. Despite this tribute the young woman remained inflexible. The mind cannot easily move to a genuine regard for someone whom it has once heartily disliked. When on one occasion, just before departing, he wanted to snatch a kiss from her, she gave him such a shove that he was sent flying and banged his chin on the floor. Immediately he touched her with a piece of bark inscribed with spells and made her like one demented, a moderate sort of punishments for the continual insults he had received.⁷⁵

His military actions, representing the second function, yield no success and he punishes Rindr by scratching runes on a piece of bark, making her mad, an action which represents representing his magic skill and thereby the first function, the magico-religious one. But to complete the pattern, Óðinn also appears as a sorceress, fulfilling his evil intent:

Still he did not shrink from pursuing his plans (for confidence in his greatness had puffed up his hopes) and so this indefatigable wayfarer journeyed to the king a fourth time, after putting on girl's clothing. Once more received at court, he proved himself not only

⁷³ Probably Hropt, a byname of Óðinn, p.76 n.40.

⁷⁴ Saxo I, p.76.

⁷⁵ Saxo I, p.77.

solicitous, but even rather pushing. Because he was dressed more or less like a woman, the majority imagined him to be one. He called himself Vecha and swore that he was a female physician, giving warrant to his claim by his great readiness to help in such matters.⁷⁶

According to Snorri, Óðinn was able to cast spells upon those who opposed him and to change himself in to various shapes (Hkr.6). To appear in a woman's disguise was no shame for Óðinn (Ls.24), and his magical talent is underscored by the name Vecha, which is the same as the modern word "witch".⁷⁷ It is obvious that Óðinn had now turned himself into a representative of the first function in his endeavour to subdue Rindr.

At length he was enlisted in the queen's entourage and acted as her daughter's attendant. He used to wash dirt from her feet in the evenings and, as he rinsed them, was allowed to touch her calves and upper thighs. Yet since Fortune walks at varying speeds, what he had been unable to manage through ingenuity was brought to him by chance.

The princess happened to fall sick. Looking round for suitable treatments, she called upon the hands she once cursed to save her life and employed a person she had always disdained to preserve her. He closely examined her symptoms and then declared that she must take a certain medicine to counteract the disease as swiftly as possible: unfortunately this prescription would taste so bitter that unless the girl allowed herself to be tied down she would not be able to bear the potency of the cure. The elements of her distemper must be expelled from her inmost fibres.

Once her father had heard this she was laid on a bed, bound, and ordered to submit passively to everything her doctor applied. The king was quite deceived by the female garments which old Odin wore to disguise his pertinacious scheming, and it was this which enabled a seeming remedy to become a licence for his pleasures. Her physician stopped attending on her and seized the opportunity to make love, rushing to wreak his lust before he dispelled her fever, and finding that where in sound health she had been antagonistic he could now take advantage of her indisposition.

The reader will be interested to hear an alternative version of the story. Some say that the king realised Odin was groaning with passion yet achieving nothing, at great cost to body and soul; rather therefore than deprive him a due reward for his good services he allowed him to have intercourse secretly with his daughter. Sometimes a father can behave viciously towards his offspring if he lacks all sense of duty and an impetuous disposition destroys his

⁷⁶ Saxo I, p.77.

⁷⁷ Cf. *vítki* "sorcerer", Saxo II, p.77 n.44.

natural humanity. When his daughter gave birth to a child, his mistake resulted in utter shame and remorse.⁷⁸

Saxo's version is the most comprehensive myth of Óðinn's fathering the one who would take revenge for Baldr. Only fragments in Icelandic literature echo the event: The strophe of the poet Kormákr *seið Yggr til Rindar*, "Yggr (Óðinn) bewitched Rindr"⁷⁹ coincides with the story of Saxo. Óðinn is told the prophesy about his son by a presumed *völva* in *The Poetic Edda: Rindr berr [Váli] í vestrspóm*, "Rindr bears (Váli) in the Western Halls" (Bdr.11). Another strophe in *The Poetic Edda: Þann gól Rindr Rani* "that chanted Rindr for Rani" (Gróg.6), probably implies that Rani is another form for Váli.⁸⁰ In Saxo's version Rinda's child is called Bous, a name which probably means "little boy".⁸¹

Rindr is mentioned as one of the *Ásynjur* by Snorri (Glgf.36), and some toponymic scholars suggest that her real name was *Vrind, which is located in *Vrindavi "Rindr's shrine", nowadays Vrinnevi in Sweden.⁸² OSw *vrind* means "ivy", and we might recall that the symbol of Baldr's death, the mistle-toe, as well as his revenge originates from an evergreen plant.

The Holy Wedding

This repeated pattern depicts a situation where a god or a hero subdues a goddess⁸³ for sexual contact, a factor which could hint at a *hieros gamos*. It is obvious that the god/hero has to appeal to each one of the three functions in a specific order, from the third to the first. When the first function finally appears in the form of the magic word, she opens her arms to the lover. It is true that Rindr in Saxo's version suffers a brutal rape. This could, however, be due to Saxo's intentions to describe the licentious and ruthless nature of the pagan gods, even mild-mannered Baldr becoming a genuine brute in the Christian author's version.⁸⁴

The fact that Old Norse mythology assigns both Gerðr and Rindr to the giants, leaving them unrelated to the goddesses, seems to contradict our thesis about the subduing of the trivalent goddess. It is, however, important to remember that we are meeting these myths in a late version, where the *hieros gamos* aspect has been focused on the giantesses, as Gro Steinsland has demonstrated.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Saxo I, pp.77-78.

⁷⁹ Kormákr Ögmundarson, *Sigurðardrápa*, 3, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtningen*, 1967, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.

⁸⁰ In the context of *Grógaldr* a mother gives her son advice in the form of spells, alluding to Rindr's having done the same for her son. Rani means "snout" in the figurative sense, the head of the army in the formation called *svinfylking* cf. Beck, H., 1965, *Der Ebersignum der Germanen*, Berlin, p.41. It seems as if Rani might be a variant with the same martial connotations as Váli, "the little warrior", ANEWB s.v. Váli, p.641.

⁸¹ A. Holtsmark, s.v. Váli, KLNMB; de Vries interprets Bous as a vegetation spirit, de Vries II, p.279.

⁸² De Vries II, p.332. This etymology has been called in question and other toponymic scholars claim that the name has no religious meaning.

⁸³ About Circe as a goddess, see M. Nilsson, 1955, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion I*, Munich, p.370.

⁸⁴ For a discussion, see B. Strand, (B. Sawyer), 1980, *Kvinnor och män i Gesta Danorum*, Gothenburg, pp.137-138.

⁸⁵ Steinsland, 1989, passim.

Odysseus versus Circe, Freyr-Skírnir versus Gerðr and Óðinn versus Rindr - in all these cases the woman is overpowered by elements from the three functions of the Indo-European structure. This repeated pattern can be compared with the Pāndavas' marriage with Draupadī, although she accepts her husbands without resistance. Nevertheless, the structure of all these myths about the Great Indo-European Goddess coincides with and expresses the following central idea: since the goddess is trivalent with respect to her functions, she must be confronted with a symbol of each of the three functions when her male partner - who only possesses one function - tries to conquer and invite her to a *hieros gamos*. The recurrent pattern of this achievement begins with the third function, usually gold and riches, and continues with physical force, which in both cases ends in failure. The goddess is won by the word, whether it appears as an oath, a curse or a spell.

The implicit meaning of these myths is, however, the same as the one stated above, namely the existence of differences between the three functions, the first proving superior to the other two. The magical word masters the words and represents the sovereign, who is able to subdue the most reluctant goddess.

Fertility, Fight and Fate: Dísir, Valkyries and Norns in Old Norse Mythology

The Collectives of Female Deities

Three groups of female deities appear in the Old Norse mythology under the names of Dísir, Valkyries and Norns. A fourth category, *Fylgjur*, could also be mentioned in this context: they are sometimes identified with the Dísir and sometimes with the Norns. The nature of the *Fylgjur* is, however, essentially different from these other groups, as they are usually connected with an individual, representing his or her destiny.¹ Neither the Dísir nor the Valkyries nor the Norns are attached to individual human beings in such a manner, although they appear very close to man's fate, especially in connection with birth and death. The Norns are said to rule destiny; the Valkyries select those who are to fall on the battle-field; and the Dísir seem to have had a protective purpose. Still, the of these three categories closely related according to the available sources, that we can hardly distinguish one group from another. For example, the Valkyrie Sigrdrífa advises Sigurðr Fafnisbani to plead for the assistance of the Dísir for a woman in childbirth (Sgd.9):

Life runes you must learn
for those labouring with child
to deliver babe safe and sound.
On palm you must carve them
clasp them round limbs
and urge aid of the Dísir.²

The Norn who is called Skuld in *Völuspá* (20) appears as a Valkyrie later in the prophecy (*Vsp.*30). The expression *úfar ro Dísir*, "the Dísir wish you ill fortune", (*Grm.*53) reminds us of *illr er domr norna*, "the doom of the norn is harmful" (*HIð.*32). The poetic technique of kennings complicates the picture, as *Dís*, *Dísir* are combined in different connections, some of them only meaning "woman, women", and conveying no further information about the qualities of the object. One is provided by *Herjans Dísir* "Óðinn's women" (*Gk.*I, 10) i.e. the Valkyries, another by *Vanadís* "the woman of Vanir" i.e. Freyja.

The Origin of the Dísir

Besides the poetical kennings, the words *Dís*, *Dísir* referred to "collective" goddesses as well as to women connected with the supernatural; cf. the strophe *bið þú þær dróttins dísir mæla* (*Sól.*25), "You may bid the Dísir of the Lord to speak for you", obviously a description of the angels' role. At the same time we may note that many female personal names end in *-dís*, for example *Odinsdís*, *Freydís*, *Hjálmdís* and *Hjördís*. In younger

¹ For a comprehensive account of the concept, see E. Mundal, 1974, *Fylgjemotiva i norrøn litteratur*, Oslo.

² Trans. from *The Poetic Edda*, 1928, trans. L. Hollander, Austin.

Icelandic literature the form *landdísasteimar*, rock formations, appears, probably alluding to a form of tutelary spirits.³

It has been observed that Snorri does not mention the *Dísir* in his enumeration of the Old Norse pantheon in his *Edda*. In her *Fylgjemotiva i norrøn litteratur*, Else Mundal has investigated the female spirits in Old Norse literature suggesting that the collective of *Dísir* is not a special group of female deities but a common term for goddesses, analogous with the male *god*, *guð*, *guðir*, as both these terms were later used for "saints, angels, holy virgins" and "God" respectively.⁴ Although the collective of angels is asexual in the Bible, with the exception of the archangels and "the sons of God" mentioned in the Old Testament, they appear later in Christian art in a female shape, probably inspired by Greek and Roman art with its winged genius. Mundal's suggestion that the tradition of a *Fylgja*, as the follower and protector of the individual, was continued by the idea of a female guardian angel in the imaginative world of Christianity seems quite plausible as a form of cult continuity.

Folke Ström, whose work about *Diser*, *Nornor och Valkyrior* analyses these deities in the available sources, regards the *Dísir* as a primeval collective of fertility goddesses, belonging to an undifferentiated society. Later the Valkyries, the Norns and the *Fylgjur* emanated from them to form groups of more specialised deities, corresponding to the evolution of society towards greater specialisation.⁵ Mundal agrees with Ström, arguing that such an evolution is supposed by the fact that the *Dísir* appear more frequently in the early poetry, whereas the three different groups are more often represented in the later literature.⁶

In my opinion a visible evolution of that kind considering the religious concept of *Dísir* during a few centuries is improbable. The *Dísir* are, according to the sources, objects of worship in the last centuries before the Christianisation; witnessed by several place-names such as *Diseberg*, *Disin* > *Disavin* and *Disavid* > *Disaui* indicate this. It is possible that the mythological borderline between the *Dísir* and the *Ásynjur* became indistinct after the conversion. Still, the testimonies about their cult that we can consult today bear witness to their status as a special group of minor deities.

In Tacitus' *Annals* the name "Idistaviso" is used in connection with a battle between the Roman army under Germanicus and the Cheruskii, a Germanic tribe.⁷ That name later became associated with the *Dísir* and J. Grimm emended it to *idisiaviso*, "the meadow where the *idisi*, i.e. the *Dísir*, meet". Furthermore OE *ides*, OSw *idis* and OHG *itis*, meaning "(noble) lady", were adduced in this connection, a combination that has been rejected by several scholars.⁸ When the *First Merseburger Galder* (see p.135 below) describes women called *idisi* - women, who intervene on the battle-field with magic weapons in the form of invisible fetters, chaining their victim to the spot where his foes could easily slaughter him - their functions are the same as those generally ascribed to the Valkyries.

3 de Vries II p.298.

4 Mundal, 1974, pp.84-86.

5 F. Ström, 1954, p.76.

6 Mundal, 1974, pp.68ff.

7 Tacitus, *The Annals* II, 16, 1955, trans. C. H. More, London.

8 de Vries II p.321.

Nevertheless, personal names exist, which do seem to prove the *Dísir*'s provenance in the ancient Germanic language, for example Frank. *Agedisus*, *Disibod*; Alam. *Disi*; Langob. *Tisi*.⁹

The etymology of the word *Dís* is a vexed issue; interestingly enough it opens wider perspectives in the Indo-European realm. Related to Gmc. **dajjan*, "to suck", and the Sw. *dia* with the same meaning, *Dís* can be compared with Gk. *thelus*, "woman", and *thele*, "mother's bosom", and Skr. *dhayami*, "to suck".¹⁰ The etymological sense of the word thus denotes a maternal function, which could fit in well with the sparse items of knowledge we possess with regard to the *Dísir* as goddesses of fertility. The etymology of the name *Dísir* leads us further towards the Vedic goddess *Dhisanā*, sometimes appearing as a collective of three goddesses called *Dhisanās*. *Dhisanās* are the spenders of riches and are furthermore combined with the sacred beverage, *Soma*.¹¹ They appear together with the Great Goddess *Sarasvatī*, and although these deities are found only a dozen times in the Vedic songs, the contexts definitely demonstrate their functions as goddesses associated with bounty and riches. In addition the *Dhisanās* are identified with the goddess *Vāc*, the personified word, who is also one aspect of *Sarasvatī*.¹²

The suggested connection between the *Dísir* and the Vedic *Dhisanās* could be held to be coincidental in view of the differences in time and space. Nonetheless, there is nothing in the laws of phonetics that opposes the notion of a link between them, inherited from a proto-Indo-European mythology. Both categories are associated with wealth, they are the bearers of maternal qualities; and they are connected with a Great Goddess. Even so, these qualities apply to a number of Great Goddesses all over the world; this ought to be reason enough for a cautious attitude to a possible relations between the *Dísir* and the *Dhisanās*.

As was pointed out above, there are no sharp distinctions between the three categories of *Dísir*, *Valkyries* and *Norns*. In Eddic poetry the *Dísir* appear with a warlike or hostile attitude (HHuII.51; Rm.11; Gk.I, 19; Ak.35; Grm.53; HHuI.16;), as associated with death (Hm.28) and as helpers in childbirth (Sgd.9). The same picture meets us in different Sagas, for example in the heroic tale *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, where, on the eve of battle the hero dreams about armed women, *spáðísir*, who promise to protect him and who follow him in his adventures as tutelary spirits.¹³ King *Sigmundur* in *Volsunga saga* is similarly protected in the same way by his *spáðísir* until *Óðinn* intervenes.¹⁴ The belief in the guardian *Dísir* is reflected in *Hálfs saga*, where one of the fighting men evokes his *Dísir* and his enemy answers: *Yör munu dauðar Dísir allar*, "All your *Dísir* may be dead"¹⁵, implying the failure of the attack.

9 AnEWb s.v. *dís*, p.77.

10 Loc. cit.

11 The theory of the relation between *Dísir* and *Dhisanās* is presented by K. Johansson, 1917-1919, "Über die altindische Göttin *Dhisanā* und Verwandtes", *Skrifter utgivna av Kungliga Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet*, bd.20, Uppsala. A broad exposition of the etymologies as well as the varying interpretations of *Dhisanās* are furnished in the essay.

12 *Shatapatha Brāhmana* IV. 5. 4, 5-8. Cf. *A Dictionary of Hinduism*, London 1977 s.v. *Dhisanā*.

13 *Ásmundar Saga kappabana* in *Zwei Fornaldarsögur*, 1891, ed. F. Dettler, Halle.

14 *The Saga of the Volsungs*, 1990, p.53.

15 *Útsteinar-kviða*, 3, *Den ældre Eddas og Eddica minor* I-II, 1943, trans. M. Larsen, Copenhagen.

The Dísir and Þiðrandi

The short story about Þiðrandi¹⁶ contains both hostile and protective Dísir. During an autumn festival at the home of Síðu-Hallr, probably at the same time as the sacrifice of the Dísir, the host's son Þiðrandi was killed by nine black Dísir, whereas nine white ones hurried to his succour in vain. A wise man, Þorhall the Prophet, declared that it was a deed perpetrated by the family's *Fylgjur* or Dísir, who were being forced to leave, as a new religion was coming to Iceland.

Dag Strömbäck has interpreted the story as being strongly influenced by Christian elements, mixed with the ancient notions concerning *Fylgjur* and Dísir, which are mentioned in the story. The author of the short story about Þiðrandi used a traditional Christian motif, the battle between light and goodness on the one hand and darkness and evil on the other, typical of the visionary poems of the Middle Ages. A parallel, the Norse *Draumkvædet*, which some scholars relate to the 14th century¹⁷, depicts the confrontation between the black army of evil and the white troops of goodness.¹⁸

Especially in view of the unhappy ending of the story, that the short story we may well regard the tale of Þiðrandi as an expression of the agony and upheaval of the religious transformation on Iceland at that time, and not simply as an instance of the transfer of symbolic images in visionary.

The Cult of the Dísir

According to the available sources, the Dísir were common objects of cult in the North. Although fragmentary these descriptions give an idea about the traditional *Dísablót* "the sacrifice to the Dísir". The *Dísablót* took place in "the Winter Nights", i.e. at the beginning of October, according to *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*.¹⁹ These sources tell us about a cult of an esoteric character - especially *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, where Bárðr, the host of the house where the *blót* is held, tries to expel Egill and his men from the ritual drinking, in which the visiting King Eiríkr Blóðøx and Queen Gunhildr take part. Actually, the reason for the expulsion of Egill was the old hostility between him and the royal couple, which is emphasized in the ensuing episodes.²⁰

Gísla saga Súrssonar presents an account of a great festival in the autumn: *Þorgrímr ætlaði að hafa haustboð á vetrnóttum ok fagna vetri ok blóta Freyr*..... We have noted that the above-mentioned tale of a festival at the home of Síðu-Hallr also excluded the actual sacrifice, which was an abomination from a Christian perspective. It is, however, quite possible that these autumnal festivals were originally *Dísablót*.²¹

¹⁶ *Flateyjarbók* I, pp.418-421.

¹⁷ For a discussion, see K. Liestøl, 1946, "Draumkvæde. A Norwegian visionary poem from the Middle Ages", *Studia Norwegica*, Oslo, pp.1-144. B. Alver claims that *Draumkvædet* is compiled from different sources. B. Alver, 1971, *Draumkvædet - folkevisse eller lærd kopidiktning*, Oslo, pp.127ff.

¹⁸ D. Strömbäck, 1949, *Tidrande och diserna*, Lund, pp.44-48.

¹⁹ *Egils saga*, ch.64; *Víga-Glúms saga*, 1956, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík, ch.6; F. Ström, 1954, pp.14-19.

²⁰ *Egils saga*, ch.44.

²¹ *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, 1943, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, Guðni Jónsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík, chap.15.

In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðrekr konungs*, a great *Dísablót* is described:

A king was called Álfr, who ruled over Álfheimr, the land between Glommen and Götälven. One autumn a great *Dísablót* was held at King Álfr's house and his daughter Álfhildr performed the *blót*. Álfhildr was more beautiful than any of the women, and besides the people were more beautiful to look at in those days than people of our days. In the night when Álfhildr reddened the *hørg*,²² Starkaðr Áludreng carried her away and took her to his home. King Álfr summoned Þórr for help in looking for Álfhildr. After that Þórr killed Starkaðr and permitted Álfhildr to return to an older female relative.²³

There are other versions of this saga, which only contain the story of Álfhildr's capture and her release at Þórr's hands. Álfhildr bears a child, Stórverkr, who becomes the father of the famous Starkaðr, the main character in *Gautreks saga*.²⁴

Álfhildr is obviously performing the ritual alone at the shrine, far from the houses, when Starkaðr Áludreng appears and abducts her. The reddening with the victim's blood reminds us of the sacrifice to Freyja's *høgr* performed by Óttarr in *Hyndluljóð*, who always industriously incarnadines her shrine with blood from cattle, so that every stone shines like glass.

Moreover, the names Álfr and Álfhildr point to the close connection between the *Dísablót* and another *blót* with a similar character, the *Álfablót*.²⁵ The *Álfablót*, "the sacrifice to the Elves", seems to have taken place in the same season and had an esoteric character. In Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Austrfararvísur*, the poet describes how the inhabitants of western Sweden celebrated this ritual and how the author himself is ousted from their home, because they feared the wrath of the gods.²⁶ In *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, recipient of the autumn sacrifice was the god Freyr, who seems to have a certain connection with the Elves, as his home is called Álfheimr. (On a possible identification of the Vanir and the Elves, see p.61 above).

The sparse facts that can be gleaned from these Sagas only allow us to speculate as to whether the story about Álfr and Álfhildr is a reflection of the myths about the fertility gods Freyr and Freyja, the latter always running the risk of being abducted by giants. We also remember that the gods themselves raised *høgr ok hof* (Vsp.7) and performed the role of sacrificers (Vsp.7, Hkr.4). Their functions were also reflected in the title

²² *Høgr*"a shrine", probably in the shape of a pile of stones. K. Eldjárn, s.v. *hov og horg*, KLNM.

²³ From A. Olrik and H. Ellekilde, 1926-51, *Nordens Gudeværliden II*, Copenhagen, p.175.

²⁴ About this motif, see G. Dumézil, 1983, *The stakes of the warrior*, Los Angeles and Berkeley, pp.117ff.

²⁵ F. Ström, 1954, p.19, shows how difficult it is to fix the exact time for the *blót*. Ström claims that the *dísablót* had another, more open character than the *álfablót*, according to the source material, *ibid.* pp.14-15. There is, however, evidence that ascribes a similar character to the *dísablót*.

²⁶ Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Austrfararvísur*, 3-5, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtningen*, 1967, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen, p.221.

of their mortal priests and priestesses, who were called *goði* and *gyðja*, respectively.

Snorri Sturluson tells us about an autumnal festival in Trøndelagen, where the inhabitants devoted their drinks to the Æsir according to the old custom, performing a *blót* that was considered beneficial for the year's crop.²⁷ Another passage deals with a severe crop failure which afflicted the Norse country during the reign of Hákon the Good, a Christian from childhood. The peasants forced him to participate in the autumnal *blót* and to propose toasts to Óðinn and other gods according to the traditional drinking ritual.²⁸ In this story the connection between the King and the fertility of soil is conspicuous, quite comparable with the story of King Ólaf, called "the Elf of Geirstaðir", to whom the peasants sacrificed for a long time after his death as they were said to have done to Freyr. The connection between the Elves and the fertility deities clearly reappears in this short notice.²⁹

The *Vølsa þáttur*

The purpose of the *Dísa*- and *Álfablót* was undoubtedly that of promoting fertility. Since Freyr was the recipient of the *Álfablót*, it seems permissible to assume that the *Dísablót* was devoted to Freyja, the Vanadís. The rituals were probably performed by both men and women, but directed to Freyr as the great Álfr and Freyja as the Great Dís, respectively. Nothing directly contradicts the idea that the sacrifices to the male and the female fertility deity could take place at the same time, possibly in conjunction with the autumnal equinox, although hard evidence backing this view cannot be adduced.

Presumably, the whole household participated in the autumnal *blót*. One example of such a festival - although there are no firm grounds for ascribing it either to the *Dísa*- or to the *Álfablót* - is described in a short passage of *Óláfs saga helga*, the *Vølsa þáttur*.³⁰ King Óláfr and his men enter a farmstead, where the people are preoccupied with a ritual around a holy object called *Vølsi*. This was a horse phallus, prepared with onion and wrapped in linen, ingredients belonging to magical medicine, where the formula *líni laukaR* is well-known from other connections, especially in runic inscriptions.³¹ According to the text, the phallus is made erect by the peasant's wife, if she wants it to be so, and after that it is ceremonially handled by her. It is passed round from hand to hand in the household with obscene recitations, hinting at the procreation of animals as well as

²⁷ Þat haust váru sögd Óláfi konungi þau tíðendi innan ór Þrándheimi, at bændr hefði þar haft vøizlur fjölmennar at vetrnóttum. Váru þar drykkjur miklar. Var konungi svá sagt, at þar væri minni ǫll signuð Ásum at fornum sið. Þat fylgði ok þeirri sögn, at þar væri drepit naut ok hross ok roðnir stallar af blóði, ok framit blót ok veittr sá formáli, at þat skyldi vera til árþótar. Óláfs saga Helga in *Heimskringla* II, 1951, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk fornrit XXVII*, ch.103 Reykjavík.

²⁸ *Saga Hákonar góða*, in *Heimskringla* I, 1951, ed. B. Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík, ch.16.

²⁹ *Flateyjarbók* II, p.7. See also Davidson 1964, p.155.

³⁰ *Ibid.* pp.331-336.

³¹ About this combination *Lini LaukaR* see E. Schnippel, 1929, "Lein und lauch in Runenzauber", *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, pp. 68-65; S. Sierke, 1939, *Kannten die vorchristliche Germanen Runenzauber?* Königsberg; W. Lehmann, 1955, "Lín and laukr in die Edda". *The Germanic Review* 30, pp.163-171; W. Krause, 1966, *Die Runeninschrift im älteren Futhark*, Göttingen, p. 85; G. Steinsland og K. Vogt, 1981, pp.87-106.

of men. Vølsi, the horse phallus, symbolizes the functions of Freyr and is evoked with the repeated formula:

þiggi Mørnir þetta blæti!

May Mørnir receive the sacrifice!

Mørnir, "sword, phallus", is identical with the phallic god, Freyr, which led to the whole ritual being interpreted as a self-sacrifice, i.e. the god is sacrificed to himself, in line with Óðinn's words on the tree, *sjálfr sjálfum mér*, "myself to myself" (Hvm. 138).³² But as Gro Steinsland and Kari Vogt have observed, the ritual text doubtless intimates a wedding ceremony. Like F. Ström, they suggest a *hieros gamos* between Freyr and an unknown female deity called Mørnir, on whose identity no proper light has as yet been shed.³³ There is, however, a third possibility: in my view this ritual text alludes to a symbolic wedding between Vølsi, a *pars pro toto* of Freyr, who is also evoked under the name Mørnir, and mortal women. Such a relationship is apparent in the recitations from the household where the slave-woman expresses her delight at a possible intercourse with Vølsi, whereas the young inexperienced daughter swears by Gefjun, the goddess of virgins, that she will only touch the phallus if forced to do so. The male members of the household who take part in the ceremony are rather uninterested in the object itself. The ritual - or properly speaking, the fragment of a ritual - has been compared with the royal horse sacrifice of India, *ashvamedha*, where the queen performed an act of symbolic intercourse with the dead stallion during an erotic dialogue with the priests and the assembled women.³⁴ The *Vølsa-þátr* could thus convey some information about a sacrifice to Freyr and the following fertility rituals, which could belong to the autumnal *Dísa-* and *Álfablót*. The obscene liturgy corresponds to the songs mentioned by Adam of Bremen as symbolic expressions of the meaning of the sacrifice to the year's crop and to peace that breeds fertility, concentrated in the formula *til árs ok friðar*.³⁵

These pre-Christian autumnal rites connected with fertility and the year's crop were not changed after the Christianisation process. In *The Elder Law of Gulathing*, from western Norway, it was stipulated that the peasants had to brew their beer before the day of All Saints: *En þat ol skal til signa Krist þacka oc sancta Mariu til árs och friðar* "...that all shall bless that beer as thanks to Christ and Saint Mary for the sake of the year's crop and to peace".³⁶ The first part, *til árs*, means a good new year, especially related to the year's crop. The expression *til friðar* implies a

³² Turville-Petre 1964, p.258; Å. V. Ström, 1975, pp.145-146.

³³ Steinsland and Vogt, 1981, pp.90-94; F. Ström interprets the personal name Mørnir as meaning "the one who will finally receive Vølsi" and equates her with Skaði, regarding the ritual as a *hieros gamos* between Freyr and Skaði. F.Ström, 1954 pp.29-30.

³⁴ The interpretation of this rite has been debated. Its similarities to the Hindu *ashvamedha* ritual and the Roman Equus October are evident. Cf. Johansson, K, 1917-1919, p.121f. For a modern perspective on ritual horse sacrifice, see W. D. O' Flaherty, 1980, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts*, Chicago, pp.149-211, albeit she does not refer to the *Vølsa þátr*.

³⁵ Adam, p.225.

³⁶ *Gulathingloven*, 6, in *Norges gamle lover intil 1387*, 1846, ed. R. Keyser og P. A. Munch, Christiania.

wish for peace, for good fellowship and the benefit of consensual action. The expression is derived from the verb *frjá*, "to love", and the connotations of the word could be widened, implying a wish for concord and unity which was desired for maintaining procreation. It is likely that Adam's description of Fricco-Freyr as the deity who gives *pacem et voluptatem*, "peace and voluptuousness", to mankind, echoes the old formula *til árs ok fridar*.³⁷ If the ritual drinking at the autumnal festival was consecrated to Christ and the Holy Virgin during Christian times, Freyr and Freyja were probably the original recipients of this drink.

The Cult of the Dísir at Uppsala

As is the case with other kinds of evidence of pre-Christian cults, the records concerning the *Dísablót* are cult more sparse in eastern Scandinavia. It is true that the word *Dís* is mentioned twice in Þjóðólfr's of Hvin *Ynglingatal* as *Loga dís* (10) and *jódís* (7), but we can only interpret the word as "woman", as it appears as a part of a kenning. In stanza 21-22, King Aðils was killed by *vitta vétrr*, "a witch", who made him fall off his horse. Snorri Sturluson, following the stanzas of *Ynglingatal*, omits the supernatural element by saying that Adils, attending the *Dísablót*, was riding round the *Dísarsalr* when his horse stumbled and the King fell off, smashing his head against a stone whereupon his brains poured out (Hkr.29). Stumbling and falling constituted a well-known bad omen, witnessed from Icelandic sagas. It is connected with the *Dísir* at the end of *Grímnismál*, where Grímnir stumbles and falls after Óðinn's utterance: "I know that your life is ending (since) the *Dísir* are angry" (Grm.53). Eiríkr Rauði relinquishes his plans for a journey to Greenland when his horse stumbles just before the departure of the ship, and so does Gunnarr of Hlidarendi, although he knows that his enemies will be free to kill him if he stays at home.

The great markets called *Disting* took place at Uppsala. They became the greatest and the best known of all markets, managing to survive until the 19th century. Christianity tried to changed its name into "Kyndelsting" in honour of the Virgin Mary, an attempt which was not successful until the 18th century. During the Middle Ages, the *Disting* was a major meeting-place for the merchants of Sweden. In the years 1362 and 1364, the election of the King was held at the *Disting*; later these occasions were used by different parties to rouse political opinions, as in the case of the election of a regent in 1512. Political culprits like Peder Sunnanväder were executed at the *Disting*, and his enemy and contemporary Gustav Vasa used the *Disting* to negotiate with the rural population.³⁸ It is obvious that the *Dísablót* and the *Disting* played important roles for the central power in the land of Svear even at an early stage. When the pagan *blót* disappeared, the *Disting* managed to survive - not only during the Catholic period but also during the Reformation, at which time many ancient customs disappeared.

To define the exact time for this event is, however, a complicated matter. There was a medieval rule which said that: *þet tungel som tändes efter trettondas midnat är Distingstunglet*, "that moon which is lit after the midnight of the Twelfth Day is the Moon of the *Disting*", a rule which

³⁷ F. Ström, 1954, p.30; H. Celander, 1955, *Förkristen jul*, Stockholm, p.155.

³⁸ J. Granlund, s.v. *disting*, KLNLM.

was apparently based on an ancient custom from the heathen times, when the different festivals were held at the rising of a new moon. This means that the *Disting* must have taken place between the 21st of January and the 20th of February.³⁹

This was not the original time for the festival, though. In heathen times, it was celebrated in the month of Góa between the 23rd of February and the 31st of March, which coincides with Snorri's note according to which the *Disting* was put back a month. This adjustment was probably due to the introduction of the forty days of fasting preceding the Christian Easter.⁴⁰

The Sacrifice at Uppsala

The exact time for the *Dísablót* is of a certain interest, as another remark of Snorri's states that an important *blót* took place at Uppsala in pagan times, to which all people from the kingdom had to gather and sacrifice *til friðar ok sigrs konungi sínum*, "to peace and victory for their King".⁴¹ This remark corresponds to the information supplied by Adam of Bremen some 200 years before about the heathen rituals of Uppsala connected with the temple and with the great sacrifice, which took place every ninth year.

Every nine years they used to celebrate a great festival with participation of people from all provinces of the Svear. Kings and tribes, everyone, sent their gifts to Uppsala, and those who had already converted to Christianity had to buy themselves free from participation, something crueller than every other form of punishment.⁴²

Hoc sacrificium fit circa aequinoctium vernale, "this sacrifice took place around the vernal equinox", Adam declares.⁴³ The time of this great sacrifice at Uppsala should thus have coincided with the *Dísablót* and the *Disting*, according to the pre-Christian calendar.

The sacrifice took place during the nine days that are described by Adam of Bremen: "...of every kind of living thing which is male, they submit nine bodies, a rite which pleases their bloody gods".⁴⁴ Corpses of dead men, horses and dogs are hung from the tree in the sacred grove. This mass sacrifice can be compared with the description provided by Thietmar's of Merseburg about the festival in the Danish Lejre, a central site for the royal power on Sjælland:

³⁹ N. Beckman, 1918, *Distingin. Studier tillägnade Esaias Tegnér*, Lund, pp.200-208.

⁴⁰ Wessén, 1924, p.188.

⁴¹ Í *Svíþjóðu var þat forn landssíðr, meðan heiðni var þar, at höfuðblót skyldi vera at Uppsplum at góí. Skyldi þá blóta til friðar ok sigrs konungi sínum, ok skyldu menn þangat sækja um allt Svíaveldi. Skyldi þar þá ok vera þing allra Svía. Þar var ok þá markaðr ok kaupstefna ok stóð viku...En nú síðan er kristni var alsíða í Svíþjóð, en konungar afæðusk at sitja at Uppsplum, þá var færðr markaðrinn ok hafðr kyndílmessu. Óláfs saga helga in *Heimskringla* II, 1951, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík, ch.77.*

⁴² Adam, p.225. For discussions, see Wessén 1924 p.188, Ström, F. 1954, pp.53ff.

⁴³ Adam, scholion 141, p. 253. It has to be remarked that the translation of Adam of Bremen from 1984 into Swedish assigns this *blót* to the winter solstice. No reason supports this translation, though neither the textual criticism nor other circumstances.

⁴⁴ Loc. cit.

But since I had perceived strange things about their [the Danish] ancient sacrifice, I will not let them pass unnoticed. There is a place in these localities, the principal site in this Kingdom, (called Leredun, in the place called Selon) where all come together every nine years in the month of January, after the time when we used to celebrate the birth of our Lord; they do their sacrifice ninety [and nine] human beings, horses, dogs and cocks, in stead of falcons. They are, as we mentioned before, convinced that these sacrifices are going to serve them [as protection against the infernal spirits] and atone for committed crimes.⁴⁵

The two authors describe a rite of a special character using the number nine in counting the victims, the days of the sacrifice and the interval, in years between the great festivals. The number nine had a special significance in the Nordic way of counting, often being connected with destiny and with the Norms (see p. 141 f., below).

Furthermore both authors supply accounts of a central cult closely connected with the royal power, which was probably combined with some kind of economic contribution from the surrounding local tribes.

Both Adam and Thietmar endeavour to demonstrate the inhuman and bloody rituals of the pagan religion, a conventional pattern in Christian Mission literature. Some scholars regard these descriptions as merely a cliché whose reliability is slight, especially as Adam never visited Uppsala and could easily have copied Thietmar's description. There is, however, insufficient evidence for us to assume that these great sacrifices never took place; moreover, we would have to disavow not only Adam but also Thietmar and Snorri. Further, archaeological finds show that horses and dogs were sacrificed to the gods, and men as well. As was mentioned above Adam's observation about the obscene songs might also correspond to the Völsi episode.⁴⁶

The Great Dís

Who was the recipient of the hanged victims of the sacred grove at Uppsala? According to some sources, primarily *Ynglingatál* the supreme god at Uppsala was Frö - the east-Nordic form of Freyr who, under the name Yngvi Frö, was the progenitor of the ruling dynasty at Uppsala. In his *Heimskringla*, Snorri makes Óðinn the supreme god of Uppsala and according to Adam of Bremen, Þórr was the most powerful of the gods. Even Freyja was, as was already mentioned, connected with the pagan cult at Uppsala in her function of *blótgyðja* (Hkr.4). One might assume that the Vanir received the sacrifice at Uppsala, because the oldest sources connect them with the kings of the Ynglinga dynasty. Snorri's reasons for making Óðinn the supreme god were probably influenced by the English historiographers' genealogies, whereas Adam makes Þórr the mightiest due to his position in the middle, a ranking which might be inspired by the Christian paradigm of Gods' appearance.

⁴⁵ Thietmar von Merseburg I,17, the quotation from Wessén, 1924, p.192.

⁴⁶ E. Mogk, 1909, "Die Menschenopfer bei den Germanen", *Abhandlungen der K. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 27, Leipzig 1909, p.612ff. A rune-inscription interpreted by L. Samuelson could hint at this type of sacrifice: "With nine rams and nine horses Hathuwolfr gave a good year", L. Samuelsson, 1989, "En blekingsk blotinskrift", *Fornvännen* 4, pp.221-229.

In Snorri's history of the Ynglinga Dynasty the fall of King Aðils took place in the *Dísarsalr*, "the Hall of the Dís". This place is mentioned in the *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, which describes how the queen hanged herself in the *Dísar-salr*, after her husband Heiðrek killed her father and brother to save his own son from being sacrificed.⁴⁷ Such a building is also reported in the *Saga of Friðþjóf ins frækna*, a late heroic saga from the 14th or 15th century. When Friðþjóf returns from the Orkney Islands, his home has been burnt down by Helgi and his brother; he therefore sets off to see the Kings. They are in the grove of Baldr in order to sacrifice to the Dísir, when Friðþjóf arrives:

*Sydan gieck friðþiofur jnn og sá ad fátt folk var i dijsar salnum, voru kongar þá ad dijsa blóte og satu ad dryckiu. Elldu var á golfinu og satu konur þeira vid eldinn og þokudu godinn, en sumar smurðu og þerðu med dukum.....*⁴⁸

Then Friðþjóf went in and saw that few people were in the Hall of the Dís. The Kings were there at the *Dísablót* and sat drinking. There was a fire on the floor and the women sat next to it and warmed the gods and some of them smeared them and dried them with cloth.....

These three sources point to the existence of a hall, or more likely, a building called *Dísar-salr*. The first element *Dísar-* indicates a singular form; we must hence suggest that the ruler of this hall was the great Dís, as distinguished from the nameless collective of Dísir.

We have already referred to the close connection between the Vanir and the cult of the Dísir. Nothing really contradicts the notion that Freyja is this great *Dís*, and as was mentioned above one of Freyja's many names is Vanadís. The suicide of King Heiðrek's wife is committed in the *Dísar-salr*, a deed which could be aligned with the promise of Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir to the effect that she would starve to death together with her father and expected to have her evening meal at Freyja's abode.⁴⁹ From these examples we are able to conclude that Freyja, the great *Dís*, could thus be a deity who receives women who had suffered a self-chosen and noble death.⁵⁰ It is true that the available facts about the *Dísir* are sparse and fragmentary; but it is possible to discern some outlines of these divinities. We have presumed an affinity between them and the Vanir. Like these gods, they were worshipped in fertility rites which took place in the autumn and in spring, perhaps coinciding with the autumnal and vernal equinoxes. It is also evident that the Dísir, like the Vanir, were bearers of a chthonic function, since they were connected with the earth and the year's crop. Their cult belonged to the family and the household, involving secret rites, such as the reddening of the *hprg*.

From the nameless collective of Dísir, a single *Dís* emerges. Although she has no other name, it is quite evident that she must be the Great Goddess, who is connected with fertility and who possesses chthonic

⁴⁷ *The Saga of King Heiðrek the Wise*, 1960, ed. C. Tolkien, p.26.

⁴⁸ *Saga of Friðþjóf ins frækni*, 1901, ed. L. Larsen, Halle, p.35.

⁴⁹ *Egils saga*, ch.78.

⁵⁰ Cf. Davidson, 1964, pp.151-152.

qualities. The great Dis whom we only discern as a dim figure in the cult of the Dísir could not be anyone but Freyja.

The Valkyries and the War-Fetter

The warlike aspect of the collective of Nordic goddesses is known as the Valkyries. The mentioned *idisi* in *The First Merseburger Galder*, who intervene in battle by way of magic paralysis, carry the typical qualities of the Valkyries:

*Eiris sâzun idisi sâzun hera duoder/suma hapt heptidun suma heri lezidun/suma clûbôdum umbi cuoniouuidi/insprinc haptbandun, invar vîgandum!*⁵¹

Once mighty women sat here and over there, some tied fetters, some stopped the armies, some loosened the fetters. Dash out of the fetters! Run from the enemies!

The charm could have been recited before battle, with a view to invoking these powers to decide the outcome of the struggle.⁵² It alludes to a recurrent topic in a martial situation, magic fetters suddenly being thought to chain the victim invisibly to the spot, so that he would easily fall victim to his enemies. This magic weapon is personified in a Valkyrie named Herfjotur (Grm.36), "the war fetter", one of the many who serve the fallen warriors in Valhøll (Glgf.35). The force of the *Herfjotur* 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 a 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.⁵³

The fourth time the "war fetter" falls over him, he is overwhelmed and killed, uttering the words: *mikil troll eiga her hlút*, "a mighty troll decides in this".⁵⁴

This kind of paralysis is not caused by fear; it is obviously a feeling of immobility, not unlike the kind we may experience in nightmares.⁵⁵ In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II, the hero is felled by his brother-in law, Dagr, at the place called Fjóturlundur, "grove of fetters" (HHu.II prose)⁵⁶. This instance could be compared with Tacitus' account about the Germanic tribe, the Semnones:

⁵¹ See Brate, 1919, pp.287-296.

⁵² F. Ström, 1954, p.71.

⁵³ *Hárðar Saga*, trans. from H. Davidson 1964, pp.63-64.

⁵⁴ There are other examples of the "war fetter" in *Sverri's saga*, 1920, ed. G. Indrebø, Oslo, *Sturlunga Saga*, 1988, ed. Órnólfur Þorsson, Reykjavík, II, 57.

⁵⁵ Davidson, 1964, p.64.

⁵⁶ This is an act of revenge, as Helgi killed Dagr's father. Dagr sacrifices to Óðinn, who lends him his own spear, which may constitute as allusion to the god's magic force.

At a fixed season all tribes of the same blood gather through their delegations in a certain forest -

"Haunted by visions beheld by their sires and the awe of the ages"

- and after publicly offering up a human life, they celebrate the grim "initiation" of their barbarous worship. There is a further tribute which they pay to the grove: no one enters it until he has been bound with a chain: he puts off his freedom, and advertises in his person the might of the deity: if he changes to fall, he must not be lifted up or rise - he must writhe along the ground until he is out again: the whole superstition comes to this, that it was here the race arose, here where dwells the god who is lord of all things; everything else is subject to him and vassal (Germ.39).

The fetters could allude to the special quality of the gods, who are sometimes simply called just *hopt* and *bönd*, "fetters, bindings".⁵⁷ When in *Hávamál*, Óðinn speaks of the wisdom he received while his hanging in the tree, he mentions the following knowledge:

Þat kann ek et fiórða/ef mér fyrðar bera/bönd at böglímom/svá ek gel/at ek ganga má/sprettr mér af fótom fiqturr/en af höndom hapt (Hvm.149).

I know that for the fourth, if people bind my limbs with fetters, then I chant that I can walk, loosening the fetter from my feet and the chain from my hands.

The magic skills of Óðinn in battle are described by Snorri: "in battle Óðinn was able to strike his enemies with blindness and deafness or fill them with fear and make their weapons cut not better than sticks (Hkr.6). The Valkyries' ability to paralyse and liberate the warriors could probably be reflected on an English votive stone dedicated to a goddess named Friagabi "the One who gives freedom".⁵⁸

Óðinn and the Valkyries

In Snorri's *Edda* Óðinn sometimes appears as the leader of the Valkyries, who serve in Valhöll, carrying the horns filled with ale, and laying the tables (Glgf.35). They are called Hrist, "the shaker"; Mist, "the mist"; Skeggiöld, "wearing a war axe"; Skögul, "battle"; Hildir, "battle"; Þrúðr, "power" (sometimes the name of Þórr's daughter); Hlökk, "noise"; Herfjotur, "war fetter"; Gøll, "loud cry"; Geirahöð, "spear battle"; Randgríðr, "shield peace"; Ráðgríðr, "council peace/ gods' peace"; and Reginleif, "heritage of the Gods". Snorri continues:

⁵⁷ de Vries II, p.3. Beside the Fjoturlundr and the forest of the Semnonnes there are some Indo-European parallels for example the fetters of Varuna which catch the sinner. The Thracian god Darzales is called the "Fetter".

⁵⁸ Davidson, 1964, p.62.

They are called Valkyries. Óðinn sends them to every battle, they choose the men who are going to fall and they rule over the victory. Gunnr⁵⁹ and Róta⁶⁰ and the youngest norn (sic!) who is called Skuld, ride every time to choose those who are going to fall and determine the outcome of the battle (Glgf.35).

The fundamental task of the Valkyries, "selectors of the slain", is to determine which of the warriors that should fall on the battle-field. In *Hákonarmál*, a poem by Eyvindr Skáldaspillir, the poet emphasises their role:

Göndul;⁶¹ and Skögul; were sent by Gauta-Týr (Óðinn).
to choose among the Kings, which of Yngvi's dynasty should go
with Óðinn and dwell in Valhöll; (1).

Göndul spoke, resting on the shaft of her spear:
"Now the power of the Æsir is increasing, when the high gods
have invited Hákon; with his army to their home" (10).

The well-famed King heard the words of Valkyries; on the horse-
back; the helmet-wearers, with their shields before them, were
wisely spoken (11).

The King protests:

"Why did you lead the battle so, Spear-Skögul? We were certainly
worthy of help from the gods" (12).

Neglecting the welcoming speech of Óðinn himself, Hákon goes on to call him evil and guileful (15). The poet obviously hints at Óðinn's deceitful actions through the Valkyries - which in other connections - render him bynames such as Skollvallir, "The one who causes fraud", and Bölverk, "the one who causes evil". When Dagr in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* tries to defend his deed, i.e. the killing of Helgi, he puts the blame on Óðinn: "Óðinn alone causes all evil" (HHu.II,33). The Valkyries seem to possess the same qualities as their master, reflected in the kenning *tálar Dísir*, "deceitful disir" of the battle-field (Rm.24).

The Selectors of the Slain

In *Völuspá*, the Valkyries forebode the destruction of the world:

*Sá hón valkyrior/vítt um komnar/görvar at ríða/til Goðþjóðar/Skuld
helt skildi/en Skögul önnor/Gunnr, Híldr, Göndul/jok Geirskögul/Nú
ero talðar/nönnor Herians (Vsp.30).*

⁵⁹ "battle".

⁶⁰ "who causes turmoil".

⁶¹ "Magic wand"; cf. Göndliir a surname of Óðinn, also denoting the *membrum virile*. The word *göndull* is only found in a Norse spell from 1325. Sometimes it is explained as derived from *gandulf, "were-wolf". AnEWb s.v. Göndliir.

She saw Valkyries, coming far off, ready to ride to the people of the gods. Skuld held her shield, Skögul was the other. Gunnr, Hildir, Gøndul and Spear-Skögul. Now the war-maidens of Herjan (Óðinn) are mentioned.

This is one example among many of the portentous function of the Valkyries, whose entrance emphasises the dreadful aspects of the battle-field. The OE *wælkýrce* has an unpleasant ring, meaning "a witch", while being synonymous with "a raven". The latter sense alludes to the followers of Óðinn, the ravens Hugin and Munin, but also to the bird which appears on the battle-field to feed on the corpses. In Ostfriesland *walrüderske* stands for nightmares and witches.

In this aspect, the approach of the Valkyries symbolises the cruelty of the war and brutal bloodshed on the battle-field, comparable with the actions of the Greek *keres* and the Irish Morrigan and Badb, who used to appear as birds of prey at the battle-field.⁶² The connection between the ravens and the Valkyries is evident in *Hrafnsmál*, "The Song of the Raven", which consists of a dialogue between a Valkyrie and a raven in homage to Harald Hárfagri. The metaphorical language about the battle and its horrors is similar to that of *Darraðarljóð* "The Song of the Spear"; the ensuing stanzas, however, depict the advantages of serving King Harald, as well as his generosity towards those who follow him in war (9,11,13).⁶³

The horrifying aspect of the Valkyries is best exemplified by *Darraðarljóð*, which was said to be a vision of the battle of Clondarf in 1014. It is interpolated with the framework in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, where a man called Þorruðr⁶⁴ sees how twelve men ride into the women's house. Looking in through the house's window⁶⁵ he beholds a terrible scene: Women are weaving with weights of human heads, their weft and warp consisting of human intestines; their reeds are swords and their weaving-comb arrows. They are singing a song about the battle while weaving the warrior banner for the army, prophesying victory for the young King and defeat for the Irish.

We weave, we weave the web of the spear
as on goes the standard to the brave
we shall not let him lose his life
The Valkyries have power to choose the slain(6).

All sinister now to see
a cloud of blood moves over the sky
the air is red with the blood of men
as the battle-women chant their song(9).⁶⁶

⁶² de Vries I, pp.273-274.

⁶³ *Hrafnsmál* in *Den ældre Edda og Edda minorica*, 1-2, 1943-46, trans M. Larsen, Copenhagen, pp.246-248.

⁶⁴ This story is probably a construction made from the title of the song, *Darraðarljóð*.

⁶⁵ To look through a window sometimes entailed taking part in a supernatural vision; cf. the slave-girl in Ibn Fadlān's story or the housewife in *Vǫlsa þáttur*.

⁶⁶ Translation from *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems*, 1922, trans. by N. Kershaw, Cambridge.

As the outcome of battle of Clontarf was in fact the opposite we may draw the conclusion that *Darraðarljóð* belongs to another context than *Brennu-Njáls saga* but has for some reason been inserted into it by its author. It was probably a battle hymn, with the function of instilling courage in the warriors before combat, and the final stanza is obviously a signal to attack.

In the 11th century, the Anglo-Saxon bishop Wulfstan noted what he called "choosers of the slain" among witches and evil-doers on his list of sinners in his *Sermo Lupi*.⁷ This is an example not only of Christian demonising of the pagan world, but of the widespread and popular perception of those deities whose function was to decide between life and death on the battle-field.

Like the *Dísir*, the Valkyries form an indistinct group of female deities with a close connection to the battle-field. They belong to the sphere of Óðinn and Freyja, who share the dead on the battle field. Like Freyja they choose among the men who are going to die. They reflect the cruelty of death, but also the joyful life on the other side when welcoming the fallen heroes to Valhöll.

The Individual Valkyrie

There is an evident contrast between the harsh chooser of the slain watching the bloody battle-field and the individual Valkyries of the Heroic Epics. These, sometimes called Shield-Maidens, dominate a certain literary style, where they appear as the erotic partner of the hero. This beautiful and wise Valkyrie is exemplified in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, where Helgi and the Valkyrie Sváva become lovers; they marry, and she helps him in his undertakings. When he dies at the hand of his brother, the poem ends with the prose addition: "It is told that Helgi and Sváva were reborn."

It is obvious that this couple are incarnated in Helgi Hundingsbani and the Valkyrie Sigrún, who, like Sváva, rides through the air accompanied by eight other Valkyries. They were married and had sons, but Helgi was felled by his brother-in-law in Fjöturlundur. In contradiction to the prevailing ethics, Sigrún then refuses to forgive her brother - her love for Helgi overrules affection for her own kin. After death Helgi dwells partly at Óðinn's Valhöll, where he continues to humiliate his enemy Hundingr, partly in his grave mound, where he meets his beloved Sigrún, who subsequently dies of grief. Once more they are reborn as Helgi Haddingjaskati and the Valkyrie Kára Hálfðanardóttir.

These epics deal with the same motif as the *Völsunga saga*, whose great hero Sigurðr Fáfnisbani is told that Helgi Hundingsbani's daughter lies asleep on the mountain Hindarfjall and that she is able to impart to him that knowledge which is necessary for a King. She is called Sigrdrífa in Eddic poetry, but later appears as Brynhildr.⁸ After the slaughter of Fáfni, Sigurðr arrives at Hindarfjall, where he enters the stronghold of shields. Behind this, Sigrdrífa is sleeping, pricked by a "sleeping thorn" turning the victory against Yggr's (Óðinn) determination. Sigurðr and Sigrdrífa fall in love, and she gives him the magic knowledge - imbued

⁷ Wulfstan also uses the word *wælcyrge*. Davidson, 1964, pp.61-62.

⁸ About the problem of Sigrdrífa's identity as Brynhildr, see Th. Anderson, 1980, *The Legend of Brynhild*, Ithaca, pp.82-84.

with echoes of the Edda poems *Hávamál* and *Rígspula* - of battle and navigation as well as of how to seduce women and help deliver a baby.⁶⁹

As the epic progresses Sigurðr arrives at the house of Heimir, where he meets Brynhildr. She prefers battle before ordinary women's work, i.e. she is a Valkyrie. After seeing a glimpse of his treasure, Brynhildr begins to weave an illustration of Sigurðr's heroic deeds on a tapestry. This change of nature illustrates the double role of the Valkyrie in the Heroic Sagas: for long periods of time, they might ravage as vikings near and far; but they could suddenly change their lives, sitting down on the bench in the house and engaging themselves in embroidery, representing the ideal of a noble woman.⁷⁰

An interesting remark about these double roles of the individual Valkyrie has been offered by P. Meulengracht-Sørensen, who suggests that she is a bearer of two basically incompatible ideals, one male, and one female, and that once her male aspect had been defeated, she could be the ideal bride of the hero. In most cases, however, this conflict resulted in her and her partner's death.⁷¹

Brynhildr's love and the fight for the treasure of Andvari are the impelling forces, which drive the *Völsunga saga* towards its tragic conclusion. The Valkyrie speaks the following words about her passion in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*:

*Unnak einum/ né ýmissum/bjóat of hverfan/ hug men-Skøgul.*⁷²

One I have loved, not many; the mind of Men-Skøgul⁷³ is not fugitive.

When Sigurðr is killed, she prepares for committing suicide. Högni declares:

*Letia hána langrar göngulþars aprtborin/ aldri verði!*⁷⁴

Do not advise her the long way, so that she will never be reborn!

probably referring to Brynhildr's birth as the fourth incarnation of the Valkyries, following Sváfa, Sigrún and Kára Hálfðanardóttir. It seems as if the passionate love between the great hero and the Valkyrie becomes the incentive that causes them to be reborn into new existences, where their mutual desire is repeated.

Ø R. G. Finch, 1965, *The Saga of the Volsungs*, London, p.37.

70 The Valkyries of the epics have been compared with the Shield-Maidens in the Heroic Sagas. A sharp distinction between these two groups is hard to draw. Shield-Maidens also appear in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, but these are usually uninterested of the opposite sex. B. Sawyer, 1986, *Sköldmön och madonnan - kyskhet som ett hot mot samhällsordningen*, *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 2, pp.3-14.

71 P. Meulengracht-Sørensen, 1983, *The unmanly man. Concepts of sexual defamation in early Northern society*. Odense pp.22ff. This pattern could be applied to the representations of the Amazons of Late Classical Antiquity, who became ideal wives after being defeated by heroes. Like the Valkyries, they - and sometimes their partner - die a violent death. Plutarch, *Vita Theseus*, 1914, trans. B. Perrin, London, 26.

72 *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, 41, in *De gamle Eddadikte*, 1932, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.

73 "Skøgul with the adornment", a kenning for Brynhildr herself.

74 Ibid. 46.

The passionate Valkyrie as an erotic partner in the epics could be regarded as a late construction, affected by the continental poetry of the Middle Ages; still, this warlike and independent figure has no parallel in the *Chanson de Geste* or in the lays of the troubadours. She is the perfect counterpart to the hero, brave, intelligent and skilful. This Valkyrie is neither the grim apparition of the battle-field nor the obedient servant at Valhöll, but a reflection of Freyja herself, the independent and passionate goddess, who is able to tap sources of secret wisdom and who desires the brave young hero. From this viewpoint, we can understand why Sigrún, Sváfa and Brynhildr take up a special position among the literary representations of women in the Middle Ages.

The Number of the Norns

*Þaðan koma meyjar/margs vitandi/þrjár, ór þeim sæ/
er und þolli stendr/Urð héto eina/aðra Verðandi/-skáro á skiði-/Skuld
ena þriðio /þær lög lögðo/þær líf kuro/alda þörnóm/örlog seggia
(Vsp.20).*

From there maidens with much knowledge came, three from the lake placed under the tree.⁷⁵ One was called Urðr, the other Verðandi, Skuld the third. They scored on wood. They made laws there, they choose lives for the children of men, men's fate.

The number of the Norns are three, which reminds us about their classical counterparts, the three Greek Moires and the three Roman Parcae. The Matronae or Mothers, worshipped in Middle Germany before Christianization, appear as three goddesses, usually depicted with fruits and other vegetation symbols.⁷⁶ In the Middle Ages, the three Holy Marys, related to an apocryphal legend connected with the women visiting the grave of Jesus (Mark. 16:1)⁷⁷, were invoked during childbirth in charms or prayers. In Lappish religion, the three helpers at birth were called Sarakka, Juksakka and Uksakka, daughters to Maderakka, "Midwife". They were supposed to live under the ground where the tent stood, and were summoned particularly during child-birth.⁷⁸

The number three is sometimes augmented in three times three, especially in spells. The Norns are probably identical with the nine helpers called *næringsmøyjar*, according to records from a witch trial.⁷⁹

We could see the fateful number nine in the Norns' connection with childbirth, alluding to the nine months of pregnancy.⁸⁰ The custom on the

⁷⁵ The *lectio difficilior* Sær "lake" is to be preferred before "house". Sær is usually apprehended as a form of *salr*, *sal* "house, room", although there is a possibility of reading the word as *sær*; cf., among other, Lappish *saivva* "tarn, holy lake, stone idols, deities of the Under World", ANEWb s.v. *sær*, p.575; cf. *Völuspá*, 1980 (new ed.), ed. trans. by Sigurður Nordal, Darmstadt, p.52.
⁷⁶ de Vries II, pp.288-296.

⁷⁷ T. Gad, s.v. Maria Magdalena, KLNm.

⁷⁸ N. Lid, 1946, "Light-mother and Earth-mother", *Studia Norwegica*, Oslo, pp.15-16.

⁷⁹ I. Reichborn-Kjennerud, 1927, *Vår gamle trolldomsmedisin*, in *Skrifter utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi*, Oslo, 4, I, 54.

⁸⁰ This is one probable explanation of the reiterated presence of the number nine in Old Norse mythology; cf. the number 40 in the Bible, alluding to 40 weeks of pregnancy. Still, the number nine must refer to other categories in the mythical universe, too; see Steinsland, 1989, pp.279-281; A. Teilgård Laugesen, 1959, *Syv - ni - tolv*, Copenhagen.

Faroes and in Norway of giving a certain helping of porridge to the Norns, called *nornagreytur* or *nornegraut*, could be defined as a thank offering.⁸¹

On a *lyfstav*, "a medicine wand", from Ribe, a spell to help those who suffer from "the shivering disease", i.e. malaria, is 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*; but in its second part it 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.⁸²

Those who create compelling necessity

The formula about the *ni : nouðr* echoes Snorri's words in *Skaldskaparmál* (89):

Nornir heita þær nauð skapa
They are called Norns, those who create compelling necessity".⁸³

This function is observed in *Fáfnismál* in Sigurðr's question:

hveriar ro þær nornir/er nauðgönglar ro/ok kíosa mæðr frá mögum?
(Fm.12)?

Who are the Norns who arrive with (compelling) necessity and choose the mothers from the sons ?

which hints at another common function of the Norns, namely that of foreboding death in childbirth.⁸⁴

However, the word *nauð*, "compelling necessity", directs us towards the Greek perception of Ananke, who was deeply connected with the fate of man and becomes comparable to the destiny in later philosophical speculations. In Plato's dialogue *The Republic*, Ananke uses a distaff, consisting of the spheres of the cosmos. Around it, the three Moires, called Lachesis "the measuring", Clotho "the spinning" and Atropos "the inexorable" are singing about past present and future, accompanied by the music created by the friction of the spheres, "the harmony of the spheres". The Moires distributed the fates of men who, after their death, drank from the river Lethe and forgot their former life. According to

⁸¹ de Vries I, p.272.

⁸² 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.

⁸³ *Nauð* means both "distress" and "compelling necessity". It is furthermore possible to derive the word from **nau*, "death, corpse", AnEWb s.v. *nauð*, p.405.

⁸⁴ Most translators have preferred to omit this version in favour of the *Vplsungu-Saga*: *Hveriar eru þær nornir/ er kíosa mögu frá mæðrum?* "Who are the Norns who choose the sons from the mothers?"

Ananke, compelling necessity, they were reborn and entered the earth as falling stars. ⚡

The Norns are not spinning the threads of fate in *Völuspá*; but they *skáro á skiði*, "they scores did cut", which reflects another pursuit - they are scoring fate on a wooden plate. ⚡ This could be compared with the spells carved on plates or wands that were referred to above. When Skírnir threatens to subdue Gerðr, he does so by carving spells. The teaching of Sigrdrifa is effectuated by carving runes on different objects. It is obvious that we are dealing with two different perceptions about fate, the power of words and the threads of life.

The latter are represented in the Heroic Poems, particularly in the birth of Helgi Hundingsbani.

Nótt varð í bæ/nornir kvómo/þær er øðlingi/aldr um skópo/þann báðo fylki/frægstan verða/ok buðlunga/beztan þikka (HHu.I, 2).

It was night in the house (when) the Norns came, who decided the life of the noble child. They bade the King to become the most famous and the best of Kings.

Snero þær af afli/ørlögþátto/þá er borgir braut/i Brálundi;/ þær um greiddo/gullin símo/ok und mána-sal/miðian festo (HHu.I, 3).

They twisted forcefully the threads of fate which broke the castles of Brálundr. The golden thread they combed together and fastened them in the middle of the hall of the moon.

Þær austr ok vestr/enda fálo/þar átti lofðungr/land á milli;/brá nipt Nera/á norðrvega/einni festi/ey bað hón halda (HHu.I, 4).

The ends were hidden in East and West. The King's land lay between them. Neri's sister tied one end on the Northern side and asked it to hold forever.

Speculations concerning the spinning-fate goddesses have been connected with the word *urðr* as related to Lat. *vertere*, "twirl, spin" as well as with the spinning-wheel (cf. Skr. *varṭula*, "spider"); still, there is no evident reason for believing that this perception is of Nordic origin. It hence seem preferable to suggest that the idea of the goddesses of fate, carving the destinies of men on wood, pre-dates the spun life-threads, a notion which has been influenced by Medieval scholars familiar with classical poetry and philosophy.

As a collective, the Norns have a great deal in common with the *Dísir* as well as with the Valkyries. Like the former, they assist in childbirth; like the latter, they decide the moment of death:

Norna dóm/þú munt fyr nesiom hafa/ok ósvinnz apa (Fm. 11).

⚡ Plato, *The Republic*, 1946, trans. P. Shorey, London, 616C - 621D. About Neoplatonic speculations regarding Ananke, see Näsström, 1990, pp.65-71.

⚡ A. Holtsmark, 1951, "Skaro á skiði", *Maal og Minne*, pp. 81-89.

The Norns' doom and a fool's fate threaten you before the nesses.⁸⁷

Their decision as to the time or place of death has a peremptory character:

*Ok til þings þrjú iofre/hueþrongs
mæz ór heime þauþ/sá's Halfdan sá's Holtom bió/norna dóms of notet
hafþe (Yt.XXIV).*

And the maid of Hvedrung (Hel) summoned the third sovereign to a tryst of love from this world, when Halfdan who lived in Holte had received the decision of the Norns.

The unavoidable doom of the Norns is frequently reflected in Scaldic poetry, as for example *Fár gengr of sköpp norna* (*Krákumál*), "no one can escape the decision of the Norns", or *kveldr lifir maðr ekki eftir kvið norna* (Hm.30), "a man does not live to the night, after the Norns have spoken". *Kveld-Ulfr*, the father of Skalla-Grímr in *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, composed the following stanza when he had heard about his son Þórólfr's death: "Now I have known that Þórólfr succumbed north on that island; the Norn is cruel to me, too early did Óðinn choose the warrior."⁸⁸

The idea of the Norns as death-goddesses survives in the Christian vision poem *Sólarljóð*, where the poet refers to the nine rune-carving daughters of Njörðr and describes his departure in the words "on the chair of the Norns I sat nine days". This passage obviously depicts an intermediary phase between life and death and we are again facing the number nine. Here it appears as describing a position between life and death, reappearing in the nine days of self-hanging by Óðinn or by Hermóð, who in his efforts to release Baldr from Hel rides nine nights through deep and dark valleys. We have previously mentioned the possibility that the number nine might allude to the nine months of pregnancy, which could also be apprehended as an intermediary state between Not-Being and Being. In *Sólarljóð*, the number nine reappears, denoting the inverted journey from Life to the realm of Death.

The Individual Norn: Urðr

Like the Dísir and the Valkyries the Norns are not a clearly defined group; their qualities are mixed with those of other collectives, and they have different backgrounds, too:

*Sundrbornar miók/hygg ek at nornir sé/eigot þær ætt saman;/sumar ero
áskungar,/sumar álfungar/sumar dætr Dvalins (Fm.13).*

I think the Norns are of different birth, they are not of the same kin. Some are from the sib of Æsir, some are from the sib of Elves, some are the daughters of Dvalinn.

⁸⁷ The ness seems to symbolize an entrance to Hel; cf. the last stanza in *Sonatorrek*: *Nú erum torvelt/ Tveggja bága/njörva nipt/á nesi stendr*. "Now is it dark; Óðinn's enemy's sister (Hel) stands on the narrow ness." *Egils saga*, chap.78.

⁸⁸ *Egils saga*, ch.24.

After the Christianisation, the word *norn* became a connotation of devilish creatures, in modern Icelandic denoting a "witch, sorceress". Belief in the goddesses of fate was an offence against the dogma of the Almighty and regarded as blasphemy, a stance expressed in a poem of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's:

Blót is now forbidden, we may avoid the decisions of the Norns, which we earlier obeyed; every one rejects the belief of Óðinn's kin; me too, I am forced away from the offsprings of Njörðr to pray to Christ.⁸⁹

The state of confusion that prevails with respect to the collective goddesses is evident when the *norn* Skuld appears later in *Völuspá* (30) as a Valkyrie, *Skuld helt skildi*. Verðandi, "the Being", is named only in *Völuspá* and is probably a new construction.⁹⁰

Of the three named Norns in *Völuspá* and in Snorri's *Edda*, only Urðr remains as a genuine goddess of fate. The name Urðr is related to OE *wyrd* and OHG, *wurt* "to be". But it seems to mean - in a transferred sense "death, misfortune"; thus it is also related to *naud*.⁹¹ In *Eyrbyggja saga* a ghostly moon appeared on the wall inside the house. Named *urðarmáni*, it portended death for many people.⁹²

Urðr thus corresponds to Loki's daughter Hel; but in the sources, the two are not identical. Whereas Hel represents death and destruction in their horrifying aspect, Urðr seems to belong to another realm of speculation about death, appearing as the unavoidable result of coming into existence. She is furthermore connected with the Tree of Fate, *Miðtviðr*, i.e. *Yggdrasill*, living in the well beneath it.⁹³

The Well of Urðr

The well out of which the Norns arise (*Vsp* 20) is mentioned in an early poem by Kormákr Ögmundarson, *Sigurðardrápa: komsk Urðr úr brunni*, "Urðr arose from the well", again emphasises Urðr as the most important, indeed the sole deity among the goddesses of fate. *Urðarbrunnr*, "the well of Urðr", was situated under one of the roots of *Yggdrasill*, the ash-tree which supported the worlds of men and of the gods. This is also described by Snorri:

Þriðja rót askins standr á himni, ook undir þeiri rót er brunnr sá er miðk er heilagr er heitit Urðarbrunnr, þar eigu guðin dómstað sinn(Glgf.15).

⁸⁹ Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, *Lausavísa* 10, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, 1967, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen. Cf. Ström, 1954, p.85 and Olrik and Ellekilde, 1926-1951, p.186.

⁹⁰ Verðandi and Skuld are presumably new constructions, see Holtsmark, 1951, p.88.

⁹¹ *ANEWb* s.v. *urðr*, p.635.; G. W. Weber, 1969, *Wyrd: Studien zur Schicksalsbegriff der altenglischer und altnordischer litteratur*, Bad Homburg; F.Ström, 1954, p. 86; V. Rydberg, 1886, p.341.

⁹² *Þat kveld er líkmenn kómu heim, þá er menn sátu við málelda at Fróða, þá sá menn á veggþili hússins, at komit var tungl hálf; þat máttu allir menn sjá, þeir er í húsinu váru; þat gekk ofugt um húsit ok andsælis. Þat hvarf eigi á brott, meðan menn sátu við elda..... Þórir kvað þat vera urðarmána; "mun hér eptir komma mannaudr," segir hann. Þessi tíðendi bar þar við viku alla, at urðarmáni kom inn hvert kveld sem annat. *Eyrbyggja saga*, 1935, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Matthías Þorðarson, *Íslensk fornrit*, Reykjavík, chap.52.*

⁹³ G. Steinsland, 1983, "Treet i *Völuspá*", *ANF* 98, pp.121-122.

...the third root of the Ash stands in heaven; and under that root is the well which is very holy, that is called the well of Urðr; there the gods hold their counsel .

which could be compared with *Völuspá* (19):

*Ask veit ek standa/heitir Yggdrasil/hár baðmr, ausinn/
hvítaauri;/þaðan koma dögguvar/þars í dala falla;/stendr æ yfir
grænn/Urðar brunni (Vsp.19).*

I know an ash standing, called Yggdrasil, a high tree, poured with white aurr; thence the dews come, which falls in the valleys, forever it stands green over the well of Urðr.

In *Völuspá* the tree and the well are combined with the white *aurr*, a word which is especially troublesome in that it means "gravel". Many interpretations have been made regarding *hvítaaurr*, from "gravel" mixed with water to "hail" coming from the sky. Gro Steinsland's hypothesis according to which the word must hint at a cultic ritual in the context, where *hvítaaurr* is poured over the tree,⁹⁴ is the most plausible one in my opinion. There are also several Indo-European parallels that tell us about the tree of the world and its connection with holy, shining water, which is ritually poured over it.⁹⁵

The pouring of *hvítaaurr* describes a cyclic process and suggests an affinity between the well and the tree. Both are combined with destiny, the well with Urðr and the tree which in itself carries and combines the cosmos. The combination also reflects a recurrent mythical theme in obscure myths concerning hanging and drowning as a sacrificial ritual in Old Norse religion.⁹⁶ The tree with the hanged victims and the well with the drowned is described by Adam of Bremen as ingredients of the great sacrifice at Uppsala.

The well of Urðr thus constitutes a prototype for those holy wells and lakes which received sacrifices.⁹⁷ These sacrifices could be connected with the drowning of the slaves in Nerthus' cult, described by Tacitus. It is possible to suggest that the Norn Urðr was related to a chthonic deity or a death goddess, to whom special sacrifices were performed by drowning. Her aspect of destiny involves death, and her well is thus the entrance to the World of the Dead. At the same time, that well contains the Water of Life, necessary for the construction of the cosmos manifest in Yggdrasil. These contradictory aspects of Life and Death are, however, united and mediated in Urðr's person and in the expression "to be, to become".

These wells were not only sacrificial places; they were also connected with the forecasting aspect of Urðr's function and considered to foretell the future. This is remarked upon in the Germanic area in a decree from

⁹⁴ Steinsland, 1983, pp.124-125.

⁹⁵ de Vries II, p.383.

⁹⁶ Dumézil 1973a pp.129-153; D. Ward, 1970, "The Threefold Death: An Indo-European Trifunctional Sacrifice", *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans*, 1970, ed. J. Puhvel, Berkeley, pp.133-142.

⁹⁷ Ward, 1970, p.127.

731 by Gregory III, who forbids the Kings and their subjects to visit what he calls *fontes auguria*, "soothsaying wells".⁹⁸

Yggdrasill and Urðarbrunnr correspond to the tree called Mímameið and the well Mímis brunnr in *Fjolsvinnsmál*. There is no doubt about the identity of these two complexes, although the former is connected with Urðr and the second with Óðinn. Both patently emphasise the symbolic meaning of the well as a medium between the world of the living and that of the dead.

Like Urðr herself, the well is chthonic, dwelling under the tree, a notion expressed in *Völuspá*: *..ór þeim sæ/ er und þolli stendr* "from this lake/ that stands under the tree" (20). This could be compared with the following stanza in *Grímnismál*:

*Sökkvabekkr heitir enn fiórði/ en þar svalar knego/ unnir yfir glymia
/þar þau Óðinn ok Sága/drekka um alla daga/glöð ór gullnom kerom
(Grm.7).*

The fourth is called 'the sunken rill', where cool waves surge over the places, there Óðinn and Sága drink every day, joyfully out of golden tumblers.

The word Sága is connected with *sjá*, "to see", and would seem to imply that she is a prophetess. de Vries connects Sága with Frigg, who knew the future and whose home was Fensalir, "the Houses in the Fens". Here we encounter two well-known and recurrent motifs in Old Norse mythology, namely Óðinn's search for knowledge, which he receives in drinking from a well, and the appearance of a female deity connected with the water.

In *Hávamál* 111, we meet Óðinn and his quest for knowledge again:

*Mál er at þylia/þular stóli á/Urðar brunni at/sá ek ok þagðak/sá ek ok
hugðak/hlýdda ek á manna mál/of rúnar heyrða ek dæma/né um
ráðom þogðo/Háva hóllo at/Háva hóllo í/heyrða ek segia svá:
(Hvm.111).*

It is time to chant on the chair of þulr at the well of Urðr. I saw and I was silent, I saw and I thought, I listened what the men said, hearing them judge about runes; they were not silent, there at the house of Hávi (Óðinn), there in the house of Hávi, I heard them say thus.

þulr probably means a poet and a religious speaker, a word with an obscure etymology.⁹⁹ The chair reminds us of "the chair of Norns" that denotes the state between life and death in *Sólarljóð* (see above p.144). In addition, we may observe that "the house of Hávi", i.e. Valhöll, "the hall of the slain", is situated near the well of Urðr.¹⁰⁰ Nearness to Óðinn as a recipient of the dead indicates that Urðr, who resides at the well, might function as his counterpart.

⁹⁸ de Vries I, p.350.

⁹⁹ *þulr* is connected with the noun *þula* "rows of words". AnEWb s.v. *þula*, p.626.

¹⁰⁰ This is, moreover, the same as Valaskjálf, "the place of the dead", where Óðinn's magic seat, Hliðskjálf is placed, from which he is able to look into every world.

The Recipients of the Dead

Urðr possesses two main characteristics: she knows destiny and she is a death goddess, connected with Óðinn. Two of the Ásynjur were said to know destiny, according to the words of Óðinn and Freyja in *Lokasenna* about Gefjun and Frigg (see above 100). In this late poem, where mythological categorisation has split the qualities of the Great Goddess into several deities, it is significant that this repeated formula is used by Óðinn and Freyja, who have many qualities in common. We may assume that those two are the recipients of the dead - Óðinn at Valhøll, "the hall of the slain", and Freyja at Folkvangr "the Field of the Warriors". In addition Freyja - in her aspect as Gefjun - receives those who died as maidens (Glgf.34).

It has been suggested that Óðinn thus received his initiated warriors, who were revived to continue their previous life in Valhøll, while every other dead person would go to Freyja, whose dwelling then became identical with the Land of the Dead, Hel. Unlike Valhøll Freyja's house did not possess the various recycling activities which brightened the warriors' existence like the never-ending battle and the revived Sæhrímnir.¹⁰¹ As was pointed out above, the relevant literature lays stress on the two functions of Freyja: she takes part in the battle; and she receives the fallen warriors afterwards.

It is hard to believe that the richly endowed graves of noble women were prepared for somebody who was bound for the misery of Hel, although we must admit that the horror which Snorri describes are strongly influenced by Christianity. Since the conception of an afterlife never constitutes one unambiguous dogmatical item in any religion, we must assume that the issue of the residence of the dead in Old Norse mythology was apprehended in just as confusing and contradictory ways as it is in other religions (see above p.88).

The idea that Freyja, in her capacity of recipient of the dead, belongs to a static sphere different from the revolving existence of Óðinn's *einherjar* is contradicted by the fact that in at least one myth, the *Sörla þáttr*, Freyja is connected with a never-ending battle instigated by herself. According to at least one version, she revives the men during the night so that they may continue to fight.

Freyja shares the qualities of a death goddess with Urðr, and like Gefjun she knows the future. Freyja's maternal aspect is Frigg, who is also able to look into the future and who has her dwelling in water. With reference to these suggestive factors, I would submit that we are able to discern a recurrent pattern in the myths - a pattern featuring a goddess whose abode is situated in water, who knows the future and who receives the dead, by way of sacrifices or other causes of death. She might appear under the names of Nerthus, Sága or Urðr in the sources, and in mythological designations she is represented as Freyja, Frigg and Gefjun. Still she is the same, the Great Goddess in all her different aspects.

Hence the conclusion that Urðr is one aspect of the complex character of Freyja, albeit her character in the course of time changed into a dim

101 J. P. Schjødt, 1991, Relationen mellem aser og vaner og dens ideologiske implikationer. *Nordisk hedendom. Et symposium*, 1991, Ed. G. Steinsland, U. Drobin, J. Pentikäinen, P. Meulengracht Sørensen, Odense, pp.309ff.

goddess of Fate, representing the Ultimate Being under the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy transmitted by Medieval erudition.

Dísir, Valkyries and Norns related to Freyja

As we have seen, the collectives of female deities called Dísir, Valkyries and Norns have many functions in common. We have also noticed that one individual from one of these groups can appear in another, as though they were interchangeable. In spite of the general disarray, some borderlines between the categories can be distinguished: the Norns carry aspects of Fate, the Valkyries watch the battle-field and the Dísir are connected with fertility rites.

The anonymous group of Dísir was lead by the Great Dís, acting as a *pars pro toto* for the collective and the *Dísarsalr* was devoted to her. In two cases the *Dísarsalr* is the place of a royal death; in the third, a royal ceremony is enacted there. We may conclude that the cult of the Dísir in the Viking Age was as closely connected to the Kings as to the cult of Óðinn.

The Valkyries have - unlike the members of the other two groups - individual names. In some poems they are subjected to Óðinn, obeying his orders on the battle-field. Other poems display the picture of the independent Valkyrie, burning with passion for a mortal hero. The latter is, in my opinion, a hypostasis of Freyja, who appears as the Great Valkyrie in *Grímnismál*, the selector of the slain on the battle-field but at the same time the passionate goddess of love. The circumstances that the leadership of the Valkyries oscillates between her and Óðinn is due to Óðinn's expanding role as a warrior god associated with the royal power, which might have reduced Freyja's role as a war goddess to the passionate Valkyrie of the Heroic Epics.

Besides the collective of Norns, who appear as fairly indistinct characters, the three individual Norns, Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld, seem to constitute an *Interpretatio Nordica* of the Greek speculations regarding Ananke and the Moires. Behind these speculations - probably of a late date - we might discern the most dominant of the Norns, Urðr; she who knows the future, and whose name is equivalent with fate, even death.

When we investigate the similarities between the three groups we find that they are all connected with the fate of man and with death. They also display features that coincide with the characteristics of the goddess Freyja. We may thus assume that the Dísir, the Valkyries and the Norns all possess qualities associated to Freyja, and that they are to be apprehended as her hypostases. Such an assumption explains the conspicuous confusion attending these categories in the sources; but it may at the same time furnish us with an instrument which will enable us to place the three groups in a certain context, each one of them representing one of the three Indo-European functions: the magico-religious function residing with the Norns, that of the warriors with the Valkyries, and fertility and production with the Dísir.

One serious objection against this assumption is that Norns, Valkyries and Dísir never appear together in text or ritual, unlike the gods of the temple of Uppsala, Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr - a feature that was characteristic of the Indo-European tripartite system and used as a criterion of the interrelations of the social classes. The presentation

supplied by Adam has, however, to be regarded as pertaining to the male aspect of Old Norse theology. When we turn to the female dimension, we find that the different functions are integrated in the same person, who is able to match the male gods representing each function. Therefore it is quite possible for the Norns, Valkyries and Dísir to belong to Freyja's complex nature, being part and parcel of her own character but appearing in the mythology as groups of minor female deities.

The Goddess and the Hero

The interpretation of *Hyndluljóð*

Hyndluljóð consists of a fragmentary dialogue between the goddess Freyja and the giantess Hyndla, a circumstantial piece of genealogical discussions connected with a certain Óttarr and a vision, called *Völuspá in skamma*, "The short prophecy of the sibyl", describing the fates of the gods from the fall of Baldr until Ragnarök. The plot of the poem is built around a contest about Óttarr's lineage between himself and one Angantýr, Freyja assisting him by seeking the help of Hyndla.

The manuscript is only represented in *Flateyjarbók*, which was written in the 14th century and belonged to a family on the West Coast of Iceland until 1657. It has been suggested that the genealogy of Óttarr was connected with this family, although there is no hard evidence in support of this idea. There are divergent opinions about *Hyndluljóð's* authenticity as an Eddic poem: is it a real poem or is it a pastiche in the Eddic form, or a mixture of both in which copyists honour a contemporary by elaborating a noble pedigree for him?

There are also various hypotheses regarding the interpretation of *Hyndluljóð*, all of them focusing on the contest between Óttarr and Angantýr. Aron Gurevitch thus declares that Óttarr's genealogy must be seen in relation to the *Law of Gulating*, where any man who would claim his land as an *óðal* - meaning that he asserts that the land is his own property - must enumerate five male ancestors of his father's side in order to secure his right of possession.¹

Another suggestion which might yield an interpretation proceeds on the assumption that the poem is connected with the prevailing ideology of the king. One variant, suggested by Jere Fleck, is based on the rare - yet existing - cases of ultimogeniture, i. e. the youngest son inherits the property. This is exemplified in *Rígsþula*, where Konr, the youngest son, becomes King, and furthermore in *Grímnismál*, where the younger of the brothers seizes the power. In *Hyndluljóð*, Fleck suggests that the nickname *heimski* means "the one who is staying at home", instead of the usual translation "the stupid one". Óttarr has to defend his birth right by resorting to a cognitive criterion against Angantýr's demand of primogeniture, and he is helped in this situation by Freyja and the giantess.²

Gro Steinsland claims that *Hyndluljóð* belongs to the Eddic poems and illustrates the holy wedding between a god and a giantess, which she considers a recurrent topic in the ideology of the mythical kings in the North. Unlike most scholars, Steinsland connects *Völuspá inn skamma* with the content of *Hyndluljóð*, and she states that the giantess Hyndla acts as a *völva* when presenting Óttarr's pedigree. The genealogy of *Völuspá in skamma* is thus connected with the origin of the royal dynasties as a result of a *hieros gamos* between king and giantess.³

1 A. Gurevitch, 1973, "Edda and Law. Commentary on *Hyndluljóð*", *ANF* 88, pp.72-84.

2 J. Fleck, 1970, "Konr - Óttar - Geirróðr", *Scandinavian studies* 42, pp.39-40.

3 Steinsland, 1989, pp.478-481.

Moreover, the struggle between Óttarr and Angantýr could be apprehended as *mannjafnaðr*, a popular form of contest between men at the great festivals in the king's hall, which included the laying of a wager. These types of contests were serious matters of honour - sometimes, indeed, of life or death. A famous example is the contest between Qrvar-Oddr and his two antagonists. Over and over again, the heroes verbalise their own deeds and scorn their antagonists as cowards; at the same time, they empty large horns of beer. In due course they become incapable of expressing themselves at all; but Qrvar-Oddr - who is the hero of the story - continues his taunting and drinking without any sign of intoxication.⁴ A similar duel in words is found in the dialogue between Guðmundr and Sinfjötli in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* (34-46), and it appears on the highest mythological level, between Óðinn and Þórr in the Eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð*.

However, the plot of *Hyndluljóð* makes it clear that Óttarr's difficulties are of two kinds: partly the wager with Angantýr about gold, *vala málmr*, and partly to the business of obtaining, *foðurleifð*. In both cases, knowledge of his ancestors is essential to him; still, the matter of inheritance seems to be more important than the wager. A possible way to combine these undertakings could be that Óttarr has to defeat Angantýr by enumerating his ancestors in order to secure his heritage, and that he has put up a stake, of gold, to enhance the excitement. Even so, the wager does seem to be a superfluous ingredient in the unsettled matters between Óttarr and Angantýr. The manuscript assigns these two elements, the inheritance and the wager, to different stanzas; there is some reason to suspect a corruption in the text.

The entire situation raises further questions, though. Who is this man Óttarr for whom so much is in jeopardy? Who is Angantýr, claiming his entitlement to Óttarr's inheritance? For what reason is this whole mythological apparatus brought into the story? And finally, can such a simple business as a dispute over inheritance inspire the creation of a whole poem?

Clearly, we must abandon the possible historical evidence as a background for the contest between Óttarr and Angantýr and tread new paths to find an interpretation of *Hyndluljóð*. By structuring the literary motifs connected with the names of Óttarr and Angantýr, we might come closer to the roles that they play in the poem.

Óttarr and Angantýr

Unlike his antagonist Angantýr, Óttarr bears a name that was common in the North during the relevant time. Several attempts have been made to identify this Óttarr in *Hyndluljóð* as a historical person, and some scholars have suggested that the poem tells the story of Óttarr Birting, a valet of Sigurðr Jorsalafari; others believe that that he and Angantýr are unknown persons originating from Hordaland, a province in Norway. None of these identifications has any tenable connection with *Hyndluljóð*, though, and they fail to explain why Óttarr bears the nick name *heimski* or other peculiarities of the poem.

⁴ *Qrvar-Odds mannjævning* in *Den ældre Eddan og Eddica Minora*, 1946, trans. M. Larsen, Copenhagen, p.234.

The name Óttarr belongs to several persons in Old Norse literature, among others the King called Óttarr Vendelkráka, described in *Ynglingatál* as well as in *Heimskringla*, in Ari's genealogy in *Íslendingabók* and in *Historia Norvegiæ*. Like most of the other persons who occur in these chronicles, Óttarr Vendilkráka appears to be an apocryphal character, although the archaeological finds in Vendel from the 7th century, especially the Mound of Óttarr, invest his person with a smack of reality.⁵

Also, fact that Óttarr appears in *Beowulf* under the name Opere has been considered to strengthen his historical identity. At the same time, a confusion around the figures arises as the name of Óttarr's father is Ongenþeow, which some scholars claim to be identical with Angantýr, whereas the mentioned Nordic chronicles call Óttarr's father Egill. Moreover, Ari gives Egill the surname Vendelkráka.

<u>Þjóðólfr</u>	<u>Snorri</u>	<u>Ari</u>	<u>Beowulf</u>
Egill, father of Óttarr	Egill, father of Óttarr Vendilkráka	Egill Vendilkráka, father of Óttarr	Ongenþeow, father of Opere.

The factors underlying this mixture of names and motifs become easier to grasp when we are told how the father of Óttarr was killed. In *Beowulf* Ongenþeow is slain by two Geatic warriors, called Eofor (boar) and Vulf (wolf) in Ravenswood. The different Nordic sources vary their records concerning the death of Egill. According to *Ynglingatál* he is killed by Tunni; Snorri's *Heimskringla* says that he was killed by a bull after a long fight with a thrall called Tunni; *Historia Norvegiæ* claims that a bull ended his life; and Ari, finally, states that Egill died as a result of being savaged by a boar.

<u>Þjóðólfr</u>	<u>Snorri</u>	<u>Hist.Norw.</u>	<u>Ari</u>
killed by Tunni	after a long battle with the thrall Tunni killed by a bull	killed by a bull (taurus)	a boar

If we grant that *Ynglingatal* and the Icelandic historian Ari are the oldest sources we can proceed to combining these two and perhaps come closer to a solution of the problem.

Þjóðólfr's version describes how Egill flees from his land as a result of the power of Tunni, which could - considering the ensuing lines of the stanza - mean that he is in fact killed by Tunni. The relevant passage also combines Tunni with *iótuns eykr*, "the giant's beast", with *farra trióna*, "the snout of a boar (or a bull)", and finally with *skiðlauss hofis hjórr*, "the restless sword without a sheath". These three kennings could quite easily be associated with an attack either by a boar or by a bull (as we have seen Ari suggests the former alternative and Snorri and *Historia Norvegiæ* the latter). Actually, the stanza in *Ynglingatal* allows for both

⁵ About the excavation of Vendel and the Mound of Ottar, see K. Stjerna, 1903, "Vendel och Vendelkráka", *ANF*, pp.71-80.

interpretations, in that Tunni could be apprehended not only as a proper name but as meaning "tooth", i.e. the tusk of the boar or the horn of the bull. When we compare this with the other kennings, we find that *farra trióna* "the snout of a boar", and *íptuns eykr*, "the beast of the giant", could be read as hinting at a bull but also at a boar together with a wolf, as the wolf was a common mount among the giants. If we take the *Ynglingatál* stanza to mean that Egill was killed by a "boar" and a "wolf", he emerges as a direct parallel to Ongenþeow, who was killed by Eofor and Vulf. Moreover, we are able to suggest that this Egill, depicted by Þjóðólfr in *Ynglingatal* is identical with Ongenþeow in *Beowulf*, especially as there are other grounds for holding that the two are in fact the same man.

Beowulf

The dynasty of Scylfingas:
Ongenþeow, Othere and Eadgils

Ynglingatál

Egill, *Skilfinga niðr*, belongs to the clan of Skilfing, whose off-spring are Óttarr and Aðils.

This clan, Scylfingas or Skilfingar is mentioned in a number of sources, Snorri being one of them. Besides, the name is mentioned twice in *Hyndluljóð* in connection with Óttarr's genealogy (11, 16).

We can now summarise the similarities between Ongenþeow and Egill:

1. They belong to the Scylfingas/Skilfingar.
2. Their sons are called Oþere/Óttarr and Onela/Áli.
3. Their grandsons are called Eadgils/Aðils.
4. They are killed by a boar/ by a person named "boar".

All versions of the story about Ongenþeow/Egill deal with a person who is defeated in combat. The name Angantýr appears in some other sources, too. Among them, the best known is *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, where Angantýr is the eldest of Arngrím's twelve sons; his brothers are called Hervarðr, Hjórvarr, Sæming, Hrani, Brámi, Barri, Remni, Tindr, Búi, and the two Haddingjar. They are all berserks, and Angantýr was gifted with two men's strength, unlike his youngest brothers who together had the strength of one man. In this saga, they are all defeated on Sámsey by Hjalmar and Orvar-Oddr. When, later, Angantýr's daughter Hervor urges her fallen relatives in the grave-mounds of Sámsey to give her the sword Tyrfingr, she only calls upon Angantýr, Hrani, Hervarðr and Hjórvardr.

Ten berserk brothers are enumerated in *Hyndluljóð*: Búi, Brámi, Barri, Reifnir, Tindr, Tyrfingr and the two Haddingjar, Áni and Ómi. Strange as it may seem, Angantýr is missing from this context; he is replaced by Tyrfingr, the magic sword. This change of names could, of course, be due to different circumstances; but the fact that Angantýr appears as Óttarr's direct antagonist in *Hyndluljóð* could have something to do with his absence among the sons of Arngrim.

In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, Angantýr's grandson and namesake Angantýr is killed by his brother Heiðrekr. Finally, in the

fourth generation, the names Hervor and Angantýr reappear as the son and daughter of Heiðrekr, representing a courteous heroine and hero who are in that respect, the complete opposites of their namesakes and ancestors.

Hyndluljóð describes the way in which Óttarr with the help of the goddess, struggles against Angantýr. The name Angantýr is rather infrequent in Norse sources. From the mentioned examples, we are given the impression that we are somehow dealing with the same Angantýr, who would seem to represent a type rather than different individuals. The same probably goes for Óttarr - although his name is common in Old Norse literature - who comes across as more of literary type than a historical person when we meet him in *Hyndluljóð*. Such a hypothesis can be compared with the different investigations made by B. Phillpotts, H. Schneider and G. Dumézil concerning the traditions that focus on heroes named Helgi - investigations that contradict the usual convention according to which the poems and episodes tell the stories of at least three persons bearing that name.⁶ Schneider and later Dumézil have elaborated on the problem in thorough studies. Having compared and analysed the dominating elements in the stories and found close similarities between them, they came to the conclusion that we are dealing with a Helgi cycle, comprising variants of stories about one hero (see below).

Óttarr's Genealogy

If we apply the same method to the poems and episodes where Óttarr appears, we find three sources with great similarities concerning the matter of genealogy:

<u>Hyndluljóð</u>	<u>Beowulf</u>	<u>Ynglingatal/Heims-kringla</u>
FRÓÐI(Óttarr's grandfather)	FROÐA(2025)	Óttarr is killed by the earls of Fróði. The point of departure is Fróði's attempts to seize treasures.
	ONELA younger son of Ongenþeow, married to the Geatic princess Yrsa.(62, 2610, killed by Eadgils)	ÁLI related to Óttarr ÁLI enemy to Aðils/ a king from Norway killed by Aðils on the ice of Lake Väner.
SKIQLDUNGA R, SKILFINGAR QDLUNGAR YNGLINGAR	HEALFDENE the father of Hroðgar and Helga and Helgi kongr Halvdansonar	HALFDAN most powerful of Skjöldungar
	SKYLDINGAS, SCYLFINGAS	SKILFINGAR, YNGLINGAR

⁶ Dumézil, 1973a, pp.110ff.

Uncertain correspondences are Friauf in *Hyndluljóð* and Freawaru in *Beowulf*, one of them married to Fróði, the other to a son of Fróða's. The two heroes Sigmundr-Sigemund⁷ and Hermóðr-Heremod appear in *Hyndluljóð* and *Beowulf*. But *Hyndluljóð* contains other names recognisable from *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, *Völsunga saga* and *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*. A number of motifs from well-known stories appear; one of them is "Hildisvíni":

Hyndluljóð

Freyja rides on the boar Hildisvíni, created by the dwarves, Dáinn and Nabbi.

Skáldskaparmál

Hildisvíni is Aðils's helmet, captured from Áli.

Heimskringla

Aðils gained two momentous horses as a war trophy.

or "the combat for a treasure":

Óttarr and Angantýr lay a wager about a treasure.

Hrólf kraki tries to obtain the helmet Hildigölltr, the ring Svíagríss and other treasures from Aðils.

Óttarr tries to spare his country from paying taxes to Fróði.

To summarise this discussion about similar motifs and persons appearing in the genealogies of *Beowulf*, *Hyndluljóð*, *Ynglingatal*, *Heimskringla* and *Skáldskaparmál*, I would like to suggest the following hypothesis:

There existed a cycle of tales about a hero called Óttarr, connected with the dynasty of Ynglingar/Skilfingar. This cycle does not confirm the historical existence of one or more Swedish kings; it merely provides an explanation of the occurrence of these similar motifs in various sources. Another berserk-type hero, called Angantýr is associated with this cycle; he features an important role in other connections, too, for instance in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðrek konungs*, where he also plays the role of a loser.

One objection against this Óttarr-cycle hypothesis is that *Hyndluljóð* twice refers to Óttarr as the offspring of Innsteinn, who was in his turn the son of Álfr the Old, a genealogy agreeing with the one offered by *Hálfs*

⁷ About the problem of Sigemund/Sigmund see *Beowulf*, 1978, ed. trans. M. Swanton, Manchester, pp.193f.

saga ok Hálfrekka. We find that Innsteinn is the hero of the poem *Innsteinskviða*; but according to this work he dies young and without offspring.⁸ Neither Innsteinn nor his father Álfr is present in *Beowulf*, *Ynglingatál* or *Heimskringla*. Consequently, they might belong to another saga cycle and have happened to become involved in the genealogy of *Hyndluljóð* by chance. Innsteinn could thus hardly be the person who bestows a historic authenticity on Ottarr and I would suggest that he and his father have been interpolated in *Flateyjarbók* manuscript with a view to giving an Icelandic family a connection with the noble genealogies presented in the poem.

Óttarr and Siritha described by Saxo.

A strongly deviating story about Óttarr, the son of Ebbo, is found in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, book VII: It tells the story of one Óttarr, who woos a shy girl called Siritha - too shy even to lift her eyes. She is carried away to a cave by a giant and Óttarr rescues her. After that he abandons her abruptly, and she continues to rove about in the wilderness. A giantess takes care of her, and she is tending goats when Óttarr discovers her again. Siritha still refuses to gaze at him, and again he leaves the unwilling girl. She begins her wandering again and seeks protection at Óttarr's home. Although the girl pretends to be a pauper, Óttarr's mother realises that she is highborn. Óttarr now pretends to marry another girl. The last act of this romance takes place by the side of the nuptial bed. Siritha has to carry the candle to the bride's and bridegroom's entrance to the bedroom. The light had almost gone out, she endures the pain in her hand, her inner pain being much greater. When Óttarr tells her to put out the candle, she finally looks into his eyes, and the mock-wedding becomes a real one, now with Siritha as bride.

This story presents well-known motifs from folk-tales about the rescuing prince and the princess carried away by evil monsters. The events in the bridal chamber are identical with the story about the patient Griselda. The surprising moments in the narrative occur when Óttarr abandons Siritha twice in the most discourteous way, contrary to his customary chivalry. These features arouse suspicion of a corruption of the text.

Victor Rydberg suggested that Siritha is Freyja herself and that Óttarr is identical with same as Svipdagr, who appears as Menglōð's beloved in *Fjolsvinnsmál*. Rydberg's intentions in his investigations of Germanic mythology were to co-ordinate the myths and the mythical fragments into coherent short stories. Not for a moment did he hesitate to make subjective interpretations of the episodes, based more on his imagination and poetical skills than on facts. His explication of the Siritha-episode is an example of his approach, and yet he was probably right when he identified Siritha with Freyja.

Although it deviates from the other narratives about Óttarr, the Saxo episode has some connections with the motifs from *Hyndluljóð*, *Beowulf*, *Ynglingatál*, etc., for example the circumstance that Óttarr's father Ebbo

⁸ This is emphasized by king Eysteinn's scorn: "All your *Dísir* are dead, all your brothers are fallen." *Utsteinarkviða*, *Den ældre Eddan og Eddica minora* I-II, 1943, trans. M.Larsen, Copenhagen.

(same stem as *eofor*⁹) is killed by King Hálfðan the leading character of the chapter. Other elements could be compared with *Hyndluljóð*: the giant-giantess, the cave, the goats and the erotic allusions. The giants' wish to carry Freyja away is well documented, although there are no proper reports of any success on their part. Caves are the usual habitations of giants; wew might, for instance, think of Freyja waking the giantess Hyndla with the words *systir er í helli býr*, "sister in the cave", and of the evil Þökk who, sitting in a cave, refuses to bewail Baldr. The goats which Siritha tends appear in Hyndla's scorn of the goat Heiðrún who runs in heat with her billy-goats. Finally the erotic allusions which belongs to Freyja's relationship with Óttarr could be compared with the love story composed by Saxo, although he uses a more romantic style. One detail in a poem, which Óttarr directs to Siritha, asking her "return as partner in my bed", bespeaks an intimacy which implies that their relation had not been so chaste as we might expect from the prudish Saxo.

Our material presents us with characters from Heroic Poetry and Sagas, where both Óttarr and Angantýr seem to have certain motifs constantly linked to them. A story may be extended, reworked or given a different course, and the hero may enter into relations with new figures. The poets may multiply their motifs; and still central essential lines, certain scenes, certain features linked to the hero of the story remain unmodified. This method of working with particular literary figures and their special motifs supposedly belonged to the oral tradition, and the audience were attuned to it in advance.

Helgi in the Helgi Poems and other Sources

The preceding chapter reviewed various reincarnations of a hero named Helgi in connection with the passionate Valkyrie. Persons called Helgi, often appearing in connection with supernatural female beings, are recurrent; *Skáldskaparmál* offers the following example:

It is said that the king called Hølgi, after whom Hálogaland is named was the father of Þorgerðr Hólgabruðr: they were both worshipped and the mound of Hølgi was heaped up with one layer of gold - that was the sacrificial offering - and the next of earth and gravel (Sksm.42).¹⁰

In historical times this goddess, Þorgerðr Hólgabruðr "Þorgerðr, the bride (or woman) of Helgi", was the special patron of the earls of Hlaðir¹¹. In the Helgi poems not only contain the similar proper name, but similar episodes and features, too. It is Helgi who wins an unearthly bride like the above-mentioned Sigrún, Hildir or Sváfa, who must avenge his father, or his grandfather or his brother, and who finally succumbs in a counter-vendetta.¹²

The name Helgi means "holy one", and it was common in tales among historic people in the Viking Age. It has been regarded as a surname or as

⁹ About *eofor*, *jofur*, see pp.213ff below.

¹⁰ Trans. Phillpotts.

¹¹ In the story of Jómsvikingar Hákon jarl was said to have sacrificed his son Erlingr to Þorgerðr Hólgabruðr in order to secure the victory. *Flateyjarbók* I, p.191.

¹² Dumézil, 1973a, p.112.

a title, belonging to the man who performed the sacrifices, maintained the religious cult and regulated proper relations between man and god.¹³ The use of Helgi as a title has, however, nothing to do with these literary appearances in the heroic poems and other works.

As we saw the recurrent pattern in the heroic tales about Helgi involves a relation between the hero and a female figure. In *Helgakviða Hjörvarðsonar*, the hero is dumb from early childhood. He is not given a name, probably due to his defect, and is thus barred from inheriting his father's kingdom.

Sitting on a mound he watches the entrance of nine Valkyries, among them Sváfa. At this sight, the hero acquires the ability to speak, and Sváfa gives him his name, Helgi, as well as a sword. This proper name appears in three of the Eddic poems: *Helgakviða Hundingsbani* I and II and *Helgakviða Hjörvarðsonar*, a romance saga of *Hromundarsaga Greipsonar* and two different episodes in the second book of Saxo. One of these episodes is of interest to our comparative study of the Helgi motif:

Gusi, prince of the Finns and Biarmians, had a daughter, Þora, who was being wooed at this time by Helgi, king of Hálogaland, though a series of emissaries. Weakness is generally recognised by the way it needs the help of others. Although in that age young men would regularly set about requesting for marriage in their own persons, Helgi was hampered by such disability of speech that he was ashamed when strangers and even members of his own household heard him.¹⁴

This Helgi is dumb in crucial situations and cannot obtain a wife, a predicament quite comparable to Helgi *Hundingsbani's* dumbness. The princess of the Finns and Biarmians, Þora, is nobody but Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr, literally "the bride of Hølgi", another example of the hero's connection with the superhuman bride.¹⁵

The other episode in Saxo's second chapter deals with a Danish King Helgi who rapes a woman called Þora. Þora later gives birth to a daughter, named Yrsa and takes revenge by giving her daughter to Helgi as a bride.¹⁶ This story is retold in *Heimskringla* (29) about Helgi's and Yrsa's marriage, whereas *Skáldskaparmál* omits Helgi from the story about Yrsa and her son Hrólf kráki.

The Hero and his Protectress in Gesta Danorum

In one way or another, all these heroes named Helgi are associated with a supernatural female being, who frequently helps them overcome a humiliating situation. The same structure recurs in the story about Regnerus and Svanhvita in Saxo's second book. Regnerus is a stepson of the

¹³ de Vries I, p.340.

¹⁴ Saxo I, p.72.

¹⁵ Cf. Snorri, who is adamant that Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr is the daughter of Hølgi (Sksm.42). As H. R. Ellis Davidson remarks in her commentaries, Saxo must have followed a better tradition here, or merely translated Hølgabrúðr literally. Gusi is also connected with Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr in *Kætils saga hængs*, ch. 3, Saxo II, p.69-71.

Steinsland defines Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr as a giantess according to her hypothesis about the holy wedding between the king and the giantess. Steinsland, 1989, p.420-433.

¹⁶ Saxo I, p.51.

queen of Sweden, who makes him a royal slave. Along with other young men in the same predicament he tends in the country, surrounded by horrifying beasts. Svanhvita, the sister of the Danish king Frotho, observes his difficulties and pays attention to his looks, which bespeak noble birth. She beseeches him to flee the situation and the threatening monsters, but Regnerus answers that he is afraid of nothing but the god Þórr. Svanhvita then becomes so impressed that she gives him a sword, and after the monsters have disappeared, together with the Swedish queen, Regnerus wins not only the throne of Sweden but Svanhvita herself.¹⁷

Another story about a young hero and his relation to super-human woman who protects him occurs in Saxo's first book about Hadingus. G. Dumézil has observed that the structure of Hadingus' life adheres to the recurrent features of the poems and tales about Helgi - the revenge of his father's death; the supernatural female, in Hadingus' case the giantess Harþgrepa; and his own death in a counter-vendetta. There is a difference, Dumézil assumes, in the quality of the protectress: Helgi is guarded by a Valkyrie, belonging to the realm of battle, whereas Harþgrepa, who had functioned as Hadingus' wet-nurse, later becomes his mistress. Her behaviour reflects the typical characteristics of the Vanir: like them she is peace-loving, insatiably pleasure-loving and given to violating sexual taboos. She rejects martial exploits, preferring carnal lust and utilising a low form of magic, *sejðr* - in Dumézil's view she is Freyja herself, although she appears in a fictitious tale disguised as a giantess. This seems a fair assumption until the observation concerning her peaceful mind are contradicted:

...when they (Harþgrepa and Hadingus) had built a shelter of brushwood and were spending the night with the corpse which was mentioned, they saw a hand of enormous magnitude creeping right inside their small hut. Hadingus was distraught and cried for his nurse's help. Harþgrepa, unfolding her limbs and swelling to giant dimensions, gripped the hand fast and held it out for her foster son to lop off. More pus than blood dripped from its hideous wounds. But later she paid for this deed, for she was lacerated by companions of her own race, and neither her special nature nor her bodily size helped her to escape from the savage nails of her assailants.¹⁸

When Harþgrepa does not avoid the fight against this terrible apparition Dumézil tries to explain the inconsistency by arguing that she had acquired Valkyrie characteristics which mingled with her Vanir traits.¹⁹

Dividing Harþgrepa into one Valkyrie creature and one Vanir personage results in some confusion and weakens his hypothesis regarding the transfer from myth to fiction. This situation could have been avoided

¹⁷ Saxo I, pp.40-41.

¹⁸ Saxo I, p.24.

¹⁹ Dumézil, 1973a, p.113.

if Dumézil had paid more attention to the complex nature of Freyja from the start, observing her evident warlike qualities.²⁰

Freyja and Óttarr

When we after these comparisons, it is time to return to the relation between Freyja and Óttarr, which is presented in the following stanzas:

Biðium Heriafoðr/í hugum sitia/hann geldr ok gefr/gull verðungu/gaf hann Hermóði/híalm ok bryniu/en Sigmundi/sverð at þiggia (2).

We shall ask the Father of the Warriors to be mild in mind, he gives and grants gold to men; he gave Hermóð a helmet and a byrnie and Sigmundur a sword to receive.

Gefr hann sigr sumum/en sumum aura málsku mǫrgum/ok mannvit firum/byri gefr han brǫgnum/en brag Skáldum/gefr han mansemi/mǫrgum rekki (3).

He gives victory to some, gold to others, word-skill to others and wisdom too, abaft wind for the vikings and skill to use words to the poets and manfulness to many warriors.

These gifts from Óðinn should be given to Óttarr, although Freyja addresses her speech to Hyndla.

Þeir hafa veðiat/Vala málm/ Óttarr ungi/ok Angantýr/ skylt er at veita/Svá at skati enn ungi/foðurleifð hafi/eptir frændr sína (9).

They have wagered for the Welsh gold, young Óttarr and Angantýr, I must help so that the young man is given his birthright after his relatives.

...

Ber þú minnisöl/mínom gelti/Svá(t) hann öll muni/orð at tína/þessa ræðu/á þriðia morni/þá er þeir Angantýr/ættir reikna (45).

Carry ale of memory to my boar, so that he can keep all your words in this speech, when he shall count the lines (of pedigree) with Angantýr the third morning.

By these words Freyja will support Óttarr's ability to remember his pedigree with the help of all the gods, if Hyndla refuses.

Orðheill þín skal/engu ráða/þóttu, brúðr iotuns/ þólvi heitir/hann skal drekka/dýrar veigar/bið ek Óttarri/öll goð duga (50).

²⁰ In a brief note about the Nordic goddesses, Dumézil declares that warrior aspects are missing among these women deities and that the positions of the goddess were split into two fractions.

The power of your words shall decide nothing, although you, the giants' bride, invoke evil words, he shall drink the choicest drink, I bid all gods lend Óttarr help.

The giantess' attitude is expressed by her repeated addressing Óttarr as *heimski*, "stupid". She calls him Freyja's lover and finally wishes to give him poisoned beer.

This situation is quite comparable to the pattern of the Helgi-poems, where the hero was protected and helped by a supernatural female being. Like Helgi Hjörvarðson, dumb and nameless, and like Regnerus serving as a slave, Óttarr has to endure the humiliation of being called "the stupid one" by the hostile giantess.

Some details at the beginning of the poem hint directly at a rite of passage. Freyja tells Hyndla that they will go to Valhöll, "the hall of the slain", and to the sanctuary, where she intends to invoke Óðinn and Þórr. The journey to the Other World is accentuated when Hyndla accuses Freyja of taking her lover, Óttarr, *í valsinni*, "amongst the slain", on their way to Valhöll. The two antagonists, the goddess and the giantess, seem to pass the border between the Land of the Living and the Land of the Dead together with Óttarr's person or something symbolising him. The purpose of the journey, and Freyja's guardianship of Óttarr, can be summarised in the following three items:

1. She will ask the warrior god, Óðinn, for special gifts for him - material ones like a sword and byrnie, and abstract ones such as special knowledge.
2. She will put him up against Angantýr to win the wager and secure his inheritance by giving him knowledge about his pedigree, derived from the gods.
3. She will give him a drink of beer to strengthen his memory, which will also protect him from evil, and she will ask all gods to assist him.

The special gifts Freyja requests from Óðinn suggest that Óttarr is not a slain warrior entering the doors of Valhöll. The weapons, especially the sword, as well as the desired knowledge allude to the equipment given to heroes like Sigurðr, Helgi and Konr at the outset of their careers - divine endowments that will help them in their future lives as warriors.

For the contest with Angantýr Óttarr needs another form of knowledge than the kind usually dispensed by the warrior gods, Óðinn and Þórr, namely familiarity with traditions regarding the origin of society, its history and its early heroes. To complete Óttarr's absorption of the knowledge offered to him, Freyja gives him the ale of memory. This action could be compared with *Sigrðrífumál*, where Sigurðr is given a cup called *minnisveig* by the Valkyrie, the contents of which will strengthen his memory of the "wisdom and hands of healing".

These three undertakings of Freyja's in *Hyndluljóð* signify, in my opinion, a young man's initiation into the warrior state. An initiation of

this kind often takes the form of a journey to the Realm of the Dead, representing a symbolic death on the part of the neophytes.²¹ Masked monsters and demons appear in the ritual in order to frighten them.²² They must learn secret wisdom while receiving instruction about their own lineage and the origin of society.²³ Furthermore the neophytes are usually humiliated in the liminal state which characterises the rite of passage - in this case belonging neither to boyhood nor to manhood. It is not unusual for the neophytes to be thought to be accompanied by a deity who helps them overcome the anxiety and horror of entering the kingdom of death.

Initiation of a Warrior

Little is known about initiation in the Germanic world, which is not surprising as the very point of these rites was the transmissions of secrets that should not be revealed to every man. Tacitus' *Germania* refers to some where a young man has to undertake a deed in which he shows his courage (like the Chatti, who had to kill an enemy (32)) or to the undesirability of any men's bearing arms before society had approved of him as a warrior (13).²⁴ In the Eddic poetry and other literature, a hanging ritual can be interpreted as a form of initiation (pp.000ff above); but typical patterns of initiation can also be found in the examples where a young man, a hero-to-be, is introduced to certain kind of wisdom by a deity, often a Valkyrie or a Goddess. In some cases monsters appear, and a humiliation of the youth takes places before his exaltation to the warrior assembly.

When we compare the poems about Óttarr, Helgi and Sigurðr, we find that they are concerned with young men on the border between boyhood and manhood. These poems emphasise the transition from one state to another, usually from ignorance to knowledge, by means of their beginning from a humiliating state of being nothing, expressed by Óttarr's stupidity, Helgi's dumbness and Sigurðr's simplicity in the face of Fáfnir's williness.

This inauspicious start is compensated by the secret knowledge which is in Óttarr's Helgi's and Sigurðr's cases conveyed by a female deity, who helps them and wins a higher status for them. In other cases, such as that of Konr in *Rígsþula*, the secret knowledge is taught by the god Heimdallr, appearing under the name Ríg. In *Hávamál*, such knowledge is passed on by Óðinn himself.

The kinds of special knowledge that feature in *Hávamál*, *Rígsþula* and *Sigrdrifumál* coincide in a conspicuous manner.

²¹ Widengren, 1969, p.222 f.

²² V. Turner, 1975, *The Forrest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*, Itaca and London, pp.93-111.

²³ J. S. La Fontaine, 1985, *Initiation*, Harmondsworth, p.41.

²⁴ de Vries I, p.503.

<u>Hávamál</u>	<u>Rígsþula</u>	<u>Sigrdrífumál</u>
Healing(148)	Long life(44)	Healing(10)
Destroying the enemies' weapons(14)	Destroying the enemies' weapons (44)	To win a battle(6)
Loosen fetters(150)		
Stop the enemies' arrows(151)		
Put out fires(153)	Put out fires(45)	
Peacemaking(154)	Calm senses(44)	Peacemaking(11)
Calm the sea(155)	Calm the sea(44)	Calm the sea(9)
Destroy witches(156)		
Help in battle through galdr(157)		
Raise a hanged man from death(158)	How to save life(44)	Healing through magic(10)
Baptising a man who becomes invulnerable(159)		
Knowledge of the gods(160)		Seducing women(7)
Seducing women(162, 163, 164)	To help women in pain(44)	To help women in pain(8)

Hávamál furnishes us with the most detailed version of this knowledge, which seems quite natural as it is geared to the direct knowledge of the skills of a priest-king whose prototype is Óðinn. Konr in *Rígsþula* is the royal leader from a historical perspective, and Sigurðr furthermore constitutes the mythical ideal hero and king.

This should be compared to the gifts Freyja asks Óðinn to bestow Óttarr:

<u>Hyndluljóð</u>	<u>Hávamál</u>	<u>Rígsþula</u>	<u>Sigrdrífumál</u>
Victory	Victory	Victory	Victory
Gold			
Intelligence	Knowledge	Calm senes	Peacemaking
Fair wind	Calm sea Poetic	Calm sea	Calm sea
Poetic skill	skill		
Vigour (to the warrior)	Invulnerability		

The most conspicuous difference between *Hyndluljóð* and the three other poems is that the ability of healing is lacking in the former, whereas the gift of gold is mentioned only in this poem where, moreover, it occurs twice. We could therefore assume that the apprentices Konr, Sigurðr and the anonymous young man in *Hávamál* belong to a certain group of warriors in the Old Nordic society, representing what we in terms borrowed from Dumézil's tripartite system, call the first function. In a more differentiated society, these youths ought to constitute the priest class, possessing capacity for healing through magic spells and sharply segregated from the warriors. As we have already mentioned, the borderline between priests and warriors was indistinct in the Germanic context, as the structure of that society did not leave enough room for a specialised priest class, along the lines of the Vedic Brahmans.²⁵ Consequently Konr, Sigurðr and the person in *Hávamál* belong to this class, distinguished from other warriors by their capability of healing.

The process of initiation was a rite of passage which would take the young person from childhood into the adult world. Entrance into society was therefore usually characterised by the future position which a youth might take up in that society. According to this presumption, the process of warrior initiation could clearly assume different outlines, as we found in the examples above where the process associated with the first function had their own sacred rites.²⁶ This relation was reflected in the titles of the Icelandic *goði*, who were both sacral leaders and rulers of certain districts, *goðorð*, different from other chieftains.²⁷

Óttarr and Helgi belong to another group, who are more preoccupied with wealth than runic wisdom. They are not taught the ability of healing; instead they are endowed with gold. Óttarr is promised *geldr ok gefr* "golden gifts(2) *aura* "riches"(3), he wagers with Angantýr about *vala*

²⁵ Dumézil, 1959a, pp.113-117; Vries, J., 1960, pp.83-95.

²⁶ Cf. Lincoln, 1981, p.134ff.

²⁷ According to P. Sawyer, the making of a kingdom emanated from the functions of *goði*, meaning a lordship. P. Sawyer, 1988, *The Making of Sweden*, Alingsås, pp.3-5.

málmi "gold" and he fights for his legacy; Helgi's duty is, according to the Valkyrie, to *hringom ráða* "reign over rings" (HHv 6) i.e. possess riches, and she promises him a golden sword as well(8). Helgi takes action in order to recapture his *aldaðra arfi*, i.e. his wealth(11). Gifts of gold and riches are typical of the third function; we may hence assume that both Óttarr and Helgi belong to a warrior class somewhere on the borderline between the second and the third.

These types of warrior must be distinguished from the berserks, a certain kind of soldier whom we are able to trace back to Tacitus' description of the Chatti (Germ.31). The berserks, as distinct from the other classes in Nordic society, were simply mercenaries who did not need houses or fields to earn their living. These circumstances are reflected in the Icelandic sagas where the berserk appears as a maladjusted individual who, lacking proper battles, terrorises his rural surroundings.²⁸ There are, however, indications that these berserks underwent a special process of initiation connected with the worship of Óðinn.²⁹ knowledge of different qualities, *Hyndluljóð* displays another form of knowledge in the genealogy that connects Óttarr with the supreme clans of the heroic age and with the gods. This kind of learning belongs to the element of initiation, where a young man takes Besides his place the society according to his rank and lineage.

The Erotic Motif

Erotic scenes are manifold in these poems, typically focusing on the encounter between a female of supernatural origin and a mortal man. Bertha Phillpotts put forward the idea that the meeting between Sigrdrífa and Sigurðr was analogous with the relation between Freyja and Óttarr, interpreting it as a holy wedding between the goddess and her chosen lover. She suggested that these scenes adhered to a certain order, beginning with the hero fighting and defeating a monster, a giantess or a dragon respectively, after which a betrothal cup is shared between him and the goddess to confirm their union.³⁰

This is, in my opinion, a distortion of the content of these poems. In *Hyndluljóð* the beer merely seems to have the function of invigourating Óttarr's memory of his ancestors. The corresponding significance in *Sigrdrífumál* is more obscure; but the hero's acquiring secret knowledge is obviously more important than the idea of a betrothal cup. Nonetheless, the erotic element is apparent in both poems, as well as in the lays about Helgi and in the two episodes mentioned by Saxo.

In *Hyndluljóð*, the sexual affinity between the goddess and her protégé is expressed in insolent terms by Hyndla: *er þú hefir ver þinn i valsinni* (6) "You have your man among the dead warriors", which is augmented at the end of the poem:

Rant at æði, ey preyandi, skutuz Þórr fleiri und fyrirskyrtnu, hleypr þú, eðlvina, úti í nottum sem með höfrum Heiðrún fari (Hdl.48).

²⁸ For example in *Gisla saga Súrssonar*, ch. 1.

²⁹ de Vries I, p.454-455 and 493.

³⁰ B. Phillpotts, 1920, *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*, Cambridge, pp.140-142.

You ran ever yearning in lechery, under your shirt still others have crept. You ran in heat, my lustful friend, as Heiðrún with the he-goats in the night.

These scornful words about Freyja's promiscuous life, corresponding to her reputation in *Lokasenna*, presuppose an intimate relation between the goddess and her devotee. This relation is, as we observed, implied in the romanticised story about Óttarr and Siritha by Saxo. We have also compared the content of what we call the Óttarr cycle with that of the Helgi cycle, drawing attention to the scenes with Sigurðr and Sigrdrífa and the lovers Hadingus-Harpgrepa and Svanhvita-Regnerus, all of which depict a liaison between a mortal man and a superhuman female figure.

Phillipotts' main thesis proposed that the Eddic poem reflected a ritual drama, a performance where the holy events in Old Norse religion were dramatised. The main topic of these dramas was the fertility motif illustrated by the *hieros gamos*, "the holy wedding".³¹ According to Phillipotts' theory, *Hyndluljóð* belongs to the pure speech poems, i.e. the different persons are acting through their speeches.³² In this drama, the mortal hero appeared disguised as a boar when he united himself with the goddess, who was also known by name *Sýr*.³³

The holy wedding between the goddess and the ruler is a phenomenon well known from the coronation ceremonies of many cultures, especially ancient Mesopotamia. There, the king was married to the goddess Ishtar, who was represented by a statue or by a priestess who played her role. The ruler's symbolic marriage with the supreme goddess is also recognised in many other cultures. On the other hand, we must bear in mind that the holy wedding between a king and a goddess is not a homogeneous phenomenon; it manifests itself differently in different cultural contexts.³⁴

When Bertha Phillipotts suggests that Freyja was the original ancestor of the clan of Ynglingar, a position that was later usurped by Freyr, she refers to the Mesopotamian model of a holy wedding between the goddess and the king. Drawing on a similar hypothesis, Folke Ström proposes that Freyja is hinted at behind the many queens and other female beings of the Ynglingar, who have a lethal effect upon their husbands - the holy wedding with the goddess ends with the sacrifice of the king.³⁵ These two variants must be rejected due to their lack of evidence of holy weddings, as well as of sacrificed kings, in the strict sense in the Nordic area.

Gro Steinsland modified the theme of a holy wedding in Old Norse religion to a union between the god and the giantess, as forming the origin of kingship in pre-Christian Nordic society. The union between them results in the first - mythical - king, who carries the antinomies of two polarities: he is an outstanding ruler whose destiny is to suffer an ignominious death. Steinsland focuses on the motif of the giantess and the

31 Phillipotts' theories have been debated. About the tradition of transmitting the myths in *The Elder Edda* and in the fornaldar Sagas, see L. Lönnroth, 1971, "Hjalmars dödssång", *Speculum*, pp.1-20.

32 Phillipotts, 1920, p.58.

33 Phillipotts, 1920, p. 170. Other heroes appearing in the disguise of animals were, according to her theory, Heðinn, "the shaggy one", and Ragnar Lodbrók, "shaggy breeches". About the interpretation of *Sýr*, see p.000.

34 Widengren, 1969, p.190.

35 F. Ström, 1954, *passim*.

king, and her hypothesis uncovers a structure similar to our motif of the goddess and the hero.

The erotic relations between the hero and the unearthly woman in our examples do not, in my opinion, coincide with the general pattern of a holy wedding in the Mesopotamian ideology of kings. The symbolic wedding between the king and the goddess/giantess was an act inherent in the coronation and a confirmation of the sacral kingship. Neither *Hynnluljóð* nor the epics of Helgi or Sigurðr bear witness to, or even contain the slightest trace of such a ritual. The supernatural females do not affirm any kind of royal power; instead, they seem to have the purpose of helping the hero to overcome dangerous and troublesome situations.

A better parallel to the super-human female being in the Nordic source materials found in the common conception of a *Fylgja* in the shape of a woman. This conception is linked to the warrior's life, especially to his luck and to the foreboding of his death.³⁶ However, the *Fylgja* of an individual is never mentioned by name,³⁷ and this idea does not involve any erotic liaison between her and the person she follows.

Turning to comparable examples of female guardianship, we find the Greek goddess Athena, who protects the Greek heroes in battle as well as in navigation and elsewhere, being chiefly concerned with males.³⁸ Although Athena is a very close friend of Achilles, Odysseus and other heroes, there are no indications of a romance between her and the hero.

The Shakti of Hinduism, especially in the Shaiva mythology, meaning "divine power of energy", is personified as female, as distinct from its male or passive aspect. The Shakti is an active force, who fights against demons or practises powerful forms of yoga and is definitively erotically linked with her male partner.³⁹ Although the Shaktis are generally absent from the Vedic texts, brief references to the *gnás* in *Atarvaveda* VII, 51, 2 indicate that the conception existed at an early stage. In the present context, though, the comparison with the Indian Shaktis is merely intended as an example of a female power functioning as a protector of male activities, not as a basis for claiming a common Indo-European origin.

Turning back to Óttarr, it becomes obvious that he is Freyja's special favourite for certain reasons which the goddess proclaims:

*Hjorg hann mér gerði/hlaðinn steinum/
nú er griót þat/at gleri orðit/rauð hann í nýju/nauta bloði/æ trúði
Óttarr/á ásynjur (10).*

He made me a shrine with heaped stones, now every stone shines like glass, he reddens it anew with blood of cattle. Óttarr always believed in goddesses.

³⁶ Mundal 1974, p.92.

³⁷ Ibid. A recapitulation of all the *Fylgja*-perceptions mentioned in the present work is found on p.000 above.

³⁸ M. Detienne, 1983, "The Sea-Crow", *Myth, religion and society/structuralist essays*, ed. R. L. Gordon, Cambridge, pp.16-42.

³⁹ M. Eliade, 1958, *Patterns in Comparative Religions*, London, p.421.

From this we may draw the conclusion that Óttarr believes specially in Freyja. Favouring one deity before the others is a well-known phenomenon in polytheistic systems of beliefs, and Old Norse religion contains many examples of special relations to divine beings in personal piety. Often the main characters of the Sagas are presented as *mikill vinr Þórrs*, "a great friend of Þórr",⁴⁰ or *Freyr...vin sinn*, "Freyr... his friend".⁴¹ The term *fulltrúi* indicates this personal relation between a man and his god, which sometimes meant that the worshipper donated half his property to the deity or consecrated an area to him. The god could show his gratitude in several ways; as Þórrgrim's grave mound where neither snow nor frost lay due to Freyr's benevolence (Gísla, ch.18), is one example. Children could be consecrated to a certain god, as is the case with Þórrgrim in *Eyrbyggja saga* (11) who was dedicated to Þórr. The stanza in *Hyndluljóð* gives us to understand that Freyja is Óttarr's *fulltrúi*, and that he has sacrificed assiduously to her.

However, the problem of comprehending the erotic relation between Freyja and Óttarr, and the comparable situations in those other poems and episodes, still remains. Instead of the hypothesis of a holy wedding - which had to be rejected for reasons mentioned above - the erotic implications could, rather, constitute one ingredient in an initiation rite. We have mentioned that the initiation of a warrior is usually attended by certain symbolic expressions denoting the young man's ability to become a full member of society. This also implies that he is qualified to marry. To quote just one example, among many, of these ideas: the ephebes of Athens entered into their manhood through certain ceremonies demonstrating both their skills as warriors as well as their sexual maturity; they were then accepted by the society as complete citizens, able to marry and enter the hoplite phalanx.⁴² Like the journey to the other world, humiliation and secret knowledge are elements belonging to the initiation rite, and the erotic relation with the female deity has to be apprehended as a component in this kind of ritual.

The War Boar

When Hyndla accuses her of being in the company of her lover, Freyja denies it; her companion is her boar with the golden bristles, an example of the skill of the dwarves. At the end of the poem, though, she compels Hyndla to give her some beer to stimulate the memory of her boar, which could not be anyone but Óttarr. Does this really mean that Freyja transformed Óttarr into a boar and used him as a horse? Such riding jaunts on young men were practised by sorceresses and nightmares, according to the common belief. They usually led to death or total disability and were thus an act of hostility, whereas Freyja's intentions towards Óttarr seem to be the opposite.

⁴⁰ *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch.3.

⁴¹ *Hrafnkels saga freysgoða*, in *Austfirðinga Sögur*, 1950, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslensk fornrit*, Reykjavík; P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Freyr i islændingasagaerna, Sakrale navne*, 1992, ed. G. Fellows-Jensen, B. Holmberg, Uppsala, pp.55-76.

⁴² C. Vidal-Naquet, 1981, *Le chasseur noir: formes de pensées et formes de société dans le monde grec*, Paris, pp.151-176.

Her brother, Freyr, rides on a boar called Gullinbursti, "Golden-bristled", to the funeral of Baldr (Glgf.49, *Húsdrápa*, 7) a boar made by the dwarf Brokki and furnished with golden bristles. These bristles were so bright that they changed the night into daylight. Besides, this fantastic boar could run as fast as a horse (Sksm.35). Freyr's and Freyja's connection with this animal, is linked to the special oath, *heitsrenging*, concerning the bristle of the boar, which is sacrificed at the *jólablót*.⁴³

It is Óttarr, and not the common mount of the Vanir, who accompanies Freyja on their journey to Valhöll, "the hall of the slain" and during the encounter with Óðinn and Þórr. It is also Óttarr who is referred to as a boar, which should receive *minnisöl*, and he appears in connection with the following expressions *göltr* (5, 7, 45) and *runa* (5). The so-called totemistic explications, where Óttarr and Freyja are thought to appear in animal form, must be rejected as obsolete interpretations of the phenomenon itself.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, these ideas will put us on the right track towards a solution of the problem of Óttarr and the boar, since we have to assume that Óttarr, or something that is representing him, is classified as a boar. This is, in my opinion, evident when Freyja alludes to Hildisvíni, which also is the name of helmet, an object typical of a warrior like Óttarr. The connection between the boar and the helmet must be due to the fact that the helmets were decorated with boars; this is documented in Tacitus' *Germania* (45), in *Beowulf* (303, 1286, 1450) and in archaeological finds as well.

The helmet Hildisvíni was, according to Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*, captured by Aðils, Óttarr's son, from his uncle Áli, together with another helmet, Hildigöltr, and the ring Sveagríss (Sksm.41), all of which were certain important symbols of power and pugnacity.⁴⁵ In *Heimskringla*, Snorri omits these treasures but speaks about a war trophy consisting of two horses, Slongvi and Hrafn; one was sent to a king, who broke his neck when he mounted it. Aðils himself rode the other at the *Disablót*, suffering the same misfortune. Another helmet, Hildigöltr, reappears in Snorri's *Háttatal* as *holt felr Hildigelti*, "Hildigöltr protects the head".⁴⁶ Other combinations containing the element "boar" appears in the kenning *veltir valgaltar*, meaning "warrior".⁴⁷

From *Beowulf* we recognise numerous examples of helmets decorated with boars⁴⁸:

..swin ofer helme.. (1286)

..a pig on the helmet..

⁴³ *The Saga of King Heidrek the wise*, p.31. Höfler suggests that Freyja riding the boar originates from an ancient pagan motif, alluding to the holy wedding between the goddess and a mortal. O. Höfler, 1952, *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum*, Tübingen, p.137 n.198.

⁴⁴ Suggested by Phillpotts, 1920, pp.165-167; for a modern approach to totemisme, see C. Lévi-Strauss, 1961, *Le totémisme aujourd'hui*, Paris, pp.29-41.

⁴⁵ Hildisvíni, Hildigöltr mean "war-boar", Sveagríss is composed by *svea*, belonging to the "svear" and *gríss* "pig".

⁴⁶ H. Beck, 1965, *Das Ebersignum im Germanischen*, Berlin, p.8.

⁴⁷ Loc. cit.

⁴⁸ *Beowulf*, 1978, trans. M. Swanton, Manchester. These examples are also given in Beck 1965, pp.4-5.

Eofor-lic scionom ofer hleorbergan gehroden golde; fah ond fyrheard, fehrwearde heold (303).

Above their cheek-guards, adorned with gold, shone the boar-image; bright and fire-hardened, it stood guard over men's lives.

The boar figure could be placed in other ways on the helmet. *Beowulf* describes a helmet decorated with a chain-mail guard round the head with a protecting effect:

Ac se hwita helm hafelan werede, se þe meregrundas mengan scolde secan sundgebland, since geweorðad befongen freawrasnum, swa hine fyrndagum worhte wæpna smið, wundrum teode, besette swinlicum, þæt hine syðþan no brond ne beadomecas bitan ne meahton. (1448-1450)

And a shining helmet guarded the head that would have to disturb the bottom of the lake, seek out the turbid depths - it was decorated with rich ornament, encircled with a chain-mail guard, just as a weapon-smith had wrought it in days of old, wonderfully formed it set about with boar-images so that thereafter no sword or battle-blade might bite into it.

This ornament is called Frea-wrasn, either "the lord's band" or "Freyr's band".⁴⁹ The existence of a god called Frea in the Anglo-Saxon world is debated; however, since Freyr means "the lord", there could be an indirect connection.⁵⁰ The most prominent hero of *Sögubrot*'s and Saxo's descriptions of the battle of Brávallá, Harald Hilditönd lists the number of warriors connected with the boar-sign and the tusk as a lethal weapon.⁵¹

A sixth-century helmet from Vendel and other finds show warriors wearing tusked visors depicted on plates.⁵² The stanzas from Torslunda depict warriors with helmets decorated with boars.⁵³ As was pointed out above, porcine ornaments on helmets appear as we mentioned, in an older source. Tacitus speaks of them in his *Germania* when he describes the Æstii:

They worship the Mother of the Gods, and wear as emblems of this cult the masks of boars, which stand them in stead of armour or human protection and ensure the safety of the worshippers even among their enemies (Germ.45).

These examples show that the boar sign had the function of protecting the warrior. However, it also constitutes another symbol, connected with the word *eofor*, "boar", which was at the same time the appellation of the

⁴⁹ J. Grimm, comparing Frea-Wasn with the names Epurshelm, Eparhelm, Frðhelm, *Deutsche Mytologie*, 4th ed. Basel 1953, bd.I p.177.

⁵⁰ Ström, 1975, p.105.

⁵¹ Beck, 1965, p.32.

⁵² *Beowulf*, p.190. The helmet from Benty-Granges and the helmet from Sutton Hoo are other examples; see Beck p.15-17.

⁵³ Beck, 1965, p.21.; de Vries I, p.448.

king, the *heiti jöfurr*.⁵⁴ This *heiti* is reiterated seven times in Þjóðólfr's *Ynglingatál* and is considered to be synonymous with other expressions for the king. *Jöfurr* is, however, the most frequent *heiti* for the king, seeming to designate the ideal ruler in Scaldic poetry. In the poems about the gods, it only appears twice: in *Hárbarsljóð* (24) *atta ek jöfrum*, "I incited the kings (to war)", and in *Hyndluljóð* as an exhortation to Hyndla to start dispensing information about Óttarr's ancestors, *um jöfra ættir dæma, gumna þeira, er fra goðom kvómo* (8), "to consider the king's clans, the men who originate from the gods". In the Heroic Poems and Sagas the *heiti jöfurr* appears more frequently. The hero Ragnar Loðbrókar identifies himself with a boar when he meets his death in the snake pit:

Gnydia mundu grisir ef galtar hag visse

The pigs might grunt if they knew of the agony of the boar.

The *heiti jöfurr* is closely connected with the king of Ynglingar in Uppsala, but appears in the personal names of heroes, too, such as Eofor in *Beowulf* and Ibor in Paulus Diaconus' *Origo gentis Langobardum*. The title may refer to the warlike tusks of the boar and at the same time to the king's place in battle - according to the sources, he stood at the outermost wedge of the *svínfylking*. This is reflected in number of designations for the leader, who directs his warriors from this position while receiving guidance from the gods.⁵⁵

The puzzling affinity between Óttarr and the boar should be regarded as a symbol of the warrior and is expressed on the helmet, which carried emblems of boars. The finds from Vendel and Toroslunda display many animal symbols, belonging to the realm of warriors. The enemy signs are snake, bear and wolf, whereas the emblems of their own "side" are boar, eagle and raven.⁵⁶ These symbols may have functioned as a system of classification, where "bear" did not mean that the enemy warrior changed into a bear or even appeared in a bear-like way, but that his hostile character was symbolised by the word "bear" - a notion which probably embodies the solution to the problems of berserks, *ulfhednar* and werewolves. In the same way, the warrior would employ a "boar" for instance, as a symbol of himself. This system of classification is associated with the modern concept of totemism, where primitive people use emblems from nature to classify their own culture, for example in order to distinguish their own tribe from another.⁵⁷ The phenomenon could, however, appear be ubiquitous as a way of structuring and classifying the surroundings of man.⁵⁸ Óttarr represented by a boar is confronted with

⁵⁴ The following presentation is indebted to the chapter "Das heiti jöfurr" in Beck, 1965, pp.183-195.

⁵⁵ See G. Neckel, 1918, "Hamalt fylkia und svínfylkia", *ANF*, pp.284-349 ; N. M. Saxtorph, s.v. *krigskunst*, *KLMN*. The names on Rani could belong to this complex, cf. p.167 n. 21 above.

⁵⁶ Beck, 1965 s.33.

⁵⁷ C. Lévi-Strauss, 1962, pp.21-45.

⁵⁸ The anthropologist R. Linton has demonstrated how the so-called "Rainbow division", soldiers in U.S.A. Army during the First World War, turned into proper totemists, carrying all the characteristics usually ascribed to them. R. Linton, 1965, "Totemism in the A.E.F.", *Reader in Comparative Religion*, ed. Lessa & Vogt, New York.

Hyndla riding on a wolf. She appears to be hostile to him and humiliates him. Freyja is his protectress against Hyndla's assaults and in the ensuing contest with Angantýr, a mock-fight with words which probably concludes the liminal phase of the initiation, marking the point where of the young warrior assumes his new status.

Hyndla's Function in the Poem

After analysing the roles of Freyja and Óttarr, it is time to inquire into the function of Hyndla in the poem. The name Hyndla is usually interpreted as "the little bitch"⁵⁹, which is puzzling as the giants are not usually associated with dogs.⁶⁰ It is not found in other sources, nor does it correspond with names typical of giantesses; they usually allude to something having an injurious effect, as in Angerboða, "the one who forebodes evil". In the world of the giants and evil creatures, the wolves are represented by Fenrir or Garm, who is finally loosened from his fetters in the final battle according to *Völuspá*. Hyndla could then be thought of as a female counterpart of that monstrous wolf, and in which case she would be related to the evil world and the powers of chaos. This is a very tenuous explanation, though, and it is probably best to leave the question about the name open, until a better explanation can be supplied.

Hyndla sleeps in a cave; as we remember Freyja had to wake her up. This scene constitutes a parallel to one in *Baldur's Draumar*, where Óðinn wakes a *völva* who, at the end of the poem, reveals her true nature - she is the giantess Angerboða, mother of the three monsters, i.e. the Miðgárðsormr, Fenrir and Hel. It seems quite probable that Hyndla belongs to the same category, i.e. to the sphere of Loki.

Our next question must be: Why on earth should Freyja, herself well skilled in *sejðr* and sorcery, employ a giantess to help Óttarr win secret knowledge? Óðinn's quest for knowledge from the *völva* at the gates of Hel in *Baldur's Draumar* seems unintelligible, too, since he ought to possess a store of secret numinous knowledge himself by virtue of his access to the head of Mimir and the mead of poetry and his own familiarity with *sejðr* and runes. We must, however, bear in mind that these questions belong within the mythological field and cannot be dealt with in a logical manner. Freyja's and Óðinn's search for wisdom has been seen as an ideal prototype of the quest for secret knowledge. Achieving this aim entailed taking risks beyond the call of everyday life, facing hazards involving encounters with dangerous and horrifying forces which materialise themselves as monsters or as dead persons. Crossing into the supernatural sphere, you must deal with, or even dominate, those extraordinary powers which control this realm. Although both Freyja and Óðinn belong to the supernatural sphere, their actions in these myths are a reflection of the world of man and of the human pursuit of unearthly wisdom.

Still, for what reason must Freyja engage Hyndla to give Óttarr this supernatural wisdom? In the Helgi cycle, which was cited as an analogous construction, the appearance of the superhuman Valkyrie is enough to help the hero - she does not have to invoke giantesses or other monsters when she provides him with special knowledge. We have already intimated that these stories about the humiliated hero and his female

⁵⁹ AnEWb, s.v. *hyndr*, p.265.

⁶⁰ The expression *hundvis jötun* means "the very wise giant", AnEWb the prefix *hund-*, p.267.

helper are reflections of initiation. However, these heroic poems or sagas represent a later layer of the narrative, where the religious elements have yielded to the influences of epic romances and lost their original character.

Hyndluljóð represents an earlier stratum, like *Hávamál*, *Rígsþula* and *Sigrdrífumál*, and describes how secret knowledge is transmitted during the initiation of a warrior. Despite the many ruptures in the poem, we are still able to perceive its purpose - Óttarr's entrance into the world of men by defeating Angantýr, and his asserting his right to his heritage. In consequence Óttarr will attain his position in the world, establishing his kinship with the heroes and the gods. The genealogies extended back into the world of the supernatural, i.e. the world of the gods and their enemies, the giants. They thus elucidates a particular world view, a perspective of time and space that is revealed to Óttarr, "the stupid one", comprising the beginning and end of the world as well as what comes next. From this perspective, Hyndla acts as a *völva*, a prophetess, when she reveals this supernatural world in *Völuspá inn skamma*, like the unknown giantess in *Baldrs Draumar* and the *völva* fostered by giants in *Völuspá*.

The Secret of the Gods

Völuspá inn skamma concentrates on the following matters: Baldr's death; the giants' and the sorcerers' names; Heimdallr's power; Loki's horrible children and Óðinn's combat with Fenrir. The motifs corresponding with the *Völuspá* are the death of Baldr and Váli as avenger, the giants' and the sorceresses' appearance, Loki as father of Fenrir and the Miðgarðsormr and the death of Óðinn caused by Fenrir in Ragnarök. Heimdallr is the central figure, the god of the beginning and the end.

Here as well as in *Völuspá* the cosmological structures of beginning and decline; but *Völuspá inn skamma* starts with the crucial point, the death of Baldr, and primarily revolves around the gods Heimdallr and Loki. Baldr's death, caused by Loki, opens the gates of destruction, which is emphasised by the fact that Baldr does not return from Hel. (When we contemplate the myth logically, we find that Baldr should according to Snorri's description, return to Valhöll as he dies from a weapon. However, in that case the myth would lose its significance and become nonsense.)

This is the first and most important victory of those chaotic powers whose aim is the annihilation of the cosmos, the god who incarnates Youth, Purity and Goodness being conquered by Death, while the Æsir and the Vanir are incapable of preventing it. The extinction of the young god and all that he represented is the event that sets off the decline of the gods and their power.

The instigator is Loki, who effects the death of Baldr in three different ways. Conspicuously, he acts as *ráðbani*, "the one who incites the killing" - first when he helps the blind Höðr kill Baldr with the mistletoe, then when he is hidden in the guise of a giantess and refuses to join in the mourning that might release Baldr from Hel, and finally as the father of Hel and hence the origin of Death:

... eitt þótti skars/allra feiknast/þat var bróður frá/Býleistz komit
(Hdl.40).

One monster I rate as the most terrible, the one who came from Byleist's brother.

In this situation Loki has revealed his true qualities. His role among the gods had until now been that of a jester whose jokes sometimes had unfortunate results - results which he, however, had to remedy by risking his own neck or reputation. Loki's qualities correspond to the declining moral standards of the Ages of the Gods.⁶¹ When we meet him at the banquet of Ægir, all his masks have definitely dropped off, and he appears as the malicious character he in fact is.

*Enn vill þú, Frigg/at ek fleiri telia/mína meinstafi/
ek því réð/er þú ríða sérat/síðan Baldr at solum (Ls.28).*

Do you really wish, Frigg, that I should tell you more evil words, I who was the one who made sure that you will never see Baldr ride again to the houses?

Loki's taunting unveils his intentions and the gods imprison him in their last effort to avert the onslaught of evil. From now on, time is merely a temporary thing and equivalent with the present time, as the pre-Christian people of Scandinavia apprehended it.⁶²

These speculations are of importance to those who must possess knowledge of the gods. Heimdallr representing the beginning, Baldr the way downward and Loki the final destruction make up the divine experience of the man's existential situation, where the decline of the cosmos is inevitable; what will come afterwards is uncertain and belongs to another level of numinous knowledge i.e. the sphere of Óðinn, probably associated with one of his sons Viðarr and Váli:

*Þá kemr annarr enn mátkari/þó þori ek eigi þann at nefna/ fáir síá nú
fram um lengra/ en Óðinn man úlfi mæta (Hdl.44).*

Then another, more powerful will come, although I dare not speak of him. Few look longer (into the future) than when Óðinn may meet the wolf.

Conclusion

This chapter constitutes an attempt to uncover the structure of *Hyndluljóð*, aimed at helping us stay out of difficulties in respect of its historical evidence. The main *raison-d'être* of this investigation is the desirability of interpreting *Hyndluljóð* - compared with other heroic poems - as a reflection of the initiation of a warrior. The search for a lineage, the appearance of a monstrous and malevolent giantess, the humiliating nick name, the journey to the Other World and finally the (pretended) combat with an experienced fighter - all are typical elements in initiation. The names of Óttarr and Angantýr in *Hyndluljóð* must be seen as allusions to old narratives, each of them representing a type, i.e. the uninitiated and the initiated warrior.

⁶¹ J. P. Schjødt, 1981, "Om Loke endnu en gang", *ANF* 96, pp. 49-86.

⁶² Schjødt, 1981, pp.49-86.

The knowledge Óttarr receives from Hyndla is the knowledge of his descent from the gods and of their cosmological battle against evil. This is different from the knowledge imparted by Óðinn in stanza 3. We have observed that neither Óttarr nor Helgi received the healing and magic skills which seem to belong to Óðinn's heroes.

We have understood the name Óttarr as denoting not a person but a fictitious hero who features in many poems and tales, combined with the name of Angantýr and with the symbolic animals boar and wolf. Like the poems and episodes about Helgi, he is the object of an initiation into the warrior's world, assisted and protected by a female deity.

The initiation of Óttarr is characterised by warlike situations along the following lines:

1. Óttarr is connected with the boar called Hildisvíni, a symbol of war.
2. The initiation takes the form of a battle between Freyja and the giantess.
3. Most of Óttarr's ancestors were known by their martial exploits.
4. On the mythological level, the world consists of battles against two parts: a) Váli against Høðr, b) Heimdallr against Loki, c) Óðinn against Fenrir. The enemies are designated as giants, a sorcerer and a sorceress respectively.
5. Whereas the numinous knowledge in *Sigrdrífumál*, *Hávamál* and *Rígsþula* is connected with medical skill by way of the chanting of runes, there is no sign of such components in the instruction that Óttarr receives.
6. Freyja, not Óðinn, initiates the warriors - or at least one type of warrior - in her function of war goddess. This means that Óttarr belongs to that half of the slain whom she receives in Folkvangr.

To sum up our investigation of *Hyndluljóð*, we have found that in this poem Freyja appears as Óðinn's counterpart in the case of the initiation of a warrior. Furthermore, the initiation of her warriors differs from the one practised by Óðinn: her protégés are not inducted in magical-medical skills (belonging to the first function), but receive promises of gold (the third function). The genealogical chains form knowledge typical of an initiation, where the role of the ancestors is characteristically revealed; even *Völuspá inn skamma*, with its cosmological vision, belongs to the transmitted tradition. The neophyte's passage into his new estate is, as in an initiation rite, expressed by a symbolic death and experienced as a trial of courage. In *Hyndluljóð* the journey goes to "the Hall of the Slain", where the warrior gods Óðinn and Þórr are invoked. The phase of admission to the assembly of warriors is expressed by a battle of knowledge against Angantýr, who represents this group. Finally, the erotic allusions involving the goddess and the neophyte are expressions of

the latter new dignity as an adult and member of the society, able to fight and able to marry.

The corrupt text of the poem *Hyndluljóð* could be interpreted in many ways, as we mentioned at the outset. The typical pattern of an initiation is evident, though. The circumstance that it is Freyja, the collector of half of the slain, who introduces her protégé into his life as a warrior underscores her role as a goddess of war and kinwoman of the Valkyries, yielding additional evidence of her complex nature.

Freyja and the Giants: The Background of *ÞRYMSKVIÐA*

The Content of *Þrymskviða*

Þrymskviða is a late Eddic poem, presumably written in the second part of the thirteenth century. The rationale of this assumption is the fact that it is not mentioned in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. Snorri ought to have recorded this literary show-piece in his manual on the making of poetry, *Skáldskaparmál*, if he had encountered it in this literary form. This circumstance has allowed for the hypothesis that Snorri was himself the author, and that he created a skilful pastiche after the model of the old Eddic poems.¹

Even if it was Snorri or someone else among his learned colleagues who composed *Þrymskviða* almost two hundred years after the conversion of Iceland, some questions regarding to its mythological background still need to be addressed. It is likely that the story itself had earlier belonged to the oral tradition, involving the recurrent of the giants' yearning for Freyja and Þórr's perpetual defence of Ásgarðr.

That late and elaborated version of *Þrymskviða* which we have access to consists of a farcical lay, where three comical highlights focus on the reactions of the acting characters: the anger of Freyja in stanza 12, the anger of Þórr in stanza 16 and the wedding feast at the giant Þrymr's house in stanzas 24-32. The presumed 13th-century author has, indeed, done his best about these situations. Behind this facade we are able to discern a mythological structure reflecting the cosmic balance between the gods and their enemies, the giants who temporarily possess the supreme weapon, Mjøltnir, Þórr's hammer.

When Þórr wakes up one morning the hammer is gone, and as it is part of its very nature never to leave its master, he immediately becomes suspicious as regards its whereabouts. He sends Loki away in the feather guise of Freyja's to reconnoitre, and Loki already seems to know where to look. The giant Þrymr has stolen the hammer using magic spells, and he will only hand it back on condition that Freyja becomes his wife. Therefore Þórr and Loki visit Freyja, informing her of the giant's demand. Freyja, who has until now been favourable disposed towards the expedition, is seized by a wrath by which makes the whole world of the gods shudder and her famous adornment, Brísinga men, break into two pieces. The gods must hence go into counsel about how to handle the situation. Heimdallr finds the solution to the problem: Þórr himself should go to the giants' world disguised as Freyja. This suggestion elicits the next divine tantrum. Hot-tempered Þórr explodes in anger and cries:

Mik munu æsir /argan kalla/ef ek bindaz læt/brúðar líni (Þrk.17).

The gods may call me queer, if I would dress in the bride's linen.

¹ P. Hallberg, 1962, *Den fornisländska poesien*, Stockholm, p. 54.

Nonetheless, he has to stand for it and together with Loki - who voluntarily dresses as a bridesmaid - they begin their journey to the world of the giants. It goes without saying that Þórr lets his disguise slip immediately. From mere habit, and jittery as he is, he gobbles down one ox, nine salmon and lots of beer. Naturally, the giant reacts to this:

*Þá kvað þat Þrymr/þursa dróttinn/Hvar sáttu brúðir/
bíta hvassara/Sáka ek brúðir/bíta breiðara/né inn meiri mið/meý um
drekka? (Þrk.25)*

Then Þrymr said, the king of the giants, 'Where did you see a woman bite harder? I have not seen a woman bite broader, not a maiden drink more mead.'

Loki intervenes and declares that the lovesick Freyja had lost her appetite for eight days. Nearing this, Þrymr becomes excited and lifts the veil to kiss his bride. At that critical moment Þórr can do nothing but glare furiously, and the giant turns in astonishment:

*Hví ero þndótt/augo Freyio/þikki mér ór augum/(eldr of) brenna!
(Þrk.27)*

Why are the eyes of Freyja so frightening? I think that a fire burns out of her eyes!

Loki answers along similar lines Freyja has not slept for eight nights, since she longed so much for the union with Þrymr. Þrymr now orders the hammer to be brought in and laid in the lap of the bride. Þórr does not hesitate to amek full use of the opportunity; hammer in hand, he makes short work of the bridegroom and of the wedding guests, too.

The Relations between the Gods

When describing an ancient religion such as that of old Scandinavian, one with its polytheistic pantheon, it is easy to tread the well-known path made by the old mythographers and classify the gods according to their qualities, for example Freyr as ruling vegetation, Óðinn war and magic, Ægir the sea, etc. This classifying can, however, convey the erroneous impression that these gods were perceived as isolated phenomena, who directed their specific realms. It could also lead us so to the point where we, in handling bygone mythologies, miss the very point - that these gods were objects of human belief, and that the myths surrounding them were essential perceptions of man's outlook on life. Scholars today may know more about the origin and the etymology of the gods than people of the Viking Ages did, but these people believed in their gods, their presence and their activity. We always run the risk of placing the gods in our own scientific view of world by making abstract classifications of them and their activities, whereas the people of the Viking Age experienced the gods as real and as a part of the nature which surrounded them.

There are other obstacles in addition to the polytheistic system itself that hamper our understanding of the Old Norse religion. It is necessary to observe that these gods had their functions in this world, not outside it in

some literary dream-land. They had not existed forever; they had passed into the world at the beginning of time, and ordered the creation. They were not immortal, although their existence endured from the creation of the world to its end. Nor were they almighty, as we may see from the myths: Baldr could not avoid his destiny through the mistle-toe; Óðinn's knowledge helped him balance the powers of the universe against each other each other, but he could not prevent the fall of the gods, although he had foreseen their fate. The development of the Old Norse universe was consistently programmed towards its decline and holocaust and further on towards a new creation.

On the other hand, the gods did have the power to intervene in people's lives, especially on the battle-field but in other situations too. They provided material goods as well as mental qualities such as courage and poetical skill; they usually protected those who believed in them; and, finally, they received the dead in their divine abodes.

The polytheistic system in Old Norse religion must be understood in such a way that the myths concerning the relations between the gods, as well as their activities, are seen to express a kind of symbolic language. Such an interaction between the different deities and their functions reveals the underlying structures of man's outlook on the cosmic order, something that scholars like G. Dumézil, J. P. Vernant and M. Detienne have already demonstrated in their research.

Loki

Interaction between the gods and their surroundings in *Þrymskviða* could be seen as a continuous struggle between the cosmos represented by the inhabitants of Ásgarðr, and the powers of chaos, the giants, who endeavoured to destroy the creation. The enigmatic figure of Loki, constituting a mixture of these two forces, appears in different and ambiguous roles in several myths, where his relations with the gods vary. Together with Þórr, he usually acts as a humble servant towards his master; Heimdallr is his mortal enemy; and around Freyja and the other goddesses he behaves cringingly, although he secretly harbours the wish of abducting them to the giants, or at least of becoming their lover.

Loki is, in reality, a giant. He became related to Óðinn in primeval times, when they mixed their blood with each other, i.e. they had sworn brotherhood. Loki is not only an odd figure, a court jester, and a trickster in the Nordic pantheon - his presence is dangerous in the long run, as his personal development in the myths is correlated to the mythical process of the gods' destiny. It is obvious that he turns increasingly demonic when the fall of the cosmic world approaches.

His role in the world drama is evident when he becomes the instigator of the death of Baldr, and after that he appears as totally evil. For the last time he confronts the gods at the banquet of Ægir, scorning them by telling the truth about their weakness. Finally, at Ragnarøk, he joins the enemy, the giants, bent on destroying the creation.²

In *Þrymskviða* he still appears as a good-natured creature on the surface, but it is obvious that his evil mind derives great satisfaction from the visit at Þrymr's, where Þórr is deeply humiliated and the giant

² On Loki from the perspective of the drama of world, see Schjødt, 1981, pp.49-86.

fooled. Furthermore, he has no qualms about dressing like a woman, running the risk of being accused of depravation. Earlier, Loki had appeared in the guise of a mare, mating with a stallion - the ultimate case of perversion - and had finally given birth to Sleipnir, which he presented to Óðinn. In many myths he works as Þórr's servant, although his giant nature shows in his fear of the hammer - the only thing that can stop his evil tongue towards the end of *Lokasenna* (64).

Þórr and his Hammer

In their relationship Þórr appears as the superior; his connection with Loki is the bold master's with the despised servant. It is, however, obvious that Þórr does not trust Loki when he asks the latter to answer immediately on his return from the giants' home - i.e. Loki should not have time enough to construct a lie. Furthermore, Þórr has reasons to suspect Loki of committing adultery with his own wife, Sif. According to Snorri Loki once tricked her into cutting her hair off (Sksm.33). In *Hárbarðsljóð*, during his dialogue with Þórr, Hárbarðr (Óðinn) hints, that Sif is deceiving him and finally Loki himself utters the following words to her:

Ein þú værir/ef þú svá værir/vor ok gröm at veri/einn ek veit/svá at ek vita þikkiomk/hór ok af Hlórriða/ok var þat sá inn lævísi Loki (Ls.54).

You would have been the only one if you had been careful and avoided men. (But) alone I think I know the one who cuckolded even Hlórriði (Þórr) and that was the wily Loki.

Þórr is the one who, according to Snorri, finally captures Loki in the guise of a salmon in the river of Fránangr, after all his evil deeds had been revealed to the gods. In *Þrymskviða*, however, he is powerless and has to put up with Loki and even rely on him in strained situations, regardless of what his vicious and deceitful servant might find out.

Mjølñir, "the crusher", is the decisive weapon used by Þórr in his battles with such giants as Hrúgnir, Þrymr and the Giant Builder. Mjølñir returns to his master after being used, just like the Vedic Indra's *vajra* and the Celtic Dagha's weapon, and thus possesses inherent magical powers. The symbol of the hammer was pictured on rock-carvings as a male attribute at an early stage. Subsequently, it acquired an averting function, frightening thieves and marking the borders between neighbours. It was also a sign of protection and therefore depicted on separate objects. In the late days of the Norse religion the hammer sign was used in opposition to the Christian Cross. Speculations have been put forward as to whether the hammer played a certain role in rites of passage; the wedding in *Þrymskviða* and the consecration of Baldr's death-ship could imply that the hammer was used in such situations. Nevertheless, such elements could merely be taken to indicate the special power of Mjølñir.

This power is wellknown by giants and demons, having smashed the skulls of many of their ancestors. Þórr must wear special gloves to be able to hold the handle of the hammer. After his death, Mjølñir becomes the property of his sons, Magni and Móði. It is obvious that he depends more on the weapon than the weapon does on him, and without the hammer

Þórr is just as impotent as when he wakes up in the beginning of *Þrymskviða*.

We might compare his predicament in this myth with a similar one which occurs during his visit to the giant Geirrþóðr. The reason for this visit was to free Loki, who was held captive at the giant's home and who had promised that Þórr would come without Mjǫlnir. Owing to other magical weapons, provided by the giantess Gríðr, the mother of Viðarr, Þórr managed to save himself from drowning in a flood caused by one of Geirrþóðr's daughters urinating. In the home of the giant he was attacked by the giant and his daughters, but with the help of the magical objects, he finally killed them. The difference between this story and the situation in *Þrymskviða* is that his hammer remained secure at Ásgarðr. Although Þórr had to fight "with his bare fists" and rely on assistance from magic weapons, the danger was not so overwhelming as it was in *Þrymskviða*.

With his hammer, Þórr is the splendid fighter, the ideal warrior and the virile protector against chaos and destruction, unlike Freyr, who voluntarily gives away his weapon to win the woman he loves. Freyr's potency is, however, characterised by his sexuality; Þórr relies on his warlike appearance, and without his hammer he is powerless.

The Abduction of the Goddess

In possession of the mighty weapon, the hammer Mjǫlnir, Þrymr demands Freyja for his bride, a recurrent yearning on the part of the giants. This brings up the old theme of the beauty and the beast, since Freyja is the great goddess of love and pleasure. We never hear, however, of the giants' lust for other beautiful goddesses such as Frigg, Sif or Nanna. Only once is another goddess, Iðunn, attacked by them in their attempts to alter the asymmetry of the matrimonial pattern, and the reason is that she owns the apples of eternal youth - people who eat them do not grow old. In this story, Loki has an important role to play - he is the one who causes Iðunn to fall into the hands of the giant Þjazi, and he also has to bring her back dressed in the feather-guise of Freyja.

The myth of Iðunn and her apples corresponds with the giants' attacks on Freyja. It is possible that Iðunn, "the perpetually beloved", is another name for the goddess, and that the strophe in *Vǫluspá: eða ætt iǫtuns Óðs mey gefna* (25), "...or gave Óðr's maiden to the sib of giants", reflects the above-mentioned event.

In Þjóðólfr's of Hvin poem *Haustlǫng*, the affinity between the two goddesses is emphasised in the name *Brísingr* in stanza 93:

*Brísings goða girðitjófr of kom síðan Brunnakrs bekkjar dís í garða
grjót-Níðaðar*

The thief of the girdle of *Brísingr* brought afterwards *Bröndaker's* seat's *Dís* to the home of the Mountain King.⁴

3 B. Pering, 1941, *Heimdall*, Lund, p.213.

4 See also Þjóðólfr of Hvin, *Haustlǫng*, 9, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtningen*, 1967, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.

It appears from the context that Loki is the one who carries Iðunn away. It is true that the stanza depicts different episodes from the myths: one about the theft of Brisinga men, and the other about the abduction of Iðunn and her apples. Nevertheless, the resemblance between the situations is evident.

In the poem of Þjóðólfr, Iðunn is presented as *mey þás ellilyf ása kunni*, "the maiden, who knows the medicine the gods use against old age", whereas Snorri speaks about *eplín, ellilyf ásanna*, "the apples [that] are the medicine of the gods" (Sksm.110). Wild apples were found in large numbers in the ship of Oseberg, in one case together with grain⁵ - two kinds of nourishment Classical Antiquity regarded as symbols of life in this world and in the other.⁶ The kenning *epli Heljar*, "the apples of Hel", in Þorbjörn Brúnason's *Lausavísa* reveals that the apple symbol carried similar connotations in the Old Norse mythology, whereas same fruit implies fertility in *Völsunga saga* (as a gift from Frigg and Óðinn).⁷

Although the word *epli* could mean any round tree fruit, even an acorn⁸, we must suspect that the account of the apples of Iðunn is influenced by Classical mythology. They originate in the Garden of the Hesperides, where Zeus and Hera celebrated their marriage and where Hera received the apples of eternal youth from the Earth Goddess.⁹ The apples were connected with Aphrodite, too, and provided the name of her island, Melos. The Irish tale of the three sons of Tuirenn, who stole the magical apples of Hisberna which had healing qualities, seems to be the link to the Nordic myth, especially when we find such details as the sons adopting the guise of hawks and being persecuted by guardians in the form of griffins.¹⁰

There are, however, important differences between the stories. The myth about Iðunn and Þjazi depicts not only the stealing of the magic apples, but also the abduction of the goddess herself. When Loki managed to bring her back, he was first compelled to transform her into a nut; but nothing is said about any apples. This story accentuates our impression that it is the goddess herself who possesses the knowledge about the remedy against old age and that the apples are secondary symbols, although they had already appeared in pre-Christian faith.

As motifs, the rescue and the persecution are closely connected with another familiar motif: Óðinn and the theft of the mead of poetry.¹¹ The two motifs are undoubtedly connected with the Indo-European conception of the theft of the drink of immortality. In its Nordic setting, this conception was divided into two myths, one focusing on Óðinn and the mead of poetry and the other on Iðunn-Freyja and the drug of eternal youth.

Like Iðunn, Freyja possesses qualities, which the giants desire and want to control. Her own person embodies important principles of life and fertility, which both Þrymr and the Giant Builder want to own, and they are also symbolised in Brisinga men, her famous adornment. Just as the

5 Turville-Petre, 1964, p.186.

6 A survey of these symbols in Classical Antiquity is found in Näsström, 1990, pp.91-92.

7 On apple symbolism, see Steinsland, 1989, pp.232-252.

8 Turville-Petre, 1964, p.186.

9 Sittig, s.v. Hesperiden, p. 1243, *Paulys Realencyklopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 1894-, ed G. Wissowa, K. Ziegler, Stuttgart.

10 Turville-Petre 1964, p.186.

11 Ibid. p.187.

hammer Mjǫlnir is the typical attribute of Þórr, Brísinga men is Freyja's. It is hence perfectly logical for the ornament to break when Þórr demands that she should marry the giant, as the meaning behind his request is that Freyja should surrender the creative power to the forces of destruction.

The Theft of Brísinga Men

The adornment was, according to Þjóðólfr of Hvin, called *Brísings... girði...* "the girdle of Brísingr", whereas Snorri later calls it Brísinga men "the adornment of Brísingr". These expressions have elicited an erudite discussion as to whether the relevant object was to be regarded as a girdle or a necklace, the romantic school deciding that it was the latter, inspired by the marvellous finds of golden neck rings. The kenning used by Þjóðólfr could be interpreted as "necklace", too.

Brísinga men has given rise to at least one myth, of which only fragments remain. The actors are Loki and Heimdallr, who both have specific roles in *Þrymskviða*. In Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa*, a poetical description of the mythical pictures in the hall of Ólaf Páir, we find the following stanza:

*Ráðgegninn frægr ragna reinvári bregðr við firna slægjan mög Fárbauta
at Singateini; modoflugar mögr átta mædra ok einnar rædr áðr fögru
hafnýra.*

The wise powerful guardian (=Heimdallr) of the way of the gods(=Bifrost) travelled together with the very cunning son of Farbaute to Singastein; the brave son of one and eight mothers managed first to reach the beautiful sea-kidney.¹²

The episode is related by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*, where he describes Heimdallr in the following terms:... "He is also the visitor of Vágaskär and Singastein - where he and Loki fought about the Brísinga men...they appeared in the form of seals" (Sksm 8). Birger Pering suggests an emendation of the word Singastein in the first strophe of *Húsdrápa* to **signastein* "magic stone", which would suggest an analogy to *hafnýra*, "sea-kidney", in the next strophe. *Hafnýra* might be the same as the Norwegian expression *vettenyrer* "wight-kidney", or "sea-bean", denoting a dehydrated plant, *Entada Gigalobium*. It was brought from the West Indies by the Gulf Stream and was actively used in folk medicine to facilitate deliveries. In Iceland the "stone" was called *lausnarsteinn* "delivery stone", and was brown or red in colour. Pering associates the colour with "fire", which is the primary translation of the word *brísingr*.¹³ Brísinga men is thus identical with "the holy stone", "the sea-kidney", and served as a helper in childbirth, which alludes to Freyja's function (see, above p.80).¹⁴

Pering's hypothesis emphasises the importance of Brísinga men as connected with fertility and childbirth. As an attribute of Freyja's it thus

¹² The original text in Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa*, 2, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldediktningen*, 1967, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen. The text is emendated by Finnur Jónsson.

¹³ *Ibid* pp.217-218.

¹⁴ Pering, 1941, p.222.

carries strong sexual connotations, a circumstance reflected in the utterance of the virile Þórr when he is obliged to appear in the guise of Freyja: "the gods may call me queer!", which not only alludes to the humiliation of wearing a woman's garment, but especially to the famous symbol Brísinga men. This adornment thus directly insinuates that he is going to have a sexual relationship with the giant and bear him children, a common relation in what Norse law called *niðr*. *Niðr* usually implied that a man had played the passive part of a sexual relationship in favour of another man, a stallion or a troll and had borne him children.¹⁵

It is true that *fogru havnýra* constitutes nothing more than a kenning for Brísinga men, but this does not explain the important role of the necklace, which is the object of Loki's desire as much as the goddess Freyja herself. In a different myth he is involved in a theft of the adornment, impelled by various motives. In the late *Sprla þáttr*, he acts on the request of Óðinn:

A man was called Farbauti ... and he had a wife who was called Laufey. She was both slim and within easy reach and therefore she was called Needle.¹⁶ They had a son among their children, who was called Loki. He was short of stature and had the gift of the gab and was agile in his work. He had more of that knowledge than the others, which is called guile. He was of wide learning in this from his youth and therefore he was called Loki the guileful. He went to Óðinn in Ásgarðr and became his servant. Óðinn praised him whatever he undertook. Still, he gave him hard commissions (but) he managed to fulfil them in the best way. He also became nearly all-knowing, and besides he told Óðinn everything he knew. It is also said that Loki had knowledge of how Freyja had got her adornment and in what way she had received it. He said this to Óðinn. When Óðinn learned this, he said that Loki should take the adornment and bring to Óðinn. Loki said that this was hard since no man could enter the room against Freyja's will. Óðinn said that he should go away and not come back until he had obtained the adornment.

Loki went away howling. Most men were delighted that Loki had been given that task. He went to Freyja's room and that was locked. He searched at the door for an entry but found nothing. It was very cold outside and he became very cold. He then turned into a fly and looked in every lock and every joint, but nowhere did he find [an opening] so big that he could fly in. Up under the ridge he found a little hole as big as a pinprick. Through that hole he managed to get in. When he had entered he looked carefully around him to see if someone was awake, but he could see that everyone was asleep in the room. He then flew to Freyja's bed and saw that she wore the adornment around her neck and that the catch was under her. Loki then became a flea and sat down on Freyja's cheek and bit her so that she awoke, turned around and fell asleep again. Loki whipped

¹⁵ P. Meulengracht-Sørensen, 1983, p.18 ff.; B. Almquist, 1965, *Norrøn niddiktning*, 1-2, Stockholm, passim.

¹⁶ The names Laufey and Nál are given i Glgf. 33; Laufey could mean "broad-leaf tree" and Nál "coniferous tree", although other interpretations are possible. Lorenz, p.407.

off his flea disguise and took the adornment from her. He locked up the room and went to Óðinn.¹⁷

The role of Brísinga men as a valuable symbol of fertility elucidates the obscure fight between Heimdallr and Loki. Loki's theft of the adornment is in analogy with his abduction of Iðunn and the contract with the Giant Builder, where Freyja is promised as a reward. Heimdallr is the father of men in the beginning of *Vǫluspá* and *Rígsþula*, himself born out of the sea by nine mothers, and he is the one who saves this symbolic adornment, the primary attribute of the goddess of love. Loki's scorn of Gefjun in *Lokasenna* probably echoes his own defeat in the fight: "The white young man who gave you the adornment, and you threw your thighs about (him)" (Ls.20). Gefjun is, as we have mentioned, a byname for Freyja, although she appears as an independent goddess in this poem.

"The white young man" probably alludes to Heimdallr, who is called *hvítastr áss* (Prk.15), *hvíti áss* (Glgf.25) and Freyja-Gefjun rewarded him in the manner described for returning her ornament. A connection between Heimdallr and Freyja could probably be found in her surname *Mardǫll*, a composite of *marr*- "sea" and *-dǫll*. *-dǫll* is probably a fem. form of *-dallr*; cf. the last part of *Heim-dallr*, meaning "the shining".¹⁸ We have suggested that *Mardǫll* could be interpreted as "the shining over sea" and thus be regarded as a counterpart of Heimdallr, "the shining over earth". Hypothetically, this could mean that the goddess connected with earth extends her power over the water, and that the god who originated from the sea watches the land of men.

Heimdallr is a god of the primeval time and Loki's perpetual antagonist. The reason behind their animosity lies in the cosmological opposition between the gods and the giants, powers of cosmos and chaos respectively. Heimdallr is not only the father of men; he is moreover *vrǫðr goða*, "the watcher of the gods" (Glgf.27), who blows his horn, heralding Ragnarǫk. In this final battle he confronts Loki for the last time, and as the last surviving gods these two kill each other before fire devours the cosmos.

Gods versus Giants

A serious motif lurks behind the comical facade of Þórr's adventures in *Þrymskviða*. It presents the mythical cosmos of Old Norse religion, where the world of the gods opposes the world of the giants. The centre of this cosmos is *Miðgarðr*, "the home in the Middle", the land of human beings. In relation with this world, we find the other two - *Ásgarðr*, the home of gods, and *Jötunheim*, the world of the giants, sometimes called *Útgarðr*. The gods are those who preserve and shelter life, upholding the cosmos, whereas the giants' function is the opposite. In their different shapes, they manifest the evils of existence, yearning for the destruction of the creation. They are related to wild nature - not identical with it, but representing its dark and damaging side. The name *jötunn* probably derives from the same stem as the Latin *edulus*, "the eater", and the meaning "the one who devours corpses" is reflected in the name of one of the giants, *Hræsvelg*. Other names reflect wild nature and its

¹⁷ *Flateyjarbók I*, pp.275-276.

¹⁸ Lorenz, p.440.

unpleasantness, too, especially the winter and the cold, e.g. Hrímnir "frost"; Hrímgrímnir "masked with frost"; Jökull "glacier"; Drífa "drift"; Snjör "snow". Other natural phenomena are alluded to in Hlér "sea"; Logi "fire"; and Kári "wind". Moreover, their demonic aspects are moreover reflected in the appellations *þurs* and *tröll*.

On the other hand, the giants are representatives of primeval times, as is the case with the giant Ymir, from whom the gods created the world. Many of the gods, like Óðinn and Týr, descend from the giants. The giantesses are desired by the gods for example Gerðr, Gunnlōð and Skaði, and even become their wives, but no interaction between giants and goddesses takes place. This asymmetry is obviously due to the circumstance that the giants are of lower rank and potential enemies of the gods. Most of those giantesses who are married to the gods in Ásgarðr are not treated on the same footing as the indigenous goddesses.

It is also important to pay attention to the role of the giants in the mythical schedule of time. At the beginning of time they, like Loki, coexist with the gods; but gradually they become a threat to the cosmos which climaxes in the final battle. Loki and the monsters he has begotten attack the gods, supported by Surtr, the destructive fire, and the other giants and demons. These direct the offensive against the gods and manage to plunge the orderly world into chaos. A new world with new gods rises from the ashes of the old; but at this moment a dragon - a symbol of evil - comes flying into the creation, and the cycle of existence is repeated. Accordingly, the relation between the gods and the giants is an ongoing balancing act between two antinomies in their connection with creation and cosmos, belonging to a perpetual cosmic succession of creations and destruction.¹⁹

The Inversion of the Sexes

In *Þrymskviða* the hammer can only be rescued through an extraordinary action, able to release it from the magic which Þrymr had used to pacify it so it would not return to Þórr. The action is performed through an inversion of the sexes, where the warrior god Þórr has to appear as Freyja, the goddess of love. His dignity and pride have to suffer deeply to save the hammer and thereby the situation in which the gods find themselves - i.e. their whole existence. The change of sex is a well-known expedient in Indo-European parallels, for example when Arjuna appears as a female dancer during the thirteenth, perilous year of the Pāndavas' exile, or when Vishnu, dressed like Lakshmi, saves the beverage of immortality from the demons who try to steal it.²⁰

In *Þrymskviða*, the antinomies of female and male are balanced with the antinomies between gods and giants. The inversion of the sexes becomes the expedient which brings out what Freyja does not want to do and Þórr is not able to, i.e. to enter the world of the giants and fetch the hammer back. The wedding scene crystallises the opposition between male and female, love and hatred, fertility and destruction. This is an inverted holy wedding, the yearning bride and bridegroom being replaced by the coarse warrior god and the destructive giant, an inversion which culminates when Þrymr's lifts the veil and meets the baleful gaze of Þórr.

¹⁹ B. Lincoln, 1986, *Myth, Cosmos and Society*, Cambridge, pp.131, 140.

²⁰ de Vries II p.144; G. Dumézil, 1934, *Le festin d'immortalité*, Paris.

The marriage celebration that ought to be consummated within the framework of sexuality, fertility and procreation ends with violence, destruction and death. The inversion is fulfilled, the hammer is restored and the cosmos once again saved from the powers of chaos. The structures of the divine world are repeated in many variants - one became the motif for the skilled Icelandic poet who wrote *Þrymskviða*.

Who Killed the King?

The Divine King and the Sacral Kingship

The Golden Bough by J. Frazer was published between 1890 and 1924¹ and left its mark on over the history of religions in the twentieth century. Primarily based on Mannhardt's theories about the dying vegetation spirit², Frazer derived his idea of the slain king from W. Robertson-Smith's work *The Religion of the Semites*.³ As a result of a fusion between Robertson-Smith's conception and Mannhardt's ideas, the hypothesis of the dying god, represented by the king, was born. Frazer's theory of magic was added to his concept of kingship, investing the ruler with a special quality which made him a divine king. But this divine king was not only a manifestation of vegetation from its growing and flourishing aspect; he also had to incarnate its fading and withering element. The latter was, according to Frazer, expressed by the sacrifice of the king at the end of a fixed time, and one of his examples is derived from Old Norse religion:

Scandinavian traditions contain some hints that of old the Swedish kings reigned only for periods of nine years, after which they were put to death or had to find a substitute to die in their stead. Thus Aun or On, king of Sweden, is said to have sacrificed to Odin for length of days and to have been answered by the god that he should live so long as he sacrificed one of his sons every ninth year. He sacrificed nine of them in this manner, and would have sacrificed the tenth and last, but the Swedes would not allow him. So he died and was buried in a mound at Upsala. Another indication of a similar tenure of the crown occurs in a curious legend of the deposition and banishment of Odin. Offended at his misdeeds, the other gods outlawed and exiled him, but sent up in his place a substitute, Oller by name, a cunning wizard, to whom they accorded the symbols both of royalty and of godhead. The deputy bore the name of Odin, and reigned for nearly ten years, when he was driven from the throne, while the real Odin came to his own again. His discomfited rival retired to Sweden and afterwards slain in an attempt to repair his shattered fortunes. As gods are often merely men who loom large through the mists of tradition, we may conjecture that this Norse legend preserves a confused reminiscence of ancient Swedish kings who reigned for nine or ten years together, then abdicated, delegating to others the privilege of dying for their country. The great festival which was held at Upsala every nine years may have been the occasion on

1 The first edition 1890 (two volumes), the second 1909 (three volumes), the third 1913-1924 (twelve volumes).

2 J. Mannhardt, 1865, *Roggenwolf und Roggenhund*, Danzig, 1868, *Die Korndämonen*, Berlin, *Wald- und Feldtkulte*, I-II, 1904-05 (first published in 1877), Berlin.

3 Frazer, J., 1890, Preface to the first edition. In the preface to his second edition he rejected Robertson-Smith's theories about the sacrifice of the totem animal.

which the king or his deputy was put to death. We know that human sacrifices formed part of the rites.⁴

In his *Studier i Ynglingatal* H. Schück put forward Frazer's theories about the ritualised sacrifice of the king and demonstrated several examples found in Þjóðólfr's *Ynglingatal*.⁵ The belief that the king was connected with and even determined the fertility of the soil and the year's crop - a well-documented phenomenon across the entire Germanic area until the 1600th century - later became associated with the special magic characteristics that Frazer ascribed to the divine king.⁶

Later, the Source Critical School under Kurt and Lauritz Weibull tore down the historicity of the old genealogies of prehistoric Scandinavia, declaring them to be apocryphal. Their criticism also affected the hypothesis of the divine king of the North, which had come to be associated, even identified with the notion of sacral kingship, although Frazer never mentioned that phenomenon. In 1964, W. Baetke severely criticised the sacral kingship of the North in his *Yngvi und die Ynglingar*, claiming a Christian influence on the sources.⁷ Baetke's hypothesis gained many adherents and raised a discussion about the original traits of the Old Norse culture, based on the existence of an original, pre-Christian sacral kingship and the influence of Christianity. The fact that Frazer took most of his comparative material from "primitive" religions had also been used as an argument in favour of the non-existence of a sacral kingdom in the North.⁸ Without delving into further details, we may observe that remarkably few of the involved scholars ever cared for a distinct definition of sacral kingship. The debate seems to have focused around two principal questions: the king's fortune in connection with the year's crop and fertility, and the ritual sacrifice of the king.

These two elements were represented in the earlier research on the ideology of kingship, although the latter was based on highly tenuous evidence.⁹ It also has to be pointed out that the term "sacral kingship" is indistinct as a definition; even so, it still constitutes the most neutral expression of the phenomenon, in sophisticated cultures as well as in primitive societies. Sacral kingship still exists in Japan and to a certain extent in the European royal houses.¹⁰ Some of the claims regarding their role as ruler that were voiced by former Shah of Iran and later by

4 Frazer, 1978, p.367.

5 H. Schück, 1906, *Studier i Ynglingatal. Uppsala universitets Årsskrift*, Uppsala, passim.

6 E. Mogk, 1909, "Die Menschenopfer bei den Germanen", *Abhandlungen der K. Sachsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 27, Leipzig, Passim.

7 W. Baetke, 1964, *Yngvi und die Ynglingar. Eine Quellenkritische Untersuchung über das nordische "Sakralkönigtum"*, Berlin; L. Ejerfeldt, 1969-70, "Helighet, karisma och kungadöme i forngermansk religion", *Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Uppsala Årsbok*, pp.112-175; L. Lönnroth, "Domalde's death and the myth of the sacral kingship", *Structure and Meaning of Old Norse Literature*, 1986, ed. J. Lindow, L. Lönnroth, G. Weber, Odense, p.75.

8 Lönnroth, 1986, p.76.

9 Frazer's arguments from Africa and Greece are considered as fallacious assumptions; cf. V. van Bulk, 1959, "Le Roi divin en Afrique noire", *The Sacral Kingship*, pp.98-134, Leiden; H. P. Rose, 1959, "The Evidence for Sacral Kingship in Ancient Greece", *The Sacral Kingship*, pp.371-378, Leiden.

10 A broad survey of the evidence of the sacral kingship is found in Widengren 1969, pp.360-377.

ayatollah Khumainī can be said to be related to the notion of sacral kingship.¹¹

The typology of the sacral king which belongs to a cultic framword, drawn up by G. Widengren in his *Religionsphänomenologie* still furnishes us with certain characteristics of the concept:

- The sacral king is characterised as divine and the issue of the gods.
- The sacral king is chosen for his royal power by the high god in order to watch over right and righteousness.
- The sacral king's enthronement brings happiness.
- The sacral king is the supreme priest and possesses prophetic gifts.¹²

Tested on the sources, the general characteristics of this typology provide an instrument for determining the existence of sacral kingship among the Nordic people.

The Sacral King is characterised as Divine and the Issue of the Gods.

The word *konungr* is derived from **kunja* "man of noble or divine origin"¹³, which coincides with Tacitus' words *Reges ex nobilitatesumunt* (Germ.7). Tacitus further mentions that the Germans considered themselves to be descended from their primeval gods, Tuisto and his son Mannus, to whom they assigned three sons, with eponymous names for the three tribes, Ingaevones, Herminones and Istaevones (Germ 2). Jordanes records that the Goths "call their chiefs, to whose luck they had to ascribe their victory, no longer ordinary human beings, but demigods or *Ansis* (Cf. áss, æsir)"¹⁴. Their progenitor was Gapt, which probably stands for Gaut, a *heiti* of Óðinn, who is also called Gautatýr (*Hákonarmál*, 1). The Icelandic sagas point out a nebulous king Gautr as an ancestor.¹⁵ Similarly, the English chronicles mention Uoden Geta or Geat as the original ancestor of the royal dynasties.¹⁶

This corresponds to the dynasty of Ynglingar, who allegedly descended from the god Ing or Ingunar-Freyr (see above p.45). Saxo uses the expression "sons of Frö" for the leaders at Uppsala, who were concerned

11 G. Aneer, 1985, *Imām Rūhullāh Khumainī, Sah Muhammad Rizā Pahlavī and the religious traditions of Iran*, Uppsala, pp.85-87.

12 Widengren, 1969, pp.359-377. It has to be remarked that this typology was never practised in its complete form at any time in any culture.

13 "...repose sur **kun-ing-az*; c'est un dérivé en -*ing* du radical *kun-*, cf. got. *kuni* 'race, famille', forme nominale dérivée elle-même de la racine **gen* 'naître', et qui appartient au même group que lat. *gens* et gr. *génos*. Le 'roi' est dénommé en vertu des sa naissance comme 'celui de la lignée', celui qui la représente, qui est le chef." Benveniste II, 1969, p.85; Cf. AnEWb s.v.

konungr, p.326 and AnEWb, s.v. *konge*, "a man of noble or divine birth" KLNLM, who seem to have read the position of the king into the word. About **kven-ungr*, see n.54, this chapter.

14 "...non puros homines, sed semideos, id est *Ansis* vocaverunt. Jordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum*, 1882, ed Th. Mommsen, Berlin, 13:78.

15 Wessén, 1924, p.25.

16 Ström, 1975, p.99.

with religious matters.¹⁷ In *Ynglingatal*, the following examples confirm the divine origin of this dynasty: *yingua þjóðar* (7); *Freyr's afspring* (11); *Frey's óttungr* (21);¹⁸ besides, there was a tradition to the effect that the first Ynglingar King, Fjölfnir, was the son of Freyr and Gerðr (Hkr.11). The Jarls of Hlaðir claimed their origin from Óðinn and Skaði,¹⁹ and the kings of Denmark descend from Gefjun's marriage with Óðinn's son Skjöldr, still according to the apocryphal tradition. Finally, Freyja's words to the giantess Hyndla emphasise the conception of the divine heritage of kings and rulers: "...Let us sit together and talk about the rulers' families, about good fighters who descend from the gods" (Hdl.8).

The Sacral King is chosen for his Royal Power by the High God in order to watch over Right and Righteousness.

Briefly, this means, that the king, whether by legal right or by usurpation, represents the manifestation of a divine will in his person. It is true that the king ought to be accepted by the aristocracy before his enthronement, and no direct parallel to the formula "by the Grace of the King" is found in pre-Christian society. Nevertheless, his position depended - as many examples show - on the will of the gods, especially Óðinn and Freyr.

In this respect the sacral king was entitled to protect the worship of the gods, right and justice among his subjects. This is evident in Nordic society, where the king was the supreme administrator of justice. After his enthronement, the king was greeted with the formula *til krunu ok kununx dǫms/landum radhæ ok riki styræ/lag styrkiæ ok frid at halda*", to crown and kingdom to govern the land and rule the country, strengthen the law and keep the peace".²⁰ The function survived in the Icelandic institution of *goðar*, chieftains with both juridical and theological duties in respect of their jurisdiction, *goðorð*.²¹

The Sacral King's Enthronement brings Happiness.

The sacral king's accession to the throne usually brings joy and happiness in his country. The examples from the German area are manifold:

By them, the Burgundians, the king is called by the family name, Hendinos; according to the old sources he had to abdicate as his luck in the war deserted him or failed to provide him with a fertile harvest of the Earth.²²

What followed was a hard year of crop failures and famine. They blamed their king for that, as the Swedes used to refer good or bad years to the king.²³

¹⁷ Saxo I, p.172.

¹⁸ Baetke reads these expressions as kennings, merely denoting the royal status. Baetke 1964, p.124.

¹⁹ Wessén, 1924, p.34.; F. Ström, 1967, "Kung Domalde i Svitjod och 'kungalyckan'", *Saga och sed. Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademiens i Uppsala årsbok*, pp.60-66.

²⁰ G. Hafström, s.v. *konge*, KLN.M.

²¹ Ólafur Láruson, s.v. *goði og goðorð*, KLN.M.

²² Ammianus Marcellinus, *Römische Geschichte*, 1947, ed. W. Seyfarth, Darmstadt, XXVIII, 4.

²³ *Ynglingasaga*, in *Heimkringla* I, ch. 43.

Þórri was a famous king. He ruled Gotland, Kønland and Finland. Kønerna (kvänerna) sacrificed to him in order to obtain snow and a good skiing surface.²⁴

The first winter when Hákon ruled the country, the herring flocked to the coast in great shoals, and in the autumn all the corn was ripened where it was sowed.²⁵

As long as Jarl Hákon ruled Norway, there were good harvests in the land and peace among the peasants. For this reason the Jarl was much beloved by the peasants for a large part of his life.²⁶

As was pointed out above, the Nordic kings were thought to possess a divine gift or fortune, related to their persons. In the sources the expressions *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja* denoted extraordinary status in relation to other men, and *ársæll*, *sígrsæll*, *fríðsæll*, *farsæll*, *byrsæll*, gave the king a special status as the protector of fertility.²⁷ W. Baetke suggests that the first group was a translation of the Christian expression *charisma* and was introduced by the missionaries²⁸, whereas the second concerned "fortune" in general terms.²⁹

Many objections have been raised against Baetke's assumption. There are examples which point at a pre-Christian belief in the king bringing good fortune to his people; one of them is Hálfðan the Black, whose body was divided, whereupon the parts were buried in the provinces of Norway.

But such was the *ársæli* of the king, so that when they found his corpse, they divided his body into pieces and his intestines were buried at Þengilstaðr in Hadeland, his body at Steinn in Ringaríki and his head was taken to Skirn's hall in Vestfold and was buried there. They divided his body because they believed that his ability to bring good years would be with him always, whether he was alive or dead.³⁰

²⁴ *Flateyjarbók* I, p.21. Þórri belongs to the realm of myth, though.

²⁵ *Saga Óláf Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla* II, ch.16.

²⁶ *Ibid.* ch.45.

²⁷ P. Hallberg, 1971, "The Concept of *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja* in Old Norse Literature", *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference*, Edinburgh, pp.143-182.

²⁸ Baetke, 1964, pp.19-22.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p.23.

³⁰ *En svá var mikil ársæli konungs at þegar er þeir fundu lík hans, þá skiptu þeir líkan hans í sundr, ok váru innnyfli hans jorðuð á Þengilstöðum á Haðalandi en líkamr hans á Steini á Hringaríki en höfuð hans var flutt í Skírnessal á Vestfold ok var þar jarðat. En fyrir því skiptu þeir líkam hans at þeir trúðu því, at ársæli hans myndi jafnan með hönnum vera, hvart sem hann væri lífs eða dauðr.* *Fagrskinna-Nóregs konungatal*, 1985, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Íslenzsk fornrit, Reykjavík, p.383. Cf. the Roman legendary king Romulus: ... "Romulus disappeared suddenly, and no portion of his body or fragment of his clothing remained to be seen. But some conjectured that the senators, convened in the temple of Vulcan, fell upon him and slew him, then cut his body in pieces, put each a portion into the folds of his robe, and so carried it away...." *Plutarch's Lives: Romulus*, 1948, trans. B. Perrin, London, ch.27.

Another example is Ólaf, the Elf of Geirstaðir, on whose mound sacrifices were performed.³¹ However, fertility depended on the kings' relations with the gods: we are told that when the Christian sons of Eiríkr Blóðøx broke down the shrines and thus thwarted the cult, they brought failure of the crops and the snow fell at midsummer. After that Hákon the Great restored the old shrines, and the land prospered again.³²

The Sacral King is the Supreme Priest and possesses Prophetic Gifts.

A customary criterion of sacral kingship states that the king appears as the supreme priest, possessing prophetic gifts. The euhemeristic Óðinn, Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja inaugurated the king as leader of the cult at Uppsala (Hkr.7, 10). The king was also called *vrðr véstalls* "the guardian of the sanctuary" and in this respect he formed the channel between his subjects and the gods.³³ Hákon the Good was requested by the peasants to sacrifice like the other kings,³⁴ and Ingi, who refused to sacrifice - *hann eyddi blótum* - was banished by his subjects, who feared the wrath of the gods.³⁵

In the Near East prophetic talent was evidence of contact with the divine.³⁶ In the North, the king's knowledge of the runes used in magic and medicine was a corresponding skill. Understanding the song of the birds, which constituted a kind of prophesy, belongs to this framework of ideas; so does power over other men's minds, that is ascribed to the king-to-be in *Rígsþula*:

Reið Konr ungr/kunni rúnar/ævinrúnar/og aldrúnar/meirr kunni hann/mönnum biarga/leggjar deyfa/ægi lægia (Rp.43).

But young Konr knew the runes, eternal runes, runes for a long life, he could also save his men, dull the sword-edges and calm the sea.

and the similar characteristics in *Hávamál*:

Þat kann ek it fiórtánda/ef ek skal fyrða liði/telia tíva fyrir/ása ok álfa/ek kann allra skil;/fár kann ósnotr svá (Hvm.159).

That I know for the fourteenth if I shall tell about the gods to the people, Æsir and Elves I know them well, the unlearned do not

The concept of the divine king is a global phenomenon. The assumption that he constitutes a channel between this world and the other ought to be

³¹ This Óláfr was a petty king who had died in the ninth century. He is, in a peculiar way connected with Óláfr the Saint, who was believed to be an incarnation of this Elf of Geirstaðir. Turville-Petre, 1964, pp.193-195.

³² Turville-Petre, 1964, p.193.

³³ Ström, 1975, p.269.

³⁴ Loc. cit.

³⁵ Hafström, s.v. *konge*, KLNLM.

³⁶ It should be pointed out that Widengren based his typology on examples from the Near East, where prophetic skill had a different status than the one that prevailed in the Nordic society, where divination was regarded as an occupation for women only.

a pleasant notion for any autocrat. There is no reason to believe that the kings of Old Scandinavia behaved more foolishly or more idealistically than other rulers in this respect. The adduced criteria show that sacral kingship doubtless existed among the Nordic rulers, although their royal power was based on small-scale societies and could not be compared with the great empires and kingdoms developing in contemporary Europe. In these, Christianity had already overtaken the concept, modifying it in the term "by the Grace of the King" and - of course - omitting the lineage from the pagan gods.³⁷

Ynglingatal is the oldest of the sources that tells us about the dynasties of Sweden and Norway. It was written in the tenth century by Þjóðólfr of Hvin as a homage to a Norse king, Rognvaldr. *Historia Norwegiæ* and Snorri's *Heimskringla* are both based on the accounts of the Icelandic historian Ari, and were written in the middle of the thirteenth century; but there are good reasons for believing that an oral tradition existed behind these sources. Hence we are again obliged to call the historicity of the enumerated kings from the fourth century up to the tenth in question. Many attempts have been made to trace the existence of the Ynglingar dynasty. The most successful efforts so far are associated with the Mound of Óttarr in Vendel, where excavations have dated some artefacts to the sixth century.³⁸ The development of the Swedish kingdom is tantamount to the making of Sweden itself, a circumstance that has sometimes roused embittered discussion about its origin. Up to a point, researchers seem to agree about two main hypotheses. 1) The kingdom of Sweden originated from small kingdoms in Väster- and Östergötland. 2) The Svear were organised around the religious cult at Uppsala; the narratives about the Ynglingar hence describe kings connected with the cult and, more likely, myths about these priest-kings. These stories could be compared with the first "kings" of Rome from 753 BC, described by Livy; conversely, archaeological excavations prove that no conurbation existed before 500BC, a fact which definitively consigns Romulus and at least the seven following kings to the world of mythology.³⁹

Besides the lack of historical evidence, it is obvious that the oldest layer of the Ynglingar dynasty also contains elements belonging to the mythical world. This is evident in *Ynglingatal* and *Historia Norwegiæ*, whereas Snorri tries to explain peculiar events as the outcome of sorcery and strives to avoid the mythical component in his *Heimskringla*.

The Holy Wedding and the Ignoble Death of the King

We have already mentioned that the enthronement of the sacral king could end with a wedding ceremony, sometimes in the form of an ordinary marriage or - in some cases - as a symbolic *hieros gamos* with a goddess.⁴⁰ This holy marriage between king and goddess has to be regarded as a manifestation of the king's unique position between this world and the

³⁷ F. Heiler, 1969, "Antikes Gottkönigtum im Christentum", *The Sacral Kingship*, Leiden 1959, pp.657ff.

³⁸ S. Lindquist, 1936, *Uppsala högar och Ottarshögen*, Stockholm.

³⁹ On archaeology, see E. Gjerstad, 1972, *Det äldsta Rom*, Stockholm, pp. 41-45; on mythology G. Dumézil, 1970, *Roman Archaic Religion*, Chicago.

⁴⁰ Widengren, 1969, pp.391-392.

realm of the divine, expressed as a personal relation to the supreme goddess.

Many kings belonging to the Ynglingar dynasty suffer an ignominious death in which a supernatural female being, sometimes expressively malevolent, is involved. Vanlandi is the first of the Ynglingar kings to be killed by an ill-disposed female, or forced to visit Vili's brother (Óðinn) (Yt.3), a kenning signifying that he died. He was hag-ridden to death by a certain Grímhildr, a witch acting on behalf of Drífa, Vanlandi's Lappish or Finnish wife, whom he had deserted (Hkr.14). Grímhildr is a common name for witches, which is why F. Ström suggests that she is actually Freyja, with her knowledge of *seiðr* and her contact with battle (*hildr*).⁴¹ He points at Snorri's account, which is the latest and most accessible one and in which the King's infidelity introduces a motif of revenge.⁴²

Vísburrr, Vanlandi's son, is burnt to death by his descendants (Yt.4), more precisely by his own sons, named Gísl ("ski stick") and Qndur ("ski"), taking revenge for their mother, whom Vísburrr had abandoned (Hkr.14).

Dómaldi

The most conspicuous victim of all the Ynglingar kings was Dómaldi, whose fate has become the great example of the ritual sacrifice of the king.

Hitt vas fyrr at fold ruþo/suerþberendr sínom dróttne/ok landherr af lífs vqnum/dreyrog vqpn Dómalda bar/þá 's árgiorn/ióta dolge/suía kin of sóa skyldr (Yt.5).

It happened in the ancient time that the people reddened the earth with their master and the army of the country carried bloody weapons from the lifeless Dómaldi, when the Svea people, greedy for year's crop (according to the destiny), sacrificed the enemy of the Jutes.

According to Þjóðólfr, Dómaldi was slaughtered by his warriors in order to remedy the crop failure, a typical expiatory sacrifice in a time of crisis. Snorri reports a similar ritual, which occurred when a crop failure befell the Svear for three years. In the first year they sacrificed oxen without results, the next human beings and the third the king himself, whose death made the year's crop improve (Hkr.15). *Historia Norwegiæ* has explicit things to say:

Cujus filium Domaldi Sweones suspendentes pro fertiligate frugum deae Cereri hostiam obtulerunt.

His son Dómaldi was sacrificed by the Svear through hanging to the goddess Ceres to obtain a good year's crop.

⁴¹ F. Ström, 1954, pp.46-47.

⁴² Some scholars consider this to be Snorri's own invention. See Strömbäck 1939 pp.36-37; A. Gurevitch, 1971, "Saga and History. The 'historical' conception of Snorri Sturlason", *Medieval Studies* 4, pp.42-53.

This observation combined with Þjóðólfr's and Snorri's version, yields the following version according to F. Ström: the protector of the year's crop, King Dómaldi, failed in his mission and was sacrificed by his people to the fertility goddess, Freyja, who also rules the kingdom of death.⁴³

It is true that Ceres is a possible interpretation of Freyja, based on the Vanir's connection with the vegetation; but we must remember to point out that neither *Ynglingatal* nor *Heimskringla* mentions, who received the sacrifice. As the direct reason for killing Dómaldi was, according to Þjóðólfr, *árgiorn* "greed for the year's crop", that the Vanir may well have been involved in this sacrifice.

The unhappy Dómaldi, a sacrifice to Ceres (HN), was followed by Dyggvi who, in Þjóðólfr's poem, was chosen by "Ulf's and Narfi's sister", i. e. Hel, the death goddess (Yt.7). The verb *kjpsa* is used in connection with Freyja and the Valkyries on the battlefield; but Dyggvi, dying a natural death, is chosen by Hel, "the daughter of Loki". Therefore, it seems consistent to interpret the kenning *glitnis Gná* in the first strophe of the poem as synonymous with the goddess of death, albeit flattered as the "glittering woman". Dyggvi's encounter with Hel contains erotic overtones, which are also found in a later stanza about King Hálfðan (Yt.24), whom Hel explicitly invites to a lover's tryst.

The death of King Agni constitutes another strange demise on the part of a king, caused by a female being. He was hanged by his own wife Skjálf, also called *Loga dís* (Yt.9), who used a golden chain (HN).⁴⁴ In Snorri's account Skjálf became a Lappish/Finnish princess, abducted by Agni together with her brother Logi from their father Frosti. She managed to hang her husband when he was drunk (Hkr.19).

The last king to meet his fate by the intervention of a supernatural female being is Aðils.⁴⁵ According to *Historia Norvegiæ*, his death occurred in front of the temple of Diana, where Aðils was performing the sacrifice⁴⁶, when he fell from his horse. Diana is an *Interpretatio Romana*, alluding to the Roman fertility goddess, skilled in sorcery; in late Classical Antiquity, she was amalgamated with Hecate, the goddess of necromancy. With the accent laid on that aspect, Diana became a demonic being during the Middle Ages - a patron saint of all witches and a diabolic defender of paganism.⁴⁷ The goddess corresponding to this *Interpretatio* is undoubtedly Freyja, both fertility goddess and sorceress. Freyja as the great *Dís* also fits in with Snorri's account of the last ride of Aðils in the *Disar-salr* during the *Disablót*, when his horse stumbles and he falls off and dies. The portentous stumbling is, as was mentioned before, connected with evil forces. Returning to Þjóðólfr's version about the death

⁴³ F. Ström, 1954, p.38-39.

⁴⁴ This is a much-discussed kenning. According to Noreen, *log* is derived from *liugan* "marriage" and consequently *Loga dís* means "the dis of marriage", i.e. "the wife"; see Noreen, A., "Ynglingatal", *Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar*, 28, hft 2 p.226, Stockholm. Gro Steinsland apprehends Skjálf as a giantess, according to her hypothesis about the holy marriage, and interprets *loga dís* as an allusion to the flames that surrounded the giants' world. Steinsland 1989 pp.387-389, referring to K. E. Gade, 1985, "Skjalfr", *ANF* 100, pp.59-71.

⁴⁵ Aðils, mentioned in *Beowulf* as Eadgils, see p. 000 above.

⁴⁶ The text has the word *fugeretur* "escaped", while *fungeretur* "performed" makes more sense.

⁴⁷ K. Hoenn, 1946, *Artemis*, Zurich, p.161.

of Aðils, the fall is caused by *vitta vettr*, the same term that he used about the sorceress who suffocated Vanlandi.

Although Aðils is riding in the Hall of the Dís, performing his sacrifice, there is nothing to prove that it is in fact the goddess who kills him. Þjóðólfr mentions a sorceress, whereas *Historia Norvegiæ* and *Heimskringla* just mention the stumbling. This event could merely be understood as expressing a common-held belief among certain peoples: unexpected events which bring disasters are explained as being caused by witchcraft, albeit the natural reasons behind the incidents are evident to everyone.⁴⁸ It is perfectly possible that Aðils was a bad horseman; but his stumbling and Vanlandi's drowsiness constitute interesting elements of witchcraft in action. The ensuing death confirms the sorcery. Hence Snorri's accounts of the revenge taken on the Ynglingar kings seem to be constructions based on the general topic of *seiðr*, i.e. witchcraft, foreboding the death of Vanlandi, Aðils and perhaps Vísburr.

Gro Steinsland has interpreted the peculiar and disgraceful deaths of the Ynglingar as the result of an amalgamation between a god and a giantess, powers of cosmos and chaos respectively, whose offspring become a mixture of both, mighty rulers yet doomed to end their lives in a futile manner.⁴⁹ Likewise, Lars Lönnroth has pointed at the mixed marriages of Ynglingar kings with women from the Lapps and the Finns, who use *seiðr* against them and cause their ultimate destruction.⁵⁰ These mixed marriages with women of Lappish/Finnish origins bring about the deaths of Vanlandi, Vísburr and Agni. Women bearing names that allude to winter and snow are always dangerous in Snorri's historical works, and this type of names is associated with the giants in the myths. To Gro Steinsland the Lappish/Finnish queens are identical with the giantesses whose marriages with the gods yield the royal dynasties while preparing the way for the ignominious deaths of the kings.⁵¹

The references of the Lappish/Finnish queens are, however, only found in Snorri's texts, although it is quite plausible that he reduces the mythical elements into human beings, though of exotic origins. Another motif emphasised by Snorri, the breaking of marriage rules, could account for the deaths of these three kings as well. Both Vanlandi and Vísburr abandon their wives; Agni takes his bride by abduction. The golden adornment, a token of their parents' marriage, is the reason why Vísburr's sons burn their father to death in his house; a golden chain becomes the noose in which Agni is hanged by Skjálfr. It is probably the same adornment; and we must ask ourselves why it appears in Snorri's text. Did this golden necklace symbolise the matrimonial sanctity? In that case, we might discern the revenge of the goddess who protected marriage and fertility. This question touches upon F. Ström's hypothesis, according to which it is the goddess Freyja in her double role of fertility and death goddess, who is both bride and executioner of kings in *Ynglingatal*. Although the source material is too fragile to allow for such a conclusion in respect of the death of Vanlandi and Vísburr, it is definitely more fruitful with reference to Agni. Skjálfr is a byname of Freyja's, according to

⁴⁸ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 1937, "Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic", *Among the Azande*, New York.

⁴⁹ Steinsland, 1989, pp.322-365.

⁵⁰ Lönnroth, 1986, pp.81-83.

⁵¹ Steinsland, 1989, p.383.

one of the *pulur* in Snorri's *Edda*; it appears in the compound "Agni Skialfar bondi" in the genealogies.⁵² *Loga*, "fire", in the kenning *loga dís* is synonymous with *brísing*, "fire", in *Brísinga men*, the famous adornment of Freyja's. The meaning of the kenning then becomes "the woman with the fire-adornment" (*Brísinga men*), i.e. Freyja. Like *Dómaldi*, sacrificed to the goddess of fertility, Agni's hanging is effected by *Skjálf*, who receives both these victims.

In the case of Agni, the murderer is found and the method of murder, hanging, is recognised. Still, no motive for the deed is stated. F. Ström assumes, in his *Diser, normor och valkyrior*, that the relevant unearthly female being is the great fertility goddess, to whom the king, in his capacity of protector of the year's crop, is married. This *hieros gamos* does not increase his royal power; on the contrary, it often leads to a sacrifice to the fertility goddess with himself as the victim. Ström considers that these sacrifices were already recorded in the ritual of Nerthus, "a death-marriage of fertility", which in due course came to focus on the king as a vicarious representative of his people.⁵³ Ström proceeds to analyse the demise of the Ynglingar dynasty, with the same result; the king is sacrificed by Freyja herself or by her representative, the queen.⁵⁴

In that respect, Bertha Phillpotts precedes Ström's interpretations of the fate of the Ynglingar dynasty in her *The Elder Edda and the Old Scandinavian Drama*. She claims to discern the existence of a *hieros gamos* between the king and a goddess in the mythological dynasties of Scandinavia, with fatal consequences for the king. The goddess was represented by Freyja at Uppsala and by Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr, who had close connections with the Jarls of Hlaðir, especially Hákon Jarl. In the course of time Freyja's dominating role was taken over by Freyr, who later became incarnated in the king's person. The preceding period was characterised by the singular death of the king caused by a female deity, Phillpotts assumes.⁵⁵

Clearly, Phillpotts and Ström have brought the sacrifice of the divine king into conjunction with the *hieros gamos*, turning these two occurrences into one component with relevance to the sacral kingship. Behind this hypothesis we can discern Mannhardt's typology of the vegetation spirit, appearing as a young mortal man who is the bridegroom of the vegetation goddess. The fate of this vegetation spirit corresponded to that of vegetation. When it withered away, he faded and died, too, attended by lamentation; but he was greeted with cheers when he returned together with the verdure.⁵⁶ As we have mentioned, Mannhardt's work inspired Frazer's famous mythologem about the dying god, whose role was played by the king in the ritual drama. In this drama the goddess could play the part of executioner a notion derived from the cult of Cybele and Attis, according to Phillpotts:

⁵² *Flateyjarbók* I, 1860, p.26; *Götriks saga*, 1990, trans. into Swedish by M. Malm, Örebro, p.41.

⁵³ F. Ström, 1954, pp.36-54.

⁵⁴ The word *konungr* was, according to O. von Friesen, derived from "*kven-ungr*" "belonging to the woman", i.e. the son or husband of the fertility goddess", *Saga och Sed*, 1932-1934, pp.15ff. This hypothesis is now regarded as obsolete.

⁵⁵ Phillpotts, 1920, p.165.

⁵⁶ J. Mannhardt, 1904-05, *Wald- und Feldtkulte*, I-II, Berlin, pp.286, 300.

We are reminded of the kings or high-priests of Cybele at Pessinous, who were regularly called Attis. Frazer suggests that these were members of the royal family who enacted the part of the bridegroom of the goddess at the annual festival..... Professor Ramsay holds that at the Phrygian ceremonies "the representative of the god was probably slain each year by a cruel death, just as the god dies himself".⁵⁷

Phillipotts, however, lacks the relevant facts about the Phrygian cult, a circumstance which invalidates a hypothesis along these lines. Actually, Pessinous held a dominating position in Phrygia; however, the realm was not led by a royal family but by a theocracy, whose high-priests bore the name of Attis. We have no evidence of a ritual *hieros gamos* between the goddess and the priests, which is not unexpected in view of the fact that sexual relations between her and her consort Attis were not an essential element in the myths. In fact, Attis emasculates himself, an act which surely runs counter to the idea of a holy wedding. This emasculation was imitated by his priests, performing the ritual by which they aspired to reach a position between the human condition and the divine sphere, as the sexless Attis does in the myths.⁵⁸

The hypothesis according to which the king marries the goddess, whereupon she sacrifices him, is thus based on false conclusions about the Phrygian rites. It must hence be abandoned, just as the concept of "the dying god" has been abandoned by modern scholars.

The Myth of the Never-Ending Battle

Having demonstrated that the mythologem of homicidal queens and moribund kings was based on false presumptions, we must look for other ways of solving the problem posed by the strange deaths of the kings who belonged to the Ynglingar dynasty. We have already stated that these kings should not be regarded as rulers in the modern sense of the word; they are undoubtedly historicised mythological figures. With this presupposition in mind we may return to the background of Agni's death.

Agni was a rather unusual name in Scandinavia at this time. *Historia Norwegiæ* provides the better-known name Hogni in the parallel situation:

Alrik autem genuit Hognia; iste uxor sua juxta locum Agnafir propriis manibus interfecit suspendendo ad arborem cum catena aurea.

Alrik bore this Hogni; his own wife hanged him in a golden chain on a place called Agnafir with her own hands.

Hogni or Hogni is one of the combatants in the never-ending battle between himself and Héðinn, provoked by Freyja who had assumed the guise of a Valkyrie and acts as a goddess of war. If we proceed to the following two

⁵⁷ Phillipotts, 1920, p.164. In his last edition of *The Golden Bough* Frazer does not mention that the title Attis belonged to the king nor that he functions as bridegroom. Instead, he puts forward a conjecture to the effect that the emasculation of the Attis-priests was a ritual undertaken in order to impregnate the goddess with life-giving energy, which she could then redistribute to the world.

⁵⁸ Näsström, 1989, pp.67-74.

stanzas in *Ynglingatal*, we will find that they tell us about a fight between Alrekr and Eiríkr, which is repeated in the second stanza about another struggle between Álfr and Yngvi. A close investigation of the names of those kings indicates that they are more likely to be epithets of priest-kings than real names. Yngvi is nothing but a byname of Freyr (see above p.45). Álfr is closely connected with the abode of Freyr, Álfheimr (see above p.61) and seems furthermore to signify the dead king.⁵⁹ The fight between the brothers was caused by the Queen Bera, whose name literally means "she-bear".⁶⁰

The relation between Freyja and Agni/Högni recurs implicitly in these battles between Kings Alrekr/Eiríkr and Álfr/Yngvi forming an example of a myth, which was historicised and inserted into the genealogy of the Ynglingar kings. According to the *Sǫrla þátt*, it is Óðinn who forces her to engineer a perpetual fight in order to recover her necklace.

Freyja woke up in the morning and every door was open and nothing was taken except the golden adornment. She thought that she might know who had done this and when she was dressed she went to the hall before King Óðinn and said that he had done wrong when he had stolen her adornment and that he might give it back. Óðinn said she should never get it back, because of the way in which she (once) obtained it, unless she could do the following: if she could create hostility and battle between two kings, each of them lord over twenty (other) kings, with all their people and wealth. They would fight each other, impelled by sorcery, and get up as quickly as they fell, unless a Christian man would be so fearless and serve a master attended by such great luck that he would dare to interfere in this battle, killing these men with weapons. He would end their battle. Both of these chieftains should then be released from their forced labour at such dangerous work. Freyja accepted and took the adornment.⁶¹

Sǫrla þátt is a late variant of the myth of Freyja's adornment. It mixes three well-known motifs connected with the Great Goddess of the North: the robbery of the adornment of Brising (see above pp.184ff), the unfaithful wife prostituting herself for gold and riches (see above p.107) and the never-ending battle with its echoes from the afterlife of the warrior. Subsequent additions to this passage contain a description of how Óláfr Tryggvason, acting in the name of Christianity, puts an end to the battle by sending one of his champions to the island where Högni, Héðinn and Hildir reiterate the struggle. Although this "happy ending" narrows down the myth to the point where it becomes an ordinary tale about the hero's struggle against ghosts, who finally become pacified, the underlying significance of the story expresses the change of religion and the perspective of an afterlife.

⁵⁹ Turville-Petre, 1964, pp.193-195. Yngvi and Alf are paired in the catalogue of dwarves in *Völuspá*.

⁶⁰ "She-bear" is an ominous name for the Ynglinga dynasty, where queen Yrsa would later create enmity among the kings. These names, Bera and Yrsa, seem to carry a certain undertone of mythical beings.

⁶¹ *Flateyjarbók* I, 1860, p.276.

As we have seen, the stanzas in *Ynglingatal* that contain the narrativer about Skjálf, Agni/Högni and the perpetual battle between the kings, constitute reflections of older myths. Such mixing of different mythical elements is also found in the other stanzas of the poem as for example the ones about Egill, Óttar and Angantýr. Still, the hanging of Agni, which was compared with the death of Dómaldi above, remains as a motif, supplying guidance when we address the problems of hanging rituals and their meaning. With reference to Dómaldi and Agni, the hypothesis of Bertha Phillipotts and F. Ström suggested that the king, appearing as Frö/Freyr together with the great fertility goddess, protected the year's crop. When Dómaldi failed in his royal function he also failed in his relation to his divine wife; consequently he was sacrificed to her and replaced by another king.⁶² We have already stated that there is no basis for this hypothesis neither in the sources nor as a religious phenomenon; nevertheless, a ritualised hanging does appear to be connected with the kings.

The Twofold Death: Dómaldi, Víkarr

There is an interesting detail in the sacrifice of Dómaldi which should be subjected to a closer investigation. In *Ynglingatal* and *Heimskringla*, he is speared by weapons, whereas he is hanged according to *Historia Norvegiæ*. Dómaldi's two ways of death coincides with the fate of King Víkarr, who was consecrated to Óðinn from his childhood (see above p.000). When Víkarr's fleet is becalmed on an island, he decides to sacrifice to Óðinn. Lots are drawn, and Víkarr himself is chosen:

The next morning the King's counsellors met and arrived at the following decision: they would carry out a mock sacrifice, and it was Starkaðr who proposed the plan. There stood near them a fir tree and a high stump near the fir; far down from the tree stretched a slender branch, which rose into the foliage. The servants were preparing the food for the men and a calf had been opened and gutted. Starkaðr made them take out the calf's intestines, then he stood up on the stump, bent down the thin branch and knotted the entrails around it. Then Starkaðr said to the King: "Your gallows is ready for you, King, and it does not seem very dangerous. Now come hither, and I will lay the rope around your neck." The king said "If this apparatus is no more dangerous than its looks to me, then I think it will not harm me, but if it is otherwise, then it is for fate to decide what will happen." Then he stood up on the stump, and Starkaðr laid the noose around his neck and stepped down from the stump. Then Starkaðr thrust his stick at the King and said: "Now I give thee to Óðinn." Then Starkaðr released the branch. The reed-stick suddenly became a spear and pierced the King. The stump fell out from beneath his feet, and the calf's intestine became a strong withe, and the branch sprang up and dragged the king into the leaves and there he died.⁶³

⁶² Phillipotts, p.165; F. Ström, 1954, pp.39ff.

⁶³ *Göttréks saga*, pp.40-41; Turville-Petre, 1964, pp.44-45.

The story is varied in Saxo, with Starkaðr as the deceitful executor of the royal sacrifice to Óðinn.⁶⁴ However, Óðinn not only appear as the recipient of the sacrifice, but also as the victim himself:

Veit ek at ek hekk/ vinga meiði á/nætr allar nío/geiri undaðr/ ok gefinn Óðni/sjálf sjálfom mér (Hvm.138).

I know that I hung on the windswept tree for nine full nights, wounded with a spear and given to Óðinn, myself to myself.⁶⁵

The formula from the Víkarr-episode *Nú gef ek þik Óðni* is repeated in Óðinn own speech *gefinn Óðni, sjálf sjálfom mér*. The phrase could appear as a formula on the battlefield, when the leader addresses his antagonists; but in these two cases it serves a somewhat different purpose. Dómaldi and Víkarr are sacrificed to Freyja and Óðinn respectively. In *Hávamál* Óðinn seems to sacrifice himself in order to drink from the mead Óðroerir and to acquire knowledge of the runes. The case of the self-sacrificing god is a world-wide phenomenon. Attempts have been made to regard Óðinn in the tree as a parallel to Jesus in Christianity,⁶⁶ as well as to Prajapati in the Vedic tradition.⁶⁷

Sacrifice by hanging?

The hanging ritual as a sacrificial act can be traced back to the Bronze Age victims found in bogs. The Danish archaeologist and bog-corpses specialist, P. C. Glob combines the neck-ring of the goddess with the sacrifice of her victims, who were hanged by a noose - a token which illustrated their being consecrated to her while alluding to her special adornment.⁶⁸ This interpretation presupposes that Bronze Age beliefs comprised a Great Goddess with a neck-ring, who received hanged victims - a hypothesis that could not be accepted directly considering the gaps in the evidences (see p.37 above). We are undoubtedly dealing with an attempt to combine the hanging of the kings of the Ynglingar dynasty with the golden adornment which, according to Snorri, played such an ominous role in the king's marriage. The end of King Agni, explicitly hanged by Freyja herself in this golden neck-ring, invites a hypothesis of ritual sacrifice of hanging to the great fertility goddess. Such a hypothesis could be associated with the fate of Dómaldi, sacrificed to Ceres through hanging. The hanging ritual was, according to our sources, exclusively combined with Óðinn, to whom the poems refer as *gálga valdr*, "the Lord of the Gallows", or *Hangatýr*, *Hangagoð*. He is also named *geirs dróttinn*, "the Lord of the spears". Óðinn owned a famous spear called *Gungnir*; hence the death of Víkarr could be seen as the demise of a divine victim, performing the role of the god in the ritual.

⁶⁴ Saxo I, pp.161ff.

⁶⁵ The English translation by G. Turville-Petre.

⁶⁶ Turville-Petre, 1964, p.43.

⁶⁷ J. L. Sauvé, 1970, "The Divine Victim: Aspects of human sacrifice in Viking Scandinavia and Vedic India", *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans*, ed. J. Puhvel, Berkeley p.189.

⁶⁸ Glob, 1965, pp. 131-145. The neck-ring (or the noose), according to Glob, frames a meeting between a phallic man and a woman on a rock-carving, which illustrates the connection between the fertility goddess and the hanging ritual.

Lars Lönnroth has observed that the stanzas in *Ynglingatal* usually contain three structural elements, repeated in descriptions of the different kings:

1. The name of the king, usually combined with some characterising epithet in kenning form, e.g. "the kinsman of X", "the ruler of Y", "the enemy of Z".
2. The name and/or the epithet of some adversary (adversaries) responsible for the king's death - usually a human being, but often a superhuman female creature.
3. A description of the way in which the king was killed, usually involving an exotic locality and/or some very peculiar instrument of death.⁶⁹

Although Lönnroth interprets *Ynglingatal* as a libellous poem, in which the Norwegians scorn the Svear by mentioning the disgraceful death of their kings⁷⁰, his analysis of Þjóðólfr's method of working reveals that the poet, operating with old myths, tries to fit them into a stereotyped scheme which is connected with historical events in the latter part of *Ynglingatal*.

Accepting that Þjóðólfr worked according to a certain method, in composing *Ynglingatal*, we are no longer bound to offer an explanation as to why the first kings of the Svear were hanged, drowned or burnt to death, or suffered an ignoble end. Seeing these stanzas as nothing but myths in which these elements are changed with a certain meaning we are able to discern a well-known pattern in the Germanic as well as in the Celtic religion, namely the three-fold death. This is a motif with roots in the Old Indo-European myths and connected with the sacrifice. Previous chapters discussed the sacrifice by drowning connected with Nerthus and the goddesses who lived in water e.g. Frigg, Sága and Urðr, all related to the third function. The hanging motif is, however, particularly conspicuous in Old Norse religion, not only in the mentioned examples - Adam's and Thietmar's descriptions - but also in the tapestry from the ship of Oseberg and on a picture-stone from Gotland.

The prototype of the hanging ritual is Óðinn in the tree. The purpose of the ritual is not a sacrifice, though, but a painful act in the course of which the god acquires secret knowledge.

In stanza 141, the hanging ritual causes the following change:

Þá nam ek frævaz/ok fróðr vera/ok vaxa ok vel hafaz (Hvm.141).

Then I began to be fruitful and to be wise/fertile, to grow and to prosper.

The strophe illustrates the increasing knowledge of the god, but also some kind of ecstatic feeling. Hanging rites are well-known as ceremonial initiation rites. They are used in archaic societies as trials of manhood,

⊗ Lönnroth, 1986, p.88.

70 Lönnroth, 1986, pp.84-85.

and a sensation of ecstatic fulfilment was reported as a result of the hanging (lack of oxygen).

The hanging of the god in *Hávamál* thus carries overtones of initiation rather than of a sacrifice, although Dómaldi's and Víkarr's deaths are explicitly described as a sacrifice to Óðinn. The royal victim is, as we already mentioned, a rare phenomenon; "death" by spear-wound and hanging could thus indicate a symbolic "death" from one stage to another, i.e. an initiation with a special significance, constituting the enthronement of a king with a sacral character. The special attributes of Óðinn, the gallows and the spear, were ingredients in the painful ceremony through which the sacral kings imitated Óðinn in the tree, thereby becoming installed in their official positions. The hanging motif returns in *Hávamál* when Óðinn declares that he is able to resurrect hanged men (Hvm.157, Hkr.8).

Returning to the third case of a hanged king, Agni, we find no sign of Óðinn's special characteristics. The kenning *sualan hest Signýjar vers*, "Signý's husband's cold horse", i.e. the gallows, furthermore strengthens the hypothesis that the king was in reality killed by hanging. The death is effected by Skjálf-Freyja, the legendary eponymous ancestress of the dynasty of Skilfingar, a foundation myth parallel to that of Yngvi-Freyr and the Ynglingar. Freyja is connected with death by hanging in two cases. Both of them - the Queen of king Heiðrek who hanged herself in the *Dísar-salr*, and the odd notice in *Historia Norvegiæ* about Ceres receiving a hanged victim - probably belongs to this pattern.

The hanging ritual of Uppsala and Lejre is the most prominent example of human sacrifice in Old Norse religion, nine kinds of males being hanged in the grove outside the temple. We have already presented the hypothesis that the *Disating* took place at the vernal equinox, which amounts to saying that it coincided with the great sacrifices described by Adam. There is nothing to contradict the idea of Freyja as the recipient of the victims at the time of the vernal equinox, assuring mankind of *úr ok friðr* for the coming summer.

The Ynglingar dynasty, related in *Ynglingatal*'s obscure genealogy and Snorri's *Begleitprosa* with its euhemeristic explanations, poses a number of problems. Many of them can never be solved, unless some unknown manuscripts or archaeological finds are unearthed to throw a different light on the old kings of

Uppsala. Nevertheless, we are able to eliminate the hypothesis of a recurrent sacrifice of the kings, as well as any attempt to regard the early kings as historical persons. Sacrifices existed, probably as a hanging ritual carried out in celebration of the Great Goddess; other suspected sacrifices may hint at other religious customs. The short narratives about the first Ynglingar "Kings" have to be regarded as myths in which where gods, heroes and forces of chaos are struggling against each other and where social institutions such as initiation, marriage, sacrifices and burial are given their institutional roles in society.

Many of these myths are recognisable from other contexts, although mixed with other motifs and pressed into a stereotyped mould. A great deal of work remains to be done on this material, and we still have not asked all the right questions; but future labours will increase our

knowledge of the Old Norse religion perhaps telling us just why the King was killed.

The Obscured Goddess: Freyja after the Christianisation Process

The Decline of the Heathen World

On Þingvellir among the gathered Icelanders, one Hjalti Skeggjason entered the Law-Rock and recited the following couplet¹:

*Vilkat goð geyja
grey þykkjumk Freyja*

I will not blaspheme the gods,
(but) Freyja seems to me a bitch.

Together with twelve other men, who might have sympathised with him, Hjalti Skeggjason was banished as an outlaw by the Assembly (Alþingi) for blaspheming the gods. This episode is told in several versions in, for instance, in Ari's *Íslendingabók*, *Kristni saga* and *Brennu-Njál's saga*, and it is cited with few discrepancies in the sources. If this story is true, it might bear witness to the Icelanders' reverence for the old gods at that point in time, especially for Freyja. In the following year, though, Iceland converted to Christianity without any battles or riots. What had changed their minds during that one year?

From the 4th century onwards, the mission of the Germanic tribes was characterised by Arianism and its Christology, which was emphasised by Wulfila's translation of the Bible into the Gothic language. In the 5th century, all the great Germanic tribes - from the Vandals in Africa to the West-Goths in Spain and the Burgundians and Alamanni in the North - were influenced by Arianism. The turning-point came when the King of the Franks, Chlodvig, converted to the Catholic Church before the battle of Zülpich against the Alamanni. When Chlodvig was baptised in Tours, his warriors followed his example, and this became the typical pattern for the conversion of other Germanic tribes.

The mission to England began one century later during the reign of King Ethelbert. After his death in 616 AD, a pagan reaction showed that the conversion of the people was merely superficial and followed the faith of the king.

If conversion adhered to the will of the kings among the western tribes, resistance to Christianity was a characteristic feature among the Saxons, who fought a bitter struggle against the Franks for thirty years. It began in 772 AD, when Charlemagne destroyed the idol called Irminsul,

¹ The couplet was translated by Strömbäck, 1975, p.14. The translation is discussed, especially the one made by Genzmer:

"I do not want barking gods/ Freyja seems a bitch to me", F. Genzmer, 1930, "Der Spottvers des Hjalti Skeggjason", *ANF* 44, pp.311-314. This interpretation gave rise to the suggestion that Freyja appeared in the shape of a dog, a misconception allied to totemism. K. von See opposed that idea in an article "Der Spottvers des Hjalti Skeggjason", 1981, *Edda, Saga und Skaldedichtung. Aufsätze zur skandinavischen Litteratur des Mittelalters*, Heidelberg, pp.380-383, where he emphasised that the last line should be understood as "Freyja is a whore".

its temple and its holy grove at Eresburg. He was subsequently "obliged to save the peace" in his neighbouring country, his mission resulting in repeated wars which ended in the mass-conversion of the defeated. After the massacre at Verden in 782 AD, when 4,500 nobles were beheaded and others were evacuated to countries east of the Elbe, resistance became impossible. This mission by the sword ended in the baptism of the Saxon King Widukind in 785 AD. The heathen gods were still worshipped, but acts of worship were suppressed by cruel penalties.

In Scandinavia Anskar was sent to Denmark and Sweden on the order of the Franks, serving here from 826 AD to 831 AD. His achievements were negligible, but he paved the way for the mission from Hamburg. The reaction came immediately. The Vikings assaulted the Franconian coasts, looting and destroying the cities to such an extent that the bishop of Hamburg had to move to Bremen. Nevertheless, the mission from Hamburg-Bremen continued on Jutland, followed by heathen reactions, whereas the western part of Sweden seems to have drawn its missionaries from England.

The political pressure against the heathen kings of Denmark continued during the 10th century, ending in King Harald's defeat and conversion to Christianity in 980 AD. The rule of his son Sven Tjúguskegg saw a new heathen reaction; but his founding of the Danish province, the Danelaw, in England increased the influence of Christianity, and with King Canute the process was closed. Missionaries such as Odinkar the Elder occasionally visited Sweden, where Västergötland was converted about 1000 AD, and the new faith gradually gained ground in Östergötland and in Svealand. Uppsala was obviously the centre of heathen resistance as late as the 12th century.

Hákon the Good was a the first king in Norway, who tried to convert his subjects, although there was repeated resistance from the jarls of Hladir in Trøndelagen. Óláfr Tryggvason completed the process of Christianisation in Norway and overcame the provincial survival of heathen beliefs. His principal method was to force the chieftains to be baptised, thus winning their subjects for Christianity. He was also the one who, according to *Kristni saga*, sent a man called Stevnir to Iceland. Stevnir's efforts as a missionary were not successful, and when nobody cared to listen to him, he began to destroy the shrines and the wooden idols. He was declared an outlaw at the Assembly and fled from the country, pursued by a fierce gale, which the Icelanders regarded as a sign of the will of the gods. The missionary Þangbrandr appeared next; he was greeted by rhymed lampoons, and after he had killed a couple of men he was declared an outlaw, too. According to a legendary tale, Þangbrandr began to perform miracles such as defeating a Norwegian berserk, whereupon his mission was more successful.² Three chieftains, Gizurr Teitsson, Hjalti Skeggjason and Síðu-Hallr, were converted.

It was in this context that Hjalti Skeggjason recited his rhymed scorn of Freyja at Þingvellir and was banished from the hallowed ground. As an outlaw, he sought refuge with Óláfr Tryggvason, who was deeply concerned in missionary affairs. The king intervened in the affair by

² According to the varying sagas, it is not not evident who was the first missionary. A survey of the missionaries' efforts is provided by Jón Hnefill Aðalssteinson, 1978, *Under the Cloak*, Uppsala, pp.63-79.

taking some Icelanders hostage in Throndheim, threatening to kill them. After that Gizurr appeared, telling the king about the crimes that Pangbrandr had committed and petitioning that the mission should not resort to such harsh methods.

At the next meeting at Þingvellir, in 1000 AD, Gizurr and Hjalti appeared together with a priest, conducting a mass and spreading incense among the assembled men. Even so, the knowledge that many of their relatives were the hostages of the Norwegian king seem to have been more persuasive to the Icelanders. The leader of the Assembly, *lǫgsögumaðr* Þorgeir, was entrusted with the task of making a decision and he also received a considerable sum of silver from Síðu-Hallr. He disappeared under a cloak for one and a half days, and no words were heard from him. During this time the heathen party performed a human sacrifice to the gods. On their side, Hjalti and Gizurr declared that instead of sacrificing their worst people as the pagans did, the Christians gave their best to Lord Jesus, thus calling attention to their own positions as possible martyrs.

The next morning Þorgeir arose out from under the cloak, gathered the Assembly and spoke eagerly in favour of the unity of the different parts. This ended with a total conversion of all Icelanders to Christianity. However, the eating of horse-meat and exposing of children were still allowed. Sacrifices to the heathen gods were allowed only if they were performed without witnesses.

Hjalti Skeggjason's Blasphemy

Hjalti Skeggjason, who triumphed when his former enemies were baptised, forms the connecting link in three different stories about the Christianisation of Iceland. His lampoon about Freyja activates the process, and he is driven away by the pagans, seeking the protection of Óláfr Tryggvason, the defender of Christianity in the North. When he identifies Freyja as a bitch, he is probably alluding to the fertility aspect as de Vries among others suggests;³ it is all the more plausible as Freyr and Freyja were worshipped precisely as gods of fertility. This belief was expressed by the phallic symbols of the male god, and we must suggest that the images of the goddess probably carried similar coarse characteristics. If the "bitch" represented Freyja's unbounded lewdness, Hjalti Skeggjason's couplet would not have created the effect that it actually had. Besides, we may observe that he used the neutral word *grey* instead of *hyndla*, "bitch", to make a neat stanza. Nevertheless, the word is used as a description of an impudent creature, following the oriental tradition with regard to canines. The problem is that the dog was not attended by such connotations in the Nordic sources. We know that both *hundr* and *rakki* could be used as personal names, and that dogs followed their masters into the graves. Not until the 13th century, i.e. when Christian values had pervaded linguistic usage, did the coarse invectives appear alluding to she-dogs and their anatomical details.⁴

Furthermore, the stories about the Christianisation process, especially *Kristni saga*, echo stereotypes and repeated features of the part of the

3 "So rundet sich auch in dieser Hinsicht das Bild einer weiblicher Gottheit, die auf alle Lebensgebieten das Prinzip der Fruchtbarkeit darstellte.", de Vries II, p.313.

4 J. Bernström, s.v. *hund*, KLMN.

missions among the heathens, such as the miracles, the destruction of heathen shrines and idols and voluntary mass-baptism. With special reference to the Freyja episode, that story could be traced back to similar situations in the Classical Antiquity, where a goddess was declared a lifeless idol and a shameful figure, more worthy of contempt than of worship.⁵

This pattern suggests that the episode of Hjalti Skeggjason and the blasphemous stanza about Freyja is a construction, probably created in the early 12th century in a monastery setting, whereupon it was chronicled by Ari in his *Íslendingabók*. Still, we must admit that Ari is regarded as a reliable source. Several rhymed lampoons, *niðr*, were composed by both sides, and Hjalti Skeggjason's *kviðling* seems to belong to that tradition. Moreover, the Assembly had passed a law against blasphemy which was directed against the missionaries' attacks on the shrines.⁶ The mild *niðr* from Hjalti Skeggjason was probably a cautious protest which might, its originator may hopefully have hoped, reach the ears of Óláfr Tryggvason.

From the history of the Saxons, we know that the Christianisation process could be a cruel and protracted procedure, where people with the utmost reluctance abandoned their old faith. True, the rule *cuius rex, eius religio* dominates the pattern of voluntary conversion without violence; but it was often followed by a pagan reaction after the death of the king. All this shows that the heathen beliefs were a dynamic and living force in Medieval Scandinavia, quite opposite to what some scholars have maintained. These researchers have declared that people no longer actually believed in their pagan gods, because the old religion was unable to provide answers to their total existential questions. Such an assumption belongs to the evolutionist perspective, which claims, that mankind took a step towards a higher form of spiritual development in leaving the polytheistic world for Christian monotheism.

This is nothing but a stereotyped description furnished by the winning side - irrespective of whether we speak of Christianity, Islam or any other religion - whose mission has managed to suffocate the original belief in a certain area. It belongs to the framework of religious cliché and is without any importance other than the pure edification of believers. In view of this, we may assume that the story of the rapid conversion of Iceland has little relevance as a historical source; it displays the stereotyped features of missionary tales, deriving from the Continent and tracing its origins back to Late Antiquity.

The Metamorphosis of a Goddess

The Christian Fathers tried to counteract the belief in Mary, the mother of Jesus in which they saw a continuation of the worship of the Great Mother, called Isis in Egypt, Demeter in Greece and Cybele in Rome. When they realised the impossibility of their undertaking, they made her a mediator between the divine and the human world. Such a mediator used to be sexless; similarly, the Mother of Christ was apprehended as

⁵ Clemens of Alexandria, 1919, *The Exhortation to the Greeks*, trans G. Butterworth, London. These traditions were followed by missionaries and bishops in Western Europe during the Middle Age, like Gregorius of Tours for example.

⁶ See Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinson, p.72.

sexually inexperienced - moreover, she was herself born without sin. As such, she was able to atone for the first woman who brought sin, sexuality and death into the world, Eve.⁷

The sparse evidence about Mary was elaborated with legendary stories taken from apocryphal Gospels and from other narrative sources. In the development of theology, the character of Mary was discussed in connection with the struggles against Arianism. She was called *Dei Genetrix* by the Synod of Ephesus in 431 AD, which made her not only the mother of Jesus but also the Mother of God. She was apprehended as *Virgo Virgorum*, "The Virgin of the Virgins". When she erases the sin of Eve, she appears as *Mediatrix*, "the Mediator", and *Corredemptrix*, "she who rehabilitates". Her mystical combination of motherhood and virginity was emphasised by the chivalrous poetry and legends, and panegyrics in her honour flourished during the Middle Ages.

This was the dogma laid down by the Church; the people were harder to convince when they were urged to abandon their old agrarian rites. At an early point in time a syncretism appeared between, for example, the rites of Berecynthia-Cybele and those of the Virgin Mary, when peasants carried a wagon containing the deity across the fields. Images of the old goddesses were interpreted as they represented the Virgin Mary - she had been present on the spot even before the missionaries arrived!⁸ On the other hand the apprehension of Mother Earth was demonised in Medieval Christian art; she represented carnal lust, carrying or even suckling the serpent, the symbol of evil. The mermaid was another expression of carnal temptation; she usually symbolised the seven deadly sins. A third representation of the female was expressed in *Luxuria*, sensual pleasure portrayed in a grotesque shape; she often accompanied the devil.⁹

Many of the local variants of the Great Goddess among the Celts and the Germanic tribes were transformed into saints. The transformation would adhere to a certain story where a virgin, fleeing from a brutal rapist, hides in a newly sown field. When the pursuing man arrives, the corn has already grown high, concealing the virgin, who becomes a saint. The story is, as Pamela Berger shows, a reiterated theme in France, Germany and England. Its prototype is the apocryphal story about the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, where a similar miracle occurred.¹⁰

The festivals of these saints were celebrated in the spring at the time of sowing, and they reflect the old rituals with processions of gods blessing the seed and the harvest. In some cases the revellers seem not to have bothered to invest their celebrations with the slightest Christian "vener". A shocked 12th-century monk reported that the people west of Cologne built a ship-like vessel with wheels affixed to it. It was drawn by men and women to Aachen, Maastricht and other towns, and everywhere people came out of their houses and greeted the wagon with joyful songs. Nobody seemed to know what idol was hidden in the wagon,

7 *Irénée de Lyon, Contre les Hérésies*, 1974, ed. A. Rousseau, L. Doutyrelleau, Paris, III, 22, 4; Näsström, 1989, p.91.

8 Berger, 1988, p.37.

9 *Ibid.* pp.42-46.

10 *Ibid.* pp.49-69, 89ff. The rapidly growing corn after the king had ridden around a field is also found in *Ólafs saga helga* in *Heimskringla* II, ch.203.

and the monk was prevented from coming near it; he hence suspected it of being pagan "demon". Around the wagon, all manner of licentiousness took place and vulgar songs were sung, all belonging to an old ritual. The women's behaviour was especially appalling: they danced and sang half-naked and at the dusk they sneaked away to a secret place to continue their lewd celebrations.¹¹

In the North, worship of the Virgin Mary seems to have become popular. Her festivals were manifold, spread over the year and performed in large numbers; but she was also connected with certain guilds and societies.¹² Some of the Nordic traditions associated with the Virgin Mary are influenced by Continental traditions, others are transformed rituals from the worship of Freyja. At weddings, the last toast used to be devoted to Freyja, but in Christians times the toast was to the Virgin Mary.¹³ She assumed the role of helper in childbirth, a function simultaneously indebted to the notion that she, who was without sin, bore her own child without pain and to the old belief in Freyja's and Frigg's assistance on such occasions (see above p.000) and in the Norns. She became the one who was served the special porridge which was once dedicated to the Norns, but was subsequently called "Marie sengegraut".¹⁴

It is obvious that the Virgin Mary took over a good many of the functions of the Vanir where production and reproduction were concerned. She was invoked by peasants and by fishermen as well.¹⁵ Her name was given to a large number of flowers, among which "Jungfru Marie Sänghalm", "the Bedding straw of the Virgin Mary", *Galium Verum*, was originally called "Freyja's weed".¹⁶ The same transmission happened to the ladybird, "Maria Nyckelpiga", which used to be known as "the bird of Freyja". The constellation "Friggerocken", "the spinning wheel of Frigg" was called "Mariarocken", "the spinning wheel of the Virgin Mary". Further instances could be adduced in order to elucidate the metamorphosis of a goddess into a holy virgin.

Pious worship of the Virgin Mary is recorded on many rune-stones in Uppland. This is, however, usually expressed in the formula "May God and God's mother help his/her soul", which may indicate that the conception of the Holy Virgin did not appeal so much to the newly converted Christians as the idea of the fertile mother.¹⁷ Adam of Bremen relates a typical conversion legend, in which a priest in the pagan temple was blind. His old gods could not help him, but the Holy Virgin appeared in a dream, promising him his eyesight back if he denied the old gods. The Virgin moreover promised that in this place, i.e. the temple, where so much blood had been shed, she would be worshipped with honour.¹⁸

11 Berger, 1988, p.78.

12 H. Johansson, s.v. Maria, KLNLM.

13 K. R. V. Wikman, s.v. *bröllop*, KLMN.

14 B. Holbek, s.v. Maria, KLNLM.

15 About the Virgin Mary's connection with fishing, see Ólafúr Larsen og M. Olsen, 1951, "Mariufiskur", *Maal og Minne*, pp.34-41.

16 Hyltén-Cavallius, 1968, p.237.

17 About Christian interpretation of rune-stones, see C.F. Hallencreutz, 1982, "Runstenarnas teologi; våra första intryck för inhemsk kristendomstolkning", *Religion och Bibel* XLI, pp.47-56.

18 *Adam*, pp.225-228.

The Obscured Goddess of Vegetation

The Virgin Mary and the female saints took over a number of Freyja's functions. In other aspects she survived in folklore, for example in Holda or Frau Holle. Holda is a female spirit belonging to German folklore, whose origin could be traced back to the Great Goddess of the North. The oldest testimony to her existence comes from Buchard von Worms in 1024. Buchard talks about a certain Holda, related to demons and called *Diana, paganorum dea*, "Diana, the goddess of the pagans" (cf. above p.197). Holda is thought to travel around in the country in a chariot, gratifying the diligent and punishing the lazy. She is especially connected with the spinning of flax; but on Christmas eve all spinning wheels must stop. The connection between Holda and Freyja-Hörn as the protector of flax preparation is evident, as was the case with Frigg and her constellation Friggerocken.¹⁹

Holda is connected with entangled threads and hair; untidy hair is still called "Hollekopf" in Germany. Again, we are reminded of the unhappy Siritha and her entangled hair in Saxo's account of Óttar. This is also characteristic of Abundia (see above p.102), who appears in stables with candles and entangles the manes of horses in the night.

A more conspicuous resemblance between Holda and Freyja is the tears of gold they shed. Holda received the unbaptised children, as Óðinn was said to do in Scandinavian folklore. It is obvious that female spirits like Frau Holle or Frau Bertha/Perchta to some extent reflect the qualities of the Great Goddess of the North, although faded and demonised in the Christian context.

If a peasant forgot his plough or his harrow in the field on Christmas Eve, people thought that Frau Holle or Bertha moved it to another, rendering it useless or blighted next year's crop. The same thing is said about Freyja in Swedish folklore. This dubious role as a malevolent spirit, appearing on the holiest night in the Christian festival calendar, is also ascribed to Ahasuerus, the shoemaker of Jerusalem.²⁰ This classification places Freyja in the world of the demons and goblins, from where she operates in order to harm mankind. In this aspect she is still Óðin's counterpart, as Christian literature and folklore made him the leader of the evil forces and demons at an early point in time.

Sometimes Freyja's appearance was thought to have a favourable effect. People imagined that she collected apples on Christmas Eve, and that they had to leave some fruit on the tree for her in order to obtain a good harvest the following year. A strong wind blowing through the trees on Christmas was a good omen; Freyja shakes the fruit trees, which will bring a good harvest.²¹ Another record combines Freyja with the ripening rye,²² which was sometimes linked with the flash of summerlighting called *kornblix*, "flash of corn". This phenomenon was apprehended as Freyja using her steel and flint to see if the corn had ripened. She

¹⁹ In *Heimskringla*, Snorri uses the name Hulð (Hulðr in three manuscripts) about a malevolent *völva*, Hkr.13-14.

²⁰ E. Elgquist, 1930, "Jerusalems skomakare", *Folkminnen och folktankar*, pp.94-95.

²¹ E. Elgquist, 1929, "Vad man i Varend kan berätta om Odin och Fröa", *Folkminnen och folktankar*, pp.94-95. von Sydow, C., 1921, *Etnologiska studier tillägnade Nils Edward Hammarstedt*, Stockholm, pp.168-170. H. Celander is opposed to these records, which he regards as late constructions by peasants. H. Celander, 1944, "Fröja och frukträden", *ANF* 59, p.100.

²² Orlík og Ellekilde, 1921-1956, p.759.

appeared benevolent in contrast to Porr's antagonistic behaviour, according to Swedish folklore.²³

A more dubious record about a female spirit called Säfrua, "the Lady of the Corn", who watches the corn's recycling process, has been interpreted as a surviving myth about Freyja.²⁴ Be that as it may, the remaining fragments that speak of a divine protector of the vegetation do coincide with Freyja's function as distributor of fertility and wealth. The likelihood of a transformation from a goddess to a hazy character in folklore and fairy-tales may be debated; but the similarities cannot very well be overlooked.

The Traces of a Goddess

The image of God corresponds to the image of man and forms a concentrate of man's perceptions of an ideal. The existence of Great Goddesses did not imply that women had equal rights in society; but the images of them gave a religious identity to their female worshippers. From Church history we have learnt that the cult of the Great Goddesses was transformed into worship of the Virgin Mary as mediator between human beings and God. After the Christianization of the North, the Great Goddesses Frigg and Freyja were banned; but as we have seen, many of their qualities survived in being attributed to the Virgin Mary. Frigg's mourning for Baldr easily amalgamated with the picture of the Mater Dolorosa, and the productive and reproductive factors were soon assimilated, too. Other features of the Great Goddess - her magic and lecherous aspects, for example - were harder to incorporate into Christian dogma. The pious monks called Freyja a *portkona*, a "harlot", and she became an expression of a kind of the licentious paganism and uncontrolled sexuality which were not accepted after the process of Christianisation.

Christian rejection of carnal love, and the great esteem in which celibacy was held in the Christian Church, were probably as incomprehensible to the various Germanic tribes as to the Gallic peasants, who continued their old fertility rituals in order to secure the seed and the harvest as well as the breeding of their livestock and the procreation of their own family. This resistance was counteracted by the Church, whose bishops and priests repeatedly declared that the gods who allegedly protected these functions were sternly forbidden and regarded as the instruments of the devil. Since the Great Goddess Freyja, protectress of fertility and sexuality, fulfilled the needs of a peasant society, the Christian Church had to invert her role. Like her male counterpart Óðinn she became demonised, transformed into an ugly witch waving a magic wand and attended by black cats, an evil spirit who appeared in the night to destroy culture. The sensual goddess was lumped with other wicked icons of the Church, such as the mermaid and Luxuria, whose lechery led men down to the torments of Hell.

Still, the cult of a goddess who protected the fertility survived in peasant festivals and during the Catholic period in the worship of the Virgin Mary and the saints, although it assumed other forms of expression. When Scandinavia converted to Lutheranism, the female saints were expelled from the church, and the image of divinity became

²³ Loc. cit.

²⁴ Loc. cit.

exclusively masculine. In popular belief, where the dogma of the Trinity was never deeply comprehended, Jesus Christ assumed the functions of mediator and helper, even in everyday labour, and his characteristic features in portraits acquired a feminine touch. In the course of the last few decades, the Virgin Mary has returned to Protestant Churches attended by an increasing popularity. This reflects a need on the part of the female half of Christianity to be represented by its own sex in the divine sphere. Applying a perspective supplied by the history of religions, we are again able to discern the return of the Great Goddess.

References

Abbreviated references

- Adam *Adam av Bremen*, 1984, trans. E. Svenberg, Stockholm.
- AnEWb *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 1961, ed. J. de Vries, Leiden.
- ANF *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, Lund.
- Bdr. *Baldrs draumar*.
- Fjølsv. *Fjølsvinnsmál*.
- Fm. *Fáfnismál*
- Germ. *Tacitus: Germania*, 1946, trans. M. Hutton, London.
- Glgf. *Gylfaginning*.
- Grk. *Guðrúnarkviða*.
- Gm. *Grímnismál*.
- Gróg. *Grógaldr*.
- Háv. *Hávamál*.
- Hdl. *Hyndluljóð*.
- HHu. *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I-II*
- HHv. *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*.
- Hkr. *Heimskringla*.
- Hm. *Hamðismál*.
- KLNM *Kulturhistorisk Lexikon för Nordisk Medeltid*, Malmö.

- Lorenz *Snorri Sturluson, Gylfaginning*, 1984, ed. G. Lorenz,
Darmstadt
- LP *Lexicon Poeticum*, 1931, ed. Sveinbjörn Egilsson og Finnur
Jónsson, Copenhagen
- Ls. *Lokasenna*.
- Od. *Oddrúnargrátr*
- Rþ. *Rígspula*.
- Saxo *Saxo. History of the Danes*, 1951, trans. H. R. Ellis Davidson,
Cambridge.
- Sd. *Sigrdrífumál*
- Skm. *För Skírnis*.
- Sksm. *Skáldskaparmál*.
- Vm. *Vafþrúðnismál*.
- de Vries de Vries, J. 1970, *Altgermanisches Religionsgeschichte I-II*,
Berlin.
- Vsp. *Völuspá*.
- Yt. Þjóðólfr of Hvín, *Ynglingatal*
- Þrk *Þrymskviða*

Editions and translations of texts cited

Old Norse texts

- Agnesar Saga Meyjar, *Heilagra manna sögur* I, 1877, Christiania.
- Ágrip af Nóreg's konungasögum in *Fagrskinna. Nóreg's konungatal*, 1985, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, *Íslenzk fornrit* XXIX, Reykjavík.
- Breta-sögur in Hauksbók*, Utg. av Det Konglige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab, 1892-96, Copenhagen.
- Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems*, 1922, trans. N. Kershaw, Cambridge.
- Ásmundar Saga kappabana, Zwei Fornaldarsögur*, 1891, ed. F. Detter, Halle.
- Brennu-Njáls saga*, 1954, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík.
- Edda* 1-2, 1912-1922, trans. F. Genzmer, Jena.
- Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* 1-2, 1914-27 and 1963, ed. G. Neckel, Heidelberg.
- Eddadigte, Gudadigte, Helteðgte*, 1971, (3rd ed.) ed. Jón Helgason, I-II Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen.
- L'Edda. Récits de mythologie nordique par Snorri Sturluson*, 1991, trans. F. X. Dillman, Paris.
- Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1848, ed. Jón Sigurðsson et alia, Copenhagen.
- Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, 1933, ed. Sigurður Nordal, *Íslenzk fornrit* Reykjavík.
- De gamle Eddadigte*, 1932, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.
- Eiríks saga rauða*, 1935, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík.
- Eyrbyggja saga*, 1935, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Íslenzk fornrit* Reykjavík.
- Fornnordisk lyrik*, 1960, trans. Å. Ohlmarks, Stockholm.
- Gísla saga Súrssonar*, 1943, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, Guðni Jónsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík.
- Gætríks saga*, 1990, trans. into Swedish by M. Malm, Falun.
- Hallfrøðr Vandræðaskáld, *Lausavisur in Den Norsk-Islandska skaldediktningen*, rev. E. A. Kock, Lund.
- Hálfs Saga ok Hálfsrekka*, 1981, ed. H. Seelow, Reykjavík.
- Harðar Saga Grímkelsonar*, 1960, ed. S. Hast, Copenhagen.

- Hauksbók*, 1892-96, ed. Det Konglige Nordiske Oldskrifts-selskab, Copenhagen.
- Heilagra manna sögur* I-II, 1877, ed. C. R. Unger, Christiania.
- Heimskringla* 1-3, 1951, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk fornrit* Reykjavík.
- Hrafnsmál* in *Den Ældre Edda og Edda minorica* 1-2, 1943-46, trans M. Larsen, Copenhagen.
- Hreiðars þáttur* in *Ljósvetinga saga*, 1940, ed. Björn Sigfússon, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík.
- Kétils saga hængs* in *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda* I-II, 1886-1891, Reykjavík.
- Kormákr Ögmundarson, *Sigurðardrápa* in *Den Norsk-Islandska Skaldediktningen* I, 1946, rev. E. A. Kock, Lund.
- Kristni saga* in *Hauksbok*, 1892-96, ed. Det Konglige Nordiske Oldskrifts-selskab, Copenhagen.
- Landnámabók*, 1968, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík.
- Laxdæla saga*, 1934, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík.
- Monumenta Historica Norwegiæ*, 1880, ed. G. Storm, Kristiania.
- Norges gamle lover intil 1387*, 1846, ed. R. Keyser og P. A. Munch, Christiania.
- Norges historia* 1969, trans. Astrid Salvesen, Oslo.
- Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtningen*, 1912, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.
- Den Norsk-Islandska skaldediktningen*, 1946, rev. E. A. Kock, Lund.
- Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla* 2, 1951, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík.
- The Poetic Edda* 1928, trans. L. Hollander, Austin.
- Saga Friðþjófs hinn frækni*, 1893, ed. L. Larsen, Copenhagen.
- Saga Hákonar góða* in *Heimskringla* 1, 1951, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík.
- The Saga of king Heidrek the Wise*, 1960, ed. C. Tolkien.
- The Saga of the Jomsvikings*, 1962, ed. N. F. Balke, London.
- The Saga of the Volsungs*, 1991, trans. J. Byock, Berkeley.
- Snorri Sturlason Ynglingasaga* 1964, ed. E. Wessén. Stockholm.
- Sólarljóð*, 1979, trans. B. Fidjestøl, Bergen.
- Solsången*, 1983, trans. G.D. Hansson, Uddevalla.
- Sigurðarkviða in skamma* in *De gamle Eddadikte*, 1932, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.

- Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Austrfararvísur in Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtningen*, 1912, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.
- Snorri Sturluson *Gylfaginning*, 1984, ed. G. Lorenz, Darmstadt.
- Sverris saga*, 1920, ed. G. Indrebø, Oslo.
- Sturlunga Saga*, 1988, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, Reykjavík.
- Þjóðólfr of Hvin, *Ynglingatal*, 1925, ed. A. Noreen, Stockholm.
- Þjóðólfr of Hvin, *Haustlǫng in Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, 1912, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.
- Þórðr Særeksson, *Lausavísur in Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtningen*, 1912, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.
- Trójumanna saga in Hauksbók*, 1892-96, ed. Det Konglige Nordiske Oldskrifts-selskab, Copenhagen
- Zwei fornaldarsögur*, 1891, ed. F. Detter, Halle.
- Ulfr Úggason, *Húsdrápa in Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtningen*, 1912, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen.
- Útsteinar-kviða in *Den Ældre Eddan og Eddica minora I-II*, 1943, trans. M. Larsen, Copenhagen.
- Víga-Glums saga*, 1956, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, *Íslenzk fornrit*, Reykjavík.
- Die Völsungasaga*, 1891, ed. W. Ranish, Berlin.
- Völuspá*, 1980 (new ed.), ed. Sigurður Nordal, Darmstadt.
- Den Ældre Eddan og Eddica minora I-II*, 1946, trans. M. Larsen, Copenhagen

Non Norse texts

- Adam av Bremen, *Beskrivelse af øerna i Norden*, 1978, trans. A.A. Lund, Højberg.
- Adam av Bremen*, 1984, trans. E. Svenberg, Stockholm.
- Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 1957, trans. H. W. Smyth, London.
- Ammianus Marcellinus, *Römische Geschichte*, 1947, ed. W. Seyfarth, Darmstadt.
- Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English people*, 1969, eds. E. Colgrave, and R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford.
- Bellman, C.M., Fredmans epistlar nr 25 and nr 28 in 1962, *Carl Mikael Bellman*, Stockholm.
- Beowulf*, 1973, ed. C. L. Wrenn, London.

- Beowulf*, 1978, ed. trans. M. Swanton, Manchester.
- Clemens of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Greeks*, 1919, trans G. Butterworth, London.
- Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque* VI, 1989, ed. M. Vermaseren. Leiden.
- Diodor of Sicily*, 1961, trans. C. H. Oldfather, London.
- "De falsiis Diis" in *Homilies of Ælfric II*, 1968, ed. J. Pope, Oxford.
- Firminus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionem*, 1957. ed. A. Pastorini, Firenze.
- The Gothic History of Jordanes*, 1915, ed, C.C. Mierow, Princeton.
- Herodotus I* 1960, trans. A. D. Godley, London.
- Irénée de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies*, 1974, ed. A. Rousseau, L. Doutyrelu, Paris.
- The Mahābhārata*, 1973, trans, ed.J. A. van Buitenen, Chicago.
- Origo gentis Langobardorum* in *Monumenta Historiae Germanicae:Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum*, 1826-1878 ed. G. Waitz, Hannover,
- Plato, *The Republic*, 1946, trans. P. Shorey, London.
- Pliny, *Natural History*, 1912, trans. H. Rackham, London.
- Plutarch, *Moralia: De Iside et Oriside*, 1957, trans. F. C. Babbitt, London
- Plutarch, *Lives:Theseus*, 1914, trans. B. Perrin, London.
- Plutarch, *Lives: Romulus*, 1948, trans. B. Perrin, London.
- Procopios, *History of the Wars*, 1954, trans H. B. Dewing, London,
- Der Rig-Veda*, 1951, trans. K. F. Geldner, Wiesbaden.
- Rimbert, *Ansgars levnad*, 1965, trans. G. Rudberg, Stockholm.
- The Shatapatha Brāhmana* III, 1966, trans. J. Eggeling, Dehli.
- Saxo. History of the Danes*, 1951, trans. H. R. Ellis Davidson, Cambridge.
- Saxonia Gesta Danorum I-II*, 1931, ed. J. Olrik og H.Raeder, Copenhagen.
- Sozomenos, *Kirkengeschichte* 1960, ed. J. Bidez, Berlin.
- Tacitus, *The Annals*, 1955, trans. C. H. More, London.
- Tacitus, *Germania*, 1946, trans. M. Hutton, London.
- Varro, M. T., *De lingua latina*, 1910, ed. G. Goetz and F. Schoell, Leipzig, VI, 18.

Literature

- Almgren, B., 1962, "Den osynliga gudomen", *Proxima Thule*, Stockholm.
- Almgren, O., 1926, *Hällristningar och kultbruk*, Stockholm.
- Almquist, B., 1974, *Norrøn niddiktning*, 1-2, Uppsala.
- Alver, B., 1971, *Draumkvædet - folkeviser eller lærd kopidiktning*, Halden.
- Andersson, J. G. G., 1938, *Cornelii Taciti*, Oxford.
- Anderson, Th., 1988, *The Legend of Brynhild*, Ithaca and London.
- Aneer, G., 1985, *Imām Rūhullāh Khumainī, Sah Muhammad Rizā Pahlavī and the religious traditions of Iran*, Uppsala.
- Armini, H., 1948, "Ett par svenska ortnamn belysta av Tacitus och Jordanes", ANF.
- Arrhenius, B., 1962, "Det flammande smycket", *Fornvännen*.
- Bachofen, J. J., 1948, *Das Mutterrecht in Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3-4, Basel.
- Bækstedt, A., 1988, *Gudar och hjältar i Norden*, Oslo.
- Baetke, W., 1964, *Yngvi und die Ynglingar. Eine Quellenkritische Untersuchung über das nordische "Sakralkönigtum"*, Berlin.
- Beck, H., 1965, *Das Ebersignum im Germanischen*, Berlin.
- Beckman, N., 1918, *Distingen. Studier tillägnade Esaias Tegnér*, Lund.
- Benveniste, É., 1969, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Paris.
- Berger, P., 1988, *The Goddess Obscured*, Boston.
- Bernström, J., s.v. hund, *KLMN*.
- Björkman, E., 1919, "Skialf och Skilfing", *Namn och Bygd*.
- Boberg, I., 1966, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, Vol. XXVII, Copenhagen.
- Boyce, M., 1961, *The Zoroastrians*, London.
- Brate, E., 1919, "Andra Merseburgsbesvärgelsen", ANF 35.
- Brate, E., 1913, "Betydelsen av ortnamnet Skjälv", *Namn och Bygd*.
- Brate, E., 1914, "Vanerna", *Svenska Humanistiska Förbundets Skrifter XXI*, Stockholm.
- Brate, E., 1913, "Wrindavi", ANF.
- Briffault, R., 1927, *The Mothers. A study of the origin of sentiments and institutions*, London.

- Brink, S., 1992, "Kultkontinuitet från bosättningshistorisk utgångspunkt, *Kontinuitet i kult och tro från vikingtid till medeltid*, ed. B. Nilsson, Uppsala.
- Brink, S., 1990, *Sockenbildning och sockennamn*, Uppsala.
- Brough, J., 1959, "The tripartite ideology of the Indo-Europeans: an experiment in method," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies* 23.
- Bruder, R., 1974, *Die Germanische Frau in Lichte der Runeinschriften und antiken Historiegraphie*, Berlin.
- Brøndsted, J., 1963, *Danmarks historie I*, Copenhagen
- Brøndstedt, J., 1977, *De ældste tider. Særudgave af Danmarks historie*. Vol. I., Copenhagen.
- Bugge, S., 1885, "Bemærkninger till norrøne Dikte I. Hyndluljóð", *ANF*.
- Bugge, S., 1899, *The Home of the Eddic Poems with Special Reference to the Helgi-Lays*, London.
- Bugge, S., 1889, "Iduns æpler", *ANF*.
- van Bulk, V., 1959, "Le Roi divin en Afrique noire", *The Sacral Kingship*, Leiden.
- Bäckman, L., 1975, *Sájva*, Stockholm.
- Burkert, W., 1985, *Greek Religion*, Cambridge Mass.
- Bøe, A., s.v. konge, *KLNM*.
- Carlé, B., 1985, *Jomfru-fortellingen*, Odense.
- Carlsson, L., 1963, *Jag giver dig min dotter 1-2*, Stockholm.
- Celander, H., 1945, "Fröja och fruktträden", *ANF*.
- Celander, H., 1955, *Förkristen jul*, Stockholm.
- Celander, H., 1906-09, "Freyjas eller Friggs falkhamn", *Språkvetenskapliga Sällskapet Uppsalas förhandlingar*, Uppsala.
- Clunies Ross, M., 1978, "The myth of Gefjon and Gylfi and its function in Snorra Edda and Heimskringla", *ANF*.
- Clunies Ross, M., 1987, *Skáldskaparmál*, Odense.
- Ellis Davidson, H. R., 1964, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, Harmondsworth.
- Derolez, R., 1974, *Götter und Mythen der Germanen*, Köln.
- Detienne, M., 1977, *Dionysos, mis á mort*, Paris.
- Detienne, M., 1972, *Le jardines d'Adonis*, Paris.

- Detienne, M., 1981, "The Sea-Crow", *Myth, religion and society/structuralist essays*, ed. R. L. Gordon, Cambridge.
- A Dictionary of Hinduism*, 1977, London.
- Dowden, K., 1989, *The Death and the Maiden*, London.
- Dronke, U. and P., 1977, "The Prologue to the Prose Edda: Explorations of a Latin background", in Einar G. Pétursson och Jónas Kristjánsson eds., *Sjötíu Riterðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*, Reykjavík.
- Dumézil, G., 1924, *Le festin d'immortalité*, Paris.
- Dumézil, G., 1930, *Légendes sur les Nartes*, Paris.
- Dumézil, G., 1945, "Naissance d'archanges: essai sur la formation de la théologie zoroastrienne" *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus*, Paris.
- Dumézil, G., 1953, "Rejoinder to Carl Koch, Bemerkungen zur römischen Quirinuskult," *Revue des études latines* 31.
- Dumézil, G., 1958a, *L'ideologie tripartite des Indo-Européens*, Bruxelles.
- Dumézil, G., 1958b, "La Rigsthula et la structure sociale indo-européenne", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 154.
- Dumézil, G., 1959a *Les dieux des Germains; essai sur la formation de la religion scandinave*, Paris.
- Dumézil, G., 1959b, *Loki*, Darmstadt, 1959.
- Dumézil, G., 1968, *Mythes et épopée I* (2nd ed.), Paris.
- Dumézil, G., 1970, *Roman Archaic religion*, Chicago.
- Dumézil, G., 1971, *Mythes et épopée II*, Paris.
- Dumézil, G., 1973a, *From Myth to Fiction*, Chicago.
- Dumézil, G., 1973b, *Mythes et épopée III*, Paris.
- Dumézil, G., 1979, *Mariages Indo-Européens*, Paris.
- Dumézil, G., 1982, *Apollon Sonore et autres essais*, Paris.
- Dumézil, G., 1983, *The stakes of the warrior*, Los Angeles and Berkeley.
- Düwel, K., 1985, *Das Opferfest von Lade und die Geschichte vom Volsi: Quellenkritische Untersuchungen zur germanische Religionsgeschichte*, Wien.
- Ejerfeldt, L., 1969-70, "Helighet, karisma och kungadöme i forngermansk religion," *Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Uppsala årsbok*, Uppsala.
- Eldjárn, K., s. v. hov og horg, *KLNM*.
- Eliade, M., 1958, *Patterns in Comparative Religions*, London.
- Elmevik, L., 1985, "Åsaka", *Namn och Bygd*.

- Elgquist, E., 1930, "Jerusalems skomakare", *Folkminnen och folktankar*.
- Elgquist, E., 1929, "Vad man i Värend kan berätta om Odin och Fröa", *Folkminnen och folktankar*.
- Elmevik, L., 1990, "Aschw. Lytis- in Ortnamen. Ein kultisches element oder ein profanes?" in *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names*, ed. T. Ahlbäck, Åbo, pp.493-494
- Erkell, H., 1981, "Varroniana: Topographisches und Religionsgeschichliches zu Varro", *De Lingua Latina, Opuscula Romana XIII:2*.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E., 1937, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic, Among the Azande*, New York.
- Falk, H., 1894, "Svipdagsmál", ANF 10.
- Finch, R. G., 1965, *The Saga of the Volsungs*, London.
- Fischer, C., 1979, "Moseligene fra Bjældskovdal", KUML.
- Fleck, J., 1970, "Kónr - Ottar - Geirrød", *Scandinavian Studies* 42.
- Fleming, A., 1969, "The Myth of the Mother Goddess", *World Archeology*, London.
- Frazer, J., 1936, *The Golden Bough*, London, (first edition 1890).
- Frazer, J., 1978, *The Golden Bough*, London, Suffolk.
- Gad, T. s.v. Maria Magdalena, KLNLM.
- Gade, K. E., 1985, "Skjalf", ANF.
- Genzmer, F., 1949, "Da signed Krist - pá biguolen Wuodan", *Arv*.
- Genzmer, F., 1930, "Die Spottvers des Hjalti Skeggjason", ANF.
- Genzmer, F., 1949, "Die Götter des zweiten Merseburger Zauberspruchs", ANF.
- Genzmer, F., 1951, "Die skandinavische Quellen des Beowulfs", ANF.
- Gehrts, H., 1969, "Die Gullveig Mythen in der Völuspá", *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*.
- Gering, H., 1920, "Ottar heimski", ANF.
- Giebel, M., 1990, *Das Geheimnis der Mysterien*, Zürich.
- Gimbutas, M., 1982, *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe 6500-3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images*, London.
- Gjerstad, E., 1972, *Det äldsta Rom*, Stockholm.
- Glendinning R. & Bessason, H., 1983, *Edda. A Collection of Essays*, Winnipeg.
- Glob, P. V., 1964, *Mosefolket*, Copenhagen .

- Glob, P. V., 1970, *Højfolket*, Copenhagen .
- Graillet, H., 1913, *Le culte de Cybèle*, Paris.
- Granlund, J., s.v. *disting*, KLNLM.
- Grimm, J., 1854, *Deutsche Mythologie*, Tübingen.
- Grünebaum, G. E., 1963, *Der Islam im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart.
- Gräslund, A. S., 1980, *Birka VI, The Burial Customs - a Study of the Graves of Birka*, Uppsala.
- Gräslund, A. S., 1992, "Kultkontinuitet - myt eller verklighet. Om arkeologin möjlighet att belysa problem." *Kontinuitet i kult och tro från vikingatid till medeltid*, ed. B. Nilsson, Uppsala.
- Gurevitch, A., 1973, "Edda and Law. Commentary on Hyndluljóð", ANF.
- Gurevitch, A., 1971, "Saga and History. The "historical" conception of Snorri Sturlason", *Medieval Studies* 4.
- Gutenbrunner, S., 1973, "Eddastudien I: Über die Zwerge in Völuspá", ANF.
- Görman, M., 1987, *Nordiskt och keltiskt. Sydsandinavisk religion under yngre bronsålder och keltisk järnålder*, Lund.
- Hagberg U. E. o Jacobsson, L., 1988, "Fröslundasköldarna - en arkeologisk sensation". *Fynd. Tidskrift för Göteborgs Arkeologiska Museum och Fornminnesföreningen i Göteborg* 1, Göteborg.
- Hafström, G., s.v. *konge*, KLNLM.
- Hallberg, P., 1971, "The Concept of *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja* in Old Norse Literature", *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference*, Edinburgh.
- Hallberg, P., 1962, *Den fornisländska poesien*, Stockholm.
- Hallberg, P., 1954, "Om *Thrymskvida*", ANF 69.
- Hallencreutz, C. F., 1982, "Runstenarnas teologi; våra första uttryck för inhemsk kristendomstolkning", *Religion och Bibel* XLI.
- Harris, J., 1976, "The masterbuilder-tale", ANF.
- Heiler, F., 1969, "Antikes Gottkönigtum im Christentum", *The Sacral Kingship*, Leiden.
- Hellberg, L., 1986, "Hedendomens spår i Uppländska ortnamn", *Ortnamnssällskapets i Uppsala årsskrift*.
- Heller, R., 1958, *Die literarische Darstellung der Frau in den Isländersaga*, Halle.
- Henningsen, H., 1950, *Kirkeskibe og Kirkeskibsfesten*, (*Søhistoriske Skrifter* 3.), Copenhagen.
- Hiltebeitel, A., 1976, *The Ritual of Battle*, Ithaca NY.

- Histoire de France religieuse* 1, 1988, ed. J. Le Goff et R. Rémond, Seuil
- Hocart, A. M., 1927, *Kingship*, London.
- Hönn, K., 1946, *Artemis*, Zürich.
- Holbek, B., s.v. Maria, *KLNM*.
- Hollander, L. M., 1950, "The Old Norse God Odr", *Journal of English and German Philology*.
- Holtsmark, A., 1945, "Bil og Hjuke", *Maal og Minne*.
- Holtsmark, A., 1944, "Gevjons plog", *Maal og Minne*.
- Holtsmark, A., 1949, "Myten om Iðunn og Þjatse", *ANF* 64.
- Holtsmark, A., 1970, *Norrøn Mytologi*, Oslo.
- Holtsmark, A., 1951, "Skáro á skiði". *Maal og Minne*.
- Holtsmark, A., 1964, *Studier i Snorres Mytologi*, Oslo.
- Holtsmark, A., s.v. Váli, *KLNM*.
- Holtsmark, A., 1956, "Vefr Darraðar", *Maal og Minne*.
- Hultgård, A., 1992, "Religiös förändring, kontinuitet och ackulturation/synkretism i vikingtidens och medeltidens skandinaviska religion". *Kontinuitet i kult och tro från vikingatid till medeltid*, ed. B. Nilsson, Uppsala.
- Hultkrantz, Å., 1961, "Bachofen and the Mother Goddess", *Ethnos*.
- Hultkrantz, Å., 1986, "Rock Drawings as Evidence of Religion: Some Principal Points of View", *Words and Objects*, ed. G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford.
- Hyltén-Cavallius, G., 1972, (new ed.) *Wärend och Wirdarna*, Copenhagen.
- Höckert, R., 1926, *Voluspá och vanakulten*, Stockholm.
- Höfler, O., 1952, *Germanischen Sakralkönigtum*, Tübingen.
- Iverssen, R., 1961, *Norrøn Gramatikk*, Oslo.
- Jahnkuhn, H., 1971, *Vorgesichtliche Heiligtümer und Opferplätze in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*, Göttingen.
- James, E., 1960, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*, London.
- Johansson, H., s.v. Maria, *KLNM*.
- Johannesson, K., 1984, "Adam och hednatemplet i Uppsala", *Adam av Bremen*, Stockholm.
- Johansson, K., 1917-1919, "Über die altindische Göttin Dhisanā und Verwandtes", *Skrifter utgivna av Kungliga Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet*, bd.20, Uppsala.
- Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinson, 1978, *Under the Cloak*, Uppsala.

- Jones, G., 1972, *King, Beasts and Heroes*, London.
- Jungner, H., 1922, *Gudinnan Frigg och Als härad*, Uppsala.
- Kaul, F., 1991, *Gundestrupskedlen*, Copenhagen .
- Kellogg, R., 1988, *A Concordance to Eddic Poetry, Medieval Texts and Studies*, East Lansing.
- Kingsley, D., 1986, *Hindu Goddesses*, Los Angeles.
- Kirk, G. S., 1984, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, Harmondsworth.
- Kock, A., 1896, "Die Göttin Nerthus und der Gott Njörðr", *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*.
- Kousgaard Sørensen, J., 1974, "Odinkar of andre navne på -kar", *Nordiska namn. Festschrift till Lennart Moberg 13 dec. 1974*, ed. H. Ståhl and T. Andersson, Uppsala.
- Kramer, S. N., 1961, *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, Chicago.
- Krause, W., 1966, *Die Runeninschrift im älteren Futhark*, Göttingen.
- Krohn, K., 1922, *Skandinavisk Mytologi*, Helsingfors.
- Kuhn, H., 1978, "Gná und Sýr", *Kleine Schriften*, bd. 4.
- Kuhn, H., 1978, "Die Wanen", *Kleine Schriften*, bd. 4.
- Kulturhistorisk Lexikon för Nordisk Medeltid*, 1958, Malmö.
- Kuhnwald, G., 1970, "Der Moorfund im Rappendam, Seeland, Dänemark", *Vorgeschichtliche Heiligtümer und Opferplätze in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*, ed. H. Jahnkuhn, Göttingen.
- La Fontaine, J. S., 1985, *Initiation*, Harmondsworth.
- Laroche, E., 1960, *Koubaba, déesse anatolienne, et le problème des origines de Cybèle. Éléments orientaux dans la religions greque ancienne*, Paris .
- Lehman, E., 1919, "Tvekønnede fruktbarhetsguder i Norden", *Maal ok Minne*.
- Lehmann, W., 1955, "Lín and laukr in die Edda", *The Germanic Review*.
- Lévi-Strauss, C., 1967, *Structural Anthropology*, New York.
- Lévi-Strauss, C., 1962, *Le totémisme aujourd'hui*, Paris.
- F. van der Leyen, 1909, *Götter und Göttersagen der Germanen*, München.
- Lid, N., 1972, "Guder och Gudedyrkning" *Nordisk kultur* 26, Oslo.
- Lid, N., 1946, "Light-mother and Earth-mother", *Studia Norwegica*, Oslo.
- Liestøl, K., 1946, "Draumkvæde. A Norwegian visionary poem from the Middle Ages", *Studia Norwegica*, Oslo,
- Lincoln, B., 1975, "The Indo-European Myth of Creation", *History of Religions*, 15.

- Lincoln, B., 1986, *Myth, Cosmos and Society*, Cambridge,
- Lincoln, B., 1981, *Priests, Warriors and Cattle*, Berkeley.
- Lindow, J., 1985, *Mythology and Mythography*, in *Old Norse-Icelandic literature*, 1985, ed. C. Clover and J. Lindow, Ithaca and London.
- Lindquist, S., 1936, *Uppsala högar och Ottarshögen*, Stockholm.
- Linton, R., 1965, "Totemism in the A.E.F.", *Reader in Comparative Religion*, ed. Lessa & Vogt, New York.
- Ljungberg, H., 1936, "Vårdtecken, en liturgisk- etymologisk undersökning", *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift*, Stockholm.
- Lodewyckx, A., 1956, "Freydís Eiríksdóttir rauða and the Germania of Tacitus", *ANF*.
- Lommel, R. B., 1954, "Anāhitā-Sarasvatī", *Asiatica. Festschrift Friedrich Weller*, Leipzig.
- Lundberg, O. och Sperber, H., 1911, "Härnevi och därmed sammanhängande ortnamn. Om nordisk fruktbarhetskult". *Uppsala Universitets årsskrift*, Uppsala.
- Lyttkens, A., 1904-1906, *Svenska växtnamn*, Stockholm.
- Löffler, L., 1894, "Svenska ortnamn på -skialf", *ANF*.
- Lönnroth, L., 1986, "Domalde's death and the myth of the sacral kingship", *Structure and Meaning of Old Norse Literature*, 1986, ed. J. Lindow, L. Lönnroth, G. Weber, Odense.
- Lönnroth, L., 1971, "Hjalmars dödssång", *Speculum*.
- Lönnroth, L., 1969, "The Noble Heathen", *Scandinavian Studies*.
- Lönnroth, L., 1978, "Skírnismál och den fornisländska äktenskapsnormen", *Opuscula Septentrionalia. Festschrift till Ole Widding 10.10.77*, red. B. C. Jacobsen et al., Copenhagen.
- Mallory, J. P., 1989, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archeology and Myth*, London.
- Mandt, G., "Female deities in the religious manifestations", *Words and Objects*, ed G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford.
- Mannhardt, J., 1868, *Die Korndämonen*, Berlin.
- Mannhardt, J., 1865, *Roggenwolf und Roggenhund*, Danzig.
- Mannhardt, J., 1904-05, *Wald- und Feldtkulte*, I-II, 1904-05 (first published in 1877), Berlin.
- Marold, E., 1977, "Thór vígi thessa runor", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, ed. K. Hauck, Bd.8.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, P., 1992, "Freyr i islændingsagaerna", *Sakrale navne*, ed. G. Fellows-Jenssen, B. Holmberg, Uppsala.

- Meulengracht-Sørensen, P., 1983, *The unmanly man. Concepts of sexual defamation in early Northern society*, Odense.
- Mitchell, S., 1983, "För Skírnis as Mythological Model: frið at kaupá", ANF 98.
- Mogk, E., 1909, "Die Menschenopfer bei den Germanen", *Abhandlungen der K. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 27, Leipzig.
- Moltke, E., 1976, *Runerne i Danmark og deres oprindelse*, Copenhagen.
- Motz, L., 1975, "The King and the Goddess. An interpretation to Svipdagsmál", ANF.
- Motz, L., 1980, "Sister in the Cave", ANF.
- Much, R., 1967, *Die Germania des Tacitus*, 3rd edition revised and enlarged by H. Jahnkuhn, Heidelberg.
- Mundal, E., 1974, *Fylgjemotiva i norrøn litteratur*, Oslo.
- Mundal, E., 1990, "The Position of the Individual Gods and Goddesses in Various Types of Sources - with special Reference to the Female Divinities", *Old Nordic and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place names*, ed. T. Ahlbäck, Åbo
- Müllendorf, K., 1879, "Frija und der Halsbandsmythos", *Zeitschrift für deutsche Altertum*.
- Neckel, G., 1920, *Die Überlieferung vom Gotte Balder*, Dortmund.
- Neumann, E., 1974, (new ed.), *Die Grosse Mutter: eine Phänomenologie der weiblicher Gestaltungen des Unbewussten*, Olten.
- Nilsson, M., 1955, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion* I, München.
- Nordisk hedendom. Et symposium*, 1991, red. G. Steinsland, U. Drobin, J. Pentikäinen, P. Meulengracht Sørensen, Odense.
- Nordblad, J., 1986, "Interpretation of South-Scandinavian Petroglyphs in the History of Religion, Done by Archaeologist: Analysis and Attempt at Auto-Critique", *Words and Objects*, ed. G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford 1986.
- Näsström, B-M, 1989, *The Abhorrence of Love. Studies of rituals and mystic aspects in Catullus' poem of Attis*, Uppsala.
- Näsström, B-M, 1991, "Freyjas funktioner. En spegling av den ideala kvinnan". *Nordisk hedendom. Et symposium*, Red. G. Steinsland, U. Drobin, J. Pentikäinen, P. Meulengracht Sørensen, Odense.
- Näsström, B-M., 1990, *O Mother of the Gods and Man. Some aspects of Emperor Julian's Discourse on the Mother of the Gods*, Lund.
- O' Flaherty, W. Doniger, 1980, *Women, Androgynes and other mythical Beasts*, Chicago.
- Ólafur Lárusson, s.v. edsformlär, KLN.M.

- Ólafur Láruson, s.v. goði og goðorð, *KLNM*.
- Ólafur Láruson og M. Olsen, 1951, "Maríufiskar", *Maal og Minne*.
- Old Nordic and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place names*, ed. T. Ahlbäck, Åbo 1990.
- Old Norse-Icelandic literature*, ed. C. Clover and J. Lindow, Ithaca and London, 1985
- Olmstedt, G., 1979, *The Gundestrup Cauldron*, Bruxelles.
- Olrik, A. og Ellekilde, H., 1926-1951, *Nordens Gudeverden I-II*, Copenhagen .
- Olsen, M., 1905, "Det gamle norske ø-navn Njarðarlog". *Skrifter utgitt av Videnskapselskabet i Kristiania*, Kristiania.
- Olsen, M., 1915, *Hedenske Kultminder i norske Stedsnavne*, Oslo.
- Olsen, O., 1966, *Hørg, hof og kirke, Aarbøger for Nordisk oldkyndighed och historie*, ed. Det Nordiska Konglige Oldskrifts-selskab, Copenhagen .
- Oosten, J., 1985, *The war of the gods; the social code in Indo-European mythology*, London.
- Ohrh, F., 1927, *Da signed Krist*, Copenhagen .
- Ohrh, F., 1917, *Danmarks Trylleformler*, bd.1, Copenhagen.
- Ortnamnen i Skaraborgs län*, 13, 1955, ed I. Lundahl, Lund
- Pering, B., 1941, *Heimdall*, Lund.
- Phillipotts, B. 1920, *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*, Cambridge.
- Polomé, E., 1954, "A propos la déesse Nerthus", *Latomus*.
- Philippson, E. A., 1953, "Die Genealogie der Götter in Germanischer Religion, Mythologie und Theologie", *Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* Vol. 37, Urbana.
- Przysluski, J., 1960, *La grande déesse*, Paris.
- Reichborn-Kjennerud, I., 1923, "Lægerådene i den eldre Eddan", *Maal og minne*, Oslo.
- Reichborn-Kjennerud, I., 1927, "Vår gamle trolldomsmedicin", *Skrifter utgitt av Det Norske Videnskapsakademi*, Oslo.
- Renfrew, C., 1987, *Archeology and Language. The puzzle of Indo-European origin*, London.
- Riismøller, P., 1952, "Fröja from Rebild", *KUML*.
- Roscher, W. H., 1894, *Griechischen und Römische Mythologie*, Leipzig.
- Roesdahl, E., 1980, *Danmarks Vikingetid*, Copenhagen.

- Roesdahl, E. 1989, *Vikingernes verden. Vikingerna hjemme og ude.* Copenhagen .
- Rose, H. P., 1969, "The Evidence for Sacral Kingship in Ancient Greece, *The Sacral Kingship*, Leiden.
- Rydberg, V., 1886, *Undersökningar i Germansk Mytologi*, Stockholm.
- Sahlgren, J., 1918, "Förbjudna Namn", *Namn och Bygd*.
- Sahlgren, J., 1950, "Hednisk gudelära och nordiska ortnamn", *Namn och Bygd*.
- Sahlgren, J., 1928, "Sagan om Frö och Gerd", *Namn och Bygd*.
- Salin, B., 1903, *Heimskringlas tradition om asarnes invandring, Studier ägnade O. Montelius*, Stockholm.
- Samuelsson, L., 1989, "En blekingsk blotinskrift", *Fornvännen*.
- Sandnes, J., 1987, "Hedensk kultus og kristen kirke. Noen refleksjoner om kultkontinuitet ut fra plasseringen av enkelte kirker i Nord-Trøndelag, *Festskrift til Alfred Jakobsen*, ed. J.R. Hagland et alia, Trondheim.
- Sauvé, J., 1970, "The Divine Victim: Sacrifice in Viking Scandinavia and Vedic India", *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans*, ed. J. Puhvel, Berkeley.
- Sawyer, B., 1986, "Sköldmön och madonnan - kyskhets som ett hot mot samhällsordningen", *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift*.
- Sawyer, P., 1988, *Da Danmark blev Danmark fra ca år 700 til ca 1000. Gyldendals og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, ed. O. Olsen, Copenhagen.
- Sawyer, P., 1988, *The Making of Sweden*, Alingsås.
- Schier, K., 1981, "Zur mythologie der Snorra Edda". *Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. U. Dronke, G. Helgadóttir, G. W. Weber, H. Bekker-Nielsen, Odense.
- Schjødt, J. P., 1988, "The 'fire ordeal' in Grímnismál, initiation or annihilation". *Medieval Scandinavia* 12.
- Schjødt, J. P., 1986, "The limits of the Phenomenology of Religion", *Words and Objects*, ed. G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford.
- Schjødt, J. P., 1981, "Om Loke endnu en gang", *ANF*
- Schjødt, J. P., 1991, "Relationen mellem aser og vaner og dens ideologiske implikationer". *Nordisk hedendom. Et symposium*, ed. G. Steinsland, U. Drobin, J. Pentikäinen, P. Meulengracht Sørensen, Odense.
- Schnippel, E., 1929, "Lein und lauch in Runenzauber", *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*.
- Schrodt, R., 1979, "Der altnordische Beiname 'Sýr'", *ANF* 94.

- Schröder, F. R., 1929, "Neuere forschungen zur germanischen Altertumskunde und Religionsgeschichte", *Germanisches-Romanisches Monatschrift*.
- Schröder, F. R., 1941, *Skadi und die Götter Skandnaviens*, Tübingen.
- Schück, H., 1906, *Studier i Ynglingatal*. Uppsala universitets årsskrift, Uppsala.
- Scott Littleton, C., 1982, *The New Comparative Mythology*, Berkeley and Los Angeles.
- von See, K., 1981, "Der Spottsvers des Hjalti Skeggjason", *Edda, Saga und Skaldedichtung. Aufsätze zur skandinavischen Litteratur des Mittelalters*.
- Sierke, S., 1939, *Kennten die vorchristliche Germanen Runenzauber?* Königsberg.
- Sidler, N., 1971, *Zur Universalität des Inzesttabus*, Stuttgart.
- Sittig, s.v. Hesperiden, p. 1243, *Paulys Realencyklopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 1894-, ed G. Wissowa, K. Ziegler, Stuttgart.
- Steinsland, G. ok Vogt, K., 1981, "'Aukin ertu Uolse ok vpp vm tekinn': En religionshistorisk analyse av Volsapáttir i Flateyjarbók", ANF.
- Steinsland, G., 1989, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi*, Oslo (Diss.). New.ed. 1991.
- Steinsland, G., 1990, "De nordiske gullblekk med parmotiv og norrøn fyrsteideologi", *Collegium Medievale*.
- Steinsland, G., 1983, "Treet i Völuspá", ANF.
- Stjerna, K., 1903, *Hjälmar och svärd*, *Studier tillägnade Oscar Montelius*, Stockholm.
- Stjerna, K., 1903, "Vendel och Vendelkråka", ANF.
- Storm, G., 1885, "Om Thórgerðr Hölgebrud", ANF.
- Strand, B. (Sawyer, B.), 1980, *Kvinnor och män i Gesta Danorum*, Göteborg.
- Ström, F., 1954, *Diser, Nornor och Valkyrior*, Göteborg.
- Ström, F., 1983, "Hieros gamos-motivet i Hallfreðr Ottarsons Hakonardrapa och den nordnorska jarlavärdigheten", ANF.
- Ström, F., 1967, "Kung Domaldr i Svitjod och "kungalyckan", *Saga och sed. Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademiens i Uppsala årsbok*.
- Ström, F., 1973, *Nið, ergi and Old Norse moral attitudes*, London.
- Ström, F., 1961, *Nordisk Hedendom*, Göteborg
- Ström, F., 1976, "Tacitus and Germania", *Words and Objects*, ed. G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford.
- Ström, Å. V. and Biezais, H., 1975, *Germanische und Baltische Religion*, Stuttgart.

- Strömbäck, D., 1975, *The Conversion of Iceland*, London.
- Strömbäck, D., 1928, "Lytir - En fornsvensk gud". *Festskrift til Finnur Jónson*, Copenhagen.
- Strömbäck, D., 1935, *Sejd*, Uppsala.
- Strömbäck, D., 1949, *Tidrande och diserna*, Lund.
- von Sydow, C. W., 1923, "Gudinnan Fröja i folktraditionen", *Etnologiska studier tillägnande N. E. Hammarstedt*, Stockholm.
- Tauber, H., 1980, "Kulstof-14 dateringen af moselig", *KUML*.
- Teilgård Laugesen, A., 1959, *Syv - ni - tolv*, Copenhagen.
- Thompson, H. A., 1959, "Activities in the Athenian Agora", *Hesperia*.
- Tillhagen, C. H., 1986, *Vävsrock*, Borås.
- Turner, V., 1975, *The Forrest of Symbols*, Itaca and London.
- Turville-Petre, G., 1969, "Fertility of Beast and Soil", ed. E. Polomé, Austin.
- Turville-Petre, G., 1964, *Myth and Religion of the North*, Worchester and London.
- Vidal-Naquet, C., 1981, *Le chasseur noir: formes de pensées et formes de société dans le monde grec*. Paris.
- Vernant, J. P., 1982, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, London.
- Vestergaard, E., 1984, "Gudrun/Kriemhild - søster eller hustru", *ANF. Vorgeschichtliche Heiligtümer und Opferplätze in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*, ed. H. Jahnkuhn. Göttingen 1970.
- de Vries, J., 1970, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte I-II*, Berlin.
- de Vries, J., 1931, "Contribution to the study of Othin especially to his relation to agricultural practice in modern popular lore, *Folklore Fellows communications* 94, Helsingfors.
- de Vries, J., 1955, "Der Mythos von Balders Tod", *ANF*.
- de Vries, J., 1960, "Sur certains glissements fonctionnels de divinités dans la religion germanique", *Hommages au Georges Dumézil*, Bruxelles.
- de Vries, J., 1954, "Über das Verhältnis von Odr und Odinn". *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 73.
- Ward, D., 1968, *The Divine Twins*, Berkeley.
- Ward, D., 1970, "The threefold Death: An Indo-European Trifunctional Sacrifice", *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans*, 1970, ed. J. Puhvel,, Berkeley.
- Weber, G. W., 1969, *Wyrd*, Bad Homburg.

- Weber, G. W., 1986, s.v. Edda, Jüngere, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*.
- Wessén, E., 1924, *Studier till Sveriges Hedna Mytologi och Fornhistoria*, Uppsala 1924.
- Widengren, G., 1969, *Religionsphänomenologie*, Berlin.
- Wikander, S., 1978, *Araber, vikingar, vëringar*, Norrtälje.
- Wikander, S., 1944, "Mahābhāratas mytiska förutsättningar", *Religion och Bibel*.
- Wikander, S., 1941, *Vayu I*, Lund.
- Wikman, K. R. V., s.v. bröllop, *KLMN*.
- Words and Objects*, 1986, ed. G. Steinsland, Oslo and Oxford.